

## Special General Meeting

It has been a long road since the AGM in January 2021 and the vote to change the articles, and subsequent Special General Meetings (SGM). I would like to thank all the members who took part in the both the SGM's and all those who sent apologies. The SGM took place via zoom which in itself had challenges such as internet speed, audio, connection speed, and voting.

The results of the SGM are below:

The proposal by Prof. Peter Stewart was defeated. The Committee proposal for changes to Article 20, 21 and 24 were all passed by an overwhelming majority.

A full summary of the SGM has been posted to all members along with the membership renewal forms, and can be found on the BAF website.

### So, what is next?

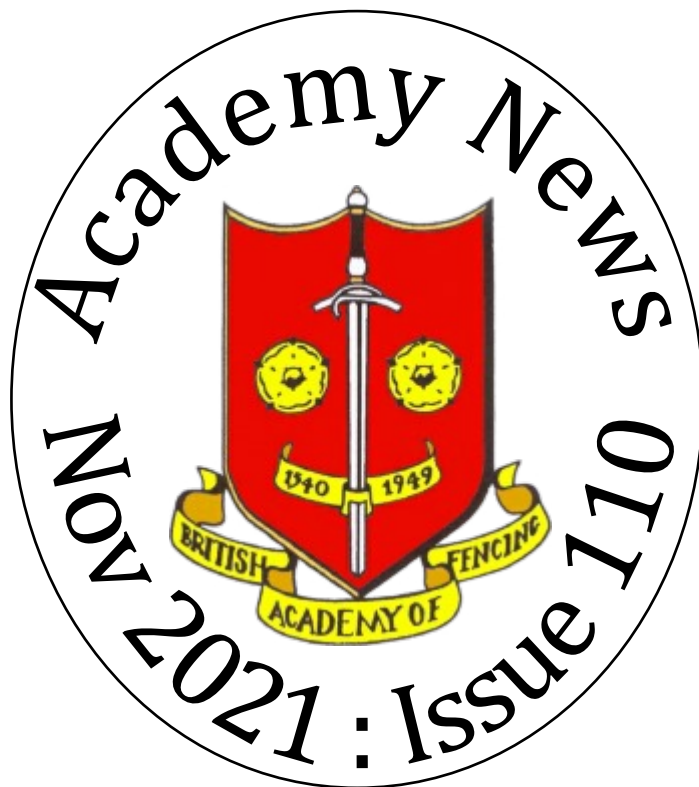
By Oct 2022 the BAF will require all active members to have an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and proof of having attended an appropriate Child Protection and Safeguarding Course.

If you require an Enhanced DBS check then the BAF will be able to process one for you. If you are a volunteer, then it is free of charge (no admin fee). However, if you are a paid coach then you will have to pay the standard fee. The BAF will not charge you any administration fee for this. The BAF will also accept an Enhanced DBS done by another organisation, thus saving you money.

You will also be required to have attended an appropriate Child Protection and Safeguarding course. More information will be given to members next year.

The aim of the BAF committee is to make these changes to membership as easy as possible and to ensure that we are being a responsible organisation.

**From Jacqueline Redikin  
Secretary BAF**



## B.A.F. A.G.M.

**8<sup>th</sup> January 2022**



**It will soon be time for  
this years A.G.M.**

**...will you be there?**

**Further details inside.**

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**Contributions to Kevin Nelson  
by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022**

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**NEXT ISSUE: February 2022**



## The President 's Piece.....

Welcome to a bumper issue this time folks, all thanks to the contributions of fellow members! But we still have some very experienced and knowledgeable members who seem shy about putting pen to paper. All opinions welcome no matter what level you are. So, send in a paragraph, a short article, anything you have a 'bee in your bonnet about' or write a review on something you have seen or read.

Well, Covid 19 has not gone completely, in fact, there is some talk about having another spike. Can I encourage you to follow the guidelines in your particular region, get 'double jabbed' and 'boosted', including the flu jab, so we can move through the winter as safely as possible.

After a false start, our Special General Meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> September brought in over 35 members to discuss making it compulsory to be on the British Fencing Coaches Register. The Meeting was longer than expected and everyone had the opportunity to speak. Points of views were exchanged; a vote was taken; and the decision to ***not*** make it compulsory to be on the British Fencing Coaches Register was the result. However, the meeting did decide to make it compulsory that all members are Enhanced DBS checked, and have attended a suitable Child Protection Course. All this to take effect on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022, making the Academy a 'safe' organisation.

We had a successful training day on 1<sup>st</sup> August, in Bromsgrove, hosted by Nick Chapman's School. More coaches turned up than we expected and it proved to be a very useful day. A whole day's training gives plenty of time to think, practice and develop ideas. If these days are done on a regular basis, the cumulative result is significant. It was satisfying to see coaches ask pertinent questions and feel free to do so. The Committee hopes to provide more of these days and encourages other coaches to run the same.

As we come to the end of the year, perhaps it is now a good idea to plan to improve your qualifications, whether to add an extra weapon or upgrade to another level. Denstone is an ideal choice to refresh, upskill and take an exam, but, for some of us, taking a week of our holidays is impractical, so get together and organise a course! This could be a weekend day, a whole weekend or several weekends. I remember about 6 of us coaches who wanted to further our training, we approached a Fencing Master and began a regular training session resulting in an exam. More coaches joined us which developed into our flagship course at Denstone College.

I am now at the end of my term as President, it has been an interesting journey! There is too much to put into words to describe the experience it has been. I have been very much helped by the Committee and am so grateful for their support. All of the Committee have had to not only deal with Academy business but do it during a pandemic! And some are front line workers!! Their generosity in giving of their time has been outstanding and must be recognised.

I have been approached by some members to continue as President. After considerable thought and with my wife's support, I will be offering myself to run again. Of course, this does not preclude another candidate to run for this Office. The future of the Academy must now revolve around retaining members, increasing membership and running coach education courses. There is much we can and must do.

I look forward to seeing you at the AGM, whether that is person-to-person.

Have a wonderful Christmas break and keep yourselves and families safe,

Dear Members,

I had a request by one of our members about Prof. Phil Carson's article in the last Academy News "In Theory We Need a New Theory", and they asked for a follow up article. The member commented that his article "was interesting, but could you give clear, specific details of what you would include in adapting a stronger, theoretical and evidence based approach".

I further clarified this and asked Phil to include some clues as to how to collect the evidence, interpret it, and feed that back into their coaching. From a practical perspective, rather than a theory one. And yes I know that is a big subject, and would be difficult to put down in writing. But the transition from theory to practice is sometimes the most difficult element in teaching, and most people need help. The following Article is Phil's reply.

Best Wishes,  
Kevin : Editor Academy News.



## Skill Acquisition From Theory To Practice

By Prof. Phil. Carson

Following on from my previous article "In Theory We Need a New Theory" I have been asked to try to show how theory translates into practice, with examples. When I started helping fencers to train and compete at an international level, I discovered very quickly how ineffective our traditional teaching method is. The idea that focusing on isolated technique and reducing and deconstructing technique will in some way transform individuals into highly skilled competitors is simply not supported by any theory of coaching nor evidenced by results. Teaching technique in the traditional way can give the illusion of learning, but skill acquisition is about the development of functional skill. Specifically, skill acquisition is the development of motor control towards a successful outcome, most usually in a performance environment. "Skill acquisition, also referred to as motor learning and control is the interdisciplinary science of intention, perception, action, and calibration of the performer-environment relationship" (Skill Acquisition, Singh, 2018)<sup>1</sup>. So rather than teaching a series of named strokes, what we are talking about here is creating small games, exercises or one-on-one coaching that is representative of the competitive situation - "skill acquisition may not refer to an entity but rather to the emergence of an adaptive, functional relationship between an organism and its environment" (Araújo, D., & Davids, K. (2011) What exactly is acquired during skill acquisition? Journal of Consciousness Studies).

Most recent developments in skill acquisition are based on ecological psychology and dynamical systems theory where the focus is on the way individuals interact, problem-solve and develop on any given task in any given environment. For example, in a traditional class session I would give an introduction to the action, a demonstration of say, a one-two or a double, an explanation of what is going on and activities to develop those actions. These activities would usually involve focus on some key coaching points, maybe a straightening of the attackers arm towards the target and how to do a disengage or counter-disengage. Starting from close, then perhaps adding a step and moving up to a step-lunge. Everyone is taught in the same way and both the problem and the solutions are constrained within the boundaries of the coach's knowledge and their instruction towards an idealised model of what a one-two or a double is. At the end of the session, everyone can do the action and in old money, there is an expectation that the fencer will then learn how to put it into practice in a fight situation.



Today's sessions will look quite different. Let's use the same intention for the class, but change some of the language and ideas based on a constraints-led approach. By way of introduction, let's play a game of tag - a great warm up game, but also a gateway to asking the group some questions about what is the role of the person who is "it" and perhaps some of the tactics deployed to evade being caught. OK, so let's get kit on and try this on the piste. Each fencer takes a turn to be "it" and can take two distances (move the front foot twice) to try to score a touch, or as much distance away from danger when it is not their turn. You let them play and observe that fencers are doing step-lunges and missing. I would usually ask a simple question here, when do you lunge? Hopefully someone has worked out that you lunge when you are close enough. So the group introduces a new rule/constraint, if you lunge and miss, you lose. Now sit back and watch some magic happen as the group "self-organises" around the game and highly functional and creative use of distance emerges. Time for a new rule, especially for right-of-way weapons. In defence, if you hit the opponent's blade, you win, but you can only move your point clockwise/anti-clockwise/laterally etc. You will see many failed attempts to begin with, but well timed attacks with compound actions will begin to emerge as the fencers "self-organise" around the "constraints". The qualitative difference is that the touches are highly representative of what happens during a fight, rather than being taught statically. Let's now change the environment and take the game to the back of the piste with the defender's back foot on the back line - does it change behaviour? In another context, for learning right-of-way, or getting the new fencer to understand the role of attack and defender we can go to the en guard lines with one side of the class being "cats" and the other side being "dogs". From a starting position, you say "en guard, ready" and then either "cats" or "dogs" to nominate who is the attacker. They play the game continuously up the piste until they either score, or their blade is taken/parried in which case the other becomes the attacker. By the end of the session, they understand right-of-way, the role of the attacker and defender and are able to deploy tactics to negotiate distance, avoid the opponent's defence and finish in time.

