

Dear Selwyn,

Many thanks for your letter and for the opportunity to respond to the points you raise. As you requested your letter and my responses have been included in Focus which is currently being delivered.

Inevitably my responses are at times wordy and to make the response viable for inclusion in Focus I've cut down the responses into a shortened form. Only the bold sections of the responses are included in Focus.

As it is such an important letter raising so many points that we agree are in the interests of members I've taken the decision to publish the full text of both your letter and my response on the website.

I hope you find the responses to the points you raise of interest.

Best wishes,

Mike Hamilton
Chief Executive, British Orienteering

Dear Chief Executive and Board,

I believe that there are a number of questions which BOF members need to be answered urgently at a time when future funding is in doubt.¹

Many of us do not see any direct benefit to clubs, members and orienteers generally, in many of the professional staff posts which we support.²

For some years now there has been little or no contact from Participation Officers, and their predecessor Development Officers with our club, LOC. I am told that a similar situation exists in other Regions and so this does not seem to be an instance of poor individual performance rather than policy. I would expect a Participation Officer to keep in regular contact with the clubs in his or her Region, and to be present at Regional events to offer support and information about their role, and not least to update themselves about the key issues for clubs and individuals. We receive no report on their activity either directly or even via Focus. How are we to know what they are doing and whether it is worthwhile?

We understand that officers have been instrumental in delivering the Explorer programme to new participants, and indeed very positive numbers have recently been released which suggest that they have been successful. Sadly, in LOC at least, we have yet to see a single Explorer participant attending any of our many and varied events and activities. My question is; how are these participants expected to find out about our events, and the Orienteering pathway which we have painstakingly constructed? I ask this question because not only were we not asked to help with local Explorer events, we were not even informed that they were happening and were therefore unable to provide these interested children and families with our event information and newsletters. No-one has supplied us with any lists of participants and so they have become to all intents 'one-off' orienteers who are now lost to the sport. If Participation Officers are intended to increase the flow of new blood into our clubs what is the evidence that the strategy is working?³

Moving on to Major Events and Marketing my question is; have you been able to quantify the financial benefit to the sport of these posts? Major events remain the responsibility of what you call volunteers, and what I call members, through affiliated Clubs and Regions. BOF is able to take a profit from major events because of the hard work and know-how of these people, and it is very hard to see any financial impact from Officers.

Put bluntly it seems to many of us that we could manage just as well without them.⁴

We need you to justify their existence please. I would also like to know why you persist in using your Chief Execs update column in Focus to berate hard-working event officials rather than to tell us what you are doing on our behalf? You seem to think that we're working for you rather than the other way around.⁵

Having been a National selector in another sport I am aware that selection can be a minefield. Last year we failed to send full teams to the Junior European Championships in spite of the fact that selectees had to completely fund their attendance. My question is; how is it beneficial to young people not to be given the opportunity to compete internationally when they have achieved the set objective criteria.⁶

A secondary question in this area is; what is the point of having additional subjective criteria around selection which effectively rest decisions completely in the hands of one person?⁷

The effect is to discourage young people who have been striving to represent their country over a number of years.⁸

This probably feels like quite enough to be going on with. Unfortunately, I'm only half way there. Many of us are increasingly concerned about the proportion of professional staff who have not only had no previous involvement with our sport either in a competitive or organisational capacity prior to their appointment; but also have shown no inclination to do so even while in post in order to help them do their jobs better.

An interest in, and indeed passion for, the subject appears to many of us to be a key ingredient in being able to fulfil any professional role. The question here is; If you aren't interested enough to go to orienteering events then how do you show your passion for our sport?⁹

I would like, almost as a side issue, to know how many and indeed which, members of our professional staff were present at any of the recent World Orienteering Championships which Scotland staged so successfully last summer?¹⁰

I believe that the time has come for you to present your case for such a large and apparently unviable professional staff – beginning at the top.¹¹

Yours sincerely,

Selwyn Wright

LOC

Responses

¹ I think this letter is a great way for us to help members understand the position British Orienteering is in, the future and some of the challenges facing us. I'm grateful to Selwyn for drafting this letter and providing us with an opportunity to respond. Many members may want to delve into these queries and responses but I'm also sure that many members aren't really interested and just want to enjoy their sport!

