

SCOTTISH FENCING - FINAL REPORT APRIL 2018

INTRODUCTION

This consultation was commissioned to review:

1. Membership growth
2. SwordMark
3. Club Development
4. Talent Development

Clearly there is an overlap between these headings but as far as possible they have been separated for reporting purposes.

In summary, Scottish Fencing (SF) needs to modernise. It is timely that the SF Board is preparing its strategy in parallel with this review so it can consider the recommendations, decide priorities and include them within that strategy. Of the recommendations, some could be implemented quickly with immediate impact, and others will require further consultation with members for longer term roll out. However whatever the Board decides needs to be communicated and “sold” to the members and to the consultees interviewed. SF is a very small organisation with around 40 clubs and 900 members many of whom wear multiple hats. The Board is relatively new, however confidence is low with several respondents stating that the Board is “silent” or “anonymous”. Better communication with members will be essential for the success of the strategy.

REPORT

This report is formatted in a way that allows the four aspects of the brief to be read separately to assist implementation. Each section contains recommendations and they are repeated here as a summary.

Many people were consulted as part of this exercise and I would like to thank them for their time and their thoughtful contributions to this report. They are listed in the Appendix.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1 MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

- Clubs need to recruit a wider range of skill-sets of active volunteers on their committees to run and grow clubs. They would not need fencing knowledge. Club committees need to be more active with members being given the responsibility to grow membership, market, promote, market, raise funds etc
- Volunteers need to be acknowledged and thanked for their efforts and where possible rewarded in some small way
- Coaches should focus on coaching and their continuing professional development in the skills of coaching
- Active Schools fencing sessions should only be offered where there are clubs locally in which young people can continue their involvement
- Plastic fencing has been a good introduction but the gap between it and the real sport needs lessening either by further developing plastic or by introducing another initiative
- Neighbouring clubs could get together to arrange fun competitions at a local level to keep beginners and recreational fencers motivated and involved by offering level-appropriate, fun competitions
- There needs to be a focus on helping clubs in the West to strengthen and encourage the creation of new clubs
- Leon Paul will be launching a new scheme for beginners developed by Keith Cook which should be considered as something that may help to fill the gap between plastic and metal
- SF could consider recreational tournaments perhaps in the North and South to reduce travel for recreational fencers
- Fencers, coaches and clubs would all benefit from some input from referees on the rules to assist the transition from club to national fencing competitions.
- For greater clarity, clubs should distinguish between the entitlement of club members to free coaching and the one to one coaching offered commercially by coaches

2 SWORDMARK

- SF strategy should clarify the purpose of SwordMark. If its purpose is to engage clubs and to improve their governance then it should continue as is. If it is about club development then more needs done (Some governing bodies have chosen to discontinue their club accreditation schemes. Eg the Scottish Gymnastics website states, “Here at Scottish Gymnastics we are all about developing clubs and not accrediting”)
- Consider the introduction of tangible benefits for those clubs that achieve SwordMark eg percentage reduction on the cost of coach education/ referee courses
- **sportscotland’s** Club First development tool and the Help for Clubs website should be promoted to all clubs
- An assessment should be done on the clubs in most need of help so that they get help from SF staff
- The role of the Club Development Manager needs to be clear in relation to SwordMark
- There are other ways for governing bodies of sport to assist the development of their clubs. Eg Scottish Basketball Club Services and support on-line, also the Royal Yachting Association (Scotland) has a system where clubs apply for help from its development staff
- The principle of a club accreditation scheme needs to be sold to SF members and clubs
- Should SF clarify the purpose of SwordMark and choose to continue with it then the criteria might be expanded to include:
 - the recruitment, retention and reward for volunteers

- club development plans (short and long term)
- role descriptors for committee members
- codes of conduct
- continuing professional development

3 CLUB DEVELOPMENT

- Need for clubs to engage and involve a much wider range of people, use their skillsets and give them the responsibility to get on with running clubs, fund raising, etc to allow the coaches to coach
- Introduce a buddy system/ apprenticeships so that new volunteers can learn their roles and there are succession plans
- Clarity about the type of coaching offered as part of club membership and that 1 to 1 coaching is separate and an additional cost
- The SF Club Development Manager to have a clear role in the development of named clubs
- Fencing clubs need to invest time in being becoming part of the local sports development network/ local sports councils/ leisure trusts/ facility providers/ Active Schools to take advantage of local opportunities and share with other local clubs and organisations
- Clubs should use the **sportscotland** Club First development tool and Help for Clubs website
- Coach Education and continuing professional development should target areas of need eg the West and North of Scotland
- “Twinning” clubs so that they have friendly critics to assist their club development could be considered and may reduce the intensity of the rivalry

