

## Australian Nationals Selection Policy Rationale

Version 1.4 (10 August 2008)

### **The Current Policy (version 2.0)**

The current selection policy is primarily based on placings at Nationals and the Selection Competition. Placings are based on total score (not TES) and hence overall performance is important. In addition, a minimum TES score is defined to set the minimum level of performance needed to gain selection (it is essentially the IJS equivalent of the old selection criteria based on a list of elements an athlete needed to perform). The current policy does not rank athletes according to their TES score, nor does it ever compare TES scores or total scores at different competitions for the purpose of selection.

For the past 2 years, we've also been able to obtain additional entries and this now seems set to continue. Australia provides these where space is available. Typically this is up to 2 additional entries per grade. In terms of selection, this results in up to 2 places being selected at Nationals and up to 3 additional places being selected at the Selection Competition.

### **Objectives for the Selection Policy**

#### **Objectivity:**

The most important aspect of any selection policy is objectivity and transparency. Selection policies should not rely on subjective decision-making, particularly subjective decisions on whether an athlete is capable of performing at a certain level or has the potential to perform a particular element, or whether an athlete is "close enough". Where subjective decisions are unavoidable, specific criteria for evaluation need to be set and athletes need to be informed of how they met or failed to meet those criteria.

#### **Nationals as a pinnacle event:**

Our National championships should be a pinnacle event. Competitions held earlier in the year often result in more inconsistent performances and therefore do not represent the best time to make selections. Selection is a significant matter and we felt it was important that this be tied as much as practical to Nationals, our pinnacle event.

#### **Minimum level of performance required:**

Because there is often not enough athletes in every grade to make selections based solely on placings at a competition, a minimum standard of performance needs to be set.

#### **Avoiding gender discrimination:**

The selection policy needs to consider that there are generally much fewer competitors in men's events and that there are gender differences in performance and differences in the way the IJS system is applied to the men's and ladies' events.

#### **Injury and illness and bad skates:**

While consistency and the ability to perform under pressure are important aspects of performance, temporary injury is a situation which we felt it was important to provide some opportunity for a second chance.

A single bad skate, by our top athlete(s) in a grade shouldn't exclude them from selection where it is practical to allow a second chance.

**Compatibility with the IJS:**

Athletes' programmes for selection and programmes to win IJS competitions should not need to be different. However additional pressure to perform more difficult elements could be a part of selection. Using both the TES and PCS scores should, where practical, for a part of selection. The PCS score is about 50% of an athlete's score and making use of PCS is important, however the TES is a more objective measurement.

**Moving between grades:**

With Australian Nationals about 11 months after our National Championships, there is ample time for athletes to move between grades. There needs to be some mechanism for athletes who want to move up a grade to be able to secure a place at Australian Nationals in the new grade.

**Avoiding direct comparisons of scores at different times:**

Directly comparing scores of athletes skating 3 or 9 months apart should be avoided. It's not fair to compare athletes who have had additional time to train or rest. It's also difficult to compare different athletes skating at different competitions with different judges: athlete's scores are often closer than the typical variance in different panels' scores. Even with the same judges there is an element of relativism in both sides of the panel that makes it difficult to compare athletes' scores at different competitions, notwithstanding other factors (e.g. ice quality, temperature, rink size, time of day) that also affect performance.

**Newly-formed Pairs and Dance Couples:**

Newly formed (within the last 10 months) Pairs and Dance couples need special consideration, because, despite the hurdles of moving from singles to pairs, it is not difficult (in any country) for good singles athletes to become internationally-competitive senior-level pairs in less than 12 months. Our policy needs to consider that newly formed pairs are capable of moving from their first skate together to senior level in a matter of a few months. Similarly experienced ice dancers that come together as a new couple also need special consideration.

**Appeals:**

Selection should be able to be appealed. However appeals should be limited to where Council failed to incorrectly apply an objective policy. That is, decisions of appeals should be based on (the same) objective criteria only.

## **How the current selection policy meets these objectives**

**Objectivity:**

There's little doubt that the current selection policy is objective. Basing selections on placings and minimum TES scores provide for absolutely objective selections. Athletes will know when they leave a competition whether they will have achieved selection (subject to any protests on the computation of athletes' scores.)

