



AGM Questions

Governance Questions

Joanna Fielder asked:

With over 17,000 BD members, of which only approx. 200 are registered para riders, do you think it is fair that all members are allowed to vote on para related matters when the outcome is of little or no consequence to the majority of the membership? Would it not be fairer to let the voices of the para community carry a greater weighting, voting for matters that directly concern them rather than potentially being drowned out and effectively silenced by the able-bodied majority?

It is vitally important that all members have a say in who represents their interests at Board level. Board Directors are responsible for the strategic oversight and good governance for the whole of British Dressage, not just their technical area of expertise. While we do need to ensure that Directors have the technical knowledge, skills and capability for their specific role, as Trustees for the Charity all Board Directors have much a broader set of responsibilities that extend across the whole sport.

It is the function of the Nominations Committee to scrutinise all applications to ensure that only suitable candidates are put forward for election by the membership. However, it would be no more appropriate for only Para riders to vote for the Para Director, than it would only Judges to vote for the Judges Director or only coaches to vote for the Training Director. The Board has to be able to represent the interests of all riders at all levels.

Derek Pullem asked:

COVID-19 has made it difficult to hold in-person AGMs for all companies but can the CEO confirm the approximate number of votes received in person and by proxy today? Given that the membership of BD is around 17,000, what efforts are being made to expand attendance at next year's AGM? Mi-Voice who provide our Board election process also provide for and in-person and virtual AGM platform – will BD consider this for 2022?

The uncertainty related to COVID was the major influencing factor in determining the date and location of the AGM. We totally agree that it has been far from ideal that we have had to host this in a hotel over the last two years – and prior to the pandemic the intention was to hold the AGM at Arena UK to coincide with the Summer Area Festival Championships. We did have a members' meeting there last week, where we had 25 people in attendance to meet with the Senior Management Team face to face, but of course we ideally would like greater levels of engagement.

At Stoneleigh, when we held the AGM on the first day of our National Championships, there would typically be only 80-90 people in attendance. Even last year, when the AGM was held online for the first time, we only had a peak viewing audience of 120 people. So, we are definitely open to exploring ways in which we can get more members involved, as the AGM is a vital opportunity for members to provide their feedback and ensure that their views are adequately represented.

Due to the lead in times and question marks over what restrictions would be in place in October, we felt it was prudent to plan for a hybrid AGM this year, to allow people to attend in person, while also offering a live streaming option. We had to make a decision on this back in mid-June, when there was still a great deal of uncertainty around running public events, especially indoors. Hopefully we can return to a normal operation for our AGM next year – and Arena UK would probably be our first preference rather than at the Nationals at Somerford Park, as there are more suitable facilities available there.

Today we have 25 people in attendance here in Meriden, plus 29 proxy votes submitted in advance, but this is obviously a very small number and we will certainly look at other ways we can make the AGM more interactive online, whether using Mi-Voice or another technology platform.

Derek Pullem also asked:

The Finance committee minutes of 3 August noted that there would be sub/committee review of the charity's reserves policy. Who was on that committee, what were its terms of reference and has any decision been reached from their meeting in September?

A working group was formed to consider and formulate a Reserves Policy in August. This included the Finance Director as Chair, as well as the Chief Executive and three other members of the Finance & Business

Development Committee. A draft Reserves Policy was produced and presented to the F&BD Committee at the end of last month and the final version was discussed and ratified at today's Board Meeting. This will be published on the BD website in due course.

As referred to earlier by Caroline Godfrey, the reserves policy will reflect our strategic planning, budgeting and risk management processes.

It is vitally important that we have sufficient reserves to protect the organisation and sport in the event of a force majeure situation, as we have experienced in the last 18 months, to enable to continued operation of British Dressage, while we also need to have money available for specific projects, such as our Judge Education System or Youth Professional Development Strategy, where it may require some additional funding upfront.

BD needs to have sufficient resources to respond to investment and growth opportunities as set out in the strategic plan, although Reserves will also be invested to ensure that any funds maintain their value, as far as possible.

Rules Questions

Julie Smith asked:

Given that outbreaks of equine influenza returned to 'normal' levels in August 2019 and have remained very low ever since, will BD be returning to an annual vaccination policy? If not, please provide the scientific evidence and justification for not doing so. The vast majority of members are unlikely to ever compete at an international event or need to comply with FEI rules and other organisations such as British Riding Clubs have already reverted back to the annual programme.

