

Fourth WADA Global Education Conference

27-29 February 2024, Cannes, France

Welcome address by WADA President, Witold Bańka

Madam Minister for Sport Amélie Oudéa-Castéra; President of the AFLD,
Madam Béatrice Bourgeois; Chair of the WADA Education Committee
Madam Kady Kanouté; other distinguished guests; dear friends from the
anti-doping community; ladies and gentlemen. Good evening.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to WADA's fourth Global Education Conference here in wonderful Cannes. Whatever your role is in the anti-doping community, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for what you do for clean sport. Your expertise is crucial. Your commitment is priceless. Anti-doping is a team sport and WADA is nothing without you.

The 2024 Global Education Conference follows on the success of our previous Conferences in 2015 in Ottawa, Canada, 2018 in Beijing, China, and 2022 in Sydney, Australia. We are here together to connect, share,

build relationships and expand our knowledge. And to inspire each other to create quality education programs for athletes and others worldwide.

And what a welcome we have had so far! It is always great to be in France. But especially in 2024 when the Olympic and Paralympic Games will be held in this country. And what a turn out! More than 400 people are registered to attend the conference in person this week. This is the highest attendance at a Global Education Conference to date. It demonstrates how education, more and more, is a key pillar of anti-doping and crucial for the protection of clean sport. What I find exciting for this conference is the diversity of roles and organizations involved. The NADOs are here of course, but also representatives from the Sports Movement, athletes, and Governments. Collaboration between all stakeholders is essential. I would particularly reinforce with Governments that are supporting a NADO – please check that education is a key component of their strategies, and that sufficient resources are allocated. Also, please ensure that connections are made between your relevant Ministries of Sport, Education and Health to reach the children and young athletes so we can positively promote the spirit of sport.

At this conference, we have a fascinating and varied agenda with 11 different sessions – all under the theme of ‘Cultivating Our Collective Creativity’. There are also some scheduled networking breaks. These will let you make and reinforce those all-important relationships for future collaborations. During the sessions we will learn about the education programs that are making a difference around the world. We will look at the evidence as to what motivates athletes, what makes some of them vulnerable to doping, and how best to use education to develop clean sport behaviors.

Modern anti-doping is about promoting and protecting athletes. Athletes start out in sport clean and our first goal must be to keep them that way. No young person dreams of becoming a sporting champion by breaking the rules. Through values-based education we are reinforcing the concept of fair play. We are giving those young athletes the tools they need to compete clean. From day one until they finally retire. Wherever that journey takes them.

WADA is 25 years old this year. For most of that time it is fair to say that the focus was on catching and punishing those who cheated. Now we are

seeing a rebalancing of the system towards supporting athletes and thereby preventing doping before it happens. This is where education comes in.

WADA is now fully embracing education as a priority. All Anti-Doping Organizations and governments of the world must do the same. The time has come to adopt a PREVENTION MINDSET. We must all put athletes at the heart of anti-doping policies, programs and interventions. We must work harder to empathize with athletes so they can navigate the anti-doping system successfully. Athletes and their entourage need your help. There is no excuse now. Athletes deserve nothing less.

The adoption of the International Standard for Education and the formation of the stand-alone department within WADA have been game-changers. First and foremost, this has demonstrated WADA's commitment to this area. It also models what can be achieved by ADOs and Governments around the world. The WADA Education Department has grown from a team of three in 2019 to 10 now. The budget has risen from USD 940,250 five years ago to more than USD 2.5 million in 2024 – this is approximately 5% of WADA's overall budget. I would ask you all to think about how much

you spend on education. Is it at least 5% of your budget? If not, why not? It is also important to invest in people, as well as paper. Let's bring more skilled and competent practitioners into education, and all technical areas of anti-doping. WADA, is leading and investing in this area. We want to see anti-doping become a career choice, so that in the next 25 years, we will have built a vast network of anti-doping practitioners devoted to keeping sport clean.

And the changes should not stop there. We must continue the evolution – to go further. What we need is a collective community commitment. And we must listen to the research. Speaking of that, connected to the GEC, WADA today held its first ever Social Science Research Symposium. This is an important milestone for the anti-doping system. Research is telling us many things... that some athletes are vulnerable. We must acknowledge the complexity of the anti-doping system, the challenges athletes face. Unintentional doping is real. Our education efforts must therefore focus on helping athletes learn the behaviors they need to remain on the right side of the rules.

Nowhere is this more important than with minors and their entourage. If there was any doubt about this, recent high-profile cases have shown it very clearly. Therefore, I think it's important that while you are here in Cannes, take the time to consider an amendment to the International Standard for Education. I believe that policy should be used as a positive tool for change. As a minimum, the next revision of the Standard should include the mandatory education of minors – and their coaches – who are competing internationally. Recent history has shown us that this is the least we can do for children who are also elite athletes. From the playground to the podium, we need to be there... lighting the way, and providing the values and behaviors that will sustain them every step they take.

In closing, I would like to thank the AFLD for hosting the 2024 GEC and the Government of France for offering its full support. France continues to be an important and valued anti-doping partner for WADA and the wider clean sport community. WADA relies on your expertise globally but particularly as a leader in the Europe region. We will continue to work with you in our mission to deliver global anti-doping excellence.

And thanks to everyone for coming this week. Please enjoy this evening's festivities. And more importantly, please make the most of the coming days at the Global Education Conference. We are all here for one reason – to serve athletes and clean sport. Working together, that is exactly what we will do.

Thank you.