



## BRITISH FENCING

### GOVERNANCE UPDATE MAY 2010

I spent my two year anniversary with British Fencing at the British Youth Championships, a fantastic event thanks to the wealth of volunteers. It seems a good time to review the major changes which have occurred over the last two years. The most fundamental change has been to the governance structure of British Fencing – how the organisation, the Board, committees and staff function and run the sport. Unfortunately it is impossible to make this subject sound exciting so I will settle for informative.

#### **SABMiller**

When I first started it became obvious that we were coming up short in terms of a clearly defined vision, strategy and set of values, with a large Board who were having to make operational decisions rather than strategic. We were very lucky to have SABMiller as our partner in the British Olympic Association (BOA) FTSE 100 Partnership Programme and so we turned to them for help. This programme seeks to link FTSE 100 companies with Olympic sports to help and advise them on how to become an effective business. This is not a cash sponsorship; rather we receive counsel on subjects such as strategy, finance, marketing and communications, governance, HR – the fundamental elements of a good organisation.

#### **Strategy Group**

A Strategy Group led by Gail Lumsden (Head of Group Strategy for SABMiller) and Suse Wesley (fencer and strategy consultant) was established with people openly recruited from a range of backgrounds in fencing and we set about developing a strategy for the sport. It became obvious from the start that before we could deliver any strategy, the focus needed to be on getting the organisation fit for purpose and run like a business. The group recommended establishing a clear governance framework, with fundamental changes such as: reducing the number of Board members; developing a skills-based Board with an independent Chair to lead the business; a transparent organisational structure with lines of accountability and responsibility for staff and volunteer committees.

This work was presented to the Board in February 2009 who, recognising the importance of the step changes required, then set up a Board Governance Working Group. This Governance Working Group met with the original Strategy Group several times throughout the year to refine their recommendations.

#### **UK Sport and Sport England Audit**

In the meantime, we were selected for a routine governance audit by UK Sport and Sport England, who as our principal funders work together to ensure we are supported to achieve our outcomes and that we are fit for purpose to receive public funds. The issues associated with MP's and BBC executive's expenses along with the findings of the *Dutton Report* into the management of public funding in sport (released the same week as our audit report) have meant that there is far more scrutiny on NGBs and how they use public funding.

The result of the audit was that we received a number of immediate and longer term actions, some of which were outstanding from our last audit in 2005, which focused on the leadership of our

organisation, roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability. UK Sport and Sport England made clear that the continuation of any funding was directly linked to us achieving the actions within the audit report. This report gave us the guidance necessary for the Board to approve many of the original recommendations of the Strategy Group, and in a very short space of time.

We have valued the support of Sport England, UK Sport, SABMiller and other sports (specifically England Hockey who have gone through many major organisational changes to develop a fit for purpose business).

### **The Key Changes**

As an organisation now receiving millions of pounds of public funding, we have an increasing responsibility to manage this income effectively. The principal recommendations of the Strategy Group and the fundamental recommendations of the audit focused on a clear leadership, including appointing an independent Chair for British Fencing and setting a clear organisational structure, with lines of authority, responsibility and accountability. The Board sets the strategic direction of the organisation; the Chief Executive manages the delivery of this strategy with staff and volunteer committees and the President continues as our sport's figurehead and representative both domestically and internationally. Board members will also take on portfolio roles, whereby they monitor implementation of a strategic area with the CEO. Information on this will become readily available on the new website where we have established a specific section on governance.

Appointing a Chair of British Fencing will of course require some amendments to the articles, which will need to be presented to the AGM planned for July. We will look to recruit a strong Chair with business skills, political skills and an understanding of the sporting environment to help us in our journey to become a *World Leading Fencing Family*: creating opportunities to start, stay and succeed in fencing.

### **Summary**

Whilst UK Sport and Sport England are clear that our funding is dependent on achieving these actions, the Board has found this process exceedingly beneficial to British Fencing and it has provided us with an opportunity to make major step changes to the governance of our sport. It has helped us to establish clear and transparent structures and processes, which I hope will allow you as members to feel confident in the leadership of your sport as we move to and beyond London 2012.

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*For further information on any of the above please visit the "Governance" section on [www.britishfencing.com](http://www.britishfencing.com) or feel free to contact me on [piers.martin@britishfencing.com](mailto:piers.martin@britishfencing.com).*