**Nationals as a pinnacle event:**

Two of the three places are typically determined at our Nationals. This makes Nationals the best opportunity to gain selection. Athletes moving up a grade and those injured at the time of Nationals will have a second opportunity to contest the remaining places (which could be more than 1 if an athlete in the grade is going to move up and out of that grade).

**Minimum level of performance required:**

Setting a minimum technical score ensures, that where there are less than 3 athletes in a grade, that attendance at a competition is not the sole determination of selection.

It needs to be noted that the entry requirements for Australian Nationals (for our athletes) are simply that they have passed our tests for the grade entered.

**Avoiding gender discrimination:**

The draft policy sets a minimum technical score which is generally higher for men (in line with typical physical development). This helps to normalise the minimum entry requirements for ladies and men, and helps to compensate for the fact that there are often fewer men competing.

**Injury and illness and bad skates:**

The current policy provides for injury without complicated or special rules for medical dispensation. There are problems with providing special opportunities for athletes to skate at a later date because of injury. In some cases the additional time can result in improved performance, and such opportunities can be open to abuse: an athlete skating at a later time has the opportunity to evaluate their competitors performances and prepare a programme to win with minimal risk. In addition, it can be difficult to make comparisons between different athletes at different competitions. In fact, we require athletes to compete directly against each other so that PCS scores are just as important as TES scores in many situations. It's not reasonable or fair to look only at TES scores of athletes skating at different times.

The current policy provides a second chance for athletes who are injured or ill at Nationals and for those who just have a bad skate or could not attend for other significant reasons.

However, there is no second chance in the current policy for athletes attending the second selection event, nor do we believe that a third opportunity is necessary or desirable even in the case of illness or injury at the second selection event.

A single bad skate, by our top athlete in a grade (at Nationals) allows them a second chance (at the selection competition).

**Moving between grades:**

The current policy provides at least one place for athletes moving up to a new grade after Nationals and before Australian Nationals. It should be mentioned that once an athlete skates in a higher grade they may not in a lower grade and that an athlete selected to compete in Primary (for instance) cannot skate in Novice without being re-selected for Novice. The issue with athletes moving involuntarily from Primary to Intermediate due to age doesn't require re-selection if athletes chose to skate in Intermediate at Nationals (there is no lower age limit).

**Avoiding direct comparisons of scores at different times:**

The current policy does not directly compare scores of athletes at different times. Athletes are selected at Nationals and the selection event without directly comparing athletes skating 9 months apart. We do not compare the scores of athletes skating at different competitions or in front of different judges. We never compare a min TES score from one competition to the next, because the primary determination of selection is placings (total score).

**Newly-formed pairs and dance couples:**

The policy provides for pairs and dance couples with prior experience (at that level) to obtain selection at a later date and by other means than just the selection competition. Because newly formed pairs are able to progress very rapidly from their first skate to senior-level, the policy provides reasonable opportunity for pairs to move from Juvenile to Senior in just a few months and still get selected. It's important to note that this special provision only applies to the first 10 months a couple competes together, after which we expect their progress to be similar to that of singles athletes and special provisions no longer apply.

**Appeals:**

The appeals process is limited to the correct (and easily verified) application of the objective criteria.

## Ideas that were considered and rejected

### **Using 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place at Nationals:**

This doesn't ensure there is a means for a good athlete who was injured to have a second chance. Also doesn't provide a means for athletes who want to move up a grade (including additionally trying to skate in Senior).

### **Using 1st, 2nd, and 3rd and more at a selection event:**

This doesn't recognise Nationals as a pinnacle event and instead makes the selection competition (usually the first competition of the year) arguably the most important.

There have too often been consistency problems with athletes at the beginning of the season and specifically during the selection competition (and athletes' should probably not also be peaking early in the season) to make this the primary time for selection.

