



**23rd IEOC Annual General Meeting
Online
Sunday 17th November 2024**

Minutes

In attendance: Andy Griffiths (GBR Chairman), Michelle Debenham (AUS Vice Chairman), Sue Stewart (GBR Secretary General), David Lee (IRL Treasurer), Wayne Copping (AUS Board Member), Sue O'Brien (NZL Board Member), Alberto Casolari (ITA), Andrew Bennie (NZL), Mossakowska Agnieszka (POL), Andrew Fell (IRL), Anibal Marianito (POR), Ann Bostock (GBR), Anna-Karin Tiden (SWE), Anne-Marie Taylor (GBR), Anne-Mette Binder (DEN), George Bazar (HUN), Bev Shandley (AUS), Jo Crosby (AUS), Christian Zehe (GER), Dianne Penny (UAE), Joachim Dimmek (GER), Peter Koepfel (GER), Felicísimo Aguado (ESP), Fritz Otto-Erley (GER), Frances McAvity (CAN), Sandor Fulop (HUN), Chris Wallis (AUS), Helmut Mett (GER), Nikki Herbert (GBR), Jan Cottam (GBR), Jane Tuckwell (GBR), Jane Starkey (GBR), Jean-marc Varillon (FRA), Jean Mitchell (IRL), Jo Crabtree (GBR), Jutta Koivula (FIN), Katherine Lucheschi (ITA), Lindo Pearce (GBR), Sue Ockendon (CAN), Marie Hennessy (IRL), Mary Duenow (USA), Nicky Nicholson (FRA), Faith Ponsonby (IRL), Patricia Clifton (GBR), Sally Price (GBR), Helen Christie (NZL), Roger Kane (AUS), Merel Schurink (NLD), Tim Downes (GBR), Ernst Topp (GER), Charles Trolliet (SUI), Vanda Stewart (IRL), Vince Roche (AUS), Wiebke Hennig (GER), Wouter Mosselman (NDL), Zbigniew Seibt (POL)

Apologies: Catrin Norinder, FEI Director Eventing & Olympic; Francisco Lima, FEI Director Governance & Institutional Affairs; Frédérique Reffet Plantier, FEI Senior Manager, Secretary General's Office; Stuart Buntine (AUS), Christina Klingspor (SWE), Mike Etherington-Smith (GBR), Wayne Quarles (USA), Sarah Verney (GBR), Genevieve Pfister (SUI), Mercedes Campdera (MEX),

1. Call to order and welcome

The Chairman opened the 23rd AGM, welcoming everybody to the meeting.

He thanked Rachel and Dan Moore for all their work setting up the meeting and the technology required to support it.

The Secretary General outlined how the meeting would be conducted and advised all apologies would be noted in the minutes.

Quorum

The Secretary General confirmed with 10 members in attendance a quorum was present.

2. Approval of the minutes of the 2023 annual general meeting

The Chairman confirmed the draft minutes of the 2023 AGM were previously circulated by email on 14th December 2023.

On behalf of the Board, the Chairman moved that:

MOTION

The minutes of the 2023 annual general meeting be approved.

MOTION IEOCGM2024-1 CARRIED

3. IEOC relationship with FEI

The Chairman introduced Ellen Kerr of Morgan Sports Law who are advising the IEOC on several legal matters involving the FEI.

Ellen provided the following update on these matters:

The two main topics are:

- Appeals by individual Officials against the FEI's decision not to transfer them to Level 4.
- The IEOC's relationship with the FEI.

Individual Officials' appeals against the FEI regarding the Level 4 Education System

Seven Level 3 Officials appealed the FEI's decision not to transfer them to Level 4 under the new education system.

In June 2024, the FEI Tribunal unfortunately dismissed the appeals. However, it did recommend several improvements that the FEI should make to the Level 4 education system going forward, including to:

- Provide specific feedback to all candidates.
- Provide advance access to marking schemes and grading criteria.
- Create template answers for examiners to use when scoring.
- Announce how examiners are selected.
- Make educational materials available to candidates.

These recommendations address key issues that were cited in the appeals, and if implemented have the potential to vastly improve the education system going forward, so the IEOC has supported the recommendations and written to the FEI urging them to implement them.

