

British Fencing

Annual Report

April 2014 -
March 2015







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Directors Report

This year the Board updated its 2024 goals and its delivery programmes. The 2024 goals for British Fencing (BF) are to achieve repeatable Olympic medal success; to grow the membership to 50,000 plus (supported by high quality, good value services, meeting the needs of members and clubs); and to deliver sustainable, quality infrastructure and governance that are financially resilient.

For this year there were vital sub targets - to enhance our performance sufficient for Sport England (SE) and UK Sport (UKS) to promote BF from just one year support to a funding commitment for the remainder of this Olympic cycle.

Progress has been made. Last July BF was able to herald its first European Champion in James Davis. UKS agreed our young sabre squad should be funded as part of the World Class Programme. We launched our new Talent programme, with SE help and funding, which we believe will develop more future winners. For these results and developments, and our all-round progress, UKS confirmed their funding support through till March 2017.

For governance, BF achieved the “Green” rating this year from SE and UKS.

Progress remains slower in the long term task of growing fencing participation. This year BF appointed a full time Development Director (Gabby Williams) who has subsequently brought together a team to drive forward a new and exciting programme. SE recognised the new focus and energy, and the fresh insights we brought to our programme, by extending funding support through to March 2017.

In financial terms BF continued to make progress recording a surplus of £37,560 for 2014/15. This result was flattered by the timing of certain expenditures and our medium term goal is to run the organization at breakeven, given a stable base of reserves.

We believe our improved financial management has given us stability, although we must remain watchful given uncertainties about income streams going forward.

The BF Board takes satisfaction in these results this year, but only as firm steps along the way toward our 2024 goals. We are grateful to our CEO Georgina Usher, who has completed an impressive first year in the post, and her committed executive team. We thank the funding partners SE and UKS. There must be a special word for Beazley - great sponsors, allies, advisors and partners - whose five years with us ends in December 2015; we shall miss them. Last, we thank all our members and volunteers, up and down the country, who make the fencing engine work, day in, day out.

President's Report

The role of BF President was re-established at an EGM in 2013, and I was appointed later that year. April 2015 therefore marks the end of my first full fencing year as President.

At the 2014 AGM it was agreed that the role will be that of President (ie – no longer an honorary one) and that it will be re-appointed every four years at the AGM following the Olympic Games. The new role is partly one of a figurehead for BF and the sport as a whole, but largely one of international ambassador.



During the past year I represented GBR at a number of events overseas including:

- the European Fencing Confederation (EFC) in Strasbourg – after the Congress I had a number of meetings, such as that with the President of the FIE Referees' Commission to initiate arrangements for a GBR Referees seminar in London.
- the European Championships, also in Strasbourg, where I had the pleasure of watching James Davis become European Men's Foil Champion.
- the senior World Championships in Kazan, Russia – while there I hosted the first FIE Women in Fencing reception, organised by GBR on behalf of the FIE Women in Fencing Council. This all-women event was well attended by FIE Presidents of national federations, FIE and EFC commission and council members, team managers, referees, coaches and medics – and well-supported by the FIE Executive Committee and FIE Head Office.
- the FIE Annual Congress in Rome – this was followed by the first meeting of the Committee for the Re-entry of Fencing into the Commonwealth Games, to which I was appointed earlier that year.

At home I attended a number of competitions, which gave me the opportunity to talk to fencers, organisers, officials, parents and spectators. These events included junior, senior and veterans championships as well as international events such as the Eden Cup, the GBR-Germany men's sabre match and the Commonwealth Fencing Championships in Largs, Scotland.

During the course of the year I completed the final modules of UK Sport's International Leadership Programme. This consisted of various 2-day modules with a strong emphasis on international relationships, working with other cultures, and understanding the international sporting framework.

Last but not least - at the 2014 AGM it was agreed to re-form the Honours Committee, chaired by myself as President. A committee of twelve people has now been formed, including eight BF Vice-Presidents, and our new terms of reference have been approved by the Board. This new system focuses entirely on the membership, with all nominations coming direct from members. Awards will be made annually, with the current year's awards to be presented at the 2015 AGM.

CEO's Report

2014-15 represents the second year in the four year funding cycle. Whilst delivering on existing UK Sport and Sport England (SE) funding conditions and working to a balanced budget, 2014-15 operational priorities were:

- Achieve a Green governance rating.
- Expand both Performance and Talent programmes.
- Create a Participation Strategy and secure Sport England funding to 2017.
- Create a plan to deliver a sustainable NGB.

