



VIRTUS
Equestrian Dressage Rules for
Athletes with an Intellectual Impairment
4th edition, effective 1 January 2026
All Competitions should be conducted in English
Changes for 2026 shown in red

2026 V1 18.10.25



GOVERNANCE, CODES OF CONDUCT AND VIRTUS GENERAL

REGULATIONS AND RULES

The policies and procedures explain how the organization is managed, its rules and regulations. All Members are required to adhere to the rules and regulations set out, and event organizers should consult sport and event specifications carefully.

Below you will find links to all of the codes of conduct, governance and by-laws that control all VIRTUS activities, members and officials.

VIRTUS By-Laws and Governance [please download using this link](#)

VIRTUS Committees [please download using these links](#)

VIRTUS Policies [please download using this link](#)

VIRTUS Sport Specifications [please download using this link](#)

VIRTUS Code of Conduct and Safeguarding: [please download using this link](#)

It is the intention of this rule book for it to be used online, if you have a printed copy please also refer to the links above.



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1. Objectives of Dressage for Riders with an Intellectual Impairment

The objective of Dressage for Riders with an Intellectual Impairment is to promote their inclusion in the Equestrian Dressage Community and the Equestrian Community as a whole. In addition, the objective for dressage for riders with an Intellectual Impairment is the same as for Equestrian Dressage riders, mainly to improve balance, control, mobility, memory and self-esteem.

For the Virtual and Live competitions there are two degrees of difficulty.

Performance Level

For the Performance Level we use for II-1 and II-3 the FEI Grade IV Novice A and Intermediate A Tests. They include walk, trot, canter and lateral movements. Whilst these Tests are written for a 20 x 60 arena, for the Virtual Competition and International Competitions with borrowed horses they will all be ridden in a 20 x 40 arena.

For II-2 from 1 January 2026 we will use the following tests:

- FEI Para Dressage Challenge II Grade III Foundation Test (Team Test)
- FEI Para Dressage Grade III Novice A (Individual Test)

In all tests the initial halt on entry is removed.

Athletes failing to achieve a score of 55% or higher in Performance Tests for horse welfare reasons will not be eligible to compete at Performance level until two scores of 65% or higher at Development Level have been achieved.

Development Level

- FEI Para Equestrian Grade II Novice A
- FEI Para Equestrian Grade II Intermediate A

These tests will not be used for international onsite championships and all tests will be ridden in a 20 x 40 arena.



In all tests the initial halt on entry is removed.

The objective for the dressage horse is to harmoniously develop its physique and ability, making the horse calm, supple, loose, and flexible, but also confident, attentive, and keen, thus achieving perfect understanding with its rider.

These qualities are revealed by the freedom and regularity of the paces, the harmony, lightness and ease of the movements, the lightness of the forehand and the engagement of the hindquarters, originating in a lively impulsion and the acceptance of the bridle, with submissiveness throughout and without any tension or resistance.

The horse thus gives the impression of doing of his own accord that which is required of him. Confident and attentive he submits generously to the control of his rider, remaining absolutely straight in any movement on a straight line and bending accordingly when moving on curved lines. In all movements the purity of the paces, rhythm and acceptance of the bridle.

2. The VIRTUS Equestrian Dressage Committee

The VIRTUS Equestrian Dressage Committee is formed of VIRTUS members and professionals in their field representing different global regions. Its goal is to:

- develop aligned guidelines, programs and pathways for participation and competition in Equestrian Dressage for Riders with an Intellectual Impairment globally,
- provide the Classification of Riders with an Intellectual Impairment,
- maintain and update the VIRTUS Equestrian Dressage Rule Book.

The VIRTUS Equestrian Committee endorses the FEI Code of Conduct and acknowledges and accepts that the welfare of the horse must be Equestrian Paramount and must never be subordinated.