4 TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Talent Development

- Talent development is not part of the culture SF and should feature as a key part of its new strategy currently being developed. The new strategy should be consulted on with members, and the final version published so that its clear what SF will and will not be doing
- A new structure should follow the strategy so that the talent development and performance functions are clear, there are voluntary roles created with key responsibilities, targets and clear measurements about how it will be judged to have delivered

Performance strategy and programmes

- SF should decide whether its targets are Commonwealth Games/Championships or places on GB teams
- SF needs to be explicit about the age group(s) and/ or weapons that it will prioritise for investment or sponsorship
- No matter the content of the Scottish Strategy it will need to align to some extent with the GB structure for performance to allow a smooth transition from Scottish into GB teams
- Either individuals with expertise in the wider aspects of performance programmes need bought in or existing coaches/ volunteers need to up-skill so give fencers the best possible chance of success
- SF could better develop links with Scottish Universities and Colleges offering sports science degrees to encourage more research into the sports science needs of fencers. There also might be students willing to become involved in the delivery of the programmes
- With a lack of funds for performance, SF could consider sponsorship of the performance programmes and/or performance squads
- SF should review programmes regularly to check whether they are delivering what they set out to.

Scottish Squads/ training

- SF could openly recruit a national coordinator (title to be determined) to lead the performance function on a voluntary basis, or on an honorarium, at the start of the season. A Role Descriptor for the position should be agreed by the Board. The national coordinator should be line managed either by the Director with responsibility for Performance or the Chief Operating Officer
- The national coordinator should be supported by one coach for each weapon so that there is access to a specialist. Role descriptors for weapons coaches should be developed by the Board and national coordinator and an open recruitment process to select them
- The national coordinator, supported by named selectors to pick squads at the start of the season using published criteria. All Scottish Teams will be selected from squad members only
- The three weapons coaches to arrange appropriate training for each of the squads in relation to the timing of the fencers' key competitions
- The athletes selected for the squads should be aware of the expectations on them, including finance, they should sign a code of conduct and have agreed training and competition plans at the start of the season that they comply with
- If fencers do not meet the fencing or behavioural requirements the national coordinator should have responsibility to de-select them

Competing for Scotland

- Research should be undertaken to find the ideal balance between competing and training for fencing and the findings to inform the new squad programmes
- Coaches and fencers need to understand that it's not all about fencing and there will be expectations on them across the widest description of performance programmes.
- Codes of conduct are essential for all athletes of all ages training and competing for Scotland and which should be backed up by appropriate penalties for non compliance with the code.
- SF needs to review its involvement in Challenge Wratistavia and assess whether it is meeting the purpose
- Due to budget constraints SF could consider supporting only team competitions and individuals and clubs take responsibility for events for individuals.
- SF should not feel the need to fill all available places in competitions which devalues representation and demoralises the individuals concerned.

Coaches and coach education

- Having a CDM has been an excellent example of good practice, however the management of the role, responsibilities, targets and budget should all be clarified in a Role Descriptor
- Continuing professional development for coaches could be better recognised through a points system or similar
- Prior learning could be taken into account within the coach education programme so that people are not having to repeat things they are already competent in.
- SF could consider an informal buddying scheme or formal mentoring scheme for coaches or at least a system where more experienced coaches formally support younger and less experienced ones.
- Communication should be encouraged between coaches working at a national level and those at clubs so that the performance programme can integrate the best of both
- Scotland should not accept qualifications awarded by the British Academy of Fencing and should actively dissuade potential coaches from taking these courses and qualifications as they are outdated and do not place importance on child protection.

Refereeing

- Refereeing needs to be treated as function on a par with coaching and should be integrated into club developments and fencer and coach education so that fencers are knowledgeable about the rules and their interpretation
- SF might consider appointing a national coordinator for refereeing with clear management, roles, responsibilities, targets and budgets.

