

## BRITISH CANOEING INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

### KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1.2 Key Findings

1.2.1 On the balance of probability, the Panel determined:

- Many members of British Canoeing talked of there being a culture of fear within British Canoeing and, in particular within Sprint, and its Senior Management Team.
- Such a culture did exist and appears to have come about as a result of a common held view that (i) the pursuit of medals was at any cost; and (ii) as elite funding was inextricably linked to UK Sport, British Canoeing used this relationship to facilitate the spread of this culture of fear.
- Although UK Sport was not directly responsible for, or aware of, the development and pervasion of this culture of fear, through the behaviour of key individuals within British Canoeing, it should be of concern that such a culture did exist in a sport whose funding of elite athletes was so reliant on UK Sport.
- Key individuals, within British Canoeing, fostered this culture of fear as a means of controlling athletes and suppressing any dissent; apparently, safe in their belief that there would be no repercussions for their behaviour.
- Furthermore, this culture was able to thrive, given the lack of accountability of these key individuals who appear to have been judged solely on results, rather than the methods deployed to achieve these results.
- The contrast between the way in which Sprint and Slalom were run, no doubt as a result of the different key personnel in key positions rather than the effectiveness of proper processes and procedures, is indicative that there must have been a serious disconnect between Management and the Board, which was, seemingly, uninformed as to the full extent of the problems within Sprint.
- In turn, this suggests that a general lack of good governance and corporate responsibility was pervasive throughout the echelons of British Canoeing – were it otherwise, it is difficult to envisage a scenario where the serious problems in

Sprint could have continued for as long as they did, notwithstanding the numerous “red flags” that existed.

- This failure in governance is, arguably, most marked by the superficial approach that was taken to compliance – in the context of corporate responsibility and behaviour.
- This superficiality is exemplified by the way in which complaints were purportedly investigated and processed; particularly those involving serious safeguarding matters.
- So poorly does this appear to have been done that British Canoeing’s approach to complaints has been, memorably and, in the opinion of the Panel, correctly, described as a “deny and defend” approach.
- Regrettably, there are sufficient incidents typifying this approach so as to question whether it had become an unwritten policy.
- Rather than being applauded, those that raised complaints, however serious and however meritorious, were often dealt with in the harshest of terms – athletes were fearful of being “punished” and not selected; members were fearful of being marginalized, labelled as troublemakers or being forced out of British Canoeing.
- A number of contributors, even those with no current connection to British Canoeing, expressed fear of reprisal. In relation to this investigation, there are instances of individuals who have declined to contribute, and instances in which evidence, once given, has been withdrawn.
- The net effect was a National Governing Body that, understandably, was often mistrusted and feared by both membership and athletes, alike – the very stakeholders whose interests it was designed to protect and should have protected.
- A lack of transparency, combined with failures in communication, did nothing except propagate this mistrust.
- This is demonstrated by the ineffectiveness, whether by design or default, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], in dealing with serious complaints.
- Whatever the reason for this [REDACTED] deficiencies, individually and collectively, had it dealt with these complaints appropriately and effectively, in terms of investigation and/or disposal, [REDACTED].

- [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED], and notwithstanding the conclusions arrived at, in relation to various individuals, who were often the holders of key positions within British Canoeing, the Panel was unable to determine, whether the failings of these individuals, either individually or collectively, were deliberate or, solely, examples of fundamental shortcomings in good governance and/or corporate responsibility.
  - Notwithstanding British Canoeing's assertions to the contrary, the Panel could not safely conclude, based on the evidence that it had received, that a review of historic safeguarding case data had been carried out, either properly or at all.
  - Accordingly, the Panel was not sufficiently reassured that British Canoeing had taken all the necessary steps to mitigate the risk of a repetition of the issues which led to [REDACTED], notwithstanding its declared intentions.
  - Judged purely on its ability to win medals, British Canoeing's World Class Programme is/was a success; however, this success appears to have come at a heavy price – namely the physical and emotional welfare of many athletes.

### **1.3 Summary of Recommendations**

1.3.1 In light of the above, the Panel makes the following key recommendations:

- British Canoeing acknowledge and apologise for its past failings in good governance, corporate responsibility and behaviour, with particular regard to those aspects contained within this Report.
- The periodic review, update and audit of all Policies and Procedures;
- Full and proper record keeping;
- The training, initial and ongoing, of all Board Members and Individuals in Key Management positions;
- The facilitation of both internal and external dialogue between stakeholders and the organisation;
- A review into the interrelationship between British Canoeing, UK Sport and elite athletes;
- Consideration of the way dispute resolution is managed, with the proper engagement of truly independent third parties.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Introduction**

7.1.1 As previously stated, this Report must be read in its proper context; although the “Recommendations”, that follow, are primarily a product of the evidence received up to the conclusion of Phase 2, following the Maxwellisation Process, the Panel notes that British Canoeing may have already implemented a significant number of these recommendations by the time the final version of this Report is submitted.

