

High-Performance Programme

Internal Review

Executive Summary

Background

Since the summer of 2015, British Rowing has been conducting a modernisation programme designed to create the most appropriate organisational structure and culture for the future. The plan was always to include an assessment of our world class High-Performance Programme (“HPP” or “the Programme”) following the Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Separate to this, in June 2016, British Rowing was made aware of allegations relating to the culture of the HPP by a former Great Britain international rower.

In response to the allegations and recognising a duty of care to current and past rowers on the HPP, British Rowing staff and the wider sport at large, British Rowing took the decision to conduct an internal review into the culture of the HPP in June 2016.

The purpose of the internal review was to:

- a. ascertain the current culture of the HPP and assess how this is reflected through the leadership of the rowers, coaches and support staff;
- b. consider how the culture is perceived by rowers, coaches support staff and the organisation, and the impact this has on the effectiveness of the HPP and on the sport more widely; and
- c. ensure British Rowing demonstrates the highest ethical, professional and sport governance standards in delivering success at Olympic, Paralympic and international level.

Governance and Process

British Rowing established a governance structure for the internal review which ensured independent input and analysis.

Nicola Palios, Independent Director of British Rowing, was appointed as Chairman of the internal review Project Board. Also on the Project Board was British Rowing Chief Executive Officer, Andy Parkinson, and former Great Britain international rower, Ali Gill. A Project Team from Unforgiving Minute Limited was appointed to ensure independence who reported to the Project Board on a regular basis.

The bulk of the internal review was conducted over three months from September to November 2016 and consulted with around 150 people. This included over 70 current and former athletes on the HPP, British Rowing coaching and support staff working on the HPP and pathway programme, club coaches, EIS staff supporting the Programme and UK Sport personnel. All were asked to provide comment on, and share experiences of, the HPP and feedback was collated via an online survey, interviews, email submissions and focus groups.

Findings

The HPP dominates world rowing and is amongst the UK's most successful performance programmes, having:

- a. an experienced and dedicated leader who has shown an exemplary level of commitment, which pervades the whole programme;
- b. a centralised programme and world-class facilities, that are the envy of all other rowing nations;
- c. a concentration of coaching and support staff that know what is required to deliver winning performances over multiple Olympic and Paralympic cycles;
- d. created and received an unparalleled level of funding that allows the athletes to concentrate solely on their training, and access the best training venues; and
- e. a highly integrated Paralympic programme.

The internal review found that the culture of the HPP is fundamental to its success. It is hard, unrelenting commitment, and is focused on maintaining Great Britain's position as the world's leading rowing nation. This culture is the embodiment of the leadership, reflecting a detailed and long-term approach, shaped over the last five Olympic and Paralympic cycles.

The internal review identified a number of areas for development, which are a consequence of continued success and societal changes, that could destabilise the Programme if not addressed. By successfully addressing these areas, British Rowing has an opportunity to better support staff and rowers in its care and to access a wider and more diverse pool of potential athletes and support staff, essential to maintaining the success of the HPP.

Recommendations

The areas for development identified by the internal review were classified under three main themes:

1. Governance.

While it is already reflected in its Strategic Risk Register, succession planning within the HPP needs to be formally addressed by the Board of British Rowing. The Board also needs to review the performance metrics of the HPP, to include the well-being of its coaches, support staff and the athletes in its care.

2. Leadership and management.

Leadership and management processes need to ensure greater trust and empowerment at all levels of the HPP to allow coaches and support staff to innovate and better manage the athletes, and to create a more inclusive environment. Personnel processes for inducting and exiting athletes on to and off the Programme need reviewing to ensure that they are of the highest standard. A greater focus on the effects of stress on performance and wellbeing need to be formally recognised and structures put in place to address them.

3. Balance.

There is a need to address the perception of balance between the different squads on the HPP. The leadership must understand and define the limits on what is an acceptable sub-culture (and therefore influence on the HPP) and what may impede other elements of the programme.

Implementation

The Board of British Rowing has reviewed and discussed the recommendations made in the report and unanimously agreed that all will be implemented in full.

A Working Group will be established to agree an action plan, advise on best practice solutions, monitor implementation of the recommendations and advocate the change programme. The Working Group will report to the Board of British Rowing on a regular basis and will begin its work as soon as its membership is confirmed.

It is the ambition that the majority of the recommendations will be implemented by the end of 2017.