



## BDF - BF: Future ways of working

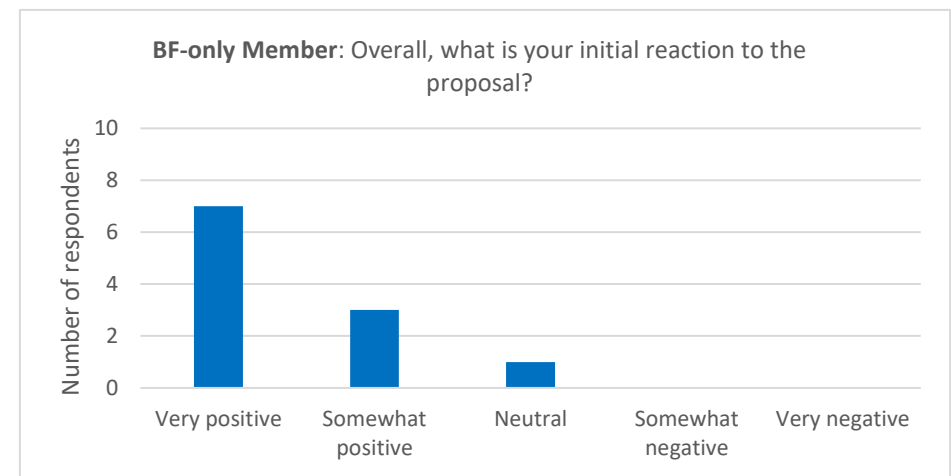
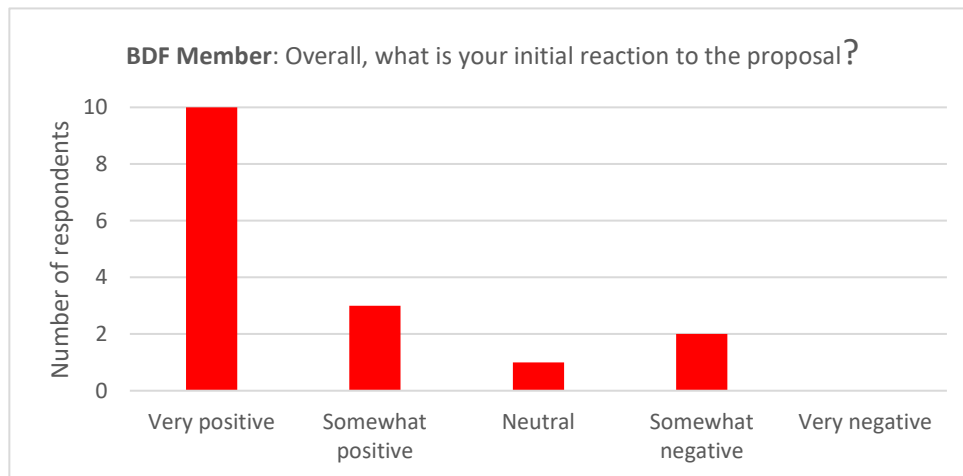
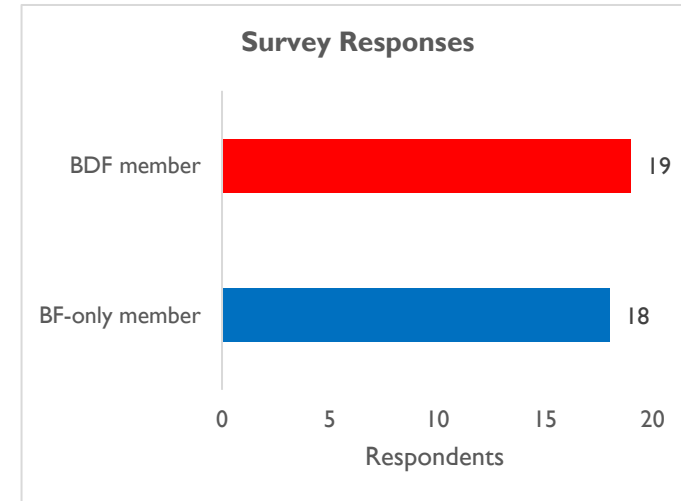
In November 2021 we launched a short survey to hear the views of members of both BDF and BF as well as the wider fencing community on the proposed merging of key roles and responsibilities of British Disability Fencing (BDF) into British Fencing (BF).