Club structure and talent

- Defining the role of clubs in the identification of talent would be foundation for a progressive system
- For there to be more talent generated within SF, clubs should focus on increasing and retaining membership
- A hierarchical structure of coaches would help clubs to pass on talented fencers to more experienced coaches and not see it as poaching
- The West of Scotland has the smallest ratio of clubs to population size, therefore SF should focus its development efforts in this geographical area to boost membership, and increase the number of qualified coaches and clubs by deploying coaches to strengthening existing clubs to provide stronger base for development

Selection and ranking points

- Squads should be selected at the beginning of the season based on clear criteria, and adjusted throughout the season. Selection for representative competitions should only be from squad members. Appropriate training is organised for squad athletes on pre-planned sessions throughout the year to fit with a new simplified calendar of events
- SF should agree selection criteria and whether there should be discretionary places and on what grounds
- If discretionary places are continued then:
 - Clarity on the criteria for discretionary places to be agreed eg only if people have been unable to compete in ranking competitions because of illness or injury
 - Greater clarity on who is selecting and selectors with any conflict of interest standing down.
- Criteria for de-selection to be agreed
- To help with transparency of the selection process it would be helpful to name the pool of selectors

Competitions and calendar

- A complete re-think on the Scottish Competition Calendar is required to position “the right competitions at the right time of the year” (although it is acknowledged that SF is often dependent on British Fencing and its calendar. This should result in a calendar that is simpler and more supportive of fencers getting appropriately timed experiences and collecting ranking points within the Scottish structure without the need for constant travel to England or Europe.
- SF to take responsibility for the complete calendar and take control of issuing permission to clubs and other external agencies that want to arrange competitions within the Scottish calendar.
- Separate Scottish ranking events could be considered
- Scottish competitions should reflect the format of more senior competitions to acclimatise fencers with the type of competitions they are aiming to compete in at Commonwealth or European level

- Consider re-introduction more local, recreational or inter-club fencing competitions. If a small number of appropriate Scottish ranking competitions were strategically positioned in the Scottish calendar then there would be capacity for recreational competitions both in terms of free weekends and the volunteers to run them
- The Scottish Championships should be re-introduced and could be included as part of the Scottish Open.

Age Groups

- Due to budget constraints it is essential that SF considers what investment, if any, should be allocated to which teams and age groups.
- Similarly if sponsorship is sought for SF teams then it should be part of the strategy that this is directed towards the younger age groups

Communication

- As a small organisation it is perhaps inevitable that there are misunderstandings, and worse, therefore it is recommended that more effective communication is a key element in both the SF central and performance strategies so members have more knowledge and a greater understanding of the background to decisions and hopefully this will result in less hearsay and better working relationships.
- It would be helpful if SF could find ways to become more influential within the GB governing body so that Scotland was able to develop a more appropriate Calendar and help shape GB talent development and performance programmes so that they were suitable and accessible for Scottish fencers.

REPORT

1 MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

Observations

- Membership growth will be driven by individual fencing clubs
- Clubs seem to be controlled by coaches whose main focus is on the coaching sessions which are only a small part of club development. Coaches do not have the time to devote to the range of activities that would benefit the development of the club. Membership growth and club development activity lacked innovation and assumed everybody wanted to fence competitively. Not much involvement of committee members was evident.
- There are many initiatives for young people but many of these are one-off with no club links meaning that there is much more chance of new members or beginners not continuing their involvement
- Recent membership growth has been heavily dependent on the candidates signing up for the plastic classes becoming recreational members. This has led to huge fluctuations and is not reflective of the active membership. Membership retention has been an issue.
- Active Schools sessions, although positive in themselves, have unfortunately not led to sustainable membership increases
- SwordMark has helped a limited number of clubs improve their systems and processes but it is questionable whether it has contributed to any increase in membership growth
- With the coach-centred nature of the sport it is perhaps inevitable that the coaches tend to focus on those with more talent, with less attention to the recreational fencers and beginners leading to lack of interest and high attrition rates
- There is very little collaboration between local clubs, indeed intense rivalry between clubs and coaches was evident.
- Plastic fencing has been a good initiative and particularly useful for the Active Schools sessions, to introduce young people to fencing but there were instances of isolated sessions, un-linked to local fencing clubs with no clear developmental purpose and therefore little opportunity to increase either club or governing body membership.
- There is noticeably wide gap between the plastic and metal versions of the sport with this transition being the area with greatest drop out
- There are no current SF competitions, tournaments or festivals of an appropriate level specifically designed for beginners or recreational fencers to keep them involved

Example of good practice

- A few clubs have active committees with volunteers in specific roles who deliver and take responsibility for their function
- Some clubs do collaborate with other local clubs (Edinburgh and Salle Holyrood) and those with a hub and spokes structures
- There is a feeling that fencing could be particularly attractive to females who are less inclined to want to be involved in the sporty/ team sports but little evidence of targeting this audience
- Those clubs with their own facilities are in an advantageous position but it's unlikely to be replicated across the country
- West Fife Fencing Club has a parents' room that is linked by CCTV to the training hall, encouraging parents to stay and become more involved