² Most posts are not supported by member funds; 2 positions from 15 are fully funded by members; 4 positions are 16% funded by member funds. The remainder are fully funded. Clearly even our 'core' function of delivering services to members is heavily subsidised.

Point of fact – Most of the staff posts are not supported by member funds. Only two are fully funded from British Orienteering funds, the Major Events Manager and Apprentice Administrator. The National Office team of CEO, Accounts Manager, Marketing Manager, Administrator, are 84% funded by Sport England. The Development team (6 people) and Talent team (1 + consultants) are all entirely funded by Sport England. Our staff in Northern Ireland (2) are funded entirely by Sport Northern Ireland. All funding is accompanied by challenging aims and targets.

It is clear from this that even our 'core' function of delivering services to members is heavily subsidised by government funding.

³ The Xplorer programme has been successful with 50,000 participant runs during 2015; of these 84% have indicated that they have or would like to participate in orienteering events. The programme was designed to free club volunteers from involvement and work entirely with partners delivering – this was based on the feedback from clubs involved in the previous increasing participation programme. We do contact clubs for lists of their events and activities to feed into Xplorer participants in the area, unfortunately LOC have not responded to these contacts. The Development Team provide 2 pages of information about the Xplorer programme in every Focus and have good contact and information flow with those clubs that have shown an interest.

As stated in (2) the Development Team are not supported by British Orienteering membership or levy income they are funded solely by Sport England/Sport Northern Ireland funds.

The current funding is provided to support activities aimed at increasing participation in orienteering. The previous programme, 2009/13, was based around clubs and activity nights. Feedback on this programme from members was that volunteers were overstretched and were needed to focus on 'core' club business and supporting traditional development approaches. The current programme was designed to free clubs and volunteers from this pressure and was explicitly to work with other partners such as local authorities.

The Development Team, Tom for the North West, regularly contacts clubs to ask if there is information we can provide to participants experiencing orienteering through our partner projects. Tom has attempted to contact LOC five times over the past 12 months with only one response coming recently in January 2016. In addition, Craig has contacted Richard Lecky-Thompson to discuss NavNight and the potential for securing funding to purchase SI kit.

One of the reasons that Tom has attempted to get in touch is to enable us to supply the necessary information to Xplorer participants in the LOC area. Having had no response, we have been unable to do this. We have examples of transition from Xplorer to club orienteering events and activities and this remains a focus for the development team in 2016. The development team are funded to increase participation in orienteering, our preference is obviously to transition people into mainstream orienteering however participation in other events and activities count towards these targets – and our targets need to be met if funding is to be continued.

We measure the success of the 'increasing participation' initiative using participant runs and you are correct the programme has been successful; from April 2015 to year-end we have measured around 50,000 participant runs, a significant number. We ask participants themselves about whether they would like to take part in orienteering events and 84% have indicated for 2 years running that they have or would like to take part in further orienteering. We do try to provide them with information about opportunities to take part.

The work of the Development team is the subject of the Development Update, a two-page feature in each edition of Focus. The team would welcome input into any strategic thinking around how we can increase participation although people with ideas may need help in understanding the restrictions placed on us by the funding process and parameters.

⁴ Feedback from associations and clubs that the Major Event Manager has worked with has been a big learning experience for us. At some major events the feedback and review has been incredibly positive and the impact significant in 'de-stressing' some aspects of staging the event for key volunteers; at other major events the attempts to work with and support the organising team have failed and the impact has been minor whilst taking significant staff time. We have learnt a lot and hence the piloting of the new delivery system where an association/club can have autonomy to organise the event if they wish. Where the Major Event Manager has been able to impact on the event the impact has been considerable both in making the role of volunteers easier and in delivering significant financial benefits. No doubt our learning will continue!

We will be the first to agree there has been a learning curve in our work to support Major Events.

The role of Major Events Manager came from evidence that the stress volunteers were being placed under in organising major events (particularly the JK) was significant. We had what was perceived as an example of good practice in the way in which the Scottish 6-Days is organised with a professional officer. Of course, our situation is different in that British Orienteering is responsible for the JK and BOCs each year rather than the S6Ds every other year. In some regions our approach can be evidenced as being warmly welcomed and easing some of these volunteer pressures; in other regions support has been less welcome. Another objective the Board had in introducing the role was to help 'corporate learning' take place. For instance, with the S6Ds there is continuous learning from event to event as many of the same people are involved. With our events there is evidence of this learning cycle failing and considerable evidence of event officials wanting to do it their own way despite what has happened before, even during the previous year.

