

An open letter to EHA/SHA affiliated clubs and members, and to the wider handball community



The athletes within the sports, including handball, cast aside by UK Sport's current investment policy have little hope for change as UK Sport looks ahead to Paris 2024.

Under the heading of 'Future Strategy', UK Sport's live consultation survey on future funding for Olympic and Paralympic sport illustrates that there is little appetite for change.

At the London 2012 Games, UK Sport invested the public's Lottery money into 70% of Olympic and Paralympic sports. At Rio 2016 this figure reduced to 64% and in Tokyo 2020, the investment is likely to be in the region of just 48% of sports. With less lottery investment predicted post 2020, UK Sports policy is fast becoming an exclusive club with fewer and fewer members allowed in.

This approach has to end and I am writing to you to urge you to have your say on how you want the future investment into the British elite sports system to be used. Should the current policy continue, the implications for handball are huge because our sport is not one that can deliver medal opportunities in the short-term.

Since London 2012, England and Scottish Handball have received grassroots funding from Sport England and Sport Scotland to help build on the legacy of the 2012 Games. We have seen great initiatives from EHA and SHA and as a result participation levels, especially among young people and schools, have increased dramatically. However because handball, and many other sports cannot guarantee a medal at the next Olympics, British Handball is repeatedly being denied any funding under UK Sport's 'no compromise' policy. As a result the development pathway for all our talented young players is being severely damaged and this could have a negative impact on the development of the sport as a whole, discouraging young players from taking-up handball.

It is a credit to our players and staff that the current GB programmes are largely self-funded and continue to improve with every year, but this is not sustainable.

Since UK Sport's investment decision in 2012, the impact on our programme has been significant:

- British Handball initially had to completely abandon all its GB national team programmes, undoing all the good work undertaken in the past six years. Many players retired or took a step back from handball
- In 2015 the decision was taken to restart the GB national team programmes on a self-funded basis, but this is costing our players and staff tens of thousands of pounds out of their own pockets and furthermore the level of activity is dictated by their ability to fund themselves
- We remain unable to provide our GB national team programmes with appropriate sports sciences support

Around 18 months ago, a group of Olympic and Paralympic sports came together around the concept that Every Sport Matters. The group strongly believe that:

- The existing approach to National Lottery funding of Britain's Olympic and Paralympic sports has created a two-class system that runs counter to Olympic ideals.
- Opportunities for elite British athletes in all Olympics and Paralympics sports need not run counter to the pursuit of medals. More sports competing and more athletes delivering more medals will make Great Britain even prouder.
- Medal targets alone should not be the sole criteria for funding because UK Sport has a responsibility to ensure that all our Olympic and Paralympic athletes are encouraged to achieve their potential and that a system of development opportunities should be there for all of them.
- An investment system should be developed whereby every Olympic and Paralympic sport would receive 'baseline funding' – this would protect the high-performance system in the UK. Sports would then receive individual investment beyond this based on their medal potential. If this approach were applied for the Tokyo Olympic cycle, the money required to provide baseline funding for those sports that are currently unfunded would represent a little over 1% of UK Sport's total budget of £550 million for the cycle.

What will happen to the British high-performance system if the current medal-winning sports stop winning medals and a generation of talent has not been able to develop and emerge from other sports? Surely, this is not the way to approach our future.

YOUR say will influence the next generation and we believe there is an opportunity to create a new, bold, inclusive goal to underpin the next 20+ years of participation in the Olympic and Paralympic Games: more sports (represented), more athletes (qualified) and more medals (won across more sports).

This goal can be achieved without sacrificing current medal success. But it will require a change in UK Sport's current approach to one in which the leading Olympic and Paralympic sports will continue to be rewarded but all sports and all Olympic and Paralympic athletes will have a chance to succeed.

You are all passionate about handball and I hope you are as proud as I am when our players step on court to represent their country, not just because of their achievements, but because we know it inspires kids to play in schools, more people to participate, more members to join clubs, more players who want to improve and more players who want to compete.

I want to support players who dream of following in the footsteps of our GB Teams at London 2012 games and every other player who sets out to make our sport proud.

I am calling on you all to have your say - <https://survey.euro.confirmit.com/wix/1/p1865845301.aspx> - in the hope that UK Sport, and the Government, will keep those dreams alive.

All the best

Paul Bray
Chairman, British Handball