Traditionally, this might have taken us a year or two to get fencers to successfully learn the skill and be able to apply it in competition. Now, we can achieve the fundamentals in an hour. The lesson I describe above is the week 2 session for complete beginners. Note how the role of the coach is not to impart knowledge so much as to design representative practices and to look for coaching opportunities to improve their game.

In terms of skill acquisition, the modern approach is relevant to today's game and the coaching methods arising from the theory are much more fit for purpose. Not only do fencers become more functional more quickly, the process is significantly more fun and engaging and retention rates are high. Affording the participants more autonomy has been shown to develop wider life skills for developing self-control, confidence, resilience, problem solving etc. It is about creating an environment and experience that develops both high functioning athletes and skilled people.

Many people assume that when I talk about theory in this way I am anti technique. Nothing could be further from the truth. It's just that in theory, and in my experience, technical training is one small component part of the coaching equation, a bi-product of the tactical relationship between two fencers. Where the focus is on technique, it can provide an illusion of learning for fencers and in the absence of results, a delusion of progress for coaching.

If I had any influence at all with the powers that be within the BAF I would suggest three simple changes that would overnight transform the effectiveness of the BAF product and maintain the integrity of the BAF content. Each of these suggestions are based on real science and avoid opinion-based assessment - especially my own! But I would say that all three changes should be taken together as a whole.

1. All coaching is undertaken in a context that is representative of the tactical game. From an ecological dynamics perspective, this is about recreating the complexity of the competitive situation from which technique emerges. Even for a complete beginner we can introduce the idea of the game of two people trying to hit, take the blade or use distance. An effective coach is able to improve the tactical ability and the game intelligence of the fencer.

2. Effective coaching is judged on timing. If timing is the outcome goal for the fencer, then they will self-organise towards achieving this. If technique is emphasised, then the degrees of freedom in the joints and muscles will seriously hamper potential. A linear approach is the least effective way to achieve tempo. An efficient coach is able to improve the timing of the fencer in a tactical context.

3. Coaching is appropriate to the individual(s) in front of them. Keeping fencers in the sport is mainly about creating an environment that is relevant, fun, safe, thriving and motivating. Key skills for any coach. Good coaches have a positive impact in a way that is relevant and appropriate to the age and stage needs of the fencers in front of them.

In theory, I would like to see the BAF operating a coach education system that is effective, efficient and appropriate, operating in a people-task-environment paradigm in a way that we can have confidence that it is underpinned by some seriously good science. A central tenet of coaching is the idea of continuous improvement. Shouldn't we be applying this principle to our coach education system as well?

I would like to thank Prof. Phil Carson for taking the time to write a follow up article, explaining a practical application of the theory he wrote about in the last issue of the Academy News.  
Kevin. Editor Academy News.

## BAF January Lectures AGM 2022

Before Covid arrived, a number of members asked for some Continual Professional Development sessions after the close of the formal A.G.M. Thereby increasing the value of coming to the A.G.M. The committee listened to your request, and would like to continue with this very successful idea, at this years A.G.M. on the 8th January 2022.

**If you are willing and able to deliver one of these C.P.D. sessions, please contact vice-president Prof. Andy Vincent to discuss further.**

The talk will be on a subject of the members own choice, but must not involve actual sword in hand. The presentations should be concentrating on the soft skills that are needed for coaching. The presentations ideally should be no longer than 20 minutes, with a 10 minute Q&A session afterward. Or if you have a subject that you feel could do with a longer time slot to do it justice then please talk to Andy Vincent to discuss it further.

*With the great wealth of knowledge and experience within the Academy, we, the membership should be able to present some interesting and varied themes. From which we can all learn*

**The deadline for submission is 1st December 2021  
(So we can organise the facilities).**



# Dennis Hunt

**26<sup>th</sup> October 1931 - 24<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

Dennis was a long time member of British Academy of Fencing, British Fencing and international M'Aitre d'Armes. He was one of the most successful sabre coaches in Great Britain and has attended Cadet and Junior World Championships on many occasions as coach. He has

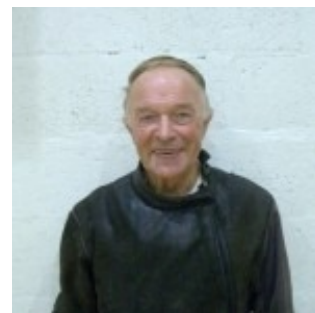


coached many of the Cadet, Junior and Senior successful sabreurs. Many of his pupils have represented Great Britain on many occasions. He has also trained Peter Wright, not only to British and international success, but to become one of the successful London coaches.

On a personal success level, he has won the South West Senior Sabre Championships 19 times and represented GB on many occasions. He has won the Veteran Sabre European Championships and was a silver medalist in the Vets World Championships in Moscow. He has been a finalist on several occasions at the Vets World Championships.

I first met Dennis when I started competing, someone else had taught me sabre, but not how to compete. So I travelled down to Hunt-Roeder in Bristol, and found that within a few months I was improving, and starting to earn points at competitions. Dennis was a major part of that improvement.

With his professional attitude, the way he would turn up at Hunt-Roeder, smiling in his jacket and cravat, look round, put his fencing jacket on, then immediately start giving individual lessons, and keep going for two hours until the club closed. He would also often spend his weekends going to competitions, supporting his pupils. When Dennis was giving you a lesson you could be sure of two things, one that you would improve because of the lesson, and secondly that you would hear one of his plethora of stories, complete with impressions of those fencers, whose antics he was describing. He always managed to find a story to fit the technique he was teaching you, or to help him discuss/bemoan a change in the "rules".



Once I became a coach at Hunt-Roeder, I had fewer lessons with Dennis, but, I started watching him more while he was giving lessons to other fencers. I am really grateful to Dennis for that, because he taught me to watch, and to see what was there, not to see what I expected to see. Which has helped me to be a better coach (and to steal points at competitions from fencers who were better than me... after watching their lessons).

Dennis will be missed by many, as one of fencing's gentlemen, and real characters, always passionate and supportive of his fencers & our sport.

Kevin Nelson.





# Money Saving Hack, Old leather covered handles

By Nick Chapman

This article is a lot different to my normal subject, but I tried something, liked the result and thought others might be interested, so here goes.

On my steam foils (and I have a lot of them) I chose to have leather covered handles, its just a personal preference, I like the way they feel and so inflict them on my beginners. The problem I find with these handles is that when you have several foils together in a bag (as we coaches invariably do) the edge of the foil guard of one weapon rubs against, and ultimately cuts into, the leather of the handle of another weapon, and vice a versa. The more weapons you put together in a bag the worse the problem. Given the passage of enough time the leather on the handle becomes damaged and eventually the handle needs replacing (more expense).

Over the years I have tried a number of tactics and interventions to prolong the life of my leather handles, from packing the swords with their hilts at opposite ends of the bag (fine if you only have two) keeping the edges of the guards smooth so they do less damage (who really has time for this), recovering the handles in new leather (varying degrees of success), or most often putting tape over the damage (normally canvas backed foil blade tape as that's what's usually close at hand!). I have rarely been totally happy with the results.

Then the other week whilst shopping on the internet for spares for my Land Rover (Land Rovers need lots of spares!) I had a moment of inspiration.

I was shopping for heat shrink for an electrical job and was amazed at the variety available. I noticed that some of it was rubberised rather than smooth plastic, and that it was available in a variety of sizes. This got me thinking, what if I recovered the handle with rubberised heat shrink? A little bit of searching showed it was available in lots of different and quite large sizes, so I dashed out to the garage and measured round a French grip. Back to the lap top, a little more searching and yes there it was, ok I had to do some maths to translate my required circumference to a diameter and then pick a size up so I could be sure it would fit (or perhaps I went a size up because I didn't trust my maths). Not only was it available in 22mm diameter but there was a verity of colours and even some with patterns.



Finished product fitted and ready to use.



Then came the frustrating bit....the long wait for delivery (all of three days, those who have fenced me will know that despite what I coach I don't actually have the patience of an epeeist!). As soon as I received it, I was out to the garage, cut a length off (scissors or sharp knife), slip it over a handle I had already prepared (removed the old leather), and a quick blast with a heat gun (I obviously had one for doing the heat shrink on the Land Rover wiring but this is the only 'specialist' bit of kit you will need, and quite possibly you don't need this, you may be able to do it with another heat source), then hey presto I have a perfectly usable, bright and colourful, comfortable handle ready to use.

I think this is what my teenage pupils would call a 'hack'! It's easy to do and costs very little. I was sent 1 metre of heat shrink for £4.16 (with free postage) and I think it will do seven handles, so that's less than 60p a handle (far better than an £8.40 replacement from my normal supplier).

Next time I am going to order the 20mm as the 22mm was a very loose fit pre heat. Assuming it fits, the 20mm will bring the cost down to just 57p per handle.

If you want to try the stuff I used, shop on eBay (other retailers are available) for 'Fishing Rod Wraps Heat Shrink Anti-Slip Handle Grip Tube' (or just 'rod wrap heat shrink').