The rules stated in this VIRTUS Equestrian Dressage Rule Book are to be adhered to by all Riders and anyone associated with them when joining global competitions under VIRTUS. When not otherwise stated, the FEI Equestrian Dressage Rules will be in place. If an issue

cannot be resolved by the rules stated in this Rule Book and the FEI Equestrian Dressage Rules, it will be the duty of the Judges and Official Stewards together with the head of the Organising Committee to make a decision in a sporting spirit.

3. Virtus Code of Conduct (Horse welfare)

- *Horse Welfare:* The highest standard of horse welfare must be adhered to. Where these specific rules do not cover a particular issue, the FEI Code of Conduct for Horse Welfare will be adopted.
- **Athletes failing to achieve a score of 55% or higher in Performance Tests for horse welfare reasons will not be eligible to compete at Performance level until two scores of 65% or higher at Development Level have been achieved.**
- *General Welfare:* Good horse management, stabling and feeding must be compatible with the best horse management practices. Clean, good quality hay, feed and water must always be available.
- *Training methods.* Horses must only undergo training that matches their physical capabilities and level of maturity for their respective disciplines. They must not be subjected to methods which are abusive or cause fear.
- *Farrier, foot care and shoeing must be of a high standard.* Tack must be designed and fitted to avoid the risk of pain or injury.
- *Transport.* During transportation horses must be fully protected against injuries and other health risks. Vehicles must be safe, well ventilated, maintained to a high standard, disinfected regularly and driven by competent personnel. Competent handlers must always be available to manage the horses.
- *Transit.* All journeys must be planned carefully, and Horses allowed regular rest periods with access to food and water in line with current FEI guidelines.

3.1 Fitness to compete:

- Participation in Competition must be restricted to fit Horses and Athletes of proven competence. Horses must be allowed a suitable rest period between training and competitions and additional rest periods should be allowed following travelling.
- *Age.* All athletes need to be a minimum of 14 years of age to compete at face to face

championship and games. There is no minimum age for video competitions.

- *Health status.* No horse deemed unfit to compete may compete or continue to compete. Veterinary advice must be sought whenever there is any doubt.
- *Doping and Medication.* Any action or intent of doping and illicit use of medication constitute a serious welfare issue and will not be tolerated. After any veterinary treatment, sufficient time must be allowed for full recovery before Competition.
- *Surgical procedures.* Any surgical procedures that threaten a competing Horse's welfare or the safety of other horses and/or Athletes must not be allowed.
- *Pregnant/recently foaled mares.* Mares must not compete after their fourth month of pregnancy or with a foal at foot.
- *Misuse of Aids.* Abuse of a horse using natural riding aids or artificial aids (e.g., whips, spurs, etc.) will not be tolerated.

3.2 Events must not prejudice Horse welfare

- *Competition areas.* Horses must be trained and compete on suitable and safe surfaces. All competition conditions must be designed with the safety of the Horse in mind.
- *Ground surfaces.* All ground surfaces on which horses train or compete must be designed and maintained to reduce factors that could lead to injury.
- *Extreme weather.* Competitions must not take place in extreme weather conditions that may compromise welfare or safety of the horse. Provision must be made for cooling conditions and equipment for horses after competing.
- *Stabling.* Stables must be safe, hygienic, comfortable, well ventilated and of sufficient size for the type and disposition of the horse. Washing-down areas and water must always be available.
- *Falls of horse and or rider.* If either or all of the combination being athlete or coach suffer a fall, they must be medically and veterinarian examined and deemed fit to compete before proceeding further with training or competition. If there is a fall of either horse or rider while in the competition arena it is automatic disqualification from that particular competition. Combinations will only be permitted to continue if deemed medically fit.

3.3 Humane treatment of horses

- *Veterinary treatment.* Veterinary expertise should be available at an Event. Where the competition is a championship then the veterinarian must be on site. If a horse is injured or exhausted during a Competition, the Athlete must stop competing and a veterinary evaluation must be performed.
- *Referral Centers.* Wherever necessary, horses should be collected by ambulance and transported to the nearest relevant treatment centre for further assessment and therapy. Injured horses must be given full supportive treatment before being transported.
- *Competition Injuries.* The incidence of injuries sustained in Competition should be monitored. Ground surface conditions, frequency of Competitions and any other risk factors should be examined carefully to indicate ways to minimise injuries.
- *Euthanasia.* If injuries are sufficiently severe a horse may need to be euthanised on humane grounds by a Veterinarian as soon as possible, with the sole aim of minimising suffering.
- *Retirement.* Horses must be treated sympathetically and humanely when they retire from Competition.

This Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse may be modified from time to time and VIRTUS will always revert to the most recent version of the FEI Veterinary Rules.

4. Eligibility & Classification

Eligibility

Please refer to the eligibility criteria as shown on the VIRTUS Website.

All riders who fulfill the VIRTUS eligibility criteria fall under the rules set in this Rule Book.

To be considered eligible to compete as an athlete with an intellectual impairment, athletes must fulfill the eligibility criteria as defined by VIRTUS which are based upon the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental



Disabilities (AAIDD).

VIRTUS now recognizes 3 different classes, II-1, II-2 and II-3

- II1 - Athletes with an intellectual disability
- II2 – Athletes with an intellectual disability and significant additional impairment
- II3 – Athletes with Autism

For details on eligibility follow link: [please download using this link](#)

Once the sport is established for athletes with an Intellectual Impairment, an Agreement will be proposed to the FEI for an II Classification criteria to be developed.

Classification rules will be developed to establish that the individual's intellectual impairment has an impact on their sports performance as an Equestrian Dressage Athlete.

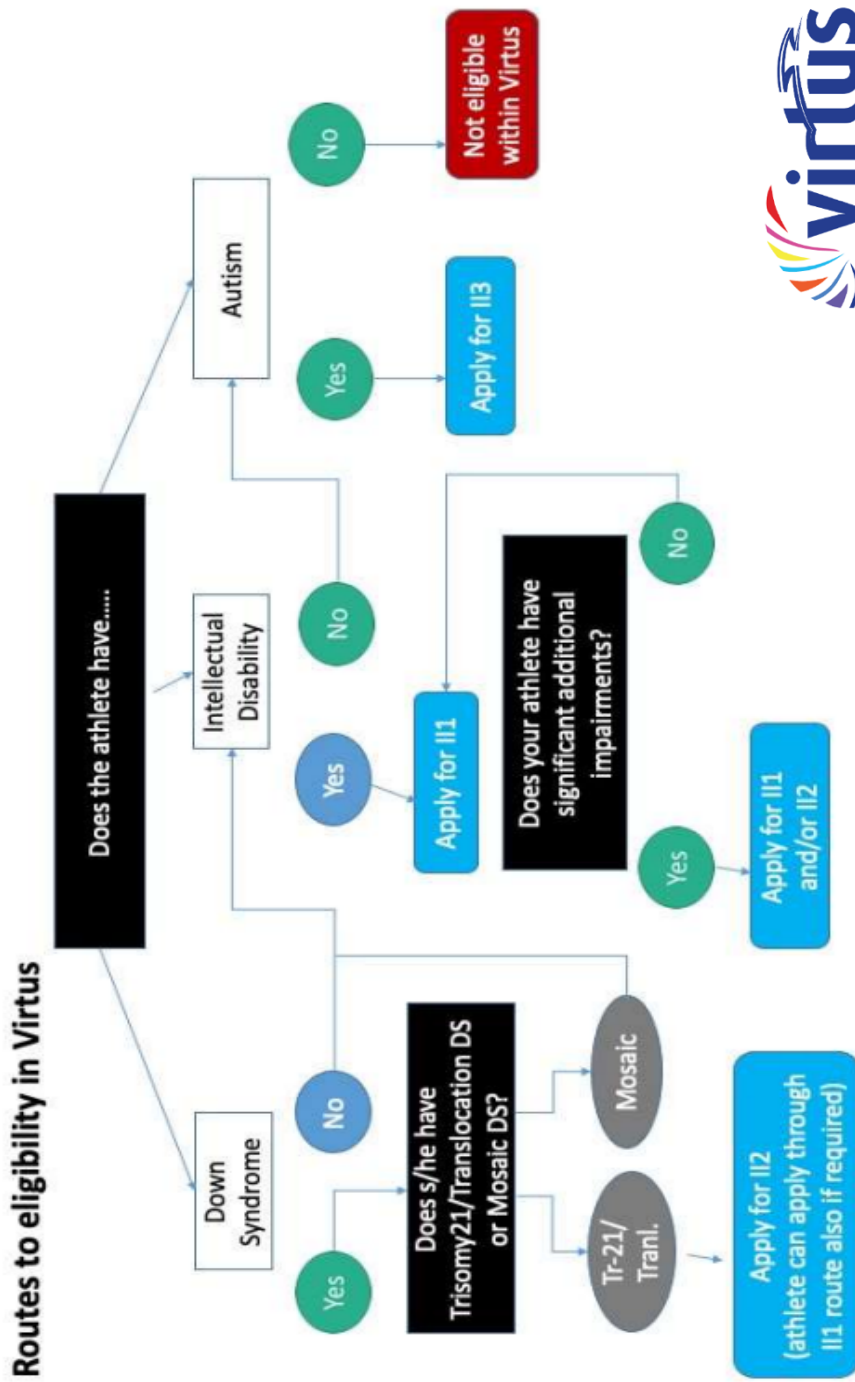
While for National competitions national eligibility with a lower amount of evidence is sufficient, for international competitions international eligibility is required. Therefore, it is suggested to apply directly for international eligibility. Details of the eligibility requirements are on the VIRTUS website: [please download using this link](#)

