

# UK Sport: Supporting elite athletes

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**1** Since 1999 UK Sport has used National Lottery money to support elite athletes competing at the highest levels of sport for the United Kingdom or Great Britain<sup>1</sup>. UK Sport is a non-departmental public body, working within a framework laid down by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Its long term aim is for the United Kingdom to be one of the world's top five sporting nations by 2012, measured by athlete performances at World Championships, and Olympic and Paralympic Games.

**2** UK Sport provides support to elite athletes through its World Class Performance Programme, which has two main elements:

- funding for national governing bodies of sport to provide a supporting infrastructure of coaching and other services for elite athletes who meet agreed performance criteria;
- funding for these individual athletes to contribute towards their living and sporting costs.

**3** This report examines the support provided to elite athletes by UK Sport under the World Class Performance Programme, focusing on the funding of £83.5 million awarded in support of Summer Olympic and Paralympic sports during the Athens Olympic cycle between April 2001 and March 2005. Over 60 per cent of this funding went to the five largest Olympic and two largest Paralympic sports (**Figure 1**). Appendix 1 provides full details of the funding received by each individual sport.

## Our main findings

**4** Our main findings on **the benefits provided by the World Class Performance Programme** are:

- a** The World Class Performance Programme has enabled national governing bodies to provide a comprehensive package of support services (such as coaching, sports medicine and sports science), free of charge to their athletes. Governing bodies have also been able to recruit high calibre performance directors, putting the management of performance services in the hands of a single, accountable professional.
- b** The athletes we interviewed highlighted dramatic improvements in the services, equipment and training opportunities now available to them and a broader survey commissioned by UK Sport in 2003 found athlete satisfaction with the services provided by national governing bodies to be generally high. However, levels of athlete take-up of some services, particularly more technical, innovative areas such as sports science, have been variable. Our expert panel considered that strengthening the World Class Performance Programme's influence over athletes and the personal coaches that some athletes employ was a key challenge for UK Sport and governing bodies.

<sup>1</sup> At the Olympic and Paralympic Games, athletes compete for Great Britain; at the level of individual sports, there is a mix of United Kingdom and Great Britain teams, depending on the sport and the competition.

# 1 World Class Performance Programme awards in support of Summer Olympic and Paralympic sports for the Athens Olympic cycle, 2001 to 2005

Sport	Funding to national governing body £ million	Funding to individual athletes £ million	Total funding	
			£ million	%
Olympic sports				
Athletics	8.3	3.1	11.3	13.6
Rowing	7.3	3.3	10.6	12.7
Cycling	6.6	1.5	8.1	9.7
Sailing	5.4	1.8	7.2	8.6
Swimming	4.9	1.6	6.5	7.8
Other <sup>1</sup>	19.0	5.4	24.4	29.2
Sub-total	51.5	16.7	68.1	81.6
Paralympic sports				
Swimming	3.0	1.5	4.5	5.4
Athletics	1.9	1.5	3.4	4.1
Other <sup>2</sup>	4.2	3.3	7.5	9.0
Sub-total	9.1	6.3	15.4	18.4
Total	60.6	23.0	83.5	100.0

Source: UK Sport

## NOTES

1 Covers 12 other Olympic sports, none of which received total funding of over £5 million, including badminton which is largely funded by Sport England but whose national governing body also received £291,000 from UK Sport. Full details of the funding received by individual sports are given in Appendix 1.

2 Covers 13 other Paralympic sports, none of which received total funding of over £2 million. Full details of the funding received by individual sports are given in Appendix 1.

3 Not all figures cast correctly due to rounding.

**c** Athletes report that the personal awards provided under the World Class Performance Programme have made a significant difference to their ability to train and compete and this was confirmed by national governing bodies. Demonstrating the difference in quantifiable terms is more difficult and the data generated by UK Sport's survey of athletes is not conclusive.

**d** The level of personal award that an athlete is entitled to receive is calculated on the basis of past performance and financial need, up to a maximum annual award of £21,830. During the Athens Olympic cycle, the average annual award was £12,184 for able-bodied athletes and £11,563 for disabled athletes. The awards provide separate elements for living and sporting costs, although UK Sport does not check whether athletes' spending reflects this split. There are no financial performance incentives, such as bonuses to reward success at major championships.