I will point out that the rubber is thinner than the leather so the handle feels a little more spindly than a leather one, but trust me it's perfectly adequate (and if you really want it to feel thicker, put two layers on, at this price you can afford it).

I will certainly be doing a number of handles this way, I might even colour code my left and right handed weapons. It's cheap and easy and appears to give a good result, and lets face it, even if it lasts a quarter of the time a leather handle lasts it's still a bargain. Go on give it a try.

1. Damaged handle

2. Handle with old covering stripped off

3. Loose fitting heat shrink on handle

4. New covering after the application of heat



# A BLAST FROM THE PAST

The words of Professor Félix Gravé

Presented by Bob Merry

Recently, some books, previously owned by Prof. Tom Etchells, were passed on to me and I found some of the more historical ones quite interesting and thought that they could offer a source for discussion by today's coaches. This extract is taken from "Fencing Comprehensive", by Professor Félix Gravé, written in 1934. Are the ideas expressed here still relevant today, or how would you modify them?

## Varieties of Fencers

Referring again to the different varieties of Fencers and styles, I should like to say that the knowledge that I had the good fortune to acquire in my young days, when studying at the Ecole de Médecine in Paris, has proved most useful to me whilst teaching Fencing, in diagnosing the faculties of my Pupils. It has helped me to develop with more certainty their physical and mental abilities; it has enabled me to even improve such things as "defective legs", "lopping shoulders", "curvature of the spine", "round shoulders", etc. It has greatly helped me to study the temperament and find out quickly the dispositions of my "subjects" and so develop their capabilities, at the same time making my lessons interesting, or at least I presume they were, having been told so by my Pupils.

Fencers may be divided into four categories, the three first being interesting, the last one unfortunately hopeless; notwithstanding all pains and efforts taken by the Teacher to eradicate their faults.

**The "Intemperate" Fencer:** I will speak of this subject (male or female) as an individual who will fight according to his or her constitution, using sometimes more force than necessary, not willingly, but perhaps because of over-developed muscles, or being of an excitable and uncontrollable nature; the brain is not working in harmony with the limbs. In such Fencers there is never a great variety of play.

With such a subject, the Teacher should try to impart a more varied and more lengthy theoretical knowledge and always to prevent or check hard and stiff movements when giving instruction. With a patient Teacher this Fencer will improve in time and learn to regulate his movements.

**The "Strategical" Fencer:** I will speak of him (it also applies to "her") as a Fencer who first sees and then thinks, trying to put into practice all the knowledge he acquires. At first he may not be a "fast" Fencer, but in years to come he will then be a most dangerous one; the one to be feared in matches or competitions.

Watch him, whether he is on the attack or on the defensive; always on the alert, he thinks of the possible consequences of a mistake and is prepared to counteract it, always seeing . . . one point further! He will try and lay traps for his opponent to fall into, but if in this he is not successful, instantly he has in his mind some other device.

The Teacher should try to develop still further such instinct and make his Pupil's brain and limbs work homogeneously, in harmony, and to explain the consequences of a failure, to show him how to redress any mistake. Such a Fencer with good training and possessing a cool head is usually very accurate in all his movements.



**The "Classical" Fencer:** I will speak of him (or her) as one who will always keep a good style, remain as much as possible Academic in the attack as well as when defending. This is really more or less inborn in the individual.

The Pupil falls from the very beginning into a natural and graceful position, which the Teacher must carefully preserve and encourage, as such pupils are few and far between, and should not be allowed to start "loose-play" too soon.

A classical fencer is always a credit to his master; he is usually rapid and accurate, showing great co-ordination of movements in all his attacks and a sure hand in his parries. In my opinion, a special prize should always be given, in all matches or competitions, to the most classical- fencer.

**The "Forcible" Fencer:** I shall speak of him as a man who uses, at all times, too much brutal force, who does not really fence with his head, whose only idea is to register a hit "home", anyhow, ignoring all the preliminary principles that his teacher has been trying to inculcate in him.

Such a man is always anxious to start "loose-play" too soon; he is considered a pest in a school or club, no one is anxious to cross blades with him, yet he does not realize this always.

In this case, I should advise a teacher - if he happens to be wealthy - to tell such a pupil to go in for weightlifting.



## Proficiency Awards

### BAF Members:

1 - 4 Awards	£3.70 each
5 - 9 Awards	£3.60 each
10+ Awards	£3.40 each

### Approved non-Academy Coaches:

1 - 4 Awards	<b>£4.70</b> each
5 - 9 Awards	<b>£4.10</b> each
10+ Awards	<b>£3.90</b> each

During the current crisis, the study guides are being reviewed and re-written, so they will not be available for the next few months.

The Foil Study Guide will be out soon.



# Individual Sport – Only for the Affluent?

By Nigel Carter



Sport can be expensive, individual sport more so than team. Fencing is amongst the most expensive to begin with – especially for children. The expense begins with the cost of (protective) clothing. Most clubs and freelance coaches will carry a basic stock, but eventually the child's parents will feel obliged to get personal clothing. Few clubs, schools even, can be expected to cater for all sizes in sufficient quantities. Taking myself as an example, I typically take one or two Primary or Preparatory school 'After School' clubs. I try to limit my classes to 12 children, and typically target years 4 to 6 (Primary Schools), or 4 to 8 for (private) Preparatory schools, to limit the size range. *Even so, I was thrown somewhat recently by a 6ft, 44 in chest, Year 5 boy!*

I buy, and promote, amongst the cheapest quality fencing clothing. Once children are ready for entering competitions, I expect their parents at least, to purchase their own breeches. The minimum cost of a pair of breeches appears to be about £30.99<sup>1</sup>. I'll accept tracksuit trousers for training. My fencers are fortunate that I am able, and willing to lend them jackets, under-plastrons, masks, gloves and chest protectors (with appropriate hygiene and COVID safeguards). Saving them almost £140, So they have the minimum protective equipment. The majority of young boys, between ages 8 and 11, seem to wish for chest protectors.

## But now we come to the extra expense for electric scored competitions!

Starting with Electric Foil, a Foil Mask (extra) and Mask wire, Foil Lamé and Bodywire will cost about £120 – but I'd better add at least £40 for an Electric Foil! Electric Sabre will need a Sabre Mask and Sabre Lamé, and probably a Sabre Lamé cuff, at about £130, plus about £40 for an Electric Sabre. If not already held (for Electric Foil), bodywire and mask wire will also be required (£9.99<sup>1</sup>+£3.99). Epee, of course, is the Budget weapon. Only an Electric Epee and Epee Bodywire being required, at about £55.

## To summarise the equipment costs:

For a basic youngster beginner's class, the kit cost per child, excluding weapons, is about £170, including fencing breeches. A 'steam' Foil would cost less than £30, but most clubs and freelance coaches can be relied upon to have sufficient for their pupils' needs;

*For Electric Epee* competitions, on top of the basic clothing, only the Epee and Bodywire are required, at about £55.

*For Electric Foil*, including breeches and *just one* weapon, the additional outlay per child might be £190 – on top of that minimum £140 for protective clothing for non-electric training.

*For Electric Sabre*, assumed the only activity, the comparative additional outlay per child might be £215 – or £355 in total. To me these costs are enormous, and probably beyond the reach of several of my parents.

One must also bear in mind that children are growing – some quite rapidly – and jacket/breeches might need replacing after a couple of years (or less). The above costing's only allow for one weapon and bodywire per activity, whereas we know that competitors should be equipped with at least two of each. My fencers are fortunate that I also have a small stock of electric clothing to enable a proportion of them to compete at any one time; and I can generally find a 'spare' weapon or two.

I have not even begun to address the additional expense of coaching fees (I have nothing but admiration for those true professional coaches who attempt to make their living from the sport), the cost of BF membership, cost of training courses, cost of competition entry, cost of travel to competition, and all of this to be found by the parents, who are also spending their time taking their children to events.

**My conclusion is that the sport has become too expensive to be healthy and, as such is unlikely to survive for children.**

**Let me digress with a bit of my own history.**

When I was introduced to fencing at university in 1956, even electric epee was in its infancy. For club practice we used 'steam' epees, with a pointe d'arret (a small steel tricorn, with three very sharp points, lashed to the flattened tip of the blade with dental floss or thread. I was lucky enough to commence electric epee because my coach was a professor of electrical engineering and arranged that his workshop built one. He also procured, as an electric piste, a discarded piece of equipment from a paper making factory. In those early days, Foil and Sabre fights were judged by a president (referee) and four judges - two behind each fencer studying the target of the fencer opposite to them. Would it be so bad to hold such competitions for youngsters, preferably with adult judges? There might be a return to Foil hitting with the character of penetration' - instead of a 'stab' in any old direction; and the Sabre hit might return to a crisp cut made only with the lower (cutting) edge and the forward third of the back edge, instead of a 'slap' with any part of the blade. We might get more confidence in referees' decisions. I still fail to see how a referee can honestly distinguish between near double hits when he/she can only see one contact.



My real good fortune was to do much of my fencing in the Armed Forces, where almost everything was provided. I did not have to face the real world until after a 20 year period of retirement, I helped Shirley Parker (nee Netherway - an Olympic fencer and Commonwealth Games medal winner of the sixties) launch Bridport and West Dorset Fencing Club in 2009. That benefited from a handsome grant from somewhere. I then helped the Dorset Pentathletes start a class in a local preparatory school - with a grant from British Pentathlon. Neither of these projects might have got underway without charitable support.

I have made a few attempts at starting After School classes in local schools, particularly following the 2012 Olympics, but many parents have generally found the cost of even a modest weekly fee prohibitive. Thus, my school coaching is now purely in the private (more affluent) sector.

