

Equestrian Australia – Interschool All Abilities Competition Framework (Revised 2025)

Executive Summary

This Framework establishes Equestrian Australia's (EA) unified national approach to delivering inclusive Interschool competition opportunities for riders with intellectual, physical, or neurodevelopmental disabilities.

It aims to ensure consistent, accessible, and ability-appropriate competitive experiences from school level through to national events, with clear alignment to Virtus and Para-Equestrian classification pathways.

1. Introduction

EA is committed to ensuring that all students, regardless of disability or accessibility needs, have the opportunity to participate meaningfully and safely in equestrian sport. The Interschool All Abilities Competition Framework provides consistent national guidance for classification, support, competition structure, and progression.

This model ensures all athletes—whether eligible through Virtus or Para-Equestrian systems—are integrated into one unified All Abilities competition pathway based on functional riding ability, not disability type.

Objectives

- Provide equitable access to Interschool competition for riders with intellectual, physical, or developmental disabilities.
- Establish clear eligibility, classification recognition, and permitted adaptive equipment.

- Deliver ability-based competition categories that accommodate riders across a range of functional abilities.
- Support State Branches, schools, and officials with education and consistent operational guidelines.
- Integrate All Abilities classes into State and National Championships from 2026 onward.
- Foster progression pathways from school competitions through to Virtus and Para-Equestrian opportunities.

2. Eligibility

Eligibility for All Abilities participation is determined by evidence that the rider's disability has a measurable impact on riding ability, motor coordination, learning, or behaviour relevant to safe riding and competition.

Riders may be eligible through:

- Virtus classification – Intellectual Disability, Autism.
- Para-Equestrian classification – physical or motor disability.
- Medical verification – for riders whose disability impacts riding function but may not fit formal classification.
- Riders who present with a combination of physical and neurodevelopmental impairments that significantly affect riding ability may be deemed eligible through medical verification even where the rider does not meet the formal eligibility criteria for Virtus or Para-Equestrian classification.

Once approved, riders receive an EA Exemption Card outlining:

- Approved adaptive tack/equipment.
- Assistance permitted in competition.
- Eligible competition category (1–3).

Additional Eligibility Principle

The All Abilities pathway is intended for riders whose disability results in a measurable functional impact on riding ability or competition participation.

Riders who are capable of competing competitively in open Interschool classes without the need for adaptive support or modification may be deemed ineligible for All Abilities classes.

The EA Exemption Committee reserves the right to determine eligibility where a diagnosis alone does not result in functional limitation relevant to riding performance.

Evidence Required

- Virtus classification confirmation; or
- Para-Equestrian classification documentation; or
- Medical documentation outlining functional impact relevant to riding.

All documentation is assessed by the EA Exemption Committee, who issue the rider's Exemption Card.

Provisional Classification

Riders who are currently progressing through the Para-Equestrian classification process may be permitted to compete in All Abilities classes on a provisional basis while classification is being completed.

3. Competition Structure

The competition uses a unified tier system, grouping riders by functional riding ability rather than disability type. This ensures fairness, simplicity, and inclusion across all Interschool events.

Category 1 – Introductory (Walk Only)

- 20 × 40m arena.
- Focus on control, rhythm, partnership, and basic patterns.

Category 2 – Developing (Simple Walk-Trot)

- 20 × 40m arena.
- Focus on control, rhythm, partnership, and basic patterns.

Category 3 – Progressive (Walk–Trot–Canter)

- 20 × 60m arena.
- Includes basic transitions, simple figures, and progressive patterns.

Category 4 – Advanced (Walk–Trot–Canter with technical elements)

- 20 × 60m arena.
- Tests may include more complex movements or extended Show Horse individual patterns (“workouts”).
- For riders with higher functional independence and riding skill.

4. Judging

All athletes are judged using unified EA All Abilities criteria with emphasis on:

- Accuracy
- Rider influence
- Control and rhythm
- Harmony and partnership

Judges with Para-Equestrian or All Abilities experience are preferred where available.

5. Competition Delivery

All Abilities classes are integrated directly into Interschool competitions.

Key delivery principles:

- Adaptive equipment permitted as per EA Exemption Card.
- Arena modifications allowed as needed and approved.
- Results are awarded per Ability Category.
- All Abilities results contribute to school and team points in accordance with State Interschool rules.
- Test lists should remain consistent nationally to support fair qualification and progression.

6. Pathways

Unified progression for all eligible riders:

School → State → National Interschool → EA All Abilities → Virtus or Para-Equestrian High Performance → International Representation (Virtus Global Games or FEI Para-Dressage).

This ensures a clear and achievable athlete pathway from school competitions to elite opportunities.

7. National Implementation Timeline

2025 – Framework finalised; communication and education rollout; pilots at select State Championships.

2026 – All States deliver All Abilities classes at their Interschool Championships; National Championships include All Abilities divisions.

2027+ – Review and refinement based on participation growth; potential expansion to disciplines such as Show Jumping and Combined Training.

8. Governance & Oversight

Delivered collaboratively by:

- EA Interschool Working Group
- National Interschool Committee
- State Interschool Committees
- Sport Inclusion Australia (Virtus)
- Para-Equestrian Technical Committee (advisory support)

Officials and organisers receive training on inclusive judging, classification awareness, and permitted adaptive equipment.