Relevant FEI Profile

FEI Profile 39 is for an Intellectual Impairment. Currently this profile is ineligible. According to the FEI Equestrian Dressage Manual for Classifiers – April 2018, update and effective January 2022. Unless the individual has a movement and mobility/eligible vision impairment also.

For a detailed explanation of the eligibility process within VIRTUS please see the flow diagram that follows:-

APPENDIX 3 – ROUTES TO VIRTUS ATHLETE ELIGIBILITY



5. Dressage Tests

In Equestrian Dressage for Riders with an Intellectual Impairment the following tests will be used:

5.1 Performance Level

- II1 and II3 FEI Para Grade IV Novice A – Team Test
- II1 and II3 FEI Para Grade IV Individual A – Individual Test
- II2 Para Dressage Challenge II Grade III Foundation Test – Team Test
- II2 Para Dressage FEI Grade III Novice A – Individual Test

For video competitions all tests are ridden in a 20 x 40 arena.

At live competition where borrowed horses are being used, all tests will be ridden in a 20 x 40 arena. Performance Tests for II1 and II3 can also be ridden in a 20 x 60 arena but only where there are no borrowed horses.

Athletes failing to achieve a score of 55% or higher in Performance a Test in Video or Live Virtus Competitions, the athlete will not be eligible to compete at Performance level until two scores of 65% or higher at Development Level have been achieved.

Please note that all tests ridden for Virtus Competitions and used under the agreement of the FEI the initial halt on entry will be removed.

For Video Competitions:

These videos must be recorded from C with a clear introduction showing the day's newspaper and an introduction of rider name, horse name and which test is being ridden. These videos may only be submitted on YouTube and must be recorded keeping the horse in the middle of the screen at all times. **Poor quality video, zooming in and out, losing the horse out of the frame, not showing the current test accurately at the start of video by the correct name may result in elimination.**

Where videos are submitted and the judge of the test deems that it is not possible to fairly judge the test being performed due to the quality of recording the judge may choose to eliminate that combination from the competition. The following must be adhered to in addition to the guidelines for videoing a test which include the following:

1. Clearly show the newspaper page displaying the date
2. Clearly announce the rider name
3. Clearly announce the horse name
4. Clearly state the Country
5. Clearly state the test being performed – **named as shown on the FEI website**
6. Clearly state whether II1, II2 or II3

5.2 Development Level

- FEI Para Equestrian Grade II Novice A
- FEI Para Equestrian Grade II Intermediate A

5.3. For Live Competitions

For Performance Riders use FEI Novice and Intermediate tests as stated above, with the difference that the Halt in the first movement is omitted:

The Tests can be found on the FEI website: [please download using this link](#)

Freestyle to Music may be used at live competitions run by national federations but these will not qualify riders for anything and will not have scores submitted to Virtus. If music is offered the first and final halt will be required for timing purposes. The national federation may choose which FEI FSM test is appropriate to use.

