



PARA EQUESTRIAN

FEI PARA EQUESTRIAN FORUM 2022 Session 2, 19 January 2022

The structure and future development of Para Dressage sport were key topics under discussion on day two of the FEI Para Equestrian Forum 2022.

Limitations of the current sporting structure

The following points were raised at the start of the Session:

- The current structure of Para Equestrian sport has created barriers to the growth and development of Para Equestrian sport, limiting opportunities for athletes to progress from grassroots participation to international competition level.
- With the focus on the organisation of 3* level events, there is currently no incentive for National Federations to host 1* and 2* level competitions, making it difficult for new athletes to enter the sport.
- The current structure makes it difficult for developing nations to participate in international Para Equestrian Events. And the global growth of sport is limited as these nations often do not have the resources to organise top level international Para Equestrian events themselves.
- There was also agreement that the current structure of team competitions is fragmented, and that this should be harmonised with other FEI Disciplines.

It was noted that the restructuring of disciplines like Vaulting, has created opportunities for athlete progression and this has resulted in a significant increase in the annual number of events, participation levels and host countries.

An alternate structure for Para Dressage

A more progressive structure of events was presented to Forum participants, which encourages nations to hold competitions at every level. It was proposed that each level would have different sets of tests with progressive technical difficulty. The idea of a qualification system, with the aim of creating a space for progression from 1* to 3* Events, was also put forward to Forum participants.

During the discussions, some delegates cautioned that the introduction of a qualification process could in itself be a barrier to participation for some athletes, and could limit their progression possibilities. For this reason, consideration will need to be given to alternate qualification pathways, such as national qualification, especially for nations that have limited competition opportunities.



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It was also noted that some nations have successfully integrated 1* and 2* competitions into 3* Events, increasing participation overall. Participants were in general agreement that there should be a Freestyle test appropriate for every level when 1* - 3* competitions are run.

A World Cup and Nations Cup Series for Para Dressage

The idea of an FEI World Cup™ and FEI Nations Cup™ Series for Para Dressage was put forward to participants during the Session as a next step in the development of the sport.

As discussions are still ongoing on the format and qualification structure of the FEI World Cup™ Series, the suggestion was to first organise a Final with athletes qualifying for the Event at 3* competitions, with a step-by-step approach more prudent for long term development.

The introduction of an FEI Nations Cup™ Series for Para Dressage would allow the discipline to more closely align with the competition structure for Dressage. This has the potential to increase media coverage for Para Dressage, develop new athlete/horse combinations, and give less experienced riders more exposure to international competitions. Raising the competition to a 4* status, would require a qualification standard to compete and this would be equivalent to the standards in place for the Paralympic Games.

During the discussions, participants raised concerns about the potential increase in costs of these Series to organisers, and the potential difficulties for some nations to attend competition with teams of three or more.

A review of the FEI Dressage Nations Cup™ Series is currently in progress and the findings will be the basis on which the Para Dressage structure will be created.

Youth Development

There was general agreement among participants that supporting and recognising young athletes within the FEI structures, would encourage National Federations to provide more support and opportunities for the Youth to develop in the sport.

It was acknowledged that the limited numbers of participants in the youth categories makes it difficult to run specific classes in each age group. Participants discussed the possibility of introducing an FEI ranking system for the youth, with an award presented each year to the highest ranked youth rider in specified age groups. It was agreed that further work needs to be done to ensure that fair opportunities are available for athletes to achieve their ranking points over the year.



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Rules Revision

The participants were encouraged to come forward on all other topics of Rules that they considered should be reviewed in the Rules Revision.

The use of double bridles for Grades I – III generated a great deal of discussion among participants, with some citing horse welfare as a reason for limiting its use while others put forward the argument that bridles contribute to athlete safety as it allows for more control over the horse.

There was also discussion around introducing a Judges Supervisory Panel for Para Dressage Events. Participants agreed that the costs for organisers would need to be considered and that the Panel could be a requirement just for FEI Championships and Games.

Participants also considered if Team Music should be produced by the athletes, or if the Organising Committee should leave this task with a music coordinator, who often provides athletes with better fitting music for their routines. Some participants acknowledged that having the music manager in charge would allow for a more level playing field among athletes.