

## 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 Wroclavia 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.