Let me break off here to ask: "Should the Academy be leading the way in offering grants to clubs, and particularly freelance coaches, towards the start-up costs of childrens' fencing classes?". I feel the Academy could help, if not with grants, then by operating an equipment bank, to which coaches could turn when attempting club start-ups, etc. I've known fencers, when giving up, simply condemning their kit to the local dump!



I remember Professor David Austen offered (free) his entire fencing stock, plus a small van, on his retirement from active coaching, possibly three years ago. I could be looking to do similar - but without the vehicle!! - in only a few years from now.

## Bibliography

1. <https://swordpricefighters.com/kids.html> : 24<sup>th</sup> October 2021

## Acknowledgements

Photographs by kind permission of the Head of Chard School, Somerset.

*One way round the issue of children's equipment costs is to encourage fencers to sell on their kit when they outgrow it. This is something that I encourage my younger fencers to do.*

*E-bay is also a good source of kit, but remember to check the handedness of any kit you buy, before putting in your bid. There is a lot of unlabelled left handed kit out there.*

*Kevin: Editor Academy News.*



Those of you who are members of England Fencing have you voted yet? If you are a member you should have received your invitation to vote via e-mail.

British Academy of Fencing Member Alan Grafton has put his name forward. Please look at his statement and consider voting. Online voting closes at 12:00 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021.



# Skipping River

By Kevin Nelson

**Apparatus** : Piece of rope, suitable for group skipping.

## Activity

Two people hold the skipping rope, and set up a slow rhythm. So that as the rope reaches its apex, it is moving towards the fencers.

Everyone else is in a line, on-guard. The fencers then, one at a time, attempt, using fencing footwork, to go through the skipping rope, without being hit by the rope.

*Note : Initially use stepping, then when they are confident, you can vary the footwork or allow free choice.*

*Note 2: Make sure they go through the centre of the skipping rope loop.*

And then go back to the end of the line.

**Variation 1** : As the fencer starts their advance, slowly move away from them with the rope. Limit how far you move backwards, before they are unsuccessful.

**Variation 2** : As the fencer starts their advance move towards them with the skipping rope.

**Variation 3** : Change the rotation of the skipping rope, so that it now moves towards them on the upswing.

**Purpose** : Timing  
: Concentration



# Lesson Plans, Record Keeping & Analysis?

By Valerie Morrish.

Excellent, even for a small club like ours. But be prepared to be flexible and adapt plans at the last minute, as necessary. My background is teaching Physics to "A" level, as a head of department, so lesson plans are natural for me. But I'm lucky, as another coach and his two grown up sons give me a lift home after fencing, so we have plenty of opportunity during the 30 minute journey home to discuss and plan.

We are a small club with a 2 ½ hour slot at the local sports centre, so we can't run classes. We divide the time into a junior session followed by a senior session, but with a very flexible dividing line and overlap. Beginners are incorporated into the group, as and when they appear, so developing a caring, family atmosphere, where beginners are carefully looked after, at the same time as developing our "high Flyers" and keeping "social" fencers happy. Our solution to teaching is to have a broad "special topic" each week, e.g. Parries, which can be developed individually to different levels, as required. Sometimes a group member requests the "special topic".

Our general format for an evening is :-

- a) Game for the Junior Session.
- b) Footwork.
- c) Free Fencing, with individual training, lessons, help, etc...
- d) Special Topic group work.
- e) Competitive Fencing – in different formats each week. Plus individual coaching.

A mixed level of competing is excellent for all, especially for the better ones, as they have chance and time, when fencing the less experienced, to slow down and concentrate on their own technique, instead of the rather natural instinct of striving to win at all costs! Hit and bash are "out", technique, tactics, and timing are "in".

Our system seems to work OK resulting in recreational fencers, county and regional fencers, BYC qualifiers, a GB U17 and U20 foilist and a world veteran championship competitor in sabre.

But one final plea. Do not say "Today, we are going to learn..." One day a wide awake teenager will mutter "We? So our coach doesn't know this yet either" Perhaps one could try "Today we are going to work on..." That's true, hopefully! We will all be working – teaching or coaching or learning or improving. So a happy, unified group of fencers, proving that work is not a chore, but can be stimulating and rewarding.

*Please note that articles published reflect the viewpoint of the individual authors in our knowledgeable and diverse academy, and the viewpoints expressed in articles are not necessarily those held by the British Academy of Fencing SSTT.*

*I have a light editorial touch on all articles received. So far all of which have been published. I am aware that sometimes there may be differences of opinion between members. If you have such a difference, you are always welcome to submit your own viewpoint in an article, as long as it contains reasoned arguments in favour of your viewpoint. Learning to coach is a process of evolution for each individual, and exposure to different viewpoints should encourage self reflection. Therefore I will always welcome thought provoking articles from members.*

*Kevin: Editor Academy News*



# Progressive pools

By Nick Chapman.

This article is a bit different as it's not me suggesting an alternative format, but rather it's a discussion of an alternative format suggested by another, namely British Fencing.

Back in July British Fencing published a document proposing the use of progressive pools at 'some' BRC B ranking events.

For those of you who are not closely involved with Cadet & Junior fencing the first thing to get your head round is 'BRC B'. BRC stands for 'British Ranking Circuit', the term that took over from BSC 'British Selection Circuit', and refers to events that were previously just called ranking events. The inclusion of the suffix A or B is new this season. 'A' events are effectively the events that have been present in the past, and the suffix is to help separate them from the 'B' events that are new this season. The 'B' events are intended to be lower level participation events that will have some small amount of ranking points attached allowing younger and less experienced fencers the opportunity to compete locally (relatively) and achieve a result that gets their name onto the ranking list. An entry level event, if you like, to promote participation in, and awareness of, the ranking point system. The idea being that the points will get you onto the ranking list but will not be enough to affect the selection for internationals. The hope is that the top fencers will therefore, to a large extent, ignore these events allowing the younger less experienced fencers an opportunity to experience a well run ranking event without being disheartened by being hammered by the top few (BF go as far as to suggest that some of these events will be run on the same weekend's as internationals to prevent the top fencers from attending).

All of this would seem in principle to be a good idea.

The idea is, as I understand it, that these 'B' events should be run using a variety of alternative formats that promote 'time on task'. 'Time on task' is one of British Fencing's new buzz words/fazes. British Fencing have become aware of how little time our young fencers spend competing compared with those in other European countries or compared to young athletes in this country participating in other sports. They aim to remedy this with more events and by having formats at these new events that maximise rather than minimise piste time.

## Members Advertise in the Academy News for Free

Academy News is a service to our members and we offer the chance to advertise on its pages, whether it be for an **event, a course, your club, or indeed anything**.

There is **no charge to members**.

It would be very helpful if you could supply with me the artwork that you would like to see published. Simply send me (Kevin Nelson) the details and I'll see you get a mention.

**[editor@baf-fencing.com](mailto:editor@baf-fencing.com)**

For all the latest information about the Academy  
go to the British Academy of Fencing web site at  
**[www.baf-fencing.com](http://www.baf-fencing.com)**

Those of you who have read my previous articles will be unsurprised to hear that I support the idea of increasing time on task. I have presented and promoted a number of formats that provide more fencing (repechage, Academy news 104, fencing off the places, Academy News 105, being just two). Looking for ways of making the quantity of piste time more uniform across the event, less dependent on the level of a given individuals success on a given day.

So, what is 'Progressive Pools'? It is a system which has its roots deep in the history of fencing. Years ago, we used to run a round of pools and promote the top 50%, eliminating the bottom 50%, repeating until you have one pool as a final. Progressive pools represents the same system with the exception that each time instead of eliminating the bottom 50% you allow them to continue in what is effectively a new competition for the lower places (a similar concept was applied to Direct Elimination fights in 'losing the E' Academy News 105). Under the traditional system, if you had four pools of 6, after the first round you would promote 50% to two pools continuing in the event and eliminate two pools worth of fencers (12) ranking them from 13 to 24 based on their first round results. Under the new system you would still promote 50% to continue in the event, but the bottom 50% would also get a second round of pools now competing for the bottom 50% of the final results (places 13-24). Therefore, by extension, in the third round you would end up with a top pool fencing for places 1-6, a second pool fencing for 7-12 a third for 13-18 and a fourth fighting for the remaining places down to 24.

Does any of this sound familiar? Whilst it is an unfamiliar format to many, it is not new, I wrote about a version of it in my article 'Doubles' published in Academy News number 106.

The advantage of Progressive Pools is that (dependent upon numbers) everyone gets the same amount of fencing. Excellent, this would seem to achieve our common goal of increasing meaningful piste time, 'time on task'.

The format that is Progressive Pools (as described in BF's original document) is not without its issues. It is a system where the vagaries of who you fence in the first round controls the progress you are able to make. If you don't make the top 50% at the end of the first round there is no opportunity to improve on what you did in that round, you will remain in the bottom 50%. I would argue this is not a problem in a social event, but to run a ranking competition where the reward for your fencing in the first round is arguably greater than the later rounds, turning competitions on their head, making the first round so important seems, at very least, odd. To do it at a time where the information available to seed the first round is, as a result of the pandemic and the 16 month interruption to the competition calendar, at the very least vague and incomplete, would seem to be counterproductive at best, naive at worst.

