**ATHLETE VOICE AND REPRESENTATION REVIEW FINAL REPORT**

**SUMMARY OF ANALYSES**

1. The evidence suggests that provision for athlete voice and representation has been under-resourced and ineffectively structured. Reviews, reports and events in 2016-2017 have exposed this, with a significant minority of athletes feeling their humanity is undervalued - a trend that increases with performance success. Almost half of all athletes felt the voice and representation system wasn’t working. Failure to rebalance the HPS to capture and exploit the athlete voice within a positive and psychologically supportive culture will inevitably lead to further problems.
2. While most athletes know how to raise issues within their sports, the majority do not know who to go to within the wider system. Where athletes are unsatisfied that their issues have been dealt with by their sport, there is a need for independent confidential advice, mediation and support. It is important for UK Sport to articulate whether such a body and service is an advocate for athletes, or a wise neutral acting on behalf of the whole HPS. There is disagreement about whether such services should come from within UK Sport or from an athletes’ commission like the BAC, but there is far less support for an independent body external to the HPS. While the current BAC has done some good work, its purpose is not well understood, it has been under-resourced, lacks credibility and clarity of purpose, and is deemed unfit for purpose.
3. The athlete coach relationship is vital and largely healthy, but coaches aren’t well trained to support the athlete voice. Generally athletes, performance, and performance support staffs want the tools to deal with issues at the lowest level possible. This requires education and upskilling of athletes, their support networks, performance and performance support staffs, and athlete representatives. Particular attention needs to be paid in staff education to developing skills and techniques to compensate for the generally lower satisfaction levels for females, medal winners, older athletes and para athletes. Despite very positive experiences of training regimes and performance planning, particular attention should be paid to induction, ongoing personal development, selection and transition out, and the impact of these areas upon athlete voice and experience.
4. Representing the athlete voice within sports should be based on centrally directed principles but be flexible in delivery. It requires role specifications, internal sports mechanisms for capturing the collective voice, and the adoption and implementation of clear athlete welfare policies, No single group of performance, performance support staff, or an athletes’ social network, can be wholly responsible for capturing the athlete voice, so all must be trained or at least informed. Representation beyond sports needs to be done on an evidential basis. It needs a mechanism to inform UK Sport decision makers, and a feedback loop to sports and athletes to explain why some ideas have been accepted and others not.
5. While respecting the authority of the sports and their NGBs who are training athletes at the very limits of human capacity and potential, the reviewers were struck by the lack of cross pollination of good practice across the HPS. In the absence of structured scrutiny from outside the HPS, there is a check and balance requirement for an internal, second line assurance mechanism to confirm that the lived experience within sports of athlete welfare, voice and representation conforms to policy. There is also a requirement for a lessons-learned functionality in UK Sport to ensure that errors in welfare, voice and representation are converted into improved policies.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **Recommendation One**. Improve anchor points for athletes throughout their careers. UK Sport should develop and direct compulsory induction, selection, ongoing development, support and transition out packages and principles for delivery to athletes within sports that include:

* The provision of taster days prior to induction.
* A formal training base orientation and organised introductions to staff and peers.
* Training in soft skills such as self-awareness, unconscious bias, inclusivity and diversity.
* Briefings on financial planning, pensions, and commercial sponsorship.
* Briefings on safeguarding and culture.
* Information for friends and family.
* The use of athlete buddies during the early stages of an athlete’s time in the HPS.
* Information on selection for competition and how such information is to be conveyed.
* Information on how to appeal selection decisions and the support that is available.
* Information on how to deal with difficulties and disagreements.
* Access to non-performance counselling and coping strategies for athletes.
* Active promotion of dual career preparation and continuous personal development.
* Information on how, and to whom, the athlete voice can be expressed.
* Formal recognition at the point of departure from the HPS.
* With sports, review the adequacy of existing Performance Lifestyle and Performance Psychology capacity to deliver these packages.
* Create standard policies on how difficulties and disagreements are to be resolved both within and outside sports.

This may require an uplift in performance support and performance lifestyle staff.

1. **Recommendation Two**. Upskill staff and athlete representatives within sports to enable an environment where people thrive from a foundation of wellness and confidence. UK Sport should:

* Seek EIS professional input on how to create a psychologically safe environment, building such advice into staff training, athlete induction and day-to-day culture.
* Develop training resources for all HPS performance and performance support staff in soft skills to enable them to better elicit athlete voice and representation, emphasising the value of adult-adult relationships in the UK HPS.
* Provide mental health first aid training for performance, performance support and performance lifestyle staffs.
* Increase the use of scenario based, experiential learning for coaches.
* Train performance and performance support staff to conduct focus group sessions to elicit and exploit athlete and sport focus groups.
* Train staff in techniques to acknowledge the differing perceptions and challenges faced by female, para, medal winning, and older, athletes.
* Develop similar training modules for athletes who are chosen to be athlete representatives, which could be delivered regionally by UK Sport staff.

Internal training costs may be absorbed in routine business. External training will require additional funding.

1. **Recommendation Three**. Reinforce athlete voice and representation policies and processes within sports. UK Sport should:

* Produce guidelines on how athlete representatives should be chosen and how athlete representative groups can be best developed.
* Create standardised athlete representative role descriptions.
* Give direction on the frequency with which athlete representatives or representative groups should meet with staffs.
* Deliver training modules and support for individual athlete representatives.
* Create a role for an athlete champion on sports boards who is not a current athlete but has proven insight into the athlete experience.
* Incentivise athlete representation.

1. **Recommendation Four**. Properly resource an expert confidential advice, mediation and support service:

* This service is likely to require regionally based case workers in the North, the Midlands and the South, with a central controller and helpline.
* Caseworkers will need to be centrally trained in listening and mediation skills.
* Caseworkers will need to study and visit the sports in their areas and win the trust of the sport’s staff, whilst developing rapport with the athlete cohort.
* Caseworkers will need a sound understanding of common dispute resolution policies both within sports and by SRUK.
* Recruitment, training and deployment of such staff is likely to take around 6 months.

This will require a financial uplift if suitable candidates are to be selected and retained.

1. **Recommendation Five**. Provide athlete representation direct into UK Sport with a feedback loop. This recommendation effectively merges the current BAC Representative Board and Advisory Board functions. UK Sport should:

* Establish a forum where athlete representatives from each sport can be centrally consulted and their views heard in conjunction with the results of the Culture Health Check.
* Create a mechanism whereby input received from athletes can be back-briefed to the UK Sports Board.
* Establish a rhythm and forward business for such a forum, so it is responsive to emerging themes, rather than a standing agenda.
* Create a feedback mechanism so athletes understand which of their opinions have been accepted or rejected and why.

This will create a modest uplift in transport and subsistence costs.

1. **Recommendation Six: Provide second line assurance and a lessons learned function from within UK Sport.**

* The absence of external checks and balances on the HPS requires internal assurance of voice and representation from UK Sport and will most likely sit within the Integrity area.
* Each sport should be visited twice annually to check that the functions described in Recommendations 1-5 are functioning within tolerable parameters.
* This will probably require 2-3 staff who will need recruiting and training.
* After the Culture Health check, annual assurance visits, and notable incidents, UK Sport should conduct learning accounts to see what lessons can be identified and embedded in policy across the wider HPS system, so that lessons can be said to be learned.
* Thought should be given to whether such staff are employed direct by UK Sport, by EIS, or by an entirely independent adviser.
* Double hatting such staff with the confidential advice, mediation and support staff from Recommendation 4 would undermine the credibility of assurance and should be avoided.