- Some of the university clubs have potential to increase membership (however as this is always a transient population, also at one of the key transition periods, unless the individual is highly motivated there is a tendency not to continue in their sport)

Recommendations

- Clubs need to recruit a wider range of skill-sets of active volunteers on their committees to run and grow clubs. They would not need fencing knowledge. Club committees need to be more active with members being given the responsibility to grow membership, market, promote, market, raise funds etc
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- For greater clarity, clubs should distinguish between the entitlement of club members to free coaching and the one to one coaching offered commercially by coaches

2 SWORDMARK

Observations

- Some key people had not heard of it, and did not know that it was a club accreditation scheme
- SwordMark has been used very successfully for SF to re-engage with a small number of its clubs. It seems to have re-vitalised some relationships between clubs and the governing body however its purpose and what it was designed to achieve is unclear
- The most fragile clubs are the least likely to participate in SwordMark as their focus is on survival and they are the very clubs that need the most help to strengthen
- The clubs achieving the accreditation were the clubs that were perceived to be good anyway
- SwordMark is very resource intensive for clubs to participate in and for SF to manage both the initial accreditation and the follow up
- Although there are undoubted benefits to the governance of clubs from being involved with such an accreditation scheme, there are no tangible benefits to successful clubs (Scottish Swimming give successful clubs an Education voucher and a discount on affiliation)
- Smaller community and rural clubs find difficulties in meeting some of the criteria
- Not all of the criteria can be measured objectively which can lead to a perception of unfairness
- **sportscotland's** Club First development tool and the Help for Clubs website were not being used to the extent that they could have
- If continued, the scheme's criteria could be expanded to provide a more holistic approach to club development

Example of good practice

- SwordMark has definitely been a catalyst for SF and its clubs to work better together where there has been input from Club Development Officers.
- Clubs that have achieved the SuperClub status have a better idea of the requirements of running a good club and the priority for developing the sport, but it is still to be demonstrated whether the clubs will be able to sustain the Award.

Recommendations

- SF strategy should clarify the purpose of SwordMark. If its purpose is to engage clubs and to improve their governance then it should continue as is. If it is about club development then more needs done (Some governing bodies have chosen to discontinue their club accreditation schemes. Eg the Scottish Gymnastics website states, "Here at Scottish Gymnastics we are all about developing clubs and not accrediting")
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3 CLUB DEVELOPMENT

Observations

- In most clubs the structure is fragile and unhealthily dependent on the coach(es). Where coaches have left or retired, the clubs have dissolved eg Edinburgh in the last 10 years
- There is little involvement from committee members and succession planning is non-existent. Voluntary committee members/ parents seem to defer to the coaches who are not necessarily experts in running clubs
- New volunteers are not always made welcome or given support. There can be a lack of warmth and inclusivity.
- The over-emphasis on competitive fencing is not conducive to recreational fencers or beginners. The element of fun is missing from some club sessions.
- Suitable and accessible facilities were deemed to be a problem however also reported was an unhelpful culture of fencers turning up late to their clubs and leaving early therefore not using the available spaces effectively
- Clubs offer a complex mix of club sessions with private one-to-one sessions. This “mixed economy” is confusing for new members
- There are geographical areas with very few clubs eg the west of Scotland. Similarly there are clubs in the north struggling because of a lack of qualified and registered coaches
- There does not appear to be much attention paid to the rules of fencing within clubs, with fencers expected to absorb them. Similarly there is a dearth of good referees across the structure
- Some clubs have innovative ways of engaging more people like offering fencing to breakfast clubs however there is little tracking of whether this has any impact on club membership

Examples of good practice

- Fencing Fun, and other organisations and clubs that make the introduction to fencing a fun experience for young people
- The two clubs with their own premises are excellent models, but not easy or practical to replicate
- Salle Holyrood and Edinburgh Fencing Clubs having a reciprocal arrangement on club nights
- Hub and spokes models and clubs where senior clubs have feeder clubs
- Plastic sessions that link into local clubs eg Gracemount Primary School and Edinburgh Fencing Club
- Clubs that welcome beginners, make it fun and have a social aspect
- Clubs whose committees / trustees are active and involved in the development of the club and using their skills to contribute
- Clubs that communicate to members and parents through social media so there is greater involvement of parents and others
- The relationship between the governing body and many clubs was not strong. This has been improving with the increase in club visits through SwordMark but some clubs reported that they had little or no contact with SF