Green Governance Rating

Much of the work in 2013-14 created the necessary foundations, both in financial and governance terms. During the year significant time and effort was invested to ensure BF was successfully rated 'Green', in order to continue to be in a strong position to attract public funding and investment. In addition, BF undertook to further embed Equality and Safeguarding Standards across all areas of responsibility.

Performance and Talent Expansion

In performance terms, the World Class Programme (including Talent) secured an increase in year-on-year funding allowing for a new sabre squad to join the Podium Potential Programme, and the foil squad results continue steadily improve.

The Talent Programme also undertook a significant exercise to identify young talent across all six weapons. BF is committed to creating a 6W Talent Programme that will allow athletes to develop to the stage where their results and trajectory qualify them onto the UK Sport funded World Class Programme.

New Participation Strategy

Much of the first half of the year was spent working on a new insight-led strategy to increase participation and recruiting a new Development Director, Gabby Williams. Whilst both activities were conditions of continued Sport England funding, it was (and is) vital to adopt a more accountable and professional approach to growing fencing to secure future external funding.

BF successfully applied for 2015-17 SE funding. This included additional support to create a Coaching Development Programme which presents an exciting opportunity to develop a qualified workforce that meets the needs of fencers, both recreational and competitive.

Sustainable NGB

As we attract new participants into fencing BF will have to adapt membership services, with the support of the Home Country Organisations, to be more relevant to this expanded community. BF must also support affiliated clubs to help them better understand and deliver to these new groups of recreational fencers.

It remains of great concern that membership income does not cover the cost of the delivery of membership services. The 'registration fee' (that part of the membership fee that BF retains, before passing the balance to the Home Country) remains at £5 for a Social membership and £20 for other memberships. This has remained static since 2002. As we conclude the last full year of the Beazley sponsorship deal, it is vital we explore alternative commercial opportunities and take careful choices to ensure BF is financially sustainable.

COMMITTEE & WORKING GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

Refereeing Committee

Chair: Graham Paul

2014/15 saw the creation of the BF Referee Pathway Scheme, supported by UK Sport. This programme is designed to deliver a programme to support and enable the development and training of referees that wish to referee at World Championships and Olympic Games.

Through this programme we were able to invite Claus Janka, the President of the FIE Referees' Commission, to deliver the first GBR Referees seminar in London. The intention is that this will be the first of a series of such seminars, and that they will be of lasting benefit to our referees.

The committee continued to work on improving the material available to BF level 1-5 referee candidates and examiners. A project was also initiated to develop an online educational tool for aspiring FIE referees.

Rules Committee

Chair: Steve Higginson

The bulk of the 2014-15 activities focused around supporting the re-writing of the BF Safety Guidelines. From an international perspective, the chair of the committee has been working with an FIE ad-hoc committee to restructure and rationalise the presentation of the FIE Rules.

The Rules committee continue to meet to discuss new FIE proposals and work with the IRC to ensure that any feedback is appropriately raised with the FIE.

In addition, the committee continue to provide answers to ad-hoc questions from BF members regarding the Rules.

Safety Committee

Chair: Peter Jacobs

The most significant item undertaken by this committee this year was the restructuring of the Safety Guidelines, which were approved by the Board and published on the BF website.

The committee continues to monitor accidents and assess the risks facing those involved in the sport. Fortunately, fencing continues to have one of the best safety records across Olympic Sport but we must remain ever vigilant.

International Relations

Chair: Peter Jacobs

2014-15 was a typical 'business as usual' year for the International Relations Committee (IRC). BF currently have representatives on four FIE commissions and two councils, plus five EFC commissions and councils.

Representatives attended the EFC Annual Congress in Strasbourg (May 2014), the FIE commission and council meetings which were held in Lausanne (July 2014) and the annual FIE congress which was hosted by the Italian Fencing Federation in Rome (November 2014).

Our International Relations Strategy is financially supported by UK Sport. This funding enabled the BF President and CEO to attend the World Championships in Kazan, Russia, a GB armourer to attend the World Championships as part of the GBR support team and various British FIE referee development activities. A proposal for support for BF's IR Strategy 2015-17 was developed and subsequently accepted by UK Sport.

