

## Equestrian Coaching in Canada- What's With the New Program?

*(For coaches, instructors, interested candidates, equestrians and parents.)*

The Equine Canada coaching program has been in a transition from the older, Levels-based system, to the new coaching certifications. Certification in both Instruction and Coaching is available or in pilot stage for a variety of disciplines. Completely overhauling an entire coaching program is an ambitious task that involves stakeholders on many levels from across the country. Information below covers:

- Why the process takes as long as it does.
- How the new program impacts participants and coaches
- Who is involved

### National Coaching Programs in Canada

Most national sport organizations (NSOs) in Canada participate in the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) which sets standards for sport coaching across the country. In most sports, certification is a mandatory requirement for the privilege of coaching, especially when working with children. Because certification is a requirement in most sports and health professions, many people assume that a practicing coach adheres to a code of conduct, uses recent best practice in their sport, and maintains updated knowledge of current safety procedures. **Certification stands for a quality measure, which reassures parents** that they and their child can expect to be treated fairly, that all reasonable safety precautions will be followed, and that the coach has been trained to certain standards.

Three guiding principles are behind these programs:

1. National standards
2. Athlete-centred: the right coach for the participant's current needs
3. Accessibility (most affordable nationally available equestrian coaching certificate program in Canada)

#### 1. National Standards

Standards in coaching are tightly related to accepted principles of human biological development stages. In many sports, certification levels are pegged directly to age group or ability levels. The CanSkate program is a very good example. Much like the public school curriculum, the programs are structured so that you can expect a child who has completed one level in one province, to be at an equivalent ability level to their peers in other provinces.

**Savvy parents expect their child's coach to have passed some form of quality control filter**, especially with the prevalence of requirements for police clearance for all professionals and volunteers working with children in Canada.

National standardization also means that coach candidates can take parts of their training anywhere in Canada, and they will be recognized across the country and internationally. The EC /NCCP is the only equestrian coaching program in Canada with recognition by the International Group for Equestrian Qualifications who govern International Trainers' Passport equivalencies, as well as the FEI.

Of course, national standards in sport are in constant evolution. **Sport is a culture of continuous improvement**, which is why professional certification is not a one-time 'been there, done it' event. Professional certifications are maintained through a commitment to ongoing professional development.

## 2. Context Specialization: The Right Training at the Right Time, Anywhere

In these programs, much like school teaching, **the instructor or coach becomes a specialist at the skills developed in their level**. Such a context-based approach recognizes that there is a distinct difference between the skill sets involved in being an accomplished athlete, being a good teacher, and in our sport, being a good horse trainer.

### Great Athlete, Great Teacher ?

Athletic accomplishment and horse training skills do not necessarily transfer to the ability to also pass along the knowledge and train future athletes. A parallel example could be in the school system where a professor with a PhD is not necessarily qualified and would likely not enjoy or be talented at teaching kindergarten.

The new equestrian coaching program takes a major shift from emphasis on testing a coach's skill as an athlete, to a focus on their professional teaching and coaching skills relevant to the type of student they will work with the most. While most equestrian coaches do end up teaching a range of ability levels and ages, it is common for a coach to have a majority of their client base within a consistent ability level or age group. **The new program recognizes ability by context**, and does not rank one context over another any more than teachers are ranked by the grade they teach in the school system.

## 3. Accessibility

The NCCP is heavily subsidized by Sport Canada. Funding helps develop the programs and train the trainers and evaluators who make the program run. Subsidies make it possible for sports to run the training and evaluations at an affordable fee, and fees are usually set to break-even. The larger a sport is, the easier it is for the sport to run the training and certification events at lower cost to participants. Sport organizations are non-profit organizations which are accountable to funnel all 'profits' back into supporting programs, and to keep overhead costs down. Fees also take equal opportunity into account, so that revenues from larger areas further subsidize events in remote regions or for minority groups.

Sport organizations in Canada are heavily volunteer dependent. They accomplish much more than their budgets would suggest, by attracting committed volunteers and staff who are motivated by the opportunity to make a meaningful and lasting contribution in the sport.

**As a result, NCCP sport coaching is one of the most affordable professional designations to achieve.** Private sector professional certifications can cost many times what it costs a coach to become certified. Unlike many sports where coaches pay for certification but do not charge for their services, equestrian coaches are often also entrepreneurs who make up the cost of their certification in a short time.