The good news is that there are early indications that some improvements will be made in future Level 4 application cycles. Therefore, if you were part of the previous Level 4 process and would like any more information from the FEI about your application, for example further feedback, you may wish to contact the FEI directly about this as we understand they are providing some further information at this stage.

IEOC's relationship with the FEI

The IEOC has been working with the FEI for just over 25 years. The IEOC's mission has always been to support Officials to ensure your voices are heard within the FEI and to improve the sport for everyone.

The relationship between the FEI and IEOC was formalised in 2014 through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which is essentially a contract which gave the IEOC various formal rights to consult with the FEI on matters relating to Eventing Officials. Unfortunately, in the last

couple of years, particularly following the Level 4 education system development there have been challenges in the relationship between the IEOC and FEI, particularly in relation to the MoU.

Essentially, the IEOC Board raised various questions and concerns with the FEI about matters impacting Eventing Officials, including the Level 4 education system. Those questions and concerns were collected from the members and put forward to the FEI. Unfortunately, the IEOC felt that there was a lack of cooperation and engagement from the FEI in relation to those matters, which the IEOC was not satisfied with.

The FEI then unfortunately claimed the MoU had expired, which was disappointing as the IEOC was hoping to continue working with the FEI on Eventing matters.

Attempts were made to restore the working relationship with the FEI, which had previously been very positive. However, it became clear that certain significant issues were not going to be addressed, so the IEOC felt that it had no other option but to file a claim to confirm that the MoU was valid and ensure that the FEI complied with it so that the IEOC continued to have the rights it had had as a stakeholder, consulting with the FEI on important matters relating to Eventing Officials. The claim that was filed also referenced areas where the IEOC considered the FEI had breached the MoU.

The claim was filed to the FEI Tribunal which is independent of the FEI and hears matters related to FEI sport.

In February this year, the FEI had a chance to reply to the IEOC's claim, and conceded that the MoU was still in effect, which is different from what it had said previously, but also attempted to terminate it immediately. Again, this was disappointing.

In August 2024, the FEI Tribunal made its decision about whether the MoU was valid, and whether the FEI had to comply with it; and therefore, whether the IEOC could continue to be an official stakeholder of the FEI.

The FEI Tribunal:

- ruled that the MoU was valid until 29 August 2024, so the FEI had been wrong to terminate it in February with immediate effect, but unfortunately the MoU would only be valid for 9 days after the decision was issued, so there was very limited time for the IEOC to benefit from the stakeholder relationship once the FEI Tribunal decision was made; and
- agreed that one aspect of the MoU had been breached by the FEI.

The IEOC's goal remains for the FEI to recognise it as a stakeholder, to re-establish the positive working relationship that the FEI and IEOC have had for many years, to advocate for Officials, and to support the growth of the sport.

The IEOC would much rather do this amicably rather than through formal legal proceedings, but so far, those efforts have been rejected by the FEI.

Therefore, in order to preserve the IEOC's legal rights, which is important, we have filed an appeal against the FEI Tribunal decision with the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which is essentially the supreme court of sports law cases, asking it to confirm the MoU is valid and to ensure the FEI complies with it. This would essentially mean the IEOC would remain a formal FEI stakeholder.

In short, the IEOC's argument is that the MoU continues to be valid until 2026, and that the FEI breached the MoU by failing to consult with the IEOC in relation to the Level 4 education system and in relation to other matters that affect Eventing Officials.

The FEI now has an opportunity to respond to the IEOC's appeal. After that, there will be a hearing, and CAS will then make a decision on whether the MoU is valid and whether the FEI has to comply with it going forwards.

Efforts at mediation

As mentioned, we know that IEOC members want to resolve this dispute amicably – the IEOC Board completely agrees with this position and knows it would be better to have the conversation with the FEI rather than file all these appeals with CAS and the FEI Tribunal.

To be clear, we have made several offers to mediate with the FEI to resolve this issue amicably. The IEOC has made those offers both before and after the legal proceedings were started. We have also made clear to the FEI that the legal proceedings can be paused, while mediation is attempted.

In addition, many of you supported these efforts by signing an open letter, encouraging mediation, which was sent to the FEI. So, several attempts to mediate have been made, however, the FEI has declined these requests despite its statements suggesting otherwise. The FEI has refused the requests to mediate.