Recommendations

- Need for clubs to engage and involve a much wider range of people, use their skillsets and give them the responsibility to get on with running clubs, fund raising, etc to allow the coaches to coach
- Introduce a buddy system/ apprenticeships so that new volunteers can learn their roles and

there are succession plans

- Clarity about the type of coaching offered as part of club membership and that 1 to 1 coaching is separate and an additional cost
- The SF Club Development Manager to have a clear role in the development of named clubs
- Fencing clubs need to invest time in being becoming part of the local sports development network/ local sports councils/ leisure trusts/ facility providers/ Active Schools to take advantage of local opportunities and share with other local clubs and organisations
- Clubs should use the **sport**scotland Club First development tool and Help for Clubs website
- Coach Education and continuing professional development should target areas of need eg the West and North of Scotland
- “Twinning” clubs so that they have friendly critics to assist their club development could be considered and may reduce the intensity of the rivalry

4 TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Observations

Talent Development

- There is no formal method of identifying talent except through competition rankings leading to a focus on fencing success at the expense of an evaluation/ measurement of attitude, mindset, strength, compliance with programmes, resilience, reaction times, etc
- There is no formal performance pathway or squad structure
- There is confusion as to whether Scottish athletes' goals should be to represent Scotland or GB or both. One respondent suggested that Commonwealth competitions were a "diversion" and another stated that of the home nations "only Scotland took the Commonwealths seriously".

Performance Strategy and Programme

- The SF current strategy on performance, and therefore talent, is unclear.
- As an organisation SF is very coach-centric, in some cases more important than their athletes.
- There is evidence of a culture of technical coaching but the coaches have very little experience or expertise in rounded, modern, performance programmes including;
 - Programme planning
 - Sports medicine
 - Sports science
 - Strength and conditioning
 - Performance analysis
 - Performance lifestyle
- For fencers, their definition of performance is simply a ranking. There is little concept of the need for a much wider programme of activity, as above, to build a true performer
- The Scottish Fencing Academy (SFA) and Summer Schools did not have a clear purpose and were not focused on talented performers, if you could pay you could go
- The GB Talent programme focuses on three areas so SF needs to align its strategy with this to some extent, or at least be able to measure Scottish athletes against the GB benchmarks
 - Fitter and faster
 - Resilience
 - Play the game
- As above, there is a divergence of opinion about athletes and whether they should be aiming for GB representation at Olympics or for a Scottish Team competing in Commonwealth Championships (or Games).
- In the area of performance the little that was delivered was not planned or sustainable eg some independent strength and conditioning sessions that were not continued into a long term training programme
- There was no evidence of a culture of monitoring and measuring progress in training
- Several elite fencers are doing strength and conditioning training in commercial gyms with personal trainers
- Generally it was observed that there is a very mistaken belief that lots of fencing and competing automatically means that you will improve without paying attention to particular weaknesses.
- Several fencers had no performance outcomes or goals
- There are talented fencers in Scotland who achieve quite high rankings with little, if any, support from SF.

- When the **sportscotland** Institute of Sport funded fencers their adherence and commitment to the programmes offered was poor which possibly contributed to the funding being cut.

Scottish Squads/ training

- At the start of a season there are no selected squads or an appointed National Coach although “head” coaches and team managers are appointed for certain competitions, and the timing was not helpful for the appointments to have the greatest impact
- Only some talented athletes have targets and performance plans, mostly these were quite short term with little long term planning
- The focus of any of these plans was generally on competitions and rankings rather than other measures
- There was little in the way of a performance programme observed where athletes were brought together to instil a culture of performance

Competing for Scotland

- Young Fencers who compete for both Scotland and GB suggested that it was often a more positive experience competing for Scotland in that they felt more part of a team and all had the same tracksuits
- The age range of people competing for Scotland is high suggesting that there are few young people making sufficient progress to be picked for teams. In addition some people have competed for many years suggesting a lack of people coming forward
- There were instances given of people picked because of their current rankings but who had not competed, or even trained for months.
- A few consultees had competed for GB. Scotland seems to lack any influence in the GB body generally and for selection
- Scottish teams are sent to Challenge Wratistavia but clubs and individuals also participate. Due to costs competitors some travel independently in preference to competing for the Scottish team. Stripes are then de-valued.