We want to help competitors and volunteers at these major events have a good experience; an experience that is improving year on year. We also need to ensure safety, risk management, budgeting and contingency planning are being taken seriously and implemented in the way that we need them to be. To do this we need our Major Events Manager to be able to impact on our events. In some cases, this happens; sadly, in other instances this support has been turned away.

Is the role of Major Events Manager having an impact and being beneficial? In many instances yes but in a few instances no, really depending on how prepared event officials are to collaborate and work with the Major Events Manager. We have discussed this at many Board meetings and believe we are now piloting an approach that provides the choice and freedom to the organising association if they wish, however with that choice comes the responsibility and risk. For many reasons it is unacceptable that British Orienteering carries the risk but is unable to impact on how that risk is mitigated.

No doubt we will continue to learn and seek more effective ways of delivering the major events that British Orienteering is responsible for.

⁵ As I understand it staff work on behalf of the sport. At times we service the needs of members, collaborate with partners to deliver or promote orienteering, deliver contracted and funded work. We work, with some volunteers/members, to deliver the functions of the national governing body for orienteering including to develop and strengthen orienteering – we fully accept that members have diverse views, often polarised, as to what we should be doing.

Justify their existence? This is a topic that could go on and on. In brief staff roles provide services for members that are significantly subsidised by Sport England, staff promote orienteering and the National Governing body within the sport and outside of the sport, with many partners, funding agencies, local authorities, schools, etc.

Examples are easily identified, are varied and many faceted including:

- Internal communications through Focus – secured advertising income (keeping costs down) ensuring continued production of the magazine three times a year. Pro-actively sourcing news and promotion of club developments, athlete successes, major events, etc, to inform members
- Support to all work programmes, through the design and production of resources and marketing materials to support: Xplorer, Xplorer Schools, Major Events, Recognised Centre Scheme, etc.
- Good national PR contacts have been developed – we are now making good progress with Sky Sports.
- Supporting major events; the volunteers the Major Events Manager has worked with over the past 2-3 years are probably in a better position to answer/justify the existence of the role:

“We have also had great support from Sally with whom we've built up an excellent working relationship.” (16th April 2015, BOC2015 Coordinator)

“Thank you both for your time and effort to help NEOA put on a good event, and nice to work with you.” (7th June 2014, BOC2014)

“Good luck to you in the future and for next year’s event. If you think you need some help to feed into any improvements, then I would be happy to help you in any way I can.” (28th May 2014, Organiser JK2014)

“Thanks very much for your help and support” (24th Feb 2014, BNC 2014 organiser)

There is no doubt that all staff see themselves as providing a service but at times there are conflicts between those we are providing a service for and others, clubs and members included. For example, in my role as Chief Executive I see myself providing the services the Board require and expect. This is sometimes for the benefit of members or clubs but sometimes for the sport of orienteering as a whole. At times there are conflicts and I have to make a judgement call or seek clarification from the Chair or Board.

⁶ JEC is a part of the talent programme and is used as a development opportunity for athletes. Provided athletes meet the selection criteria and competing in JEC is advantageous to their development athletes will be selected. In 2015 some athletes that met some of the criteria were rested to avoid fatigue related injury and other athletes were not selected as JEC did not fit with their personal development plan. Such decisions were only taken after extensive discussion which involved the athletes concerned.

JEC is an important part of our Talent Programme and the aims and objectives for each JEC are set as part of the long-term strategy.

In 2015 JEC was used as a development opportunity for athletes that were considered to be potential JWOC athletes for the future and to help develop those athletes for future competitions. A decision was made to rest athletes who had been to JWOC in 2015 as they had all gone on to a busy summer of training camps including a pre JWOC 2016 camp. This decision was taken after extensive discussion and consideration; the intention being to keep those athletes healthy and injury-free. There were other athletes that had expressed an interest in competing at JEC and were considered but were not invited because they were either not considered to meet the relevant performance standards, or physically, technically or psychologically not yet ready. Standards are applied and we feel it is important to keep our eyes on the target and stay focussed on it. We are measured against results in this area– not participation. Just because athletes pay for competitions, this surely does not mean that we should lower the standard or select an athlete who is not ready? For the performance standards we use races that can demonstrate competence at that level. We need athletes to perform consistently well or to have stand-out performances that demonstrate they have both competence and potential. Athletes will benefit from JEC if they are capable of being competitive at JEC. We would not want to

put any athlete into that arena if the experience would demoralise or demotivate them or not provide a good learning experience. We do not want athletes with the wrong attitude going, for instance an athlete who considers competing to be a 'holiday' and is a poor influence on other athletes.

