

Report Summary

This report provides a summary of the background, observations, and recommendations of the recent 'Walk the Floor' Culture Healthcheck. The interim report was received in November 2021 and following a consultation period, the final report was received in January 2022. This, together with the action plan developed and agreed over the same period, provides the content for this summary report, which has been prepared by Badminton England.

Background

UK Sport conducts Culture Healthchecks for all funded organisations. Given the concerns that had been raised around Badminton's Olympic programme and the imminent return of UK Sport World Class funding, Badminton England, GB Badminton and UK Sport commissioned the review to take place immediately after the Tokyo games. Specifically, the Healthcheck was to:

- a) provide specific feedback and recommendations to accelerate a sustainable "medals and more" culture in the GB World Class Programme (WCP) in the Paris cycle and beyond and
- b) observe and appraise the current state of affairs in relation to World Class Programme culture, taking into account additional specific questions requested by Badminton England and GB Badminton.

To gain a view of the programme as a whole, Badminton England requested that players and coaches from the England Performance Programme, as well as the World Class Programme, were included in the review. Between 16th and 20th September 2021, a 7-person panel travelled to Milton Keynes National Badminton Centre (NBC), the team split on 21st September, with four individuals travelling to the English Institute of Sport (EIS), Sheffield for 21st September to visit the Paralympic programme, while the rest of the panel remained at the NBC. A range of observations, 1-1 conversations and focus groups were completed during these visits.

A total of 69 participants contributed overall, including current and former players, senior leaders, coaches, and support staff.

Report Findings

The report makes eight observations and six recommendations, the vast majority of which relate to the Milton Keynes-based Olympic Programme. It also asked the 69 contributors to rate various aspects of both the Olympic and Paralympic programmes.

Observations

The observations below are from the Milton Keynes based Olympic Programme:

1. **Concerns regarding mental health and well-being** of players and coaches, and specifically how it is actively monitored and acted upon. Numerous examples of mental health needs were raised to the panel, with support staff stretched and several "near misses".
2. Previous funding constraints leading to the **absence of multi-disciplinary team (MDT) practice in support of athletes**, evidenced by the absence of robust athlete training load processes, well-being and mental health monitoring, collaborative training programming and communication. The gap in provision compared to other sports is now even wider, given the significant advances during the period where the programme was streamlined due to funding constraints.
3. Linked to the above, **the absence of a clear process to support systematic athlete induction, development, and transition, underpinned by a clear performance journey and appropriate care**, leading to a varied level of understanding in players on the performance environment and their own development plans.
4. **Little evidence of a systematic, collaborative, and transparent performance planning process**, and while performance planning takes place, there is little collaboration with players and other external partners and stakeholders.

5. **Poor relationships and inconsistent communication between and from senior leaders**, who were pulled into additional responsibilities that have had a negative effect on the key duties of delivering good practice in the training environment as well as effective communication.
6. The performance environment has a **complexity in leadership and governance that negatively affects the smooth operation of the World Class Programme**. Adopting a similar approach to other sports' World Class Programmes would improve consistency and transparency, and free up senior leadership capacity to focus on enhancing the training environment.
7. The coaching team is predominantly male, long-serving, and from a similar elite playing background, which has contributed to a feeling of unequal treatment of **Females in the World Class Programme**. The close working and personal relationship within the coaching team has normalised certain behaviours that were reported as discomforting for players on the programme, especially females and junior athletes.
8. Clear evidence that issues and player concerns over the programme were widely felt and long-standing, and that the fallout around Olympic Team **selection was a triggering event illuminating existing date-to-day challenges**. There was evidence of inappropriate behaviour by all parties (players, coaches, and senior leaders), and while there was no desire for any issues to be progressed formally, there is a clear need to complete the mediation process to repair relationships between various people involved in the programme.

Ratings

The table below shows the mean ratings given by the 69 contributors for the Olympic and Paralympic programmes (out of 5, unless stated otherwise):

Question	Olympic	Paralympic
The effectiveness of the senior leadership	2.03	4.88
Athletes, coaches, and support staff working together	2.58	4.75
Athletes and Athletes working together	3.61	5.00
The effectiveness of line management	2.48	4.88
Opportunities to give feedback without fear of negative consequences	2.13	4.75
I feel cared about as a person by all those around me	2.70	4.88
People are consistent	2.74	4.75
I have confidence in the future direction of the World Class Programme	2.39	5.00
There are consequences for Inappropriate Behaviour	2.23	4.88
The pride people feel to be part of the World Class Programme	3.03	4.75
To what extent would you recommend the World Class Programme to others*(/10)	5.42	9.88

It is clear that the majority of respondents felt that the Olympic programme was poor in a number of aspects, particularly the effectiveness of the senior leadership and a perception that feeding back could have negative consequences. The report noted that while there was a stark difference between the ratings of the Paralympic and Olympic programmes, they are very different in scale and maturity, and so care should be taken not to simply seek to apply systems and processes from one to the other, and a more nuanced and considered approach was needed.

Recommendations and our actions

Further to the above issues, the report makes a series of recommendations. These are set out below, together with commitments on actions to improve the environment:

1. **Proactively safeguard welfare with immediate change to some reported practice**, by ensuring safeguarding protocols are developed, clearly communicated, and appropriately implemented.

Badminton England's Response

While robust policies and procedures are in place, the issues outlined in the report demonstrate a clear need to change the culture, ensure policies are adhered to and to agree professional standards for all parties in and around the training environment.

