

IEOC Regional Meeting

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This presentation will be about:

- (a) The FEI's social media policy – which applies to officials as well as athletes;
- (b) What to do if you face abuse at an event; and
- (c) Your responsibilities surrounding decision-making at events.

2 SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

2.1 Social media is something that many of us use every day, in our personal life and perhaps also for work. Regrettably, this means that some people will also use social media for negative purposes.

2.2 To counter this, the FEI introduced a Social Media Policy last year, which sets out the standards expected online. Prior to this, there were already conduct rules in place, which covered online behaviour as well as behaviour in the real world – but the Social Media Policy bolsters these rules, and is much more specific to the online context.

2.3 As officials, it's important to be aware of these rules – not only so that you do not breach them, but also so that you know what protections you have if you face abuse online.

2.4 This is because the rules apply not only to you as officials, but also to athletes, organisers, support personnel and anyone else involved in FEI activities. That means that everyone has to abide by the expected codes of conduct when using social media.

2.5 In terms of what you can and cannot do online, it's important to remember the key purpose of the social media policy, which is to provide a respectful online environment for everyone in equestrian sport, and to protect the reputation of the sport and the FEI.

2.6 The Policy expects that you behave online as you would in the real world.

- 2.7 Behaviour that is prohibited under the Policy includes the following:
- (a) Offensive or inflammatory posts.
 - (b) Personal attacks, bullying, “naming and shaming”.
 - (c) Spreading false or misleading information.
 - (d) Posting content that may damage the reputation the sport or the FEI.
 - (e) Publicly endorsing commercial products or services in a way that could create a conflict of interest.
- 2.8 As I mentioned, the Policy is designed to protect individuals, but also the FEI – so you should bear that in mind when using social media. I.e. posts that are offensive to the FEI will also be taken seriously.
- 2.9 On the flip side, the Policy sets out the standards expected: you should be professional and respectful; you should verify facts before posting them; you should make clear when you are posting in a personal capacity, rather than in your professional capacity.
- 2.10 As for when the policy applies, it is important to know that the policy is not limited to competition days or times when you are acting “in uniform.”
- 2.11 Instead, it covers all use of social media at any time, whether before or after an event, whether on private accounts, public posts, or casual comments online.
- 2.12 It also does not just apply to content posted. Sharing other people’s content, or even just liking other content, could be covered by the Policy.
- 2.13 The key message is that your online presence is part of how you represent the sport, and everyone should think very carefully about how they present themselves online and interact with others online. A key difference with online vs in-person presence is that your online presence is more permanent and potentially available to a much wider audience than comments made in-person.
- 2.14 So what happens if you do something that is in breach of the Policy?
- 2.15 The FEI can impose a range of sanctions. For minor issues, you may receive a formal warning. For more serious infractions, you could face a suspension or demotion from your role, you

could be removed from certain appointments, and you may be fined.

- 2.16 The FEI has previously pursued cases against individuals for online conduct, thus it is something to be taken seriously.
- 2.17 As the Policy applies to athletes and other participants, not just officials, you too have a right to be protected against abuse online. If you experience anything like that, do not be afraid to report it to the FEI. It should be taken seriously.

3 WHAT TO DO IF YOU FACE ABUSE

- 3.1 Officials may sometimes feel that the FEI rules are designed to protect athletes. However, as officials, you are entitled to be protected from abuse too.
- 3.2 As I mentioned with regard to the Social Media Policy: all participants are subject to conduct rules. That includes athletes, owners, trainers, chefs d'équipe, and anyone else participating in FEI events.
- 3.3 The key document setting this out is the Safeguarding Policy Against Harassment and Abuse which can be found at Appendix I of the General Regulations.
- 3.4 What counts as misconduct under this policy includes:
 - (a) Bullying, harassment, or verbal abuse.
 - (b) Intimidation or threatening behaviour.
 - (c) Any other inappropriate conduct: whether at the event, online, or away from competition as long as it impacts anyone in the FEI environment.
- 3.5 These rules exist to create a safe and respectful environment for everyone.
- 3.6 So, what do you do if you think you have experienced abuse?
- 3.7 The primary reporting mechanism is the FEI Safeguarding Reporting Portal which can be found on the FEI's website at <https://inside.fei.org/fei/fei-reporting-hub/safeguarding> It is a simple form that you send off by email.
- 3.8 What happens when you submit a report?
 - (a) The report is reviewed by the FEI or the ECIU, the Equestrian Community Integrity

Unit. This is a body that supports the FEI in investigations related to the codes of conduct and other rule breaches.

(b) Investigations are confidential.

(c) Protection against retaliation is expressly guaranteed – with consequences for anyone who is found to retaliate.

3.9 That is the formal reporting mechanism provided by the FEI. However, we appreciate that not everyone will feel comfortable pursuing that route on their own.

3.10 As officials, you can also make use of the Independent Helpline for Officials (IHO). This is a service set up by retired officials to give free advice and support to all officials, including access to legal advice if necessary.

3.11 The IHO can be contacted via email: Iho4you@gmail.com.

3.12 The IEOC is also always on hand to support fellow officials through difficult times.

3.13 I hope that you never have to use these services, but it is always good to know what your options are if it does arise.

4 DECISION-MAKING AT EVENTS

4.1 As officials, you often have to make decisions on the spot, in the heat of the moment and under immense pressure. It can be very stressful. Your decisions can affect not just the results of the competition, but also the sport's reputation.

4.2 Given how important your decisions are, they may sometimes be challenged.

4.3 This would be by way of a protest, at an event. When a protest is lodged, the Ground Jury initially must decide the outcome. What happens in those circumstances?

4.4 Firstly, it's important to note that not all decisions can actually be challenged. In particular, decisions that are made on the field of play, i.e. during the competition, related to the competition, cannot generally be challenged. This is because it is accepted that, in sporting events, decisions are made quickly based on your experience and judgment. You cannot know what would have happened in the event had a different decision been made. It's also difficult to decide how to correct the decision, once it has been taken.

- 4.5 Thus, so called “field of play” decisions typically cannot be overruled after the event. The only exception is if there is evidence that the decision was made with bias, bad faith, arbitrariness, or corruption.
- 4.6 That doesn’t stop people from challenging field of play decisions. What do you do when a protest is filed?
- 4.7 That involves considering all the evidence and hearing the sides of all the relevant parties. The Ground Jury can tackle that alone if they feel comfortable doing so – but can also seek support from the FEI Headquarters. I would particularly recommend seeking support in cases where you are asked to decide a protest against a field of play decision. As I mentioned, these decisions are generally not reviewable unless there is evidence of bad faith, bias, etc. However, there have been occasions where field of play decisions have been appealed all the way to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (the supreme court for sports disputes) so it is important to get support early on about the right course of action.
- 4.8 The key thing to remember is: are you making the decision in good faith, impartially, and within the scope of your role and the rules? That’s the guiding principle for good decision making at events.