This issue was a topic for discussion at a recent British Equestrian Federation Council meeting, where there was a presentation on behalf of the Equine Infectious Diseases Advisory Group. It was also on the agenda and discussed at length at today's BD Board Meeting.

While we are aware that BRC have reverted back to an annual programme for EI vaccinations, subsequently the British Horseracing Authority have moved to a six-monthly booster requirement, from the previous nine-month regime. The Equine Infectious Diseases Advisory Group continues

to strongly endorse and recommend a six-monthly booster protocol and encourage the Olympic Disciplines to maintain a gold standard, in line with FEI regulations.

The scientific evidence supports maintaining the current rules. EI vaccines induce measurable antibodies that protect against infection and disease. These decline with time after vaccination and some horses are proven to be less well protected at 12 months versus six months after their booster. Studies by the Animal Health Trust indicate that the vaccine strains become outdated over time, and based on their mathematical models and field data, there are smaller outbreaks with horses that have received six-month boosters.

While the reduction in movement of horses over the last 18 months due to Covid has resulted in a lower prevalence of Equine Influenza in the community, there is no room for complacency – and the best protection we can give to our horses is to maintain the current minimum requirement of mandatory annual vaccinations, with a booster within six months (plus 21 days) prior to the horse competing. This remains in line with the FEI, British Eventing and higher-level Pony Club competition.

Organiser Questions

Duncan Whitney-Groom asked:

Could you advise why we have to set competition dates/levels so many months in advance? If we only had to set classes six weeks prior to the competition, there would be a better opportunity to secure judges in that timescale as understandably many don't want to commit so far in advance. It would help avoid clashes and issues in gaining judges, stewards and competitors if we did not have to set schedules so far in advance, especially as the schedules do not appear in the magazine. The current opening date is six weeks prior to competition, so riders cannot enter prior to the period in any case.

The competition schedules were initially removed from the BD magazine as a short-term measure during COVID as we were not in a position to plan ahead with any certainty, with fixtures and competition dates likely to change and require further updates or amends.

One of the drawbacks of having competition schedules in the magazine rather than online is that they are out of date from the moment they are

published. From an operational perspective, it would be our preference to maintain these in electronic form on the BD website, so we can ensure that the information provided to members is current and correct.

However, many members have requested that competition schedules are restored in the magazine from January 2022 onwards. There are some who have expressed a strong preference from having these in printed form, well in advance, to aid with their campaign and competition planning.

Discussions on this remain ongoing, as there may well be a compromise solution that allows an abridged version for competition listings to be included in the magazine, with the full schedule including details on specific classes and levels available online only.

Once a 'normal' calendar is restored, our intention is to return to publishing all major dates in advance of fixtures meetings, as we did previously prior to the pandemic, so all organisers are informed of these when planning the allocation of competition dates to avoid clashes wherever possible.

Duncan Whitney Groom also asked:

Why do BD continue to charge venues fixed starter levies for Novice and Elementary qualifiers, regardless of the numbers entered in those classes?

These were originally introduced to discourage venues from running unaffiliated competition at those levels on the same day as qualifiers for affiliated dressage, which resulted in smaller class sizes. This dilution is not desirable for anyone, but particularly our competitors and officials.

There are exemptions in place for those venues in remote areas that do not have sufficient numbers of competitors to meet these minimum starter number requirements – and we did waive these fees post-COVID to help assist venues during the recovery period.

Sport Operations Questions

Another question from Derek Pullem:

The Sport Operations Committee minutes of 5 May stated a working group had been established to review the silver structure and pathways for

Regionals and Area Festivals. Who is on that working group, what are its terms of reference and when are they expected to report?

Unfortunately, due to COVID we have been unable to start work on this review as yet, although it remains a priority for the Sport Operations Committee over coming months. Due to running the rescheduled Winter fixtures and summer season qualification in parallel, all of our championships have been condensed into a six-month timeframe.

With the qualification carryover and reduced points requirement, it would have made it difficult to conduct any meaningful review this year due to these exceptional circumstances. However, now that we have had the first year of Summer Area Festivals, we will have more data to work with.

This is on the agenda for further discussion at the next Sport Operations Committee meeting in November, when we aim to set the terms of reference for this review and formally constitute the working group. The intention would be for this group to produce their report by the spring of next year.