A supporter may raise the hand for the music to commence on behalf of the athlete.

Any National Competition where Virtus Classes are run over multiple days must host an athlete meeting once a year face to face at these competitions so that athletes and supporters are given important information and we can receive feedback

Warm Up Etiquette

- 10 minute arena should be provided if facilities and timetables permit. Use of one or provision of one is not compulsory
- Coaching from long side of arena OK but coaches/helpers cannot be on the warm up surface except for safety which is agreed with steward
- Use of hand signals during calling test is not permitted
- Coaches should ensure riders adhere to the rules of arena
 - Walk only on inner track
 - Priority to lateral work
 - Left to left passing
 - Max warm up time in a day
 - Lunge max 2 a day in 2x30 minute slots
 - No more than 2 ridden sessions in a day max 40 minutes per slot
- If a horse is being shared by two athletes they cannot be the same class
- **A rider may only compete 2 horses per competition in a live environment with prior approval by the OC. They may only be in a team on one horse.**
- If an athlete also has a horse they are riding, they may not also ride a shared horse.
- All judging must be conducted under FEI Guidelines and Equine Welfare Policy
- All horses must be sound and regular at all times, if a horse is deemed not to be the Steward may approach the Ground Jury to discuss on the grounds of horse welfare
- If a team competition shared horses may only be used in different classes

5.4 Use of Headsets for test during Competition and phonetics for letters

If an athlete has the test read to them while competing in live competitions with a headset, a 3-way headset must be used. The rider will wear one ear piece, the commander the 2nd and the designated official will wear the 3rd. All three ear pieces must be workable to enable the official to hear any two-way conversations.

The letters around the arena may be called phonetically but prior to the start of the test the steward must be advised of this. Only the following phonetic alternatives may be used. No commands maybe altered when calling.

Virtus letters	
A	Apple
K	King
E	Egg
H	Harry
C	Cat
M	Mary
B	Bob
F	Fred
R	Roger
S	Sam
V	Vic
P	Peter
L	Larry
I	Igloo
D	Dog
X	X-ray
G	Goat

- No movement or letter may be repeated more than twice
- No visual aids may be given to the athlete
- The test must be called in the manner in which it is written and no additional instructions or words added. Words may however be omitted where appropriate

Calling if using a headset must be 3 way and it must work so that the steward can use 1 head piece and evidence what is being spoken to the athlete.

5.5 Riding own horse in a live competition

All athletes riding their own horse in a live competition where others are riding borrowed horses will have a 0.5 percentage point from their final score deducted.

5.6 Coaches riding athletes horses at live competitions

Only borrowed horses for the competition may be ridden by a coach from the day of trial until the end of training on the day of the Horse Inspection. After acceptance at the Horse Inspection coaches may no longer ride the athlete horse(s).

5.7 Coaches riding athletes own horses at live Competitions.

The coach may not ride the horse once it is on the show ground unless exceptional circumstances prevail and approval by the Virtus Equestrian Committee and OC.

6. Equipment (Rider & Horse)

6.1 Riding Wear

All riders should wear an outfit as stated in the FEI Para Dressage Rules, however the riders may wear jodhpur boots and black or brown leather half chaps.