Thank you to everyone who responded, both by completing the survey and providing written commentary directly to the independent consultant, who has collated and analysed your returns. The following is a summary of these, with a full analysis provided to the boards of both BDF and BF to help them in their decision-making.

By way of reminder, as UK Sport currently fund the EIS to deliver the Wheelchair World Class Programme (WCP) directly, this therefore falls outside the scope of the responsibilities of BDF and as such is outside the scope of this merger of responsibilities.

### Key findings:

Some 37 members responded, 19 from BDF (which is great engagement by the NGB membership, so thank you) and 18 BF-only members. The majority of respondents were in favour of the proposal (85%), with only 7% against the move. That indicates strong approval from those who responded.





You were asked to explain, in one sentence, your initial reaction to the proposal.

The key words and phrases you used included:

You were asked for your thoughts on what would be the best course of action to ensure BDF is an effective NGB **should the proposal not be advanced.**

Although many of you stated merger was the only option, if it didn't advance you were united in your views that there needed to be:

**A fresh approach. A total reset. New policies. New personnel.**

**There was support for BF (continuing to) developing an inclusive approach regardless of whether there is a formal merging of roles and responsibilities.**

There was general agreement as to **the main benefits of the proposal**. These can be grouped under the following key themes:

- Sharing of **resources, expertise, training and development**.
- **Increased opportunities to get more people fencing**, including more opportunity for wheelchair fencers. This makes it so much easier for provision of a single "one stop" base/ shop for British Fencing in all its aspects.
- **Improved governance arrangements**, with strong views expressed that BDF governance was not fit-for-purpose and hadn't been for some time. The move would bring much needed certainty to members of BDF.
- This was an opportunity to not **only mainstream /normalise para-fencing** but **make the sport of fencing more inclusive** as disability fencing extends beyond wheelchair fencing.

There was **strong support for clubs to provide more inclusive environments for fencers with a disability**. A flavour of the responses given include:

“ Really important that every fencing club in UK should have equipment, knowledge and resources to cater for para fencers. Currently far too few places where you can fence with a disability - bit of a postcode lottery. Too many clubs currently turn away fencers with disabilities or have them training sat on a regular chair not in a frame - which is not only dangerous but gives no opportunity for meaningful development either as a recreational fencer or as a competitive fencer. Clubs also need support to make their buildings accessible. Also, key that fencing clubs and entire community take disability fencing seriously - it is every bit as competitive as able-bodied fencing ”

“ This would be amazing as it is very difficult to find a club that has a frame/ is willing to work with disabled fencers”

“ Good idea but only feasible if clubs had access to additional central funds to purchase the frames and associated equipment for disabled fencers. There would also need to be a programme to train up sufficient coaches within the UK to develop athletes from the three categories. A difficult task.”

“ Some clubs are very welcoming of disabled athletes, while others are determined not to let any pass their doors. I think the latter is due to fear that they might offend disabled people, or because they think there will be untold difficulties in accommodating people with disabilities ”

“ Good idea. From much practical experience only sustainable in a multi-coach club”

“ It's a shame that wasn't happening before. So good news if that is going to happen”

You provided a catalogue of things **you would you like to see BF develop or do more of** should the proposal be advanced. Here's your top 10:

