

**The FEI Eventing Forum was held on 17 and 18 January 2025 in Lausanne (SUI). This document provides a short summary of some of the key points from the presentations and discussions on day one of the Forum.**

**The Forum was led by David O'Connor, Chair of the FEI Eventing Committee with participants moving to breakout sessions to explore key topics in detail before reconvening in the plenary to present and discuss their ideas collectively.**

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### **Eventing Future**

David O'Connor highlighted the need for a clear mission and vision, actionable goals, and a steadfast focus on horse welfare as the foundation for the future of Eventing.

He highlighted the sport's key strengths, including its strong spectator appeal, accessibility, high standards of horse welfare, robust live attendance, and the unique opportunity for spectators to experience the action up close. However, O'Connor also addressed significant challenges, such as the ongoing need for equine and human risk management, the high capital costs associated with staging competitions, limited media exposure beyond the equestrian community, and the sport's reliance on tradition.

Participants were invited to reflect on critical sustainability questions, such as how Eventing can maintain relevance beyond the Olympic movement, strategies for attracting and retaining athletes and officials, ways to support organisers in ensuring financial viability, and measures to uphold horse welfare as a central priority.

Opportunities for growth were identified, including the introduction of innovative, media-friendly competition formats; revisiting the economic model of 5\* events to enhance their appeal; expanding the FEI Nations Cup system to regions beyond Europe; increasing the sport's entertainment value to attract a broader audience; creating series rather than standalone events; and leveraging rankings as effective promotional tools.

Risk management was also a key focus, with proposals including enhanced athlete education, stricter qualification standards, greater use of safety technology, and course design adjustments to improve safety while preserving the sport's competitive spirit.

### **Eventing at the Olympic Games**

O'Connor highlighted the positive reception of Eventing at Paris 2024, noting that the sport enjoyed high audience numbers on two key days: cross-country and show jumping. He emphasised the significance of these exceptional days in showcasing the sport's appeal. Looking ahead to LA 2028, he encouraged participants to carefully consider the potential implications of any proposed format changes, including their impact on event management, veterinary requirements, and medal ceremonies.

### **2026 Eventing Rules Revision**

As per the FEI Board Resolution of 4 June 2024, the next full revision, originally scheduled for 2026, has been brought forward to 2025. This adjustment ensures that any new rules can be implemented in time for the 2026 World Championships, while also aligning with preparations for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.

The timeline for the FEI Eventing Rules revision process was outlined as follows:

- **1 March 2025:** National Federations (NFs) and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) can propose changes to the rules.
- **8 July 2025:** The FEI will provide the first draft of the revised rules to NFs.
- **26 August 2025:** NFs and MOUs will have an eight-week period to review and provide feedback on the first draft.
- **10 October 2025:** The final draft of the revised rules will be shared with NFs and MOUs.
- **7 November 2025:** The revised rules will be voted on at the General Assembly.

Participants encouraged to look more closely at the following key topics related to the rules review process for Eventing, including:

- The procedure for addressing flag queries and the penalties for missing narrow fences.
- Points allocation for activating frangible technology, ensuring penalties are appropriate.
- The need to adjust Minimum Eligibility Requirements (MERs) for all levels, including 2-star competitions.
- Evaluating course lengths to align with the sport's evolution, balancing short and long formats.
- The appointment of officials at upper levels, with a focus on creating opportunities for new officials to gain experience while ensuring experienced individuals are placed in key roles.

### **EquiRatings HFI / Venue Analysis - building to the standards – Sam Watson**

Sam Watson, representing EquiRatings, presented an analysis of risk management and course standards in Eventing, focusing on how data-driven decisions can enhance safety while preserving the sport's competitive integrity. He emphasised the importance of establishing measurable benchmarks to guide decision-making and ensure Eventing remains both challenging and safe for participants.

Over the past decade, the sport has made significant progress in risk management, with the average horse fall rate decreasing to below 1% for the first time (excluding one-star events). This achievement highlights the success of data-led initiatives in reducing risks. However, Watson stressed the need to maintain high standards in course design, ensuring that courses remain sufficiently challenging while avoiding unnecessary risks.

Effective course design plays a pivotal role in preparing athletes and horses for higher competition levels. Watson noted that excessively high clear rates, such as over 85% for four-star long courses, may indicate insufficient difficulty and undermine the development of skills required for five-star events. By establishing and adhering to clear metrics for risk and challenge, the sport can better support athletes' progression while safeguarding safety.

A key element of Watson's presentation was the philosophy of balancing risk and challenge. He emphasised that manageable risks are an inherent part of Eventing and necessary for growth and learning. Falls caused by minor issues, such as pecking on landing, are part of the sport and can be accepted if they do not compromise overall safety. However, rotational falls remain a critical focus, with ongoing efforts to eliminate them through technological advancements and adjustments to course design.

The concept of phase influence was also explored, with Watson highlighting the importance of balance across the dressage, cross-country, and show jumping phases. Courses that do not emphasise galloping or fitness at lower levels risk leaving athletes and horses unprepared for the demands of five-star events. Maintaining the integrity of each phase

ensures the sport's unique character is preserved and provides a foundation for success at all levels.

Watson introduced EquiRatings' tools for auditing courses, venues, and course designers, which use large sample sizes to evaluate fall rates, clear rates, and other metrics. These audits help identify trends, such as consistently low or high difficulty, and offer a framework for continuous improvement. He highlighted the importance of allowing for occasional errors in course design while ensuring consistent oversight to uphold safety and standards.

Looking ahead, Watson stressed the need to address critical questions such as acceptable fall rates at different levels and how to define and maintain course standards. Continued innovation in course design, targeted benchmarks, and the integration of advanced safety technologies will be essential to shaping the future of Eventing. By balancing challenge with safety and leveraging data-driven insights, the sport can remain engaging, competitive, and secure for all participants.