### Cost Reduction in the New Program

The financial accessibility of the new program is even greater because the new Equine Canada coaching program cuts costs for participants in several ways:

- a) The evaluation process for most certificates is reduced from two weekends and events the candidate was expected to bring a student and horse to, to one day without need for trailering in.
- b) The removal of the requirement for a coach to work their way through levels sequentially. Candidates apply in the context that best describes their client base- they no longer have to start as a Level 1 and work their way up.
- c) Candidates no longer have to work their way up the rider levels to achieve their prerequisites for applying to the coaching program. Candidates can apply directly to take the testing at the level they are at, rather than working their way through the levels.
- d) Training is not mandatory. Available training does improve a candidate's chances of passing, and is very strongly recommended. However, uncertified coaches with significant experience no longer have to take the time away from their business to do the training if they already have the competencies and feel they could pass the evaluation without the training.
- e) The available training is more affordable than many learning opportunities coaches regularly pay for, such as attending a two-day clinic with your horse.
- f) Mentoring hours are no longer mandatory, so a coach can book as few sessions with a mentor as they need to assist them in preparation for the new evaluations. A coach in a remote area could even contact a mentor somewhere else and work through video if geography prevents frequent in-person contact. Because the new evaluations adhere to higher standards of coaching practice than the old system, mentoring is still recommended because a candidate's own coach may not be recently updated enough to teach them the coaching skills that are expected in the new evaluations. However, the number of hours needed depends on the individual, and mentor rates are usually exactly the same as what a candidate would pay for receiving coaching on a regular basis.
- g) In equestrian sport, professional development almost occurs naturally as a coach has their own riding coach, gets involved as a volunteer, or attends interesting learning opportunities. Unlike other equestrian certifications which require a coach to attend only

events run by that organization to maintain their certification, the EC coaching professional development requirements are very broad and make it easy for coaches and instructors to remain current with the sport, and continuously develop their coaching abilities wherever they live and work.

As a result of these changes, even though the new EC program has higher standards than other equestrian coaching certifications (including our old program), EC certification is now the most affordable equestrian coaching certification program recognized throughout North America and internationally.

### **Life Cycle of a Coaching Program- Why Does it Take So Long?**

The typical life-cycle for a sport to develop a new coaching program is anywhere from 2-5 years. Most sports assign the development of new coaching certifications to a very small and agile working group of a handful of people or less. The timeframe for program launch from conception is on par with other sports, even though the EC coaching programs are developed with the input of a team of dozens of contributors from across the country.

It is common for a certification to go through several drafts and pilot phases so that the final result is realistic, achievable and affordable both from a delivery and candidate perspective. During the various steps in this process, each sport stays in close contact with the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) in order to stay on top of Sport Canada requirements as they evolve. Decisions and changes can each take hours, days or even months depending on the scope of their impact or the degree of deliberation needed for stakeholders to reach a common ground.

**There is an inherent element of continuous improvement and evolution of standards in all aspects of sport.** As in any product creation cycle, the first sports to create a certification context often become learning opportunities for the rest of the sport community. Subsequent programs can be refined even further. Once a draft of a new coaching certificate program is created, it is submitted to the CAC for pre-review.

Training and evaluation pilots are run, which provide an opportunity to test and refine the materials and processes. Conditional approvals mean that the sport is on the right track, and still needs to clarify elements in their program to satisfy Sport Canada's requirements

Depending on the size of the program, number of stakeholders involved in reaching decisions, and degree of involvement by volunteers, it takes 3-12 months for a program to move from conditional to full approval. Candidates can be certified once the program reaches the conditional approval stage.

By the time a program is available to the public in final form for the first time, original contributors have been familiar with the material for at least a couple of years. While the inclusion of so many volunteer stakeholders and perspectives may slow program development, the process ensures that the final result is a fair representation of the real and practical needs of the sport as a whole, and is developed for the good of the sport long term.

The following grid provides a snapshot of the status of the various certificates in the new coaching program.



## **Find Out More or Join the Team!**

More information about the EC Coaching, Learn to Ride and athlete development programs is available on the Equine Canada website or by contacting Equine Canada or your provincial equestrian association.

If you have further questions or are interested in participating in the EC national coaching and athlete development programs, please feel free to contact me. You do not need to be a member of the coaching committees to contribute to the program by joining a project working group, or becoming a Learning Facilitator for coach training courses, Evaluator or Mentor.

Sincerely,

Heather Sansom  
Manager of Coaching, Equine Canada

## **Development Cycle Snapshot: EC Coaching, Summer 2011**

	<b>Discipline or Context:</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Western</b>	<b>Saddleseat</b>	<b>Drive</b>	<b>Endurance</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Conception and Planning Phases</b>	<b>Planned for Future</b>	Advanced Instructor	Advanced Instructor			Endurance Competition Coach	Vault Instructor and Coach  Trail & Tourism Instructor
	<b>Development Phase</b>	Eventing Competition Coach Training Module  Coach Specialist Certification: Eventing, Jump, Dressage	Western Coach Specialist	Saddleseat Competition Coach	Instructor of Beginners-Driving	Instructor of Beginners-Endurance	
<b>Evaluation as a Pilot participant is available</b> <i>(passing candidates' results are processed for official certification when conditional approval is achieved)</i>	<b>Pilot Phase</b>		Western Competition Coach		Instructor of Beginners-Driving	<b>Programs in this phase are expected to have certification available by late 2011 or the first half of 2012.</b>	
	<b>Pre-Review</b>	High Performance: Jump, Eventing, Dressage	High Performance: Reining				
<b>Certification is Available</b>	<b>Conditional Approval</b>	English Competition Coach					
	<b>Full Approval Submission</b>	English Competition Coach					
	<b>Full Approval Achieved</b>	Instructor of Beginners-English	Instructor of Beginners-Western	Instructor of Beginners-Saddleseat			