⁷ Selection involves a group of people and most decisions are taken by consensus. At times a difficult decision is necessary and the athletes understand that one person carries this responsibility, our Performance Manager. This is normal practice across many sports and has the benefit that everyone including the athlete knows who carries ultimate responsibility. Criteria used for selection is published on the website and take into account the athlete's strengths and weaknesses, progression, attitude, longer term personal development plan and current form.

It is not true to say that selection is only made by one person. There are two selector advisors, as well as the Performance Manager, for every competition plus the coaches. Last year, the Performance Manager was 'The Selector' taking advice but the reality is that the group acted as a team of selectors and that has been made clear in the policy this year. The subjective criteria are extremely important. Research shows that selection based on performance and results alone is seriously flawed (Á. MacNamara, A. Button, & D. Collins, 2010). Especially in a sport such as orienteering, when it is very normal for juniors to make mistakes. Selection should include taking into consideration an athlete's potential as well as their current level of performance. The athlete's strengths and weaknesses, progression, attitude, longer term personal development plan and current form need to be considered.

⁸ Athletes should understand what they have to do to be selected and the need to focus on mastering their performance. Their drive and motivation should be to improve their performance rather than purely competing. We would be very disappointed to hear that an athlete would be discouraged by not being selected and question whether the athlete's motivation is what it needs to be to succeed longer term.

I'm sure it will concern our Performance Manager to hear that an athlete would be discouraged by not being selected to represent Great Britain. The athlete's coach or mentor probably needs to work with the athlete to develop more intrinsic motivation rather than the extrinsic reward of wearing the track suit or getting on the plane with the team.

We have examples of athletes competing in international events and treating it as a holiday and social rather than an international competition, this does not help to create a 'performance culture' for other athletes or set a good example. As part of the programme, staff endeavour to develop a 'mastery-orientation' in athletes rather than an 'ego-orientation'. By improving their own skills, levels of fitness and therefore performance, many athletes will reach the standards required to represent Great Britain in international competition and have the satisfaction of knowing they are improving – and deserve selection.

⁹ Staff are passionate about their work and work many long hours. There is no doubt that we would love to have staff that are experts in their field and orienteers! However, you would expect us to employ the most capable staff that we can and these are often not orienteers. You also have to remember that for many funded positions we always have to involve funding partners and they are insistent that we employ the best candidate. I do think, if you talked to them, you would be surprised at how many of our staff are passionate about what they do and the sport.

Staff are passionate about their work and many work long hours – far more than they are paid for. When challenged on this point one staff member made the comment "It staggers me that people still think this way and believe you have to be physically participating to understand the sport and have a passion for what you are doing. In a previous job, as a smoking cessation advisor I helped over 1,000 people in 2 years to quit smoking...I've never smoked in my life!!"

Staff attend many meetings in and out of work hours as you would expect and some staff also attend events. All staff have their own personal interests out of work, 2 serious athletes, 1 rugby player etc and I think they deserve and have the right to be able to choose what they do during their leisure time.

I think we would agree that in many roles the ideal would be to have staff that are expert in their profession and orienteers. In reality, however, we always try to employ the people who will do the best job for us and that remains our overriding aim.

For senior positions, the recruitment process involves our funding partners and they insist that we offer roles to the person who demonstrates the strongest alignment to the job description and person specification as you would expect.

Lastly, I think you would be surprised at how passionate staff are about the sport of orienteering if you talk to them.