This provides no reasonable means for an injured athlete to gain selection. Trying to cater for illness, injury and bad skates with only a single selection event is difficult. Providing an opportunity for injured or ill athletes to skate at a later time makes selection very difficult. PCS scores are too variable, and moving to basing selection on TES scores alone is undesirable (since they are only 50% of an athlete's score). Currently selection is based primarily on placings (total score). Even TES scores are not perfectly comparable between competitions. And it's fundamentally unfair when injured or ill skaters get more opportunity to train for selection and have weeks to evaluate the performances of their competitors. Lastly, if we provide chance for an injured or ill athlete to skate for selection at their club competition, then we must consider what it means if the athlete beats the scores of all the athletes at the selection competition, but loses to those same athletes at the club competition. Trying to develop a policy that seems reasonable and doesn't force an athlete who skated at the selection competition to travel to every club competition to fend off possible threats to their selection isn't easy.

This also provides no opportunity for a gifted athlete who has a bad skate to have a second chance for selection.

And it ensures an additional expense to gain selection. While the current policy doesn't completely eliminate the possibility of having to travel to the selection event, there are two places available at Nationals which do not require traveling to a special selection event.

### **Selecting only 1<sup>st</sup> Place from Nationals and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and more at a later selection event:**

Selecting only one athlete at Nationals doesn't place enough emphasis on Nationals as our pinnacle event, particularly when we can often send 5 athletes. And where the top athlete moves up a grade (not uncommon), then all three (or more) places would be selected at the selection event early in the year.

Illness and injury re-skate opportunities are significantly reduced as only the National Champion doesn't have to skate at the selection event. See "Using 1st, 2nd, and 3rd at a selection event" above for discussion of the issues surrounding trying to cater illness and injury with only one selection event.

Also, by selecting two athletes at Nationals, there are two opportunities for athletes to be selected to a grade without the potential need for them to travel to another selection competition to gain selection.

**Using total score to determine the minimum score for selection (instead of the total element score):**

This was rejected on a number of grounds, one is that it doesn't provide an incentive to do the more difficult jumps, it's often easier to place higher by not attempting anything difficult. At the current time there is too much variation in programme components to set a minimum total score that is objective enough.

**Averaging the results of two or more competitions:**

This was rejected because averaging tends to severely disadvantage athletes who had one great skate and one bad skate (perhaps because they were injured during the competition). It also complicates comparison where some athletes competed twice and others only competed once. With possibly 9 months between competitions those athletes who didn't skate at the first competition would be expected to have a higher score due to improvements in the 9 months between competitions.

**Using the best 1 out of 2 or best 2 out of 3 results:**

This is complicated by the possibility of different panels awarding more or less points and different lengths of time (to train) between events and different timings of events (though the year).

## **Considerations of the current policy**

**Level of minimum technical score:**

The minimum technical score has been chosen to allow athletes to attend Australian Nationals when they are able to finish in the lower ranks of the grade. This is roughly equivalent to the selections made for ISU Championships over the past 2 years, where tier 1 athletes have been selected when they are able to finish in the lower ranks of the grade.

**Gender differences in the minimum technical score:**

Men at Junior and Senior ISU competitions typically earn technical element scores that are 1.25 times higher than their female counterparts (or to put it another way, ladies typically earn technical scores 0.80 times their male counterparts). The ISU factors ladies programme components by 0.80 for this reason (which helps to ensure that the programme components in both men's and ladies' events form roughly 50% of the total score). However we should expect (and we can measure) this gender difference to be less pronounced in athletes below the age of about 15.

**Importance of technical proficiency:**

The minimum technical score should help prevent athletes from playing it too safe and still getting selected. While the purpose is not to set the bar as high as for ISU international competitions, the minimum technical score will help ensure a level of technical competency so that "playing it safe" won't typically be sufficient for selection.

**Importance of programme components:**

While not directly tested, athletes need to understand that programme components are still an important aspect of skating and the overall placings which are part of the selection process. Just because there is no minimum programme component score does not mean programme components are not an important aspect of selection.

**Winning, while “playing it safe”, isn’t necessarily enough:**

Athletes who win an event at Nationals, but do so without demonstrating sufficient technical ability, will not be selected if their technical score is below the minimum technical score required. The second place athlete in the event would be selected if their technical score was over the minimum required.

**Areas that Require Further Consideration**

Monitoring of selected athletes from selection to event (not just for Australian Nationals).