The British Fencing document made a series of claims for this system including that everyone gets the same number of fights. They do if you have a full house (48 fencers is 20 fights each), if you don't then people don't get the same number of fights (47 fencers open's the opportunity for one unlucky fencer to go home having had 16 fights, 20% less than most of the other fencers) \*. But the numbers attending don't just affect the numbers of fights. Imagine being the top seed in this event, number 1 in pool 1, winning all of your fights 5-0, and finding out you are still seeded 8th at the end of the first round (with 7 pools of 6 and one of 5, pool number 1 would be the smaller pool, seed number 1 therefore gets one less fight than the top fencer in each of the other 7 pools and therefore despite having the perfect round could end up seeded behind the other top fencers because of the lack of opportunity to generate as good an indicator (he is limited to +20, where as they could achieve +25). If this was a social event, or a training event, none of this would matter. My problem is that any and all of these inequities become magnified through the lens of ranking points. If the result counts only for the kudos on the day then bad luck, if it counts towards a position on a national ranking list then it becomes important.



I put many of my concerns about the format to British Fencing and they were kind enough to take the time to respond. Whilst they did go into depth about 'time on task' and what they hoped to achieve they did not address any of my specific points about flaws with the format when used for ranking. They seemed to try and deflect my fears by pointing out that the format would only be one of several used for 'B' events and that the problems were somehow irrelevant as they wouldn't affect selection. Either the points are important enough to mean something to the young fencers trying to earn them, exciting them about what they are getting involved with ....or they are not worth having at all. I would go further, if their young fencers see their first experience of gaining ranking points to be inequitable then they will be demotivated and the whole project has failed in it's intentions.

I applaud British Fencing's vision, I support their innovation of 'BRC B' events, I am delighted by their bravery in introducing alternative formats to mainstream fencing, however, I remain convinced that Progressive Pools is not the right format for the job.

Please don't dismiss the idea of running events using progressive pools, it's an excellent format for social events that provides lots of fencing and in principle gives fencers a similar number of fights, just don't use it for anything important!

British Fencing's original document is no longer available, however you can now find a version amended 'following community feedback' (guess I wasn't the only one to make my feelings known) at <https://www.britishfencing.com/format-brcs2122/>

This new version mitigates some of the issues of poor seeding going into the first round and also the effect on the top seed of there not being a full house, however it still maintains that everyone gets 20 fights and it contains a poorly worded statement about promotion from the third round.

\*There are certain numbers that work perfectly using pools of 5,6 or 7. They are 5, 6, 7 (though these numbers would be single pools and so would represent pool unique's rather than progressive pools), 10, 12, 14 (two rounds of pools each), 20, 24, 28 (three rounds), 40, 48 and if you go beyond British Fencing's suggestion and have pools of 7, 56), all other numbers will result in fencers getting different numbers of fights.



## ***Membership Fees for 2021/22***

Insured Coach	£60
Retired Member	£26
Overseas Member	£35

Membership was due on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021, please send a cheque made out to "The British Academy of Fencing" or make a bank transfer.

Please make sure that you return the signed form as well.

If you require a copy of the insurance letter please contact Stefan Leponis (Membership Secretary).

*[membersrep@baf-fencing.com](mailto:membersrep@baf-fencing.com)*

*(Although if you have already renewed your membership, you should have received this along with your new membership card in the post).*



# Young Minds Matter: Social Prescription

By Kevin Nelson

Since lockdown began, there has been increased awareness that the current mental health system is failing our young people, especially with the physical social isolation, and lack of exercise due to home learning. This is one initiative that hopes to reverse that trend.

At Cotswold Fencing Club, we have become an “activity on referral provider” through Active Gloucestershire . This is essentially a social prescription of physical activity for young people, without being referred through their GP. We took on our first referral in September, and are part of the second wave in Gloucestershire (The first trials in our county were in May 2021). Initially this referral is for 12 weeks, but further funding is available, to extend this for the young person involved.

The green paper for this project was published in December 2017, with the aim of improving young peoples access to mental health services through support in schools. In December 2018 the Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group was granted funding after a successful application, and started work on the project. Engagement through focus groups changed the name from “Mental Health Support Team” to “Young Minds Matter” and established the criteria for support. Including, no need to inform either your GP, or your parents, as this was felt to be more damaging than helpful. Hence it is a confidential service that empowers young people to be involved in their own treatment . The programme is designed to provide early intervention for mild to moderate mental health issues (Exam stress, friendship issues, behavioural difficulties,...).



“We all know how valuable being active can be for our mental health and finding an activity, that brings you enjoyment, a challenge or simple connection with your friends is important. We take this ethos of being active into this programme

This project aims to change the way we talk about and introduce activity to children and young people, to help them see that being active can be as easy as going for a walk or a kick about with their friends through to joining a club or a gym that helps them focus on a specific goal.”<sup>1</sup>

I would suggest that you see if your C.S.P. or N.H.S. trust is involved in one of these projects to help with young peoples mental health and put yourself forward as an activity provider. Helping with our young peoples mental health is something that many of us already do without thinking about it.

## Bibliography

1 Active Gloucestershire “activity on referral” website (still under construction).

2 <https://www.gloucestershireccg.nhs.uk/about-you/your-views/you-said-we-did/young-minds-matter-gloucestershire-trailblazer-programme-mental-health-support-teams/>

PS - Sorry for the garish colours, but that was also contained in the report - for our younger readers.



## Ray Parsons.

Ray Parsons died on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2021, aged 92. He had been poorly for some time. Due to the Covid restrictions only his wife Jean, and son and daughter-in-law were present at the funeral in Newcastle.

Ray was a notable fencer, coach and person. He was involved at the start of Welwyn Garden City Fencing Club in 1952, and from then on in Hertfordshire Fencing, Eastern Section and national coaching. He was an early member of the AFA Leaders Club under Bob Anderson.

His work as coach and administrator was recognised in 1970 with one of the earliest AFA Awards of Merit and described by Charles de Beaumont as “a dynamo for fencing in the area”.

His wife, Jean, joined the BAF and taught fencing at many local Hertfordshire schools, with the result that after two years there was a steady influx to local Clubs of young fencers. Several went on, with Ray’s guidance, to be members of the Under-20 squads. I hear that a few are still fencing with the Veterans!

He joined the BAF and continued to coach in the area. He retired early from his job as Tool Drawing Office Manager at British Aerospace (formerly Hawker Siddeley) at the Hatfield site. They moved to Keswick in the 1990’s and Ray still fenced and taught locally. He had a right hip replacement, and then another as the first one disintegrated. He still fenced when he could.

He was a ‘thinking’ fencer and coach. The ability to analyse the opponent and decide the correct response was keen. One team competition when Ray was listing the 3 of us on the pool sheets, meant he normally only had one or two fights whilst we had three. Several opponents were upset that they did not get to fence with him, as the result was reached. “I know I would have lost, but I always enjoyed the chance to fight Ray” was the comment. When I started coaching, he used to make me give him lessons, so that he could give constructive advice on hand positions, timing and distance.

There are many people who will have fond memories of him as a fencer, coach, examiner, president, chairman, and a real nice guy.

Our thoughts go out to Jean and his two sons.

Bob Dye.  
Warkworth. New Zealand.

*Past fencer, coach, examiner, Chairman of WGCFC and Eastern Section.  
Past Chairman of the AFA Coaching Committee and the Joint AFA/BAF Coaching Committee.*

Have you ever seen the film starring Robert Mitchum and Deborah Kerr “Reunion at Fairborough” ?

Did you spot one of the extras reading a book on sabre fencing?

Well next time you watch the film keep an eye out, the book is titled “Sabre Fencing “ and is written by D F Evered, who just happens to be one of our members .



# Bromsgrove LEVELLING UP day

By Jacqueline Redikin

The BAF held its first course since the lifting of 'Lockdown' in Bromsgrove with the help of Nick Chapman, the course was run by Prof. Peter Northam and Prof Andrew Vincent. The course had been planned previously but due to Covid rates had to be postponed. It was a fantastic day run in a Covid secure environment. It was good to see so many coaches and catch up with everyone.



The theme of the course was 'Levelling up' and was aimed at coaches who wished to increase their knowledge about coaching and who wanted to gain further coaching qualifications. Coaches were able to explore the differences in teaching and coaching, how to bring your pupils onto the next stage of their fencing journey. Numerous examples were provided around varying approaches to lessons to increase the difficulty for pupils. Various techniques for turning technical lessons into competitive lessons were also explored.

In the last issue of the Academy News, you were asked if you wanted to hold a course near you or if wanted to have an examination day that offer is still open. We hope to hold more courses and are now planning Denstone 2022 for July/August.

## 'Tribute'

by Provost Jan Lacey.

Knowing Professor Leon Hill MBE

I am sorry to hear of the death of Professor Leon Hill MBE.

I was most fortunate to meet Leon in 1977, when I was attending a coaching course that Professor Bob Anderson, the then Senior National Fencing Coach of Great Britain, was doing at Loughborough College. Bob had Leon assist him on this course.

Leon was a very experienced coach, with many years of knowledge.

I was to be examined for my Advanced Certificate at Foil, Epee and Sabre.

Leon gave me words of encouragement and his wisdom.

I was awarded my three Advanced Awards, for which I am most grateful for Leon's help.

I am sure many fencers and non-fencers, will like me, have fond memories of Leon.

# Ideas for Individual Lessons



The most difficult aspect of giving individual lessons for a coach is usually knowing where to start.

Several members have been in touch asking for ideas or starting points that they could use to develop into a lesson.

The following is a suggestion based around attacks and distance for use at foil, although it could be easily adapted to epee and sabre.

It must be stated that this is by no means a prescriptive example of a lesson. Coaches are free to use, adapt, exclude or ignore any of the content. The example is exactly that 'an example'. There are many, many other routes that could be used.

## A lesson on simple and compound attacks where distance dictates the complexity of the attack.

### Introduction to the lesson

This part of the lesson should be without any pressure on the pupil. The coach simply is asking for the pupil to perform a range of actions as a refresher and to set the scene for the lesson to follow. It is also an opportunity for the coach to look at possible faults, deficiencies, strengths or weaknesses in the pupil that they may wish to focus on later.