Despite all of this, the IEOC remains open to mediation and is committed to pursuing a peaceful resolution. We still believe that would be the best way to resolve this dispute and restore a positive working relationship and we hope that mediation will be possible in the future.

Conclusion

In summary, the IEOC's goal is to have a positive and productive working relationship with the FEI, to ensure that you, the members have your voices heard within the FEI so the sport can be developed in the best possible way.

Thank you for your continued support, your commitment means a great deal to the IEOC and strengthens the collective efforts to find a resolution. We hope a resolution can be found so that your dedication and commitment to the sport is once again recognised and respected in the way that it deserves.

Questions

- *Roger Kane (AUS): What do you think are the chances of the IEOC and FEI returning to a normal relationship?*

Ellen advised there are two sides – the legal case and the informal, amicable resolution side of things. In terms of the legal case, it's very much for CAS to decide whether the official stakeholder relationship continues, and the MoU is valid, but it also comes down to whether the IEOC and FEI can work together, and the IEOC is doing its absolute best to continue to pursue a positive working relationship. She very much hopes a positive working relationship can be restored. It would be very valuable for the IEOC and FEI to work together again as it's a really good way for Eventing Officials to have their voice heard and to be able to raise questions and concerns as a collective group. Hopefully the FEI values the relationship, and this can be restored in the future.

The Chairman added that the IEOC and FEI worked very well together for many years, but when the IEOC presented members' questions on the Level 4 education system the FEI didn't seem to want to answer these questions. The IEOC made it clear we wanted to work together, having done so for such a long time, and having had a good relationship and didn't understand why these matters couldn't be discussed. We then went on to suggest we sit down and mediate, see where the problems are, and involve the IEOC with the education programme, but there seemed to be huge resistance, mainly probably in the legal department of the FEI. The Chairman confirmed he has had conversations on a personal level which have gone very well but any progress has then been blocked by the FEI legal department.

- *Roger Kane confirmed he had attended the most recent FEI Eventing Officials' webinar, and it was pretty clear the FEI legal department were taking a pretty hard stand. The FEI did question how representative the IEOC actually was and advised they had asked for information on the IEOC membership and that the IEOC had refused to provide this information. Was a response provided and if so, what was the response?*

Ellen confirmed the FEI did ask for a list of every member of the IEOC, which we would not do without getting consent from all members for data privacy reasons. We therefore asked the FEI if they could explain the reason they wanted the list of names so we could provide this to members when asking for consent, but the FEI refused to provide any reason as to why they wanted the list of members' names, so we weren't able to process that request in accordance with data privacy rules and protecting members' identities. The FEI hasn't at any point asked for the location of members in an anonymous way, they've only ever asked for the list of names. If they want to know about geographical representation, the open letter that we sent to the FEI recently, which was signed by just over 110 members, listed the location of members both for those who signed it with their name and those who signed anonymously. In our opinion this shows a very large geographical representation. If there is any further information the FEI would like from us in this regard, if they put it to us, we can consider it, but to date they have only ever asked for the list of names and have not given a reason why.

The Chairman confirmed the IEOC is quite happy to supply further information on the geographical location of members, but this information has never been requested, and it is a little upsetting that Mikael Rentsch suggested otherwise on the recent webinar.

- *Mary Duenow (USA): Does the FEI work with groups representing Officials from other sports?*

The Secretary General confirmed there is the International Dressage Officials Club and the International Jumping Officials Club. These organisations work in a very different way from the IEOC in that they charge a membership fee of €70 - €80, whereas the IEOC is run entirely on voluntary donations.

- *Mary went on to ask whether the FEI has any interest at all in considering the interests of Officials in any equestrian sports, or do they want to call the shots without any input from their Officials?*

The Secretary General stated she would not know but noted that dressage and jumping Officials have been paid for many years whereas the option for Eventing Officials to be reimbursed is only just being introduced so there is a difference there.

The Chairman agreed, noting that the majority of Eventing Officials are volunteers, and the sport relies on volunteers a lot more than the other disciplines do to run the sport. Eventing requires a lot more Officials to run an event, and the IEOC represents Officials in all these roles.

Mary replied that she would have thought it would be to the FEI's benefit, for the good of the sport, to have a friendly, active relationship with the Officials that are running their sports; and that her understanding is the Eventing Officials are the only ones having problems with the FEI. Like any other business in the world, they must require input from stakeholders. If you want to run your sport properly, you are a fool if you don't take input from your stakeholders, and they seem to get input from competitors and the public, but they don't seem to be interested in their Officials' input.