National Championships Questions

We have also received a number of questions, comments and feedback about the Nationals at Somerford Park, including at our members' meeting at Arena UK last week, so rather than address those individually it's perhaps easier to give you a full overview and background to this year's championships.

We only had the green light to run this as a full-blown spectator show in mid-June, so had just weeks rather than the usual 12 months to pull such a large-scale event together, all on a new site, with significant changes to the format, timetable and showground layout.

The move to a new location gave us a third arena, which meant that we could open up additional competition opportunities. New silver classes for Prix St Georges and Inter I were joined by PSG Gold Freestyle and Prelim Gold, as well as an inaugural U21 Championships and a 7yo Championship. A further eight classes had their numbers increased by 112 places in total – providing an extra 250 competition spots over the four days.

From a competitor perspective, the flow of the site worked really well, from the new barn style stables, to the individual warm up areas for each arena.

The main show arena had a real championship atmosphere, surrounded by spectators on all sides, with free seating offering space for up to 1,500 spectators and the Nationals Pavilion providing a fantastic view over two arenas. Many said it had much more of a 'continental' feel to the showground, like an international CDI, which was great to hear.

The feedback we have received from members has been overwhelmingly positive, so thank you for coming along and supporting us.

It was particularly challenging running the National Championships this year at a brand-new venue, against the dual backdrop of COVID and Brexit, which provided a number of obstacles to overcome. Whereas we had access to permanent facilities and resources at Stoneleigh, including toilets, Wi-Fi, electricity and water, at Somerford most of the infrastructure was temporary.

The compacted season for outdoor events meant that contractors and suppliers were in high demand and difficult to source. Retailers were also reluctant to commit to trade stands this year – some have gone out of business during COVID, others had changed their commercial model to selling online only. This was all compounded by supply chain issues and staff shortages, resulting in changes to suppliers at the eleventh hour and a number of food concessions dropping out in the last ten days building up to the show.

So, I'm very proud that the BD, Show Direct and Somerford teams managed to pull it off under the circumstances. While of course there is room for improvement – and we share members' desire to have a better range of healthy food options, as well as a greater variety of trade stands – it must be understood that the context for this year's championships was unique.

The escalating costs in running an event of this nature also needs to be recognised. Since our last Nationals at Stoneleigh in 2019 the cost of seating alone as rocketed from £9.50 per seat to £23 per seat for the covered grandstand and £18 for the uncovered seating. This requires a significant investment from BD in order to put on a show of this magnitude.

Therefore, while we understand that there is a desire from our members to have the Championships available via live streaming, this has to be balanced against the commercial viability of the show. It is not true to assert that this would not have an impact on footfall; other sports have the same commercial pressures on attendance at live events, as it inevitably cannibalises income.

We will continue to look at potential ways we could make this work in future years, but it will need to stack up financially, including the additional investment required in production costs. While members have indicated that they would be happy to pay to access live streaming, it is unlikely that this price point would be equivalent to the face value of tickets – and we do rely on spectators to make the show pay, as well as generate footfall for trade stands and create the atmosphere you would expect at a championship event.

Another point raised by a number of members related to the programme not being available in printed form this year. Due to COVID, as well as our ongoing attempts to be as environmentally friendly as possible, it was a conscious decision to make the Nationals a paperless event this year.

Therefore, there were no physical tickets or programmes – and these were instead produced in digital form. Programme sales have been in decline for a number of years now – from a peak of around 1,200–1,500 down to just 400–500 copies, so again this is a loss-making enterprise for BD.

Nevertheless, we are aware that some members have expressed a strong preference for printed starter sheets, so this is something we will look to address next year so we have the best of both worlds. We will also make sure to make the information easier to access via the live scoring App, as well as provide charger stations so your mobile phones don't run out of juice!

The BD Fanzone was a popular addition, with up to 1,700 of you also viewing the sessions broadcast on Facebook Live, and we learned a lot from the other digital initiatives we introduced this year, from the e-ticketing to live scoring. This was just the start, and it provides us with a good foundation on which to continue to build and evolve the show, to make it as interactive, accessible and enjoyable as possible for spectators.

We'll be sending out a feedback questionnaire to competitors and those who bought tickets very soon. Please do take time to complete it if you

came to Somerford. We want to work with all stakeholders to make the Nationals our flagship show, so your input is vital.