### **7.2 Policies and Procedures**

7.2.1 In order to avoid the mistakes of the past, it is imperative that all policies and procedures, together with any/all appeal provisions, are periodically reviewed, updated and audited to ensure (i) compliance with good governance principles and (ii) full understanding across the entire membership of British Canoeing.

7.2.2 It is the opinion of the Panel that the following policies and procedures, previously seen as a source of much controversy and frustration, are given immediate and urgent attention:

- Selection Policies and Procedures (including appeals) – both for (a) the funding of elite athletes and (b) participation in international events;
- Complaints Policy and Procedure.

7.2.3 On the basis that policies and procedures are reviewed, and updated where necessary, it will then be incumbent on British Canoeing to ensure that they are both followed and, importantly, seen to be followed.

7.2.4 The Panel notes that, further to representations made during the Maxwellisation process, British Canoeing has indicated that it has already implemented these recommendations.

### **7.3 Transparency and Accountability**

7.3.1 It follows, from the observations made directly above, that the implementation of fair and clear policies and procedures is only part of the solution.

7.3.2 What is also required is that, unlike in the past, there is a consistent and transparent approach in the application and policing of these policies and procedures – this should be aimed to be achieved in various ways:

- All policies and procedures should be readily and easily accessible from the British Canoeing website;

- Full and proper records must be kept – be they in relation to (a) Safeguarding; (b) Selection; (c) Complaints; (d) Disciplinary Matters; (e) etc.–such an approach will only enhance confidence in British Canoeing;
- The facilitation of regular dialogue, both external and internal, between stakeholders and the organisation.

[NB. The Panel notes that, further to representations made during the Maxwellisation process, British Canoeing has indicated that it has already implemented these recommendations.]

7.3.3 In addition, the Board and the Executive must continue to be accountable for all decisions made and must ensure that the correct checks and balances are in place to fully embrace the fundamentals of good governance and assuage any fear that the implementation of policy and procedure is, simply, a box ticking exercise.

7.3.4 With this in mind, and bearing in mind the conflicting positions of the Panel and British Canoeing, the Panel urges that the safeguarding review, as recommended by the author of the Independent Report, in March 2017, is undertaken by an independent expert, so as to ensure that the review is both undertaken and seen to be undertaken.

## **7.4 Training and Education**

7.4.1 The Panel is of the view that, in order to effect transparency and accountability, members of the Board and key members of the Executive need to undergo regular training and education and notes that, further to representations made during the Maxwellisation process, British Canoeing has indicated that it has already implemented this recommendation.

7.4.2 Ideally, this would be done annually as part of CPD, or similar, to ensure that key individuals have a full and up to date understanding of the issues relating to good governance and how those principles have informed real life situations in British Canoeing.

## **7.5 Culture Change**

7.5.1 In the light of a number of high-profile investigations, the Panel acknowledges that a critical eye has been cast over how the funding of elite sport is allocated and monitored.

7.5.2 Given its conclusion, namely that there was a perception among many of its elite athletes that the priorities of British Canoeing were skewed in favour of UK Sport, the Panel recommends that British Canoeing conduct a review to understand this perception and that that any imbalance is redressed, ensuring that athlete wellbeing is paramount.

## **7.6 Independence of Dispute Resolution**

7.6.1 In addition to a review of the dynamic interrelationship between British Canoeing, UK Sport and elite athletes, the Panel recommends a review into how all forms of dispute, across the spectrum, are investigated and resolved, by the NGB.

7.6.2 The Panel was concerned that a process, whereby a "Compliance Manager", "Safeguarding Lead", or similar, was:

(a) Appointed by the NGB, either as an employee or as a consultant,

(b) funded by the NGB,

(c) in practical terms, only accountable to the NGB (and, often, only to limited individuals within the NGB),

was open to the sort of failings in good governance and corporate responsibility that have been highlighted in this Report.

7.6.3 In light of this recent history, and to restore confidence, the Panel would recommend consideration, in appropriate cases, of a different process whereby individuals, tasked with investigating and resolving matters, pertaining to "compliance", "safeguarding" and similar, would be:

(a) independent of both the NGB and its stakeholders,

(b) appointed by an independent body/organisation, unconnected to the NGB or its stakeholders,

(c) fully accountable to that body/organisation, even though these individuals would (i) be accountable to the NGB; and (ii) perform the function of "Compliance Manager", "Safeguarding Lead", or similar, within the NGB.

7.6.4 Whatever system is implemented, the Panel is clear that it must ensure that the core aims of independence, fairness, impartiality and accountability are prioritised and not compromised.

7.7 [REDACTED]

7.7.1 [REDACTED]

7.7.2 The Panel notes that, further to representations made during the Maxwellisation process, British Canoeing has indicated that it has already implemented this recommendation.



Sport Resolutions (UK)  
1 Salisbury Square  
London EC4Y 8AE

T: +44 (0)20 7036 1966

Email: [resolve@sportresolutions.co.uk](mailto:resolve@sportresolutions.co.uk)  
Website: [www.sportresolutions.co.uk](http://www.sportresolutions.co.uk)

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