6.2 Compensating Aids

Standard Aids (all riders may use these)

- Magnetic Stirrups may be used
- Salute with head only
- Sitting or rising trot

- Sign language
- Use of Voice (athlete)
- Test Caller (must be recorded for video competitions) and escorted in live competition.
- Safety vest (including inflatable)
- Gloves
- 1 whip (max length 120cm)
- A pair of matching spurs (without rowels or offset)
- Reins of any type – but must not be attached to the saddle (multi coloured reins permitted)
Any kind of auxiliary reins are strictly prohibited
- Saddle – any type
- No stirrups
- Seat Savers
- Soft hand-hold (30cm max length) Firm hand hold max dimensions 10 x 30 cm
- Firm hand-hold max dimensions 10 x 30 cm
- Breast plate and/or neck strap
- Any stirrup irons permitted by FEI Para Dressage (including magnetic and enclosed)
- Elastic bands on stirrups
- Strap from stirrup leather or stirrup to girth (must use safety stirrups if taking this option)
- Any FEI permitted snaffle bit or Weymouth
- Double bridle
- Split reins
- Elastic inserts in reins
- Knotted Reins
- Looped Reins
- Bar reins
- Marker Beepers

6.3 Dispensations

A Dispensation Panel has been formed that approves the use of any non-standard compensating aids. It currently consists of Mary Longden and Amanda Rodgers. This Panel will evaluate on issues other than rider safety and permission must be gained prior to competing.

Examples of areas that may come under consideration by this Panel include:

- Use of Velcro
 - Multiple whips
 - Adapted gloves
 - Attachment of stirrup irons or leathers to girth with a Velcro strap
 - Foot reins
 - Any adjustment to a standard saddle design
- * Saddles must be no deeper than 12mm and is measured as below



Not permitted:

- Electronic communication devices
- Reins not directly from the horse's mouth to the rider's hand
- Leaders and side walkers

If an athlete has compensating aids from Para Equestrian these must be pre-notified and accepted by the Compensating Aids Panel of Virtus Equestrian prior to use in any video or live competition.

6.4 Additional Rule for VIRTUS Competitions

A friendly horse is permitted for all riders. This horse must be held by a handler and be in a bridle. It should be positioned a minimum of 5m from the edge of the arena and must be at the A end of the arena.

All riders may be led around the outside of the arena prior to starting their Test. They must be released at A. The handler must have an attached lead rope and not interfere at any time with the reins.

A helper may stand at each corner (4) of the arena for safety during the Test. They may not speak and they must be a minimum of 5m from the edge of the arena.

Visually impaired riders are allowed to be led or ride independently once around the inside of the arena in each direction. If required, they may commence their Test from within the arena.

7. Competition Rules

Competitors must have gone through the eligibility process set by VIRTUS and appear on the VIRTUS Master list.

All competitors must adhere to the current rules as shown in the FEI Equestrian Dressage Rule Book, and any addendums to the rule book.

No horse may be ridden in advance of the athlete by a coach at Video competitions. If two riders are sharing the same horse, the riding of the horse by the first athlete is acceptable.

At live (not video) competitions no horse may be ridden by anybody other than the athletes who are competing the horse after the start of the competition (horse inspection).

Horses may be lunged by a designated person but may only be lunged unmounted wearing equipment in accordance with FEI lunging guidelines as stipulated in the Para Equestrian rules.

At live competitions a schedule of trial, exercising, schooling and coach assessment will be produced on non competition days. If for safety reasons on competition days a horse requires any coach intervention this must be addressed to the OC in advance.

8. Rules for Video Competition

Tests should be ridden and will be judged according to the rules of this VIRTUS Equestrian Dressage Rule Book.

