

I took over this role from Peter Huggins in April 2020. Firstly, I must therefore thank Peter for everything he has contributed to this role over the past few years – I realise I have a lot to live up to!

Over the past few months, I have set out a major update to the refereeing level 1 and 2 system for England Fencing. I have placed particular emphasis on the need for engaging, standardised referee training and a general need for more referee mentoring. The revised referee system is broken down into two separate levels:

Level 1 = Introduction to refereeing. This will be aimed at new fencers and parents, to help them understand the role and responsibilities of a referee. This module is for educational purposes only, so there is no examination or central register of level 1 referees.

Level 2 = Regional-level referee. This will be aimed at those looking to referee at small events, such as county / regional events and junior series competitions. In order to achieve a level 2, referees must pass a theory and a practical exam. The theory modules and theory exams are split into general and weapon-specific parts, whilst the practical exam can take place at a county-level event. Those that pass are added to a central referee register.

I am also pulling together an additional 'level 2+' module to help bridge the gap between level 2 and the British Fencing level 3. This is key to mentoring new referees as they begin to referee cadet & junior events or opens.

As part of the push for standardisation, I have worked with some of the other refereeing examiners and created PowerPoint slides for teaching theory courses. These are designed to be interactive, with games, quizzes and diagrams throughout. When delivered in person, these presentations also increased learner participation via Plickers, a free app that enables every referee candidate to vote on an action / multiple choice quiz simply by rotating a printed QR code.

However, Covid-19 also presented the opportunity to trial online referee courses. As such, foil and epee level 2 seminars and exams were trialled on Zoom. Both these modules and exams were received well, presenting a new opportunity for online seminars in the future; whilst face-to-face seminars are still preferred from an engagement perspective, the option of online webinars will increase accessibility of referee courses across the country.

In terms of theory examination, I have updated the questions and moved the exams to an online delivery. This has multiple advantages, including allowing diagrams and videos to be integrated into the exam, automatic exam marking and making remote exams possible. This also allows easy analysis of questions that candidates perform well on / struggle with, to allow the exams to be developed going forwards.

Going forwards, I am collaborating with the other home nations, who have all agreed to work together, to relaunch the 1 and 2 system, as described above.

There are many people that have helped contribute towards relaunching the referee system. I would particularly like to thank Alex Savin for his guidance on launching this referee system, Pat Jennings for his general feedback and sabre material, as well as Chiara McDermott, Mike Selig, Jen Sancroft and everyone else that has shared and reviewed these presentations. I would also welcome anybody else that has referee materials of their own that they would like to share, or anyone that believes they can help in this project, to collaborate in the future.