Coaches and coach education

- The coach education programme is an excellent example of a Coach Development Manager (CDM) is in place, takes responsibility for the role and delivers a national programme for the greater good. He has organised some excellent events, there is a closed Facebook page and communication is excellent.
- There is no doubt that the mixed economy of voluntary and professional coaching makes both entry into the sport and progression through it more complex and potentially expensive for talented fencers. Professional coaches need to make a living but it is possible that this happens at the expense of more people becoming involved in the sport. It was also suggested that coaches could give parents false expectations about their child’s level of ability and their chances of getting into Scottish teams in order to sell more one-to-one coaching sessions.
- The age group of the current active coaches is a concern with 60% of the coaches over 40
- With no “national” coach appointed there is confusion over the chain of command with reportedly “clingy” coaches hanging on to fencers who would benefit from moving to a more experienced coach.
- Some coaches still focused on the qualification rather than coach education as a continuous process where they are always hungry to learn more
- There are a multitude of real and perceived conflicts of interest in terms of: team and coach selection, bias in focusing on certain fencers and refereeing

- There is evidence of lazy coaching, with athletes having no goals or forward plans
- Measurement and review was missing from programmes where coaches should have a lead role. Eg progress in strength and conditioning and whether fencers reviewed long term goals

Refereeing

- There was very little evidence of referee education and several consultees advised that competing fencers do not know the rules of the sport
- Clubs were aware that they did not have fully knowledgeable or competent referees but did not appear to be addressing this even when they knew they had to provide referees for certain competitions
- At some competitions, fencers are expected to referee who do not possess the knowledge or skills to do so competently.

The Scottish Fencing Academy

- The SFA was not a performance programme. There was a lack of clarity as to its purpose, no criteria, no selection, no fitness testing, no training diary and reportedly a focus on the coaches' "own" fencers.
- Although there was evidence that the SFA sessions and the Summer Camps were very enjoyable it did not achieve a performance outcome
- It was not just for representative fencers, it was open and inclusive which diluted its impact – if it was designed for talented fencers
- There were some short strength and conditioning sessions but no follow up and left up to the individuals to try to find ways to carry out the advice they received
- There was no communication with attendees' club coaches after the events as to how the new ideas and content of these events could be integrated into the fencer's regular club training. This led to lack of continuity and the club coaches felt devalued.
- Consultees were concerned at the lack of communication about why the monthly sessions were cancelled.

Club structure and talent

- There is no formal talent identification structure within SF. There is informal discussion about promising fencers but individuals could be missed, especially those in the more rural areas or the less connected clubs
- Club level coaches in general did not appreciate their limits and seemed reluctant to let fencers go to different clubs or more experienced coaches. They saw it as "poaching" not seeing the necessity for fencers to make progress.
- The relatively low membership numbers and low retention from plastic sessions contributes towards a small pool of talented individuals who are rarely challenged for places on a team

Selection and ranking points

- Selection was reported to be much better than before but it still depends very much on the integrity of the selectors, who are generally coaches. Neither the selection criteria nor the selection process are clear to fencers and therefore it was open to speculation. One person suggested that they had "never seen a Scotland team that was as strong as it could have been"
- There was a real divergence of opinion on discretionary places. There was a suggestion that the only fair way to select was on ranking points only with no discretionary places. Others felt that the majority of selection should be on ranking with some allowance for discretionary places but this needed to have criteria that were published from the outset

and take account of injury, exams and other high level reasons

- The relentless chase for ranking points is not helpful to athletes' long term development. It perpetuates the myth that they should be competing every weekend
- Fencers felt the need to travel and compete in English and European competitions because of the higher standard of entries and the (Notional International Fencer) NIF weightings – even with the added expense involved
- The SF calendar is not supportive of Scottish fencers (this is covered below)

Competitions and calendar

- SF does not have control over all of the competitions in its calendar and its influence over both the structure of the calendar and the format competitions is limited because other organisations and clubs organise and run events
- The SF calendar is not structured in a way that is benefiting high performance programme planning. The calendar was reported to be “horrible”, “too busy” and that it was “difficult to plan and manage fencers’ programmes because the wrong competitions are at the wrong times of the year”. Important events can sometimes clash
- There is a muddle of smaller club run events alongside key ranking competitions.
- Because everybody can enter everything then elite performers may be drawn against beginners, and older fencers against much younger ones. This is not ideal for either party’s experience or training.
- Some competitions were criticised as being “boring”
- Competition formats do not always mirror those of the more senior competitions that the fencers are aiming to compete in. Some competition formats are innovative for example 48s and 24s - but it was questioned whether they attracting the appropriate competitors
- 6 weapons events seem to be the preferred type of event
- There was criticism that the YDS events are not fit for purpose with unsuitable venues and pistes that are too short
- With the competitions offering opportunities both team and individual SF has the opportunity to decide whether to focus on teams, individuals or both

Age groups

- The Scottish age groups are aligned with Challenge Wratistavia age groups not GB, this is a fundamental issue and could present problems if GB is the ultimate goal
- The purpose of SF sending teams to Challenge Wratistavia is unclear
- The age groups need structure and squads that can ease feeding into the seniors
- With limited funding available it seems that the younger age group teams are in greater need of SF investment than for example Veterans Teams who are in a better place to self fund or secure sponsorship.