- Modifications have been made to facilitate Virtual judging:
For the Virtual competition all tests will be ridden in a 20x40 arena. Riders using the wrong sized arena will not be judged and will be disqualified.
- Videos of Tests must not be entered if they have already been judged in another competition. For this reason, horses must wear bandages or boots.
- The videographer must stand well behind C. All recording must be in landscape.
- The quality of the video must be so that it can be judged keeping the horse central in the frame of the picture throughout with minimal zooming in and out.
- Sound must be recorded to ensure the rider is not receiving coaching during the Test.
- The video must be in one take, without cuts.
- Videos will only be accepted in You Tube format with a password if required
- Horses and ponies can be ridden by two riders of a Team.
- Entry Fees. Will be paid online to VIRTUS via the entry platform, in line with VIRTUS event entry Terms and Conditions.
- A date will be set for the competition and a rider/horse combination may submit one or two entries out of the three different Tests offered.
- Electronic Certificates will be awarded to the riders placed 1 to 6 in each of the Tests.
- Regarding the outfit of the rider and equipment of the horse, please refer to the rules in this book.
- Any kind of auxiliary reins are forbidden. Using of auxiliary reins will lead to disqualification.
- A Commander may be used.
- The Salute should be with the reins (and whip) in one hand and the free hand lowered to the rider's side. The rider should nod his head. Riders can also salute with the head only.
- **There will be no team placing at video competitions.**

9. Global Games & Regional Games

All riders must be internationally VIRTUS Registered, have competed in a nominated Virtual Competition in the twelve months before the date of the competition, each competition will have its own dates and should be referred to via the schedule for the event.

Athlete will have achieved a minimum of 62% in the virtual competitions or Regional/World Games within the twelve months prior to the Championship or any other event defined as being qualifiers.

It is the athlete who qualifies for this competition, not the combination. Horses may be substituted prior to arrival on site if bringing own horse.

No two athletes may ride the same horse at a live competition unless it is deemed necessary by the ground jury. If this is put into place no two riders from the same grade may compete that horse.

Should a horse fail the horse inspection, a substitution horse may be brought into the competition from the pool of loan horses or a substitute from that athletes country. The substitute horse must be presented at the horse inspection and approved fit to run by the Inspection Panel.

Team Competition

- Teams can only be made up of a maximum of four riders.
- Teams of three riders will be accepted.
- The best three scores will be taken forward for the team calculation
- If there are more than two II3 riders in a team only the highest two scores will count towards the team score calculation.
- there cannot be more than three riders from the same eligibility class in a team of four. The lowest score will be discarded.

Horses must be assessed as fit to compete.

Athletes' owners, trainer and supporters must adhere to the Code of Conduct and directives of Officials at all times.

The protocol for the Horse Inspection is as follows:

- All horses must be presented in a Snaffle Bridle displaying the horse ID number
- A whip max length 120cm may be used for a horse and 100cm for a pony
- Helmet compulsory
- Sensible clothing to be worn
- Suitable covered footwear which can protect feet and can be ran in
- A designated person must be declared who will present the horse
- Only the Chef d'quipe for the team and the designated person may enter the horse area's during horse inspection

If the athlete is to present the horse, they may only do so if correctly trained and dressed and able to understand the instructions given by the Ground Jury

Horses will be presented to the Vet on arrival at the Show. Failure to be deemed fit to compete or be vaccinated in accordance with local veterinary protocol will result in elimination.

There will be a formal horse inspection for all horses within 24 hours of the start of the first competition day. Failure to pass this inspection will offer athletes one of the following options:

- Re-present later in the day or before the commencement of the first athlete competing on the first day of competition.
- Withdraw from competition
- Represent at the end of the Horse Inspection
- the decision of the Ground Jury and Veterinarian is final and cannot be contested.

All tack and equipment will be in accordance with the current years FEI Rules



Attendance at all Prize Giving's is compulsory, failure to do this may result in elimination from all competitions at the relevant event. The only exceptions are on production of a Veterinarian certificate or Doctor's letter.

Athletes who opt not to ride for 2 consecutive days will forfeit prizes unless a Doctors or Vet Certificate is provided.

10. World Rider Video League

- The league will run from the first video competition after the Global Games and will finish at the video competition early in the year of the Global Games (4 years later).
- The league will be updated annually and displayed on the Virtus Equestrian Page of the website.
- A rider must have a minimum of 3 scores regardless horse and test.
- The average of all tests will be counted. If riders who ride two horses for one video competition do not want one horse going into the calculation, they have to join the competition HC.