The coach may ask the pupil to perform a variety of simple attacks to all parts of the target (high/low lines), in pronation/supination, at close quarters, with a lunge, with a step lunge, on fleche (foil/epee). These could also be performed as attacks on preparation or preceded by a preparation (e.g. step, beat, engagement).

Following on from the simple attacks the same may be undertaken for a variety of compound attacks (two-time, progressive), feint-direct-disengage (counter-disengage), one-two, doublé. The pupil may be asked to execute the feints into high line hit into low line and vice-versa.



If the coach decides to incorporate the use of angulations then the following could be looked at using the following reasons/conditions:

- Hitting into low line requires angulation
- To get round an attempted parry (closing of the line)
- To hit into an apparently closed line
- To ensure opposition (final action could be prise de fer/opposition)
- To bring the point onto the target at 90 degrees.

## Main Part of the Lesson

Following the introduction, the coach may wish to mention to the pupil that the theme of the lesson is to look at how distance might influence the choice of attack.

The spoken words between coach and pupil have not been included in the following sequence of actions. The coach will need to tell the pupil what to do and the possible outcomes. How much needs to be said and explained will depend upon the ability and experience of the pupil.

The starting distance should be that needed for the pupil to perform a step forward-lunge.

Pupil: Steps forward and attempts to engage the coach's blade in sixte

Coach: stands still and gives/does not give an opening

Pupil: Executes the appropriate simple attack

**Or** (after practicing the preceding a few times)

Pupil: Steps forward and attempts to engage the coach's blade in sixte

Coach: takes a small step back giving opening

Pupil: Executes the appropriate compound attack

**Or**

Pupil: Steps forward and attempts to engage the coach's blade in sixte

Coach: steps forward

Pupil: Executes an attack on preparation

**Or**

Pupil: Steps forward and attempts to engage the coach's blade in sixte

Coach: opens distance rapidly

Pupil: Does not attack, or could follow the coach and choose to attack when in range

**Or**

Pupil: Steps forward and attempts to engage the coach's blade in sixte

Coach: presents point in line

Pupil: Attacks in opposition (pride de fer) or preceded the attack with a beat.

Please note: Ideally the pupil should be asked to consider only two choices. Once these are being executed satisfactorily, one of the options can be substituted for another. Once these two are working fine all three options may be included. If the pupil struggles to choose between three options, the coach should drop one and continue with two until the pupil can consistently make the correct selection. The lesson should not become a memory test with too many options being used. This is unlikely to be representative of what fencers may expect to be faced with in competitions/ free fighting.





## Emphasis of the lesson



In this example the emphasis of the lesson may be said to be distance or choice reaction, or the lesson could also develop along a competitive line by the coach trying to parry some of the attacks.

- You should stress that the choice of the complexity of the attack is dictated by the distance prior to the commencement of the attack and not on the opening presented by the coach.

- Time could be spent on determining the distance at which a pupil is successful with say a simple attack and then practicing the pupil getting to this distance (getting into range). Too far away and they will be unsuccessful, too close and they should be hit.

- The lesson could also turn competitive, in that the pupil should not be always allowed unopposed hits. Some attacks could be parried or occasionally the pupil could be attacked on their preparation to keep them awake and observant.

- The lesson could also be changed so that the attacks are executed on the coach's step forward (preparation). A deep preparation should draw a simple attack, whereas a sharp short preparation a compound attack, as it is likely that the opponent may be trying to draw a simple attack and parry it.
- Another theme could be to allow the pupil to step forward and choose where they want to attack, the coach will try and parry it - this is harder as the control/initiative is left more to the pupil.
- As a final note the pupil should always be given the right to sometimes not attack. It is important to ensure that fencers do not become too predictable and a 'puppet' of their opponent.

## Summary

We hope this has given you some ideas. As mentioned earlier 'other lessons are available' and may suit you and your pupils better.

It is always difficult to put down in words a description of what are three-dimensional movements, being executed by two individuals. Misinterpretation is very easy. If anyone needs clarification, further explanation or has a request for a different lesson subject please write to the editor.



# British Academy of Fencing Proficiency Awards - News

Due to circumstances beyond his control, Donald would like to apologise in advance for not being able to process the Proficiency Awards with his usual efficiency. Please allow extra time when ordering your awards, ***especially if you want them for the end of term.***

# Strawman

## Definition 1 (Political)

An intentionally misrepresented proposition that is set up because it is easier to defeat than an opponent's real argument.<sup>1</sup>

## Definition 2 (Business)

The straw man is hypothesis-driven problem-solving technique used by consulting powerhouses, such as McKinsey. It is an iterative process for arriving at increasingly better solutions. As this approach is iterative & hypothesis-driven, the consulting team should be prepared to discard it if necessary & create a new straw man. The premise is to create a draft version for criticism & testing, & then use the feedback for subsequent iterations, & eventually develop a proposal that is rock solid.<sup>2</sup>

It is always interesting when the same word can mean different things to people. Personally I would like to see more strawmen in the Academy News, articles to open discussions, to make us think... But I have spoken to several people about writing articles, many of them are apprehensive, because of definition 1. The political definition, which is self serving, deceptive and destructive. It destroys self-confidence and perpetuates ivory towers. It does not in itself create. It is vindictive to just knock a model down, without trying to put something in its place, which is where Definition 2 comes in.

I would like us to concentrate on Definition 2, the business model, which in itself is a coaching process, with the aim of producing a better model. Where the solution to the problem is brainstormed, but you have to start somewhere, and the strawman is your starting point, there are times you have to destroy it to create a better one, and so on, until you have a working theory. But in doing so it promotes greater understanding of your process. This is also the basis of scientific method.

Although we have to remember what we produce is still only a model, after all, is an electron a wave (1927) or a particle (1897)? You can show evidence for both models. Then both models were combined under a new theory... The iterative process of understanding the nature of matter is still continuing today.

So please send your strawmen to me, let us all become better coaches by understanding the different approaches all around us.

## Bibliography

1: Google Dictionary

2: <https://thinkinsights.net/consulting/strawman-proposal-brainstorming-the-mckinsey-way/>

## Postscript

After the pandemic, we hear that many clubs are in trouble or just not reopening, is there someone out there who could write an article on effective marketing of our clubs and fencing in general?

Without being totally reliant on social media.

How do we make people aware that there is a fencing club in their local area? And they can join...



# Lean Start Up

By Craig Jinks

We're all facing a difficult pandemic situation in our clubs. Many people out there are responding to the increased family time they had during lockdowns with a very different prioritisation to their clubs & hobbies - that provides us with challenges in attracting and keeping fencers, let alone thoughts of growing. This is a light touch introduction to some thinking we've been doing in the Cotswold club to respond - this started pre-pandemic, but has become more relevant than ever.

I've been working over recent years with some folk who are coaches in Lean Start Up methods. What's that, you ask? If you google it, you'll come up with an answer something like "entrepreneurial skills utilising a scientific or data-driven approach and a customer focus to enable faster experiments and learn from failures" ... or something like that. For me, it's a real focus on understanding what your customers need and how the service you provide meets that - and using data to try new ideas and learn quickly if they work or not.

## So what does this have to do with fencing?

Let's be honest, how many of you have planned your next lesson and sat there thinking about what you need to teach your students? I certainly have. Time to challenge yourself to stop thinking about what you need to teach them, but what they want to get out of coming to your club.

How often have you thought about them as customers? Feels a bit weird, doesn't it, but you provide a service and you have customers that benefit from it... and more of them than you probably think. Your fencers, prospective fencers, even the parents and partners of fencers are all your customers - time to start thinking about them as such.

We tried using some of this thinking at Cotswold and it helped immensely (we're having to cancel U14 beginner courses because we just can't fit any more in!) So, how can some of these techniques help us move our clubs forward and adapt to what looks like a very different, post-pandemic approach to sports by many people.

### 1. Start with why

Very simple and nothing new - we all should already have a club vision. What are you trying to achieve with the club - is it churn out potential elite fencers? Grow the grass root sport in your area? Simply run a social club that enjoys its fencing?



All are valid, but check that your vision is appropriate (stretching but achievable) and, most importantly, that you use it to guide your decisions and priorities.



## **2. Who are your customers?**

I'll start by making it clear that you don't have one audience (your students) and that's it. Who is it that benefits directly from the service you provide? Are there segments of this audience that have different needs.. different enough to think of them separately.

For our juniors, we think of 4 customer segments... basic students, those wanting to compete (more), students with special needs and parents.

With seniors it's simply social fencers and competing fencers.

Then we think of prospective fencers separately... those looking to pick up a new sport and those that simply want to try something out.

The specific categories don't matter, just distil it down to a manageable number that's relevant for you. If you're struggling to work out if there's a separate group, try thinking if they need anything different from the club. You may want to consider age as a definition, or geographical location, or any other demographic (particularly if you are trying to expand into areas that you haven't previously).

## **3. What do they want - pains & gains**

Now, don't fall into the trap of guessing what their needs are, either, but ask a handful of people from each of your customer groups what they enjoy or get from coming to your fencing sessions (their gains) and what makes it difficult for them (their pains). You will be surprised by many of the answers.

This is the hard part. Not to carry out... what's hard is listening to the answers and not creating excuses or beating yourself up - it is simply data that allows you to think about the service you provide, that's all.

## **4. Are you meeting those needs?**

Now look hard at that data and think about your normal sessions and what the club provides. If you're human, you will probably find that you have (intentionally or not) skewed your fencing services to meet what your regulars want. Nothing wrong with that per se.