Ellen confirmed this is why the IEOC wants to have mediation with the FEI, to hear from them what they would like the IEOC to do so that they can get input from Eventing Officials, but

unfortunately, we haven't been able to have that open conversation with the FEI about what they would like and how it would like that relationship to work. She agreed they do seem to have stakeholders in other disciplines, and with athletes and vets, so if their issue is purely with the IEOC, it would be very helpful for them to explain exactly why, and then the IEOC would obviously listen to that and would be able to work on how to work together again.

- *Zbigniew Seibt (POL) asked who takes the decision in the FEI regarding mediation, the Legal Department or the Eventing Department? Will a change of the Eventing Department head influence the situation?*

Ellen confirmed the decision on whether to mediate is made by the FEI Board which is made up of a number of people including David O'Connor who chairs the Eventing Committee, there may also be members of the Eventing and Education Departments on the Board, but she couldn't say for sure. The Board may be influenced by the opinions of other people within the FEI.

- *Anne-Mette Binder (DEN): stated she was happy to be able to give some comments on the issues that have been raised during this meeting.*

Firstly, she was surprised to hear that the open letter was signed by members from 20 countries, as that was not her recollection.

She was keen to stress it is of the greatest concern to the Eventing Committee to hear from, advocate for, help and support all Eventing Officials. She personally was part of the group that founded the IEOC and recognises it is an important group to work with the FEI.

She confirmed the dressage Officials have their own committee, and they work very closely with the FEI and the FEI dressage committee.

She hopes that in the future it will be possible to get back to the close relationship we had between the FEI and the IEOC, this is very, very important.

The FEI has started running webinars for Eventing Officials, with the second one taking place just recently, in order to try to reach out to Officials and make sure there is a close relationship and possibility to work together.

There is an issue regarding the Level 4 education programme. They are currently working on the education system and have had feedback from all stakeholders for the redesign of the system. The suggestions for changes have been sent to a reference group who are currently looking into it and Eventing Officials from all levels and functions have been invited to give feedback on the suggestions the FEI has made for updates to the education system.

Anne-Mette encouraged members to contact her, or her colleagues on the Eventing Committee with any questions. The committee not only has her, as a judge but also a TD, course designer etc, so don't hesitate to contact them with any comments.

Ellen confirmed members from 11 countries signed the open letter to the FEI with their name. A further 73 members signed the letter anonymously, due to their wish for anonymity a breakdown of their countries wasn't provided, but they were from four different continents: Oceania, Europe, North America and South America, thus demonstrating a very good geographical representation.

The Chairman thanked Ellen for her report and all her help and reaffirmed the IEOC's hope that the FEI will agree to mediation so this matter can be resolved as soon as possible.

Members were encouraged to submit any additional questions they may have for Ellen via email after the meeting.

4. Chairman's report

The Chairman confirmed Ellen had covered most matters for his report under the previous agenda item.

He thanked the Board for their hard work over the past year, and members for all their support.

The IEOC has found itself in a very unfortunate situation and is desperately trying to get things back on track and to work through the problems – he firmly believes there is always a solution to a problem. The Board is absolutely determined to find a solution so the IEOC can once again represent Officials with the FEI. In the meantime, the IEOC still has a very strong voice and will continue to use that voice to put forward Officials' points of view to the FEI just as it did prior to signing a MoU with the FEI in 2014.

The past year has been difficult and depressing with all the legal challenges, but 2025 is an important year because rule changes are coming up and it's important that IEOC members have input into that process.

5. Secretary General's report

The Secretary General echoed much of what the Chairman had said and reiterated the IEOC will continue to do its best to answer members' questions and keep everyone in touch as best we can.

The Board is working hard to try and resolve the issues with the MoU and hopeful of an amicable result.

In addition, the IEOC launched its new Officials pack in April.

In this pack the Board has collated materials to help Officials locate and access the key resources they require to fulfil their roles.

Links to access the relevant information on the FEI website are included, rather than reproducing the content, as the FEI may update the information on its website at any time.