Communication and influence

- There was much discussion about lack of communication, especially from the Board about what it was doing.
- Scotland is lacking influence at GB level

Examples of good practice

- Selection was reported to be much better than it was before but still room for improvement.
- There was a preference for 6 weapons events
- The role of Coach Education Manager is an excellent model to follow for other national functions as long as the management and parameters of the role are made clear
- The Coach Education programme is comprehensive and is fulfilling the need to update

coaching and coach education.

- A coaching structure is likely to emerge from exposure to the British Fencing 4 x 3 framework
- Individuals are achieving despite there being little or no support from SF
- Younger competitors seemed to understand the need for wider performance programmes including strength and conditioning, nutrition, competition preparation etc but they did not have access. Many have sought out help from personal trainers. (Older competitors were not convinced of need for these programmes.)
- There are several coaches who are dedicated to coaching as a full time profession
- The social media volunteer is doing a good job of publicising certain aspects of talent and performance eg “This girl can” campaign around national women’s day.
- Innovative competitions have been trialled
- Competitors feel good being part of a Scotland Team
- Scotland has some high level referees

Recommendations

Talent Development

- Talent development is not part of the culture SF and should feature as a key part of its new strategy currently being developed. The new strategy should be consulted on with members, and the final version published so that its clear what SF will and will not be doing
- A new structure should follow the strategy so that the talent development and performance functions are clear, there are voluntary roles created with key responsibilities, targets and clear measurements about how it will be judged to have delivered

Performance strategy and programmes

- SF should decide whether its targets are Commonwealth Games/Championships or places on GB teams
- SF needs to be explicit about the age group(s) and/ or weapons that it will prioritise for investment or sponsorship
- No matter the content of the Scottish Strategy it will need to align to some extent with the GB structure for performance to allow a smooth transition from Scottish into GB teams
- Either individuals with expertise in the wider aspects of performance programmes need bought in or existing coaches/ volunteers need to up-skill so give fencers the best possible chance of success
- SF could better develop links with Scottish Universities and Colleges offering sports science degrees to encourage more research into the sports science needs of fencers. There also might be students willing to become involved in the delivery of the programmes
- With a lack of funds for performance, SF could consider sponsorship of the performance programmes and/or performance squads
- SF should review programmes regularly to check whether they are delivering what they set out to.

Scottish Squads/ training

- SF could openly recruit a national coordinator (title to be determined) to lead the performance function on a voluntary basis, or on an honorarium, at the start of the season. A Role Descriptor for the position should be agreed by the Board. The national coordinator should be line managed either by the Director with responsibility for Performance or the Chief Operating Officer
- The national coordinator should be supported by one coach for each weapon so that there is access to a specialist. Role descriptors for weapons coaches should be developed by the

- Board and national coordinator and an open recruitment process to select them
- The national coordinator, supported by named selectors to pick squads at the start of the season using published criteria. All Scottish Teams will be selected from squad members only
- The three weapons coaches to arrange appropriate training for each of the squads in relation to the timing of the fencers' key competitions
- The athletes selected for the squads should be aware of the expectations on them, including finance, they should sign a code of conduct and have agreed training and competition plans at the start of the season that they comply with
- If fencers do not meet the fencing or behavioural requirements the national coordinator should have responsibility to de-select them

Competing for Scotland

- Research should be undertaken to find the ideal balance between competing and training for fencing and the findings to inform the new squad programmes
- Coaches and fencers need to understand that it's not all about fencing and there will be expectations on them across the widest description of performance programmes.
- Codes of conduct are essential for all athletes of all ages training and competing for Scotland and which should be backed up by appropriate penalties for non compliance with the code.
- SF needs to review its involvement in Challenge Wratistavia and assess whether it is meeting the purpose
- Due to budget constraints SF could consider supporting only team competitions and individuals and clubs take responsibility for events for individuals.
- SF should not feel the need to fill all available places in competitions which devalues representation and demoralises the individuals concerned.