But now think about that vision... is that making it harder to keep new fencers? Are you focusing so much on one group that you only sporadically get others turning up? Are you worrying about designing training for that experienced small group of fencers that really only want somewhere to spar with their mates?

What value are you offering to help these customer groups realise those gains and avoid those pains. Whatever you find, you have a decision to make - do you change anything?

## **5. Hypothesis & experiments**

You've decided to try something new (and if you asked those groups what they might want to see more of, you may well have a few ideas from them already). How do you know it's the right thing and make sure you don't break what's already working?

Don't go for wholesale change, just try one new thing at a time. And treat each new idea as an experiment, testing it for a short period and being conscious about what will tell you if it works.

*NB: If you make it clear to your audience that this is in response to their input and you want feedback, you also minimise the risk of someone dropping out because of your 'new approach'.*

There's a source of Lean Start Up tools and techniques called Strategyzer (sign up for small companies and service providers is free), They have what they call a test card for this stage. [[how to fill in a test card](#)] It asks you four questions that give you every chance to prove an idea's worth.

*We believe that...*

*To verify that, we will...*

*And measure...*

*We are right if...*



As an example, one of the things we tried at Cotswold was in response to most groups feeling that their improvement was sporadic (usual surge and plateau in skills). What I came up with was:

We believe that... we can help students and parents see their constant improvement and reduce drop off from them feeling no growth/improvement in skills.

To verify that, we will... focus each month for the next 3 months on one particular skill or skill set, make that clear to all and give feedback based on it.

And measure... by asking students for their own sense of growth in that skill as well as coaches monitoring performance over the month.

We are right if... 60% of students express a sense of improvement and coaches see more students attempting to use that skill appropriately and/or using that skill more effectively.

### **So what happened?**

After the 3 months we set for this experiment, we looked at our measures to see if we continued with it as part of our normal way of running our sessions, or dropped it and tried something else.

This one was a resounding success - around 75% of students could tell us how they were improving and we, as coaches, could see skill development ourselves.

What we hadn't thought of measuring was the benefit for one of those key customers - parents. We still got feedback from some of them, and they told us of changes in excitement after our regular end of month club mini comp (box night). Instead of "I didn't win many. I'm so bad at this", some of them were hearing "I only won 1 fight, but I got loads of disengages in". We hadn't anticipated this, but by being open to students and parents what we were focusing on each month, the engaged parents were asking about that skill and drawing out some of that recognition of improvement for us.

If you consider anything from this, I would strongly recommend thinking about what your customer groups want from you and how/if you're providing that to them. Especially if you're looking to reach out to another area or demographic

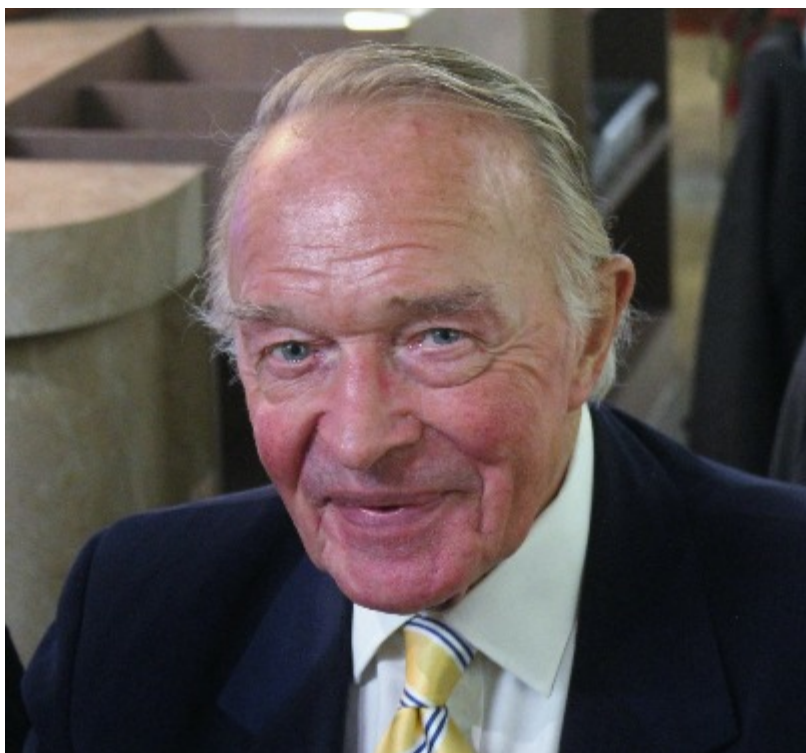
### **Sources:**

**Strategyzer** | Corporate Innovation Strategy, Tools & Training tools and techniques beyond what is mentioned above to help you work out that value proposition for your customers.

# DENNIS HUNT - INTERNATIONAL M'AITRE D'ARMES

It is with the greatest sadness to report of the death of Dennis who died on 24.10.2021 after a long and painful illness. He is succeeded by his son Martin, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He had a close relationship with Marcia for over 30 years.

~As a young man, he was first involved with Sea Cadets - 'mucking about in boats' - as he put it. He was a great swimmer and tennis player. Started fencing foil in late teens at Bristol Fencing Club Dennis and was a highly successful fencer in his own right at all major national and international competitions. He won the S.West Sabre championships 19 times - a record still to be beaten. When he became a veteran fencer he continued winning medals including the gold at the European Championships as well as silver and bronze medals.



When he entered competitions he would be rushing in at the very last minute but then would pick up his sabre ready to do battle!

Dennis started coaching foil and sabre at Salle Roeder in '60s as a voluntary coach turning professional early 1990's. He qualified as a sabre coach with the British Academy of Fencing and went on to qualify as a M'Aitre d'Armes international coach. He also taught foil for a while in addition to sabre - his first love - in his club, Salle Roeder Hunt.

For many years he coached at Badminton School and Downside School. Many fencers have profited from his coaching and incisive comments at competitions.

## **International Results**

International Corble Cup - Finals

National Sabre Championships - Finals

Represented GB in Rest of Britain team 14 times

World Masters Individual finalist - Vichy

World Masters team and individual - Germany

World Masters team - Switzerland

World Masters Team - Belgium



Won Welsh Open .

19 times winner of S.W. Sabre Championships

18 times winner Gloucester Foil Championships

Individual winner at both foil and sabre of the Excalibur inter-county competition on many occasions.

Member of the England Quad match between England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales for many years.

**As a Veteran fencer, he has won**

Gold medal - European Championships, Liege

Silver medal in Moscow in 2003,

Bronze medal - World Vets Championships, Hungary

Bronze medal - World Vets Championships, Denmark

Bronze medal -Vets sabre team in European Championships

Bronze medal - Vets Sabre championships, Martinique

National Vets Age Group Sabre Champion - 3 times.

Trained son Martin who won British U.20 Sabre Championships, 2nd Dourdon 'A' grade International (highest ever placed Brit). Both fenced for GB in same team in Quadrangular match (only time that both son and father in the same team)

Trained many young fencers to national and international level including Colin Hillier, Steve Hutton, Peter Hutton- World Championships, Peter Wright, Gary Foukes-won National Youth Championships, Gareth Evans, Marvin Evans, Julian Nellis- No.2 National squad, Chris Buxton , Nat Lewis, Andrew Cashin, Howard Stretch-U/17 World Championships, Many of his young fencers have been placed in Finals of national youth competitions and he has had 3 out of 4 finalists in the Youth Age-Group Championships.

Trained Chris Prevett as a vet who won the National Vets Sabre Championships in 2008 and bronze medal; in European Team Championships, 2008.

Treya Annil won U/17 ladies national championships.

Coaching ladies sabre including Jenny Hutchinson- Veterans World champion,

Captain and Coach to England sabre team and U/20 team at World Championships at Athens and Istanbul. Selector for the Rest of England team for many years. Committee member on U/20 sabre.

He visited Honved in Budapest to train with Hungarian coaches and continually updated his knowledge of current coaching methods when travelling abroad.

His great strength in coaching was that he taught the individual - not lesson of the week capitalising on their individual strengths.

Not only a great coach but a true gentleman and will be greatly missed by all who were fortunate to know him and most of all, be taught by him.

**Marcia Stretch**

## **DENNIS JOHN IVOR HUNT**

**26.10.31 – 24.10.21**

The funeral of Dennis will be at the Canford Crematorium, Canford Lane, Westbury on Trym BS9 3PQ on **Wednesday 17 November 1.45 p.m.** After the service there will be a wake and buffet until 6.30p.m. at the Red Lodge, Park Row, Bristol BS1 5LJ.

Please let Marcia know by email ([marcia\\_stretch@hotmail.com](mailto:marcia_stretch@hotmail.com)) if you will be attending as a indication of the number attending for the catering requirements.

If you wish to send flowers, please ensure they are with the funeral directors: Co-Op Funeral Care, 20 High Street, Westbury on Trym BS9 3DU by the morning of 17 November. If you wish to make a donation in his memory, please send this to BVF sort code: 52 30 31 Account no: 65851765. Please quote reference DennisH and your name.

Should you require help or information on safeguarding then please contact Jacqueline Redikin

E-mail [courseofficer@baf-fencing.com](mailto:courseofficer@baf-fencing.com)

Should you need to report a Safeguarding issue then use the procedures of the organisation that you are working for. Then contact British Fencing, either through your club welfare officer, regional welfare officer, or directly.....

Equality and Safeguarding Manager, Liz Behnke for advice on 077177 40125

If you have a serious concern and you believe that a child or vulnerable adult is at immediate risk then in the first instance you must contact the Police or Children/Adult Services in your area.