As such, the document is provided as guidance only and is not intended to be a replacement for the FEI website, which should always be referred to as the official source. If in any doubt about the applicable rules, Officials should always consult the relevant parties (which may include the FEI).

The IEOC Officials pack can be downloaded from the IEOC website (<https://ieoc.info>)

6. Finance report

The Treasurer noted the IEOC does not charge a membership fee but relies on donations to pay for its administration costs, and thanked members for their donations over the past year which totalled €1239.46.

The Treasurer encouraged members wishing to donate to do so via PayPal at <https://www.ieoc.info/subscriptions>

The majority of recurring annual admin costs relate to the website, mailbox and domain, as well as hosting services, and subscriptions for election and online meeting/webinar software.

The IEOC account balance as of 31st October 2024 was €1196.71.

7. Vice Chairman's report

The Vice Chairman reiterated the IEOC's main objective is, and always has been to represent its members to the best of its ability and the Board will continue to do this going forward and are hopeful that the relationship between the FEI and IEOC can be restored.

8. General Board members' reports

Wayne Copping fully supported the Vice Chairman's comments and stated Officials can be confident the IEOC Board is working to support them in any way they can.

Sue O'Brien endorsed the comments of all her fellow Board members and looks forward to a positive resolution to the current issues with the FEI.

9. Discussion: "Can Eventing "as is" survive the next twenty years and what can we do to make sure it remains as an Olympic sport?"

The following discussion point was suggested by Karlene Osorio-Khor (USA) who was unable to attend the meeting due to ill health.

I have wondered if the relationship between the IEOC and FEI has faltered because the FEI may believe that Eventing will, in the near future, go the way of steeple chase and fox hunting.

Certainly, Eventing is a most expensive discipline requiring many more moving parts than other equestrian disciplines.

The show jumping world made changes twenty or so years ago but has Eventing been open to change? Are some changes overdue and necessary to survive?

Maybe a topic worthy of conversation for consideration: "Can Eventing "as is" survive the next twenty years and what can we do to make sure it remains as an Olympic sport?"

I am hearing for the first time here in the United States people questioning whether the sport of Eventing should exist and if horses should be ridden!

I know "animal rights aka PETA" is quite familiar to Europeans, but this has not been the case in America. We have not had such activism against Equestrian sport till now. It is absolutely astounding. We have not had such a pushback on horses and riding horses as we do now.

I think it's a very important time in the sport for reflection and the formation of a plan of action.

The Secretary General noted many of these elements may have already been dealt with in different areas under the welfare of horses.

Meeting participants were invited to comment on this discussion topic.

There were no comments forthcoming, therefore people were invited to submit any suggestions/comments via email to mail@ieoc.info

10. Election results: IEOC Board (2024-2028)

The Secretary General outlined the election procedure and results as follows:

- The term of all IEOC Board members is four years. To ensure continuity of the work of the Board, the term of members' positions is staggered over a four-year cycle with an election of approximately half of the Board taking place every two years.

- Andy Griffiths, Wayne Copping and Sue O'Brien's terms of office will end on 30 November 2024.
- Andy and Wayne chose to stand for re-election. Susan O'Brien decided not to stand for re-election due to increased time pressures in other areas of her life.
- A call for nominations went out on 2 September, with a closing date of 30 September.
- Nominations were announced and details of candidates sent to members on 14 October.
- A personalised voting link was sent to each member on 28 October
- The electronic voting system closed on 16 November.

Both Wayne and Andy have been re-elected to the IEOC Board for the 2024-2028 term.

Their new term of office will begin on 1 December.

The Board will then appoint the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary General from amongst its members.

The Chairman thanked Sue O'Brien for all her hard work during her time on the IEOC Board.

11. Next AGM

The Chairman confirmed the next IEOC AGM will take place online in October/November 2025.

12. Any Other Business

The Chairman confirmed the floor would be opened for members questions, providing an open forum for discussion after all AGM business has been concluded and the meeting closed.

Comment from an anonymous participant: At the recent FEI webinars they did not answer all the questions asked by the participants, only some of them. They are supporting the riders by giving them a freebie, but Officials have to pay yet again (for the FEI Eventing Forum 2025).

Anne-Mette Binder (DEN): thanked the IEOC Board members and all meeting participants for their contribution as FEI Eventing Officials all over the world.

No further business was raised.

13. Close meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 21:02 GMT.