International Youth Committee

Chair: Clare Halsted

This year saw a major review into the governance of International Cadet and Junior fencing. As a result the International Youth Committee (IYC) responsibilities changed considerably. International Junior activities will, for subsequent seasons, be run directly by the WC Talent Programme. International cadet activities will be run by a volunteer working group reporting into the WC Talent Programme.

The Board of BF would like to extend their thanks to all those volunteers who worked on this committee, many of whom are moving to new roles within BF and will continue to support Cadet and Junior fencing.

Honours Committee

Chair: Hilary Philbin

At the 2014 AGM it was agreed to re-form the Honours Committee, chaired by the BF President. A committee of twelve people has now been formed, including eight BF Vice-Presidents, and new terms of reference have been drawn up and approved by the Board.

Grow Group

Formed in January 2014 this joint England Fencing/BF Steering Group met regularly throughout 2014/15. During this period the group supported and monitored the progress made in delivery of the Sport England Funding conditions and development of the new Growth Strategy.

Home Countries Working Group

This year saw the formation of the Home Countries Working Group – a group containing the Presidents of Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. The objectives of the group are to:

- Create a financially viable and sustainable relationship between the HCs and BF.
- Design and develop a sustainable and financially viable membership scheme that would secure the future of the sport and all HCWG organisations.
- Improve communications between the organisations.
- Improve/define the relationships, expectations and interfaces between the organisations.

MEMBERSHIP & EVENTS

Membership

Over the reporting period, total year-on-year membership remained constant (9491) and reflecting the broader ten year trend.

This is the primary factor that underpinned the requirement for a new development strategy in the sport, and the initiation of a wider review of our membership model.

The current fencing membership model has remained unchanged in price and structure since 2002 and caters primarily for competitive members. The intention in the future is to broaden the categories aimed at participants and supporters in line with many other National Governing Bodies.

Membership income came in at £171K, once the Home Countries recharge had been taken into account. The majority of this income is taken up in four expense categories – insurance, the Sword, safeguarding and typical office and business running costs, (inc. audit, accountancy, legal, HR). The lack of membership funds to cover any staff cost is of significant concern; simply increasing membership fees is not the answer. Alongside a strategy for growing the membership, future commercial opportunities (including sponsorship) must be fully explored.

BF continues to provide a basic level of service to clubs. However it is clear that both the club membership package and the club support services require greater focus in the future to increase the numbers of clubs as well as participation in clubs.

During 2015/16 BF will be working to ensure that the development work to attract new participants is suitably integrated with the club network to provide appropriate participation pathways.

Workforce

During the 2014/15 year, BF started a project to increase understanding of the size and needs of the wider registered workforce in fencing - including coaches, referees, team managers and safeguarding officers.

This information is essential to identify areas where BF can help grow, support and upskill this workforce.

It is of particular importance that the needs of the volunteer workforce are considered. Without this community our sport at all levels would not be able to run. Further consideration of how BF can fund and deliver the development of this community is vital to ensure fencing remains sustainable.



Coaching

The number of coaches peaked in December 2014 at 550 but fell to 521 as the year finished in March 2015. The majority of coaches removed from the register resulted from their failure to renew Safeguarding and Protecting Children training, which is required every three years.

The vast majority of fencing coaches in Britain work in environments that contain young people. Therefore this requirement will remain and BF will run additional free SPC sessions at major fencing events and assist coaches struggling to find appropriate courses to attend.

Events

For the 2014/15 financial year, the BF events portfolio consisted of four levels of National Championship (British Youth Championships, Cadet British Championships, Junior British Championships and British School Team Championships; there was no Senior National Championships in this financial year), three International Tournaments (Eden Cup Junior Men's Foil A Grade, Leon Paul Cup Men's Foil Satellite, GLL Camden International Cadet Sabre Tournament) and the Level 4 School Games.

This season saw the shift from BF events being managed by a committee to being brought in house under the new Event Manager role, and also the introduction of a new team of organisers. Feedback on these changes has been overwhelmingly positive. The other major change for this year was the addition of the Camden International Cadet Sabre Tournament to the BF portfolio, and the competition continued to be run at the high standard set when organised by Camden Fencing Club.

