



HORSE SPORT

IRELAND

F.A.O. Board of Directors Dressage Ireland clg

admin@dressageireland.ie

Re: FEI European Dressage Championships 2026 – CDIJ

11 June 2026

Dear Members of the Board,

Thank you for your letter of 9 June regarding Junior representation at the 2026 FEI European Dressage Championships.

Horse Sport Ireland (HSI), as the Sport Ireland recognised National Governing Body for equestrian sport in Ireland, and the FEI-recognised National Federation responsible for youth and senior international dressage representation and for selection of athletes to represent Ireland at FEI Championships. We note your acknowledgement in this regard.

By way of context, the current selection policy and associated performance criteria form part of a long-established High Performance framework. These criteria have evolved progressively over a number of years in line with the increasing standards of international competition and have been applied consistently over successive cycles, demonstrating their appropriateness in preparing combinations for Championship competition. They were published, circulated and discussed in advance of the current season.

As part of that process, the 2026 criteria were presented in detail at the Youth High Performance camp earlier this year, where performance requirements, athlete responsibilities and veterinary considerations were outlined, and athletes and parents were afforded the opportunity to engage with and understand the framework within which selection decisions would be made.

The programme itself is technically led, with selection decisions informed by objective performance data, progression benchmarks and horse and athlete welfare considerations. Within that framework, selection criteria are designed not only to determine eligibility, but to assess readiness to compete at championship level in a manner consistent with both performance expectations and the welfare of the individuals involved. In that regard, HSI respectfully disagrees with the suggestion that meeting the FEI qualification standard should, of itself, be sufficient grounds for Championship selection.



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The FEI qualification standard is an eligibility threshold. HSI's published criteria represent a performance standard. The existence of the former does not remove the necessity for the latter. The FEI criteria establish which combinations may be eligible for consideration. HSI's additional criteria are designed to ensure that those ultimately selected have demonstrated the level required to compete at contemporary European Championship level.

International youth dressage has become increasingly competitive over the past decade. While FEI qualification identifies combinations eligible for consideration, HSI's responsibility is to determine whether those combinations have demonstrated sufficient performance, consistency and readiness to justify selection to represent Ireland at a European Championship.

HSI's role is not simply to facilitate participation, but to select athletes who can compete effectively at the level they will encounter. The consistent application of published standards is fundamental to the integrity, credibility and long-term success of the High Performance programme.

Maintaining these standards is not about restricting opportunity or preventing progress. Clear and objective performance benchmarks are a central component of athlete development: they provide transparency, recognise achievement and give athletes a clear understanding of the level required for Championship selection. To select solely on the basis of FEI eligibility would undermine the purpose of having published national criteria and would be fundamentally inconsistent with a High Performance approach based on demonstrated readiness.

For clarity, these criteria define the basis upon which all selection decisions are made, including whether sufficient combinations meet the standard required to support a team capable of competing credibly and in line with programme objectives.

HSI fully recognises the importance of providing championship opportunities as part of athlete development. However, such opportunities must be delivered within a structured pathway that prioritises appropriate preparation, positive athlete experience and long-term progression. Participation at championship level, in the absence of these factors, carries risks for both athlete development and welfare and is therefore carefully considered within the High Performance programme.

In addition, HSI has a duty to safeguard athlete and horse welfare, which is a central consideration within the High Performance programme and is explicitly reflected in the selection policy. Selection decisions therefore necessarily include assessment of factors such as horse welfare, veterinary considerations, suitability for travel and the demands of Championship competition. These considerations are integral to determining whether a combination is appropriately prepared for the conditions and challenges associated with European Championships and are not always fully visible outside of the programme environment.



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It is important to avoid reducing a detailed, criteria-based selection process to simplified characterisations which do not reflect the full context of technical assessment, programme standards and welfare considerations. Selection decisions are made following comprehensive evaluation against all published criteria. While HSI remains committed to transparency, it would not be appropriate to comment on the performance, preparation or individual circumstances of athletes or combinations in open correspondence.

We do not accept that the consistent application of clearly defined and previously communicated criteria undermines the development pathway. On the contrary, transparent and progressive standards provide clarity for athletes and stakeholders, support sustained improvement and ensure alignment with the demands of international competition.

HSI remains firmly committed to the development of youth dressage and to supporting athletes in their progression towards championship participation through the High Performance system. This includes ongoing programme support, pathway development and engagement with stakeholders across the discipline.

In response to your request that the position be reviewed and that clear reasons be provided, HSI is satisfied that the published selection criteria were appropriate, proportionate and clearly communicated in advance of the season, and that selection decisions have been made in accordance with those criteria. While stakeholders may differ on where performance standards should be set, HSI's responsibility is to apply those standards consistently and fairly in the interests of athletes, horse welfare and the long-term development of the sport.

In the interests of transparency, and to ensure that stakeholders have access to the full and complete context of the selection framework and its application, HSI intends to make this response publicly available through its own communication channels.

HSI remains available to engage constructively with Dressage Ireland on the continued development of the youth pathway, in a manner that respects the respective roles and responsibilities of both organisations.

Yours sincerely,

Avalon Everett

Chief Operations Officer & General Counsel

Horse Sport Ireland

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Avalon Everett

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Anne-Marie Dunphy

Dressage High Performance Manager – Youth & Senior

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Signed by:

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