

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 two 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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### **Athletes and Coaches**

The Athletes and Coaches session at the FEI Eventing Forum featured a distinguished panel of speakers, including Andrew Nicholson (NZL), Phillip Dutton (USA), Andrew Hoy (AUS), and Ros Canter (GBR). Moderated by Bettina Hoy (GER) and Pierre Le Goupil (FRA), the session tackled critical questions about enhancing performance while prioritising horse welfare.

Key topics included strategies for producing better results without compromising horse welfare, methods to mitigate the risk of fatigue in horses, and insights from athletes renowned for consistently maintaining fit horses. The panel also explored how to educate athletes effectively without over-policing, and whether involving senior athletes at events or afterwards could foster learning with less experienced riders.

A key point highlighted during the discussions was the dual importance of both horse and rider preparation. While the strength and fitness of the horse are essential, equal emphasis must be placed on the rider's physical fitness and psychological approach. This balance is critical to achieving optimal performance and bringing out the best in their horses.

Discussions extended to practical aspects such as training riders to use a watch early to develop a feel for appropriate speed and rhythm, and the evolving role of coaches. Panellists debated whether coaches should focus on becoming better mentors or guiding athletes to find suitable mentorship.

Other critical areas of focus included:

- The Ground Jury's role in stopping riders on Cross Country when necessary and the potential for improved systems to support this.
- The value of the existing system spotters on the Cross Country Course. The Course Designer's responsibility to create flowing Cross Country Courses, starting at lower levels, to enable riders to learn progressively.
- Athletes' roles were also scrutinised, with particular emphasis on their own fitness, the fitness of their horses, and whether deficiencies in training, frequency, could be contributing factors to performance challenges.

### **Education of Officials**

Anne-Mette Binder (DEN), Alec Lochore (GBR), and Neil Mackenzie-Hall (NZL) introduced the updates that have been made to the **FEI Eventing Officials' Education System**, aimed at modernising pathways, streamlining requirements, and enhancing consistency across all functions.

Developed by the Eventing Education Working Group (EEWG) in collaboration with stakeholders, the revised system focuses on attracting new officials, providing clear progression pathways, and improving officiating quality.

Key updates include the **FEI Course Designer Mentoring Programme**, offering an accelerated pathway for talented candidates, and simplified entry and maintenance requirements for Level 1 (L1) and Level 2 (L2) officials. Prior to the update of the FEI Eventing Education System, Judges and Technical Delegates (TDs) could automatically get an L1 & L2 Steward function. With the new criteria, Judges and TDs can now only become L1 Stewards. Clearer criteria have been introduced for Level 3 (L3) and Level 4 (L4) progression, including evaluations and online interviews.

Discipline-specific enhancements include reduced progression requirements for Judges, broader access to stewarding for national officials, and online maintenance courses for L1 and L2 TDs. Course Designers benefit from reduced maintenance requirements and a mentoring programme for advanced levels.

Additionally, the idea of a new “fast-track” system was introduced which would support athletes transitioning to officiating roles and officials transferring across functions, leveraging prior experience for efficient progression.

Looking ahead, the FEI Officials Working Group, led by Mark Samuel (CAN), will continue refining officiating assignments to align with the sport’s evolving needs. Rule changes based on the revised system are expected in 2026, reinforcing the FEI’s commitment to a robust and forward-thinking approach to education in Eventing.

The following was addressed during the discussion session:

- The **variations in judging scores** were discussed with athletes highlighting the importance of consistent scoring. It was acknowledged that any notable discrepancies (e.g., a score difference of over 5%) is reviewed by the judges to ensure accuracy and fairness, with adjustments made as needed.
- There was a constructive conversation around **improving transparency and follow-up communication** when riders submit feedback on judging. The focus was on refining the process to ensure that feedback loops are more effective, keeping riders informed and engaged.
- The idea of creating a more **formal mentorship programme for officials** was raised, particularly for those who do not necessarily wish to advance in rank but would like to receive ongoing feedback to improve their practice.
- The introduction of a **maximum term for course designers at a venue** was discussed as was the separation of roles between cross country and show jumping course designers.
- Several challenges regarding the **distribution of officiating opportunities** were put forward, particularly in regions such as South America and Australasia, where fewer events limit officials’ ability to maintain qualifications.

## **Risk Management Data and Eventing Safety**

The afternoon session, led by David O’Connor (USA), Geoff Sinclair (AUS), and Stuart Buntine (AUS), focused on crucial aspects of risk management in equestrian sports, particularly regarding fall and injury statistics collected between 2015 and 2024.

It was noted that the number of horse falls has decreased, with a significant reduction in rotational falls, thanks to advancements in course design, education, and technology. However, falls on the flat remain a concern, as does the potential for serious injuries from rotational falls, which carries the greatest risk to an Athlete. National statistics revealed improvement in horse falls in countries like France, Germany, and the USA, but the ongoing focus remains on further reducing rotational falls and maintaining safety improvements. A proposal was made to move the National Safety Officer meetings to February, allowing horse falls and injury data to be collected and sent to the FEI until the end of January.

The discussion also touched on the potential benefits of the Horse Form Index (HFI), suggesting that making it publicly available could promote transparency and motivate riders and owners to improve their scores. The HFI balances positive and negative results, rewarding quality performances while penalising mistakes such as falls.

A proposal was also made to share course data (clear rates and falls percentage) with officials and Organising Committees, enabling them to refine course difficulty over time.

The use of frangible fences was another key topic, with an emphasis on improving safety by ensuring they activate appropriately. While concerns about penalties for soft activations remain, the consensus was that the reduction in rotational falls justifies this trade-off.

The challenge of implementing frangible fences and technology to improve safety in Cross Country events was also addressed. Key points included the need for consistent training for course builders, the high cost of advanced technology, and the proposal for a fund to subsidise the cost of frangible fences.

Judging concerns were raised regarding whether minor fence activations should automatically lead to penalties, with some advocating for a review process, especially when the horse has not lost balance.

The discussion also highlighted the disparity in access to technology across regions, with mobile phones potentially offering a solution to improve video review and consistency in judging.

Finally, the group emphasised the importance of balancing safety, fairness, and the practicalities of implementing these measures at different levels of the sport, while maintaining the natural aesthetics of Cross Country Courses.