Coaches and coach education

- Having a CDM has been an excellent example of good practice, however the management of the role, responsibilities, targets and budget should all be clarified in a Role Descriptor
- Continuing professional development for coaches could be better recognised through a points system or similar
- Prior learning could be taken into account within the coach education programme so that people are not having to repeat things they are already competent in.
- SF could consider an informal buddying scheme or formal mentoring scheme for coaches or at least a system where more experienced coaches formally support younger and less experienced ones.
- Communication should be encouraged between coaches working at a national level and those at clubs so that the performance programme can integrate the best of both
- Scotland should not accept qualifications awarded by the British Academy of Fencing and should actively dissuade potential coaches from taking these courses and qualifications as they are outdated and do not place importance on child protection.

Refereeing

- Refereeing needs to be treated as function on a par with coaching and should be integrated into club developments and fencer and coach education so that fencers are knowledgeable about the rules and their interpretation
- SF might consider appointing a national coordinator for refereeing with clear management, roles, responsibilities, targets and budgets.
-

Club structure and talent

- Defining the role of clubs in the identification of talent would be foundation for a progressive system
- For there to be more talent generated within SF, clubs should focus on increasing and retaining membership
- A hierarchical structure of coaches would help clubs to pass on talented fencers to more experienced coaches and not see it as poaching
- The West of Scotland has the smallest ratio of clubs to population size, therefore SF should focus its development efforts in this geographical area to boost membership, and increase the number of qualified coaches and clubs by deploying coaches to strengthening existing clubs to provide stronger base for development

Selection and ranking points

- Squads should be selected at the beginning of the season based on clear criteria, and adjusted throughout the season. Selection for representative competitions should only be from squad members. Appropriate training is organised for squad athletes on pre-planned sessions throughout the year to fit with a new simplified calendar of events
- SF should agree selection criteria and whether there should be discretionary places and on what grounds
- If discretionary places are continued then:
 - Clarity on the criteria for discretionary places to be agreed eg only if people have been unable to compete in ranking competitions because of illness or injury
 - Greater clarity on who is selecting and selectors with any conflict of interest standing down.
- Criteria for de-selection to be agreed
- To help with transparency of the selection process it would be helpful to name the pool of selectors

Competitions and calendar

- A complete re-think on the Scottish Competition Calendar is required to position “the right competitions at the right time of the year” (although it is acknowledged that SF is often dependent on British Fencing and its calendar. This should result in a calendar that is simpler and more supportive of fencers getting appropriately timed experiences and collecting ranking points within the Scottish structure without the need for constant travel to England or Europe.
- SF to take responsibility for the complete calendar and take control of issuing permission to clubs and other external agencies that want to arrange competitions within the Scottish calendar.
- Separate Scottish ranking events could be considered
- Scottish competitions should reflect the format of more senior competitions to acclimatise fencers with the type of competitions they are aiming to compete in at Commonwealth or European level
- Consider re-introduction more local, recreational or inter-club fencing competitions. If a small number of appropriate Scottish ranking competitions were strategically positioned in the Scottish calendar then there would be capacity for recreational competitions both in terms of free weekends and the volunteers to run them
- The Scottish Championships should be re-introduced and could be included as part of the Scottish Open.

Age Groups

- Due to budget constraints it is essential that SF considers what investment, if any, should be allocated to which teams and age groups.
- Similarly if sponsorship is sought for SF teams then it should be part of the strategy that this is directed towards the younger age groups

Communication

- As a small organisation its is perhaps inevitable that there are misunderstandings, and worse, therefore it is recommended that more effective communication is a key element in both the SF central and performance strategies so members have more knowledge and a greater understanding of the background to decisions and hopefully this will result in less hearsay and better working relationships.
- It would be helpful if SF could find ways to become more influential within the GB governing body so that Scotland was able to develop a more appropriate Calendar and help shape GB talent development and performance programmes so that they were suitable and accessible for Scottish fencers.

APPENDIX

CONSULTEES

Andy	Alderman	
Sheila	Anderson	
Liz	Anderson	
Vincent	Bryson	
Phil	Carson	
Jo	Cook	
Keith	Cook	
Graeme	De Sainte Croix	(in writing)
Chloe	Dickson	(by phone)
Jennifer	Griffin	sportscotland
Michelle	Guarino	
Sarah Jane	Hampson	
Chris	Hyde	
Hugh	Kernohan	
George	Liston	
Alan	Martin	Formerly Scottish Fencing
Charity	McArdle	
Don	McKenzie	
Paul Neil	McLachlan	
Gavin	McMenemy	
Ross	Morrison	
Dylan	Morrison	(by phone)
Alex	Pearson	
Gail	Prince	
David	Rollo	
Ken	Rose	
Jennifer	Sancroft	
Bill	Steel	
Stan	Stoodley	
Georgina	Usher	British Fencing (by phone)
Calum	Wood	sportscotland Institute of Sport