¹⁰ **WOC 2015 was organised by staff and members of British Orienteering; the Event Director was a consultant employed by us. Volunteers involved also came from across the UK. Regarding staff, almost all of our staff wanted desperately to attend! 4 staff members attended WOC in addition to the coaches/managers/medics etc. At a time when British Orienteering was under considerable financial pressure, a potential overspend of over £100,000 on the year was discussed in May/June, I took the decision with the Board's agreement that other staff would not be involved – we simply were not able to justify it on the basis of cost in such circumstances.**

Let's deal with the facts first; WOC 2015 was organised by staff and members of British Orienteering. The Event Director was a consultant providing a service to British Orienteering and paid by British Orienteering. The WOC Steering Group consisted of representatives of all the stakeholders. Certainly many of the organising committee live in Scotland, as you would expect, but equally there were members from England heavily involved in the organising committee and sub groups. Other staff were also heavily involved in the organisation and played significant parts behind the scenes to help the event be successful.

Regarding staff attendance at WOC; at one point I had the majority of staff wanting to attend and being able to justify their attendance and passionate to be involved. I raised this matter at a Board meeting early in 2015 and the Board were understanding of the dilemmas particularly bearing in mind it would be Sport England and members who would pay for staff attendance and time at WOC.

During May/June 2015 we were seeking to mitigate what could have been a loss on-year of over £100,000 for British Orienteering. I took the hard decision to say 'no' to many staff over their wish to attend WOC. Even ignoring staff time, it would have cost somewhere approaching £800 per staff member attending WOC. I brought this to the notice of the Board as I anticipated the potential raised eyebrows by members of staff not attending, the Board were supportive of the decision.

In the end, our Event Director, Performance Manager, Marketing Manager and Major Events Manager attended. Sally as Major Events Manager aligned it with a few days' holiday and partly paid for the pleasure herself. All the staff in attendance were actively working whilst at WOC. I personally took the decision that it was difficult to stop staff attending and then turn up myself and felt very comfortable with the knowledge that Martin Ward, Chair of British Orienteering, other Board members and some staff were present to represent British Orienteering.

Taking Jennie our Marketing Manager as an example, she worked at the World Orienteering Championships 2015, staying in a self-catering youth hostel, and attended all days of the Championships apart from the Sprint Qualifiers. She attended and enjoyed the excitement of the Opening Ceremony in Nairn and cheered on the GB team at the Mixed Sprint Relay. Jennie was present at the Sprint Finals where the electric of the stadium was incredible; personally congratulated Cat Taylor on her performance after the Middle race. In between races, Jennie worked at the Event Centre writing and issuing press releases, website news reports and social media updates. Like many she attended the last day of the World Championships and watched athletes competing in the Long race at Glen Affric, before getting on the train for a 7-hour journey on the Friday evening for home. Whilst in Scotland Jennie met with various Board members, athletes and members and gained a good insight into orienteering at the elite level.

¹¹ **British Orienteering and the development of orienteering in the UK has been and continues to be heavily subsidised by government funding. The Board is considering ways in which British Orienteering core business can be funded to reduce our reliance on government funding. In essence we agree with you that we would like a viable governing body (British Orienteering) that is able to meet its responsibilities without depending on Sport England funding. As you can see from these responses British Orienteering per se is not large and certainly not overstaffed – we do more by far than the staff funded by members/participants alone are able to do!**

The Board agree with you; our strategic plan should reflect and build on the needs of the sport and not be 'shaped' to align with government objectives and funding. No doubt over the coming months we are going to have many more discussions about future plans and this will determine the number of staff employed by British Orienteering and their roles.

Orienteering has been subsidised by government funding delivered through the various sports councils, this continues in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. I use the term subsidised carefully as there are effectively two types of funding; funding that is for the delivery of a programme and has the inherent targets that the delivery of the programme has to achieve. An example is the 'increasing participation' funding from Sport England that has challenging targets but is largely independent of the core business of British Orienteering. The second funding type is core funding that in theory underpins British Orienteering delivering the funded programmes but in reality funds a larger part of our core business that is for members.

Do you as members want orienteering to be a sport recognised as such by government and other sports or do you wish orienteering to be a group of people competing/participating in a sport that is effectively unrecognised? If we are a recognised sport, British Orienteering as the National Governing Body for Orienteering has a role and associated responsibilities that are many faceted.

The Board have decided that our strategic plan should reflect and build on the needs of the sport and not be 'shaped' to align with government objects and funding. No doubt over the coming months we are going to have many more challenging discussions about future plans and this will determine the number of staff employed by British Orienteering and their roles.