- e** The personal awards do not fund athletes' costs in full and athletes are expected to fund their own careers to some extent with income from other sources. The living costs element of the award has remained at the same level since 1997 and UK Sport is currently considering what changes it should make to athlete funding for the Beijing Olympic cycle.
- 5** Our main findings on **the performance achieved under the World Class Performance Programme** are:
- a** UK Sport met its performance target for the Athens Olympic Games, with Great Britain finishing 10th in the Olympic medal table against a target of 8th to 10th. In the Paralympic medal table, Great Britain was second, against UK Sport's target of first (**Figure 2**).
- b** Although the overall Olympic target was met, half of the funded sports did not meet the individual medal targets they had agreed with UK Sport (see Figure 11 on page 24). This meant that the cost per medal to UK Sport was £2.4 million, compared with £1.7 million had the targets been achieved. Most Paralympic sports did not meet their individual medal targets (see Figure 12 on page 24), which meant that the cost per medal for UK Sport was £0.2 million compared with £0.1 million had the targets been achieved.
- c** A comparison of the performances of Great Britain across the last five Olympic Games suggests that the trend of declining performance has been arrested since the start of the World Class Performance Programme. The haul of 30 medals in Athens was the best performance by a British team since the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984 when results were affected by the boycott led by the Soviet Union.

## 2 Medal tables for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Athens in 2004

Olympic Games						Paralympic Games					
Rank	Country	Gold	Medals won		Total	Country	Gold	Medals won		Total	
			Silver	Bronze				Silver	Bronze		
1	United States	35	39	29	103	China	63	46	32	141	
2	China	32	17	14	63	<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>94</b>	
3	Russia	27	27	38	92	Canada	28	19	25	72	
4	Australia	17	16	16	49	United States	27	22	39	88	
5	Japan	16	9	12	37	Australia	26	38	36	100	
6	Germany	14	16	18	48	Ukraine	24	12	19	55	
7	France	11	9	13	33	Spain	20	27	24	71	
8	Italy	10	11	11	32	Germany	19	28	32	79	
9	South Korea	9	12	9	30	France	18	26	30	74	
10	<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>30</b>	Japan	17	15	20	52	
11	Cuba	9	7	11	27	Russia	16	8	17	41	
12	Ukraine	9	5	9	23	Czech Republic	16	8	7	31	
13	Hungary	8	6	3	17	South Africa	15	13	7	35	
14	Romania	8	5	6	19	Brazil	14	12	7	33	
15	Greece	6	6	4	16	Mexico	14	10	10	34	