The events portfolio as a whole continues to lose money even before staff costs are taken into account. This is partly due to the increased number of international events where there is limited ability to affect income levels due to entry fee limits set by EFC and FIE.

Alternative competition formats, potential date moves, different venues, sponsorship and other commercial income opportunities are being considered and pursued in an attempt to improve the situation.



DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

2014/15 was a critical time for BF as it transformed its approach to developing the sport through the creation and piloting of a new insight-led strategy. This strategy was specifically designed to increase participation in the 14-25 year old market, the target market of Sport England. The significant changes and success of the approach resulted in BF securing £815,000 from Sport England for the 2015-2017 funding period.

New Insight

In April 2014 BF launched a 'Tribal Insight' survey based on the behavioural study undertaken by Channel 4 (<http://tribes.channel4.com/>).

From this we learnt that fencing attracts a significantly high proportion of 'alternative' and 'leading edge'* behaviour types relative to the UK wide population. (Fig 1.)

Through subsequent studies, we also discovered that fencing is uniquely positioned to attract a higher number of young people typically classed as 'uninterested' in sport and could provide an attractive alternative to the choices typically facing the inactive population.

New Strategy

Alongside the various insight studies, BF also commissioned a wide ranging market review from Deloitte. This market review formed part of the Sport England funding conditions for 2014-15.

Drawing from this significant amount of professional insight and research, BF has established an understanding of the fencing participation market and its 'customer', the fencer or potential fencer.

This formed the basis of the new BF Strategy for increasing participation in England.

Testing the Strategy

During 2014/15, British Fencing delivered a range of community projects. These were designed to test the new insight into participant needs and passions. They were also aimed at identifying the most successful delivery models and potential partners and workforce requirements.

Next Steps

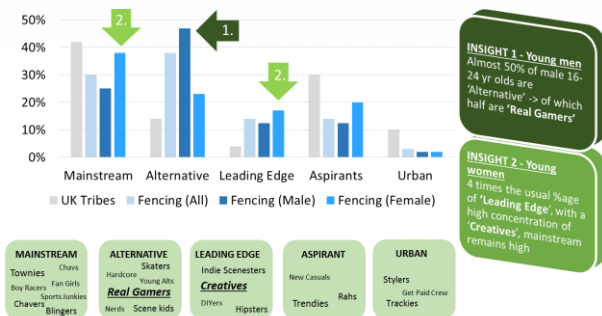
With the funding secured we now face a very exciting and potentially game changing time ahead. We have the opportunity to

- Introduce new participation programmes working with accredited national partners.
- Review and update our membership scheme to provide more attractive product for members and financially sustainable for BF.
- Establish a much needed coaching development programme to grow the sport.

From our unique insight into the fencing community the Development Team has kick-started a process of programme design aimed at attracting and retaining new people in our sport. Programmes will be tested in 2015/16 and continually refined to create bespoke fencing offerings.

Fig 1. Behavioural Insight

We have undertaken market research about the young people that fence. From this we gained two critical insights about the segments of our target market.



2015

The target is to attract over 3000 new young people by March 2017, retaining 60% of them in regular fencing activity. To do so BF will:

- Design and deliver BF's Higher Education (HE) offer – one that enhances student experience using a customer led approach, delivered in a select number of universities across England.
- Develop a BF Youth offer – one that responds to our young customer insights, needs and passions, targeting a select number of youth groups operating within England.
- Review and improve the existing Development services and products to create a portfolio for BF and its members that is sustainable, financially resilient and supports growth within our sport.
- Work across Development, Talent and the World Class Programme to create a coaching development programme. This will be designed to empower and support a network of coaches and leaders to grow the sport at a grass root level, as well as deliver coaching excellence at every stage of the coach

pathway which is central to a highly successful world-class fencing programme.

- Continue to deliver the Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (AASE) programme and better connect the work of Development and Talent with a new role of Performance Co-ordinator – Talent.

2016 onwards

As Development takes a new approach, delivering the Strategy for Growth, it will focus on:

- Growing participation through our new HE and Youth Programmes.
- Creating a fit for purpose Coaching Development Programme.
- Establishing business efficiencies and identify new opportunities to transform Development into a high performing, sustainable service for the benefit of its members and for the sport.

Such objectives will only be achieved by working through credible and appropriate stakeholders as well as building a greater sphere of influence across local, regional and national stakeholders in sport.