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 1  | Increase support for those <b>not involved in the world class performance programme</b> . There is a need to build a <b>talent pipeline</b> , identifying, nurturing and supporting talent in a more systematic way. You want to see a Talent ID programme, sending coaches to National Inter-Spinal Unit Games, Limbpower Games, National Junior Games, etc in order to promote the sport and find new fencers. You'd like to see the integration of young wheelchair fencers into BF's Athlete Development Programme  |
| 2  | There appears to be a split between the EIS /WCP fencers and everyone else – <b>'a team within a team'</b> . At the very least you want to better understand why this is the case; ideally you want it addressing.  |
| 3  | Reinstate <b>jointly-run National Championships</b> every year - disability fencing benefits from improved exposure of being included at able-bodied competitions and it's a potential avenue to find new fencers <del>and it</del> promote the idea/fact that we are serious that para-fencing is of equal importance. You'd also like to see both <b>wheelchair competitions and inclusive competitions</b> (where able-bodied fencers take part in a chair) at more Opens. A number of you commented that this would create a <b>UK circuit of competitions</b> . Despite the strong support for more inclusive environments, there was a request for disabled-only camps now and again as the support, socialisation and sharing of fears and concerns with others was seen to be of value. |
| 4  | Raise the <b>profile of wheelchair fencing and current GB athletes</b> . There's lots of current success but it gets little coverage.   |
| 5  | Improve <b>gender equity</b> within wheelchair fencing and ensure that there is <b>'meaningful athlete representation'</b> that is not male-dominated.  |
| 6  | There is work to do around workforce development – its <b>identification, nurturing and recognition</b> . There is a need to develop more coaches able to coach both able bodied and parafencers, You state you need more parafencing referees and more domestic and international parafencing team managers.   |
| 7  | Rethink the <b>approach to selection</b> – everything from having a new selection policy to increased transparency, adopting a more athlete-centred approach.   |
| 8  | <b>Provision of more structured training camps</b> . A number of you commented there are seldom enough frames and some of you questioned the current approach to having everyone from novices to performance athletes at the same camp.   |
| 9  | A consistent theme was that there is work to do around <b>classification</b> .  |
| 10 | Some of you see the move as essential <b>to unlocking more funding</b> – to buy more equipment and give financial support for elite athletes. Clubs will need support to do this.   |

Although you saw **few drawbacks to the proposal**, you did identify some. When you identified solutions to overcome these, these are listed:

| Drawbacks to the proposal  | Your suggested solutions and mitigations   |
|--|--|
| 'Being swallowed' up by BF that includes loss of identify  | Assuming both Boards agree to the proposal, there needs to be a clear plan, communicated to all, with a strong steering group (with new faces) to make this happen.  |
| Despite best intentions, what if this is too hard and BDF just continue to operate as a 'club' within a much larger organisation?  | Visible evidence that this is one sport, catering for different needs, with one set of policies and procedures, with disability specific arrangements only when this is necessary / required.  |
| BF having the necessary expertise to ensure the potential can be realised  | BF to recruit paid, professional staff, who can advance this. There are lots of passionate volunteers in BDF. BF need to reach out to them and use their talent, enthusiasm and understanding, working to a BF-agenda, rather than their own. Keep them involved, working to defined roles with a clear scope.   |
| BF using funding specific for para wheelchair activity being used on other activities  | Providing reassurance and evidencing this isn't the case.  |
| Para fencing being taken seriously given the WCP is not part of the merger   | You seem to be largely (but not completely) comforted by the fact that:<br>1. The BF CEO is spending time on this,<br>2. The BDF Chair is driving this change and is trying to avoid getting pulled too much into the history of the NGB but has a clear focus on 'getting the job done'.<br>3. Sport England (who funded the consultant) appear to be fully behind the move.  |
| Disabled fencers not been made welcome – being 'tucked away' in the corner at clubs. Plus many local clubs have little or no storage at their venues.  | This will take time – comes back to workforce development and practical advice and guidance given to clubs. A tiered offer could see selected 'hub clubs' which are directly supported with training and equipment to create a more inclusive environment and they, in turn, help support other clubs to welcome a more diverse membership. The choice of which clubs to support and to what extent may end up being limited as much by logistics as any other factor. |
| This requires cultural change on the part of BDF members – with polarised views as to the best way to do things. Although this was seen not to be a reason to not progress the merger, it was seen as something that needed acknowledging.           | Trust BF to work out how best to deploy volunteers. There are strong personalities coming across that have strong views on each other and how things should be done. Neither 'camps' can give dictates to BF.  |
| What if this is just a distraction from the core NGB work of BF?   | -  |
| Despite the failings of BDF, there are some who will still want a separate body from BF – this will need managing as they have the potential to derail the good intentions of many and where others have tried but failed to bring about the change. | -  |

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