Source: UK Sport

- d Medal table position has some inherent limitations as a performance measure and management tool, including the narrowness of the margin between success and failure in medal terms, the masking of absolute athlete improvement by rising competitive standards, and the difficulty of attributing medal results to the World Class Performance Programme alone given the complexity of the wider support system for elite athletes. Nonetheless medal table position is an important indicator of achievement and has a number of benefits, including being widely understood by stakeholders and the public, and it is an important part of UK Sport's performance measurement framework.
  - e Most of UK Sport's wider performance measures for the World Class Performance Programme (see Figure 15 on page 27) are also medal outcome based and share the same limitations as medal table position, and work is in hand at UK Sport to review its performance measures ahead of the Beijing Olympic cycle. We also identified a number of other concerns with the way in which the performance measurement framework is operating in practice, in particular scope for UK Sport to report its performance more systematically and accurately.
- 6 Our main findings on [the management of the World Class Performance Programme](#) are:**
- a UK Sport awards funding on the basis of sports' past medal winning record and future medal winning potential and a wide range of other more intangible factors. Resources are focused on key strategic sports – 55 per cent of Olympic funding was awarded to the four top priority sports (athletics, cycling, rowing and sailing). In the event, these four sports delivered 61 per cent of the medals won, including eight of the nine golds. Six funded sports (gymnastics, judo, triathlon, shooting, taekwondo and weightlifting) delivered no Olympic medals at all, having received between them £12.4 million of funding.
  - b For Paralympic sports, just over half of UK Sport's funding went to the two top priority sports (swimming and athletics). These two sports delivered 73 per cent of the medals won, including 22 of the 35 golds. Four funded sports (wheelchair rugby, sailing, boccia and wheelchair fencing) delivered no Paralympic medals, having received between them funding of £1.3 million.
  - c UK Sport is reviewing its investment strategy for the Beijing Olympic cycle, with a view to securing a more transparent process and a better return on investment. We identified a number of options UK Sport might consider to maximise its return in the future, including reducing the number of athletes supported by the World Class Performance Programme, focusing funding on fewer sports, or funding in more cases tailored support for individual athletes.
  - d In the main UK Sport agrees medal based targets with national governing bodies and monitors performance against them. The exception was swimming which won no medals at the Sydney Olympics in 2000 and where UK Sport did not insist on the national governing body setting medal targets despite subsequent success at the World Championships in 2001 and 2003, although targets based on swimmers' world rankings were agreed. The effectiveness of the targets that were agreed with other sports was limited by the fact that they were not always set or maintained at a challenging level.
  - e During the Athens Olympic cycle, UK Sport commissioned independent experts to undertake periodic evaluations of the programmes provided by individual national governing bodies. While recognising the value of a system of evaluation, UK Sport and governing bodies considered these arrangements added little significant value, although governing bodies confirmed that they were keen to retain some external element to the evaluation process. UK Sport is considering a new approach involving self-evaluation by governing bodies themselves, supplemented by closer ongoing monitoring by UK Sport staff and more focused external input where particular issues merit it.
  - f UK Sport also seeks information on the effectiveness of its investment from a survey of athletes on the World Class Performance Programme. This survey generates some eye-catching positive headline feedback, although the declining response rate creates difficulties in drawing conclusions based on smaller sub-groups such as athletes from individual sports.



- g** UK Sport is working with national governing bodies where it has significant concerns about performance, although the effectiveness of its interventions with the larger sports is unclear. A number of smaller sports have had funding for particular disciplines cut where they have failed to perform but intervening in larger sports, including athletics and swimming, has proven more complex and generally involved supporting the governing bodies concerned to turn the programmes round.
- h** National governing bodies and our case file review indicated that it has been difficult for UK Sport staff to challenge governing bodies effectively. Looking ahead to the Beijing Olympic cycle, UK Sport is seeking to improve its own capacity to manage the World Class Performance Programme effectively, including recruiting a number of well regarded people from within the sector and enhancing the technical expertise of other staff.
- i** UK Sport is well positioned to disseminate the good practice it learns across the sports (for example, on innovative coaching practices or the use of new technology to support athletes' training) and national governing bodies welcome the forums that exist for cross sport working, although they consider the discussions would add more value if they were more focused.
- j** The system of elite sport funding has traditionally been complicated by the multiple funding agencies and governing body structures which reflect the devolved structures of sport in the United Kingdom. UK Sport is now working with the home country sports councils to simplify the system of applying for funding through the introduction of a 'one stop planning process'.
- k** In the second half of the Athens Olympic cycle, declining revenue from lottery ticket sales created a shortfall between the grant commitments UK Sport had made to national governing bodies and the lottery funding it had available to meet those commitments. To cover the shortfall, UK Sport diverted Exchequer funding away from other activities (such as the modernisation programme to help governing bodies become more efficient and effective) and the home country sports councils contributed funds from their own lottery resources.
- l** UK Sport is seeking to maintain the levels of funding available for the World Class Performance Programme despite an anticipated drop in lottery proceeds for the Beijing Olympic cycle compared with the Athens cycle. It aims to generate £4 million from sponsorship during the course of the cycle – a challenging target since this represents a new source of funding for UK Sport and is far in excess of the levels of partnership funding previously secured by national governing bodies.
- m** The Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2008 are expected to be the most competitive ever and because of the distance involved they will pose particular logistical difficulties. In disability sport specifically, national governing bodies and our expert panel raised concerns about whether Great Britain would be able to maintain its position in future Paralympics and UK Sport has commissioned an external review on the way forward for the delivery of programmes to disabled athletes.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