WORLD CLASS PROGRAMME

Performance

The BF World Class Programme is designed to provide fencers, who have the identified talent and commitment to succeed at the highest level, with the support they need to maximise their potential. The Performance Programme is funded by UK Sport through the funds generated from the National Lottery and also supported by BF's main sponsor Beazley.

The additional support from Beazley has allowed the Programme to deliver added benefits to those athletes competing at the highest level to enable them to have the equivalent of 'Podium Level' support. (All 2014-15 funded athlete places were at 'Podium Potential' level).

The post 2012 decision to focus on developing a performance structure around one weapon (men's foil) paid off as British Fencing received a significant increase in their original four year award, at the beginning of the second year of the cycle (2014/2015). This funding was provided to deliver further performance gains in men's foil, in addition to supporting six athlete places to develop a men's sabre squad capable of delivering a medal in Tokyo 2020.

These new additional places represented an increased investment of £720,000 of programme costs. This is in addition to resources being provided directly by UK Sport for Athlete Performance Awards (APAs) and medical insurance. The overall funding to fencing for the four-year cycle was increased to £3.976 million.

Talent

The two talent programmes, Talent and Talent Identification and Confirmation (TIC) were developed immediately post London 2012. In recognition of the progress made in year one, Sport England more than doubled their annual funding and provided a three-year grant for the remainder of the cycle. An investment of £250,000, representing an increase of £140,000 over the 2013/14 level, was made with a further £500,000 for the final two years awarded to enable the new Talent Pathway to be developed to increase the flow of talented athletes into the podium potential programme.

This was great news for the sport and over the last year, based on best practice in talent development models, a new talent pathway was established to provide athletes with the best chance of success in Tokyo. This included the recruitment of three weapon specific coaches and a programme of activity aimed at improving the technical, tactical and physical capabilities of the young athletes. Unlike the UK Sport funded performance programme, which focuses on two weapons, the talent programmes have identified and are developing athletes across all six weapons.



Notable Results

A special highlight of this last year was in Strasbourg at the European Championships when James Davis (men's foil) became fencing's first British European Champion. He followed this up with a 6th place at the World Championships in Kazan, Russia gaining podium funding for the following year. The Men's Foil Team also produced an impressive performance to finish 8th, keeping qualification for Rio firmly on track.

The men's sabre programme started to develop with a cohort of athletes attending an assessment day with six being selected on to the Programme from 1st April 2014. An international search for a Head Coach was undertaken with Pierre Guichot joining the Programme in September 2014. The focus over the last six months of the year was to further develop the squad and raise the performance levels for the remainder of the season.

Looking Forward to 2015/2016

From May 2015, Olympic qualification began with a real focus on ensuring as many athletes as possible qualify for the Olympic Games in Rio in 2016. With the change in qualification rules and the strength in depth of European countries in the individual and team events, qualification will be harder than ever. However, given the progress of the men's foil squad over the last year and the performances at the senior internationals, under the direction of Head Coach Andrey Klyushin, we have confidence that a men's foil team can qualify for Rio.

The recruitment of a new Talent Pathway Manager was a priority during the early part of 2015, to ensure that the gains and momentum in the development of young fencers is not lost. We have secured a new Manager who will take up their position in Autumn of 2015 with a priority to ensure that greater links between club and regional level and the national programme are developed and nurtured.



WITH THANKS TO

None of this would have been possible, nor continue to be without the ongoing support from our volunteers, funding partners, stakeholders and supporters including:

- Beazley
- UK Sport
- Sport England
- Leon Paul
- England Fencing
- London Youth
- Skills Active
- Lolly Rewards
- S&G College
- Yew Consulting
- English Institute of Sport

BRITISH FENCING 2014-15

The Board

Paul Abrahams
Thomas Cadman
Janet Campbell
Clare Halsted
Caryl Oliver (appointed 11 October 2014)
Alp Orge
Gillian Palmer (appointed 11 October 2014)
Graham Paul
William Pitt
Brian Speight (appointed 11 October 2014)
David Teasdale
John Troiano

The Senior Executive Team

Georgina Usher, Chief Executive Officer
David Moseley, Finance Director
Alex Newton, Performance Director
Gabby Williams, Development Director

APPENDIX A - FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The full financial statements can be found here:

<http://www.britishfencing.com/news/latest-news/?n=1420>