## **Committee Contribution**

The committee has met several times since the last Academy News, nearly all of those, meetings were to discuss the Special general meeting. All committee meetings this year have been via zoom, which has saved costs and travelling time for all the committee. Although it is not quite the same as meeting face to face.

- The last time that we met was on 7<sup>th</sup> November to discuss
- Insurance, and how the cost has risen this year, and its potential knock on effect to membership fees.
- Denstone next year, provisional dates on page 36.
- The possibility of organising day / weekend courses next year.
- Strategic planning to grow fencing + grow coaching
- During this period we have also submitted one person for DBS checking.

A

G

M

# British Academy of Fencing

The date of the BAF AGM is provisionally Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2022 (TBC).  
Venue & Date to be announced via email, facebook and website.

**All members of the Academy are urged to attend.**

- The meeting of Maîtres d'Escrime, Provosts and Members to commence at 9.30 am.
- The main meeting will start at 11.00am
- All positions on the Committee, except that of the Secretary, are due for election at this year's AGM. Members may request a proxy (postal) vote for the election of the President, by applying to the Secretary.
- All other positions will be determined by votes at the AGM itself.
- We currently require nominations for a Vice President & Members Rep.
- Motions for alteration or addition to the articles are required, in writing to the Secretary, at least 21 days before the meeting (by 16th December).
- Other proposals to be tabled at the AGM should be submitted to the Secretary 10 days before the AGM (by 27th December).
- Apologies for absence may be forwarded via any Committee Member.
- The BAF will not be providing lunch this year.
- There will be no formal meal, however members are invited to dine together if they wish in the evening.



Mrs J .A. Redikin  
Secretary BAF.  
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# The Future of Fencing Clubs in a COVID-19 World?

By John Worsley

Recently I took the difficult decision not re-open the fencing club I ran for the last 12 years. We effectively closed down in March 2020 when in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the Government ordered that all sports venues close their doors. Just sending that email out to the club members seemed to make things, so final; and to tell the truth, I've been putting it off for a few weeks now. Finally saying goodbye to something I've been deeply involved with for so long was difficult to put it mildly.

There are several varied reasons for not re-opening the club from falling numbers of fencers (which was already apparent before the pandemic), through the difficulties of maintaining the cleanliness of the kit in a COVID-19 world on my own. To finally just not seeming to have the time to fit it in now the lockdown has finished (at least for now). My fulltime job seems to have become more demanding on my time now and I seem to be spending more time working than I used to. But it got me thinking. Am I the only one, the only coach going through this, or are there others? If people are, willing I'd like to hear from those members in the BAF, who have been, or who are, or are likely in the near future to be in the same position as me. Having to choose to not re-open a fencing club or close one down.

As a coach and a member of the committee this situation worries me because the loss of a fencing club represents a loss of opportunity for new people to try the sport. It also means that exiting fencers could leave the sport never to return. It also means for some of our members the loss of income, a loss of earnings and a squeeze their finances.

Again I'd like to hear from any of our members that have been in this position. I'd like to know if any of them plan to re-open their club or clubs at a later date in the future. Will they look to open new clubs in other locations? Are any other coaches struggling to balance fencing commitments with full time jobs? I suppose what I'm looking for is some idea of how our members are coping at the moment and what the future possibly holds for us.

If anyone wants to contact me about this they can do so at the following email addresses:

[treasurer@baf-fencing.com](mailto:treasurer@baf-fencing.com) or [worsleyja@aol.com](mailto:worsleyja@aol.com)

John Worsley.

*John has highlighted a really important issue with fencing, and if we are going to survive as a sport then we need to pool our information, and consider our options. So if you are running a club, or have decided not to run your club any more, then please respond to John's request for information. Why are you stopping, or how are you managing to keep going? Also please do read Lean Start-Up (Craig Jinks P26-28) it makes a lot of sense, and has worked for us at Cotswold, as you will have read in some of my previous articles.*

*Kevin: Editor Academy News : Chairman & Coach Cotswold Fencing Club.*

At the time of going to press we have heard about the sad passing of another member of the British Academy; John Shearn. We hope to include an obituary to him in the next issue of Academy News.

# Stefan Speaks

The thought of your Members' Rep.



The first part is a summing up of about 4 years.  
The second part is to prove that I have more than one thought no matter what the editors of the academy news think!

For the past 4 years I have been the Members Rep but at the members meeting prior to the AGM in 2022 I will not be standing for the post.

Looking back to my first academy news article I made a list of how I perceived the duties of members rep should be.

- Customer services
- Internal communications officer
- Equivalent of a union rep for members
- First point of contact to report bullying, intimidation and the like WITHIN BAF
- Morale officer
- Agony aunt
- Someone to fill a page in the academy news
- To run the members meeting before the AGM

After 4 years I still think this list is what Members Rep is all about and I hope you have all been happy with my interpretation and implementation of it. But it is time I step down and let someone else (the role is open to any BAF member who is not a professor) take on the duties and privilege of representing the non-professors in The Academy.

Now part 2, I leave you with this thought/question: –

What would fencing be like today, if it existed at all, if all good Catholics throughout the centuries had obeyed the Pope?

Because : The Catholic Church raised her voice against duelling. St. Avitus (d. 518) and the Popes Nicolas I (858-67), Stephen VI, Alexander II and Alexander III, Celestine III, Innocent III and Innocent IV, Julius II, and many others.

From the middle of the fifteenth century duelling over questions of honour increased so greatly, especially in the Romanic countries, that the Council of Trent was obliged to enact the severest penalties against it. It decreed that –

*'the detestable custom of duelling which the Devil had originated, in order to bring about at the same time the ruin of the soul and the violent death of the body, shall be entirely uprooted from Christian soil'.*

It pronounced the severest ecclesiastical penalties against those princes who should permit duelling between Christians in their territories. According to the council those who take part in a duel are ipso facto excommunicated, and if they are killed in the duel they are to be deprived of Christian burial. The seconds and all those who advised the duel or were present at it are also excommunicated.

These ecclesiastical penalties were at a later date repeatedly renewed and in part made even more severe. Benedict XIV decreed that duellists should also be denied burial by the Church even if they did not die on the duelling ground and had received absolution before death. Pius IX in the "Constitutio Apostolicae Sedis" of 12 October, 1869, decreed the penalty of excommunication against "all who fight duels, or challenge to a duel or accept such challenge; as well as against all who are accessory to the or who in any way abet or encourage the same; and finally, against those who are present at a duel as spectators or those who permit the same, or do not prevent it, whatever their rank, even if they were kings or emperors".

Like his predecessors, Leo XIII in his letter "Pastoralis officii", of 12 September, 1891, laid down the following principles: "From two points of view the Divine law forbids a man as a private person to wound or kill another, excepting when he is forced to it by self-defence. Both natural reason and the inspired Holy Scripture proclaim this Divine law."

Answers on a postcard to your friendly neighbourhood Members Rep.

Stefan Leponis : Your Members Rep

Tel: 07816 423 809

Email: [membersrep@baf-fencing.com](mailto:membersrep@baf-fencing.com)



Visit the Academy's web site

[www.baf-fencing.com](http://www.baf-fencing.com)



It is essential that all activities that are undertaken by members (coaches) are risked assessed and the risk assessments are written down and dated. In order to comply with our insurers requirements, Academy members must ensure that they follow the NGB's (British Fencing's) guidelines when coaching and specifically those relating to health and safety. All equipment used must conform to the standards and specifications set by British Fencing.

## Everyone Has Something to Give!

We all go stale from time to time, and need freshening up with new ideas.

I believe that all members of the Academy have the ability to write an article for Academy News. Many of the articles published in the Academy News are **not** written by Professors, but by ordinary Members sharing their experiences. So PLEASE if you are doing something well, or have an alternative viewpoint, share it with the rest of us. Freedom of speech is important, and we all need to respect other peoples viewpoints, but before we can do that we need some viewpoints.



# B.A.F. Residential Course 2022

## Provisionally 18<sup>th</sup> July to 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2022

The next residential course will be held at Denstone College and it would be a pleasure to have you there should you wish to join us. The British Academy of Fencing's residential course is open to all fencing coaches irrespective of whether they are members of the BAF.



The course is designed for fencing coaches who wish to improve or enhance their practical skills, increase their technical/tactical knowledge or to simply meet other coaches and share ideas and experiences. The course is also ideal for those wishing to prepare and take BAF examinations. Optional examinations are held on the Saturday for those who wish to take BAF coaching awards.

### Cost

British Academy of Fencing Members : £470  
Non Academy Coach : £550

The fee will include full board (breakfast, lunch and evening meals), tuition and course documentation. Examination fees are extra.

**For further details, contact the Course Officer,**

**Jacqueline Redikin**  
**secretary@baf-fencing.com**



## Examination Fees

Level 1 Assessment £11.00  
Level 2 to Diploma £21.00 (**£26.00**)

These are for "normal" exams - for Special exams, consult the Course Officer. Figures in **RED** are for non-BAF members

## Documentation

The following documentation is available from the Course Officer Jackie Redikin.

Key Teaching Points (Weapon specific)	<b>£7.35</b> ( <b>£9.4</b> ) each
Key Coaching Points (Weapon specific)	<b>£7.35</b> ( <b>£9.4</b> ) each
Glossary of Terms (including Translation of Fencing Terms)	<b>£7.35</b> ( <b>£9.45</b> )
Employment Guidelines	<b>£7.35</b> ( <b>£9.45</b> )
Teaching/ Coaching Tactics (2nd Edition)	<b>£16.80</b> ( <b>£21</b> )
Examples of past written Papers for Advanced and Diploma examinations - <b>FREE</b>	
All prices include p & p. Figures in <b>RED</b> are for non-BAF members	

## British Academy of Fencing

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