7 Our recommendations follow two broad themes:

### On direct support for athletes and national governing bodies

- i In reviewing its investment strategy for the Beijing Olympic cycle, UK Sport needs to strengthen its framework for deciding where to spend its money. In particular, it should:
  - make its funding criteria, which at present are fairly all-encompassing, more focused on what it wants the World Class Performance Programme to deliver;
  - be prepared to take tough decisions based on performance about whether sports merit funding and on what scale;
  - be clear about the best balance between the funding of day to day support services for athletes and work to strengthen the underpinning national governing body structures, as the latter is no longer covered by a separate modernisation programme.
- ii UK Sport needs a contingency plan which sets out its funding priorities in the event that lottery proceeds or sponsorship income fall short of the levels projected and it is therefore not able to meet all the grant commitments it has made to national governing bodies.
- iii UK Sport should review the arrangements for making personal awards to athletes, given they have remained unchanged since the start of the scheme in 1997, and do this during 2005 so that any changes are in place early in the Beijing Olympic cycle. For example:
  - there may be scope to reduce the size of the World Class Performance Programme, continuing a trend begun during the Athens Olympic cycle, by focusing funding on those athletes who have a genuine prospect of winning a medal;
  - it would be useful for UK Sport to reflect on arrangements overseas where athletes can earn performance bonuses, although if the total amount of funding were to remain the same there would be less available for distribution to athletes in the first instance;
  - UK Sport may be able to simplify the scheme given that it currently makes separate awards for living and sporting costs but does not check how the money is spent.
- iv As UK Sport is funding national governing bodies to deliver a package of support services, it should ensure that these services, including those in more technical, innovative areas, are taken up by athletes and their coaches.
- v Following the Athens Olympic and Paralympic Games, UK Sport should identify the 'success factors' that helped certain sports to perform well and the barriers to success in those sports that were less successful. Lessons should be made available to national governing bodies during 2005 so that they can be acted upon early in the Beijing Olympic cycle.





- vi UK Sport is well placed to disseminate good practice and should respond to the demands of national governing bodies for more flexible and focused forums for cross-sport working. In this regard, there may be scope for UK Sport to draw on experience from countries overseas such as Italy, where the national sports body runs a 'sport school' in association with the national sports federations.
- vii In revising its arrangements for evaluating the programmes provided by national governing bodies, UK Sport should retain some external element to the process while drawing on the expertise and knowledge within governing bodies. External input brings independence to the process and involving other sports would help to spread good practice.

#### On UK Sport's performance monitoring and wider management of the World Class Performance Programme

- viii To help it get a full picture of the effectiveness of the World Class Performance Programme, UK Sport should broaden its performance measurement framework to develop a more rounded package of measures, which as well as focusing on medal success also cover other absolute indicators of performance improvement, such as the percentage of supported athletes improving their world ranking.
- ix UK Sport should report to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport performance against all the targets agreed in the funding agreement.

- x UK Sport should ensure that it reports performance accurately to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and in its annual report, measuring performance on the same basis as it used for setting targets and not including results from sports and events which were not considered relevant in the target setting process.
- xi UK Sport should build on what it has done to canvass the views of athletes by exploring with professional pollsters how it might secure higher response rates in future; and identifying key baseline data that it can use as a benchmark for future surveys. It would also be useful for UK Sport to seek views on the World Class Performance Programme from coaches and other technical experts.
- xii UK Sport should ensure that its staff have the skills and authority needed to be able to probe and challenge, as well as advise, national governing bodies effectively.
- xiii Given the step change in the amount of sponsorship income it is seeking to raise, UK Sport needs new skills; others in the lottery sector and in museums and galleries have expertise in this area and UK Sport should draw on their knowledge and experience, as well as drawing on the experience of sports bodies overseas such as in the Netherlands.
- xiv In taking forward our recommendations and managing the World Class Performance Programme in the Beijing Olympic cycle more generally, UK Sport will need to ensure it works closely with other players in the elite sport system, in particular the home country sports councils and the national institutes of sport.