We have already...

- *Fully investigated all examples raised in the report.*
- *Ensured all relevant policies are up to date, compliant and fit for purpose.*

We will...

- *Continue our continuous development programme for coaches, including safeguarding, mental health first aid, and external mentoring*
- *Widen the above training to include players wherever possible.*
- *Co-create a code of conduct / charter between players and coaching / support team to set out the desired performance culture.*
- *Create an internal audit process to ensure the 'Charter' and all relevant policies and procedures are regularly shared and continue to be adhered to in practice.*
- *Proactively include sport psychology for all, rather than an optional intervention.*

2. To improve the current relationships between individuals on the programme, **offer well-being and psychological support followed by a change and reconciliation process.**

Badminton England's Response

The report highlights challenges around a breakdown in some relationships within the programme. Mediation was started, but all agreed to pause while players focussed on a series of world tour events and the report was finalised, which would provide objective opinion to help complete the mediation process.

We have already...

- *Engaged with the Athletes Commission and commenced independent mediation with affected coaches and players*
- *Limited contact between affected parties to minimize further harm until mediation can be completed*
- *Brought in an in-house wellbeing professional to work with affected individuals*
- *Offered sports psychology support on referral from Chief Medical Officer (CMO)*
- *Replaced the retiring CMO, with additional presence at the National Badminton Centre to foster relationships*

We will...

- *Complete the mediation process as soon as all parties are available (January 2022)*
- *Commence Performance Lifestyle support*
- *Reiterate the availability of clinical and sports psychology support for affected parties*
- *Use the mediation process to agree enhanced and permanent lines of communication between all parties*

3. Undertake a review of the leadership and governance structure of the WCP.

Badminton England's Response

The report raises valid observations over the quantity and complexity of governance requirements around the running of the programmes, which had a net effect of reducing the Performance Director role's focus on the performance environment itself.

We have already...

- *Reviewed the role and responsibilities of the vacant Performance Director role to refocus on developing and enhancing the performance system, rather than governance requirements*
- *Revised job descriptions to reflect the above*
- *Launched a Female Leadership Programme, in partnership with UK Coaching, to help develop female coaching and leadership talent.*

We will...

- *Recruit a new Performance Director with exceptional elite badminton experience and fitting cultural values*
- *Review subsequent changes in Programme leadership in terms of roles, responsibilities, and job descriptions.*
- *Review the Governance requirements from Badminton England and GB Badminton to ensure they are clear and as efficient as possible, while retaining their robustness*

4. Integrate coherent world class Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) support, including industry standards for sports science, medicine and wider support, to safeguard the welfare and advance performance through effective monitoring processes.

Badminton England's Response

Multi-Disciplinary Team support is something that we are currently rebuilding, after having to be removed when the 'Skeleton' Performance programme was self-funded after Rio 2016, and only limited ad hoc support could be offered. While fit-for-purpose systems and processes were in place, the skeleton nature of the support clearly hindered their effective delivery and led to a poor level of internal communication.

We have already...

- *Audited the existing systems and processes around athlete programming*
- *Designed an MDT structure, to be resourced through a combination of new staff and EIS contracted support*
- *Designed a structure of 'personal support' to supplement the 'sporting support' structure above*

We will...

- *Consult on the proposed structure with players and/or representatives to ensure it is comprehensive for their needs*
- *Complete the recruitment of the team, with player input, and using best practice open recruitment processes. Once recruitment is completed, it is anticipated that over 50% of the direct player support team will be new staff*
- *Identify and implement global best practice to guide our reintroduction of an athlete-centred and science-influenced programme*
- *Introduce a 'case conference' model between a player and the MDT to consult on their individual training and development plan*
- *Improve 2-way communication through the above to ensure comprehensive load monitoring is in place*

5. **Integrate World Class Performance processes**, with particular emphasis on clear communication and transparency with willingness to change from all parties.

Badminton England's Response

While the environment has suffered through being self-funded for the previous Olympic cycle, the report highlights that expectations and best practice has advanced during this period. The expectations of society have also changed, and the programme needs to transform its ethos and culture to be fit for purpose.

We have already...

- Introduced a new and more robust player planning process which builds on the profiling tool we developed and introduced in 2020*

We will...

- Recruit a new world-class Performance Director to oversee the evolution of the performance system and culture*
- Co-create a player-coach charter to agree the culture, values, and behaviours of the World Class Programme*
- Update all relevant job descriptions to set out clear values and behaviours to adhere to*
- Implement performance measurement to ensure standards, once implemented, are effective and maintained*
- Implement a system that continually educates the player support team on global best practice*
- Redesign the player induction process, to ensure full understanding of the environment and mutual expectations*
- Implement a holistic player education programme, ranging from financial management and life skills to sport science essentials, both to enhance their playing development as well as preparing and equipping them for when they exit the programme*

6. Finally, the only recommendation relating to the Sheffield-based Paralympic programme, where we should **provide targeted support from GB Badminton to the Paralympic programme leadership and general outreach support for non-centralised coaches and players within the Olympic system**. The focus is on ensuring the Paralympic programme continues to thrive as it evolves and expands.

Badminton England's Response

We are proud of the Paralympic Programme and this report provides additional reassurance over a programme that delivers exceptional results both on and off the court. The challenge remains continuing this success as we look to grow and evolve the programme over the coming cycles.

We have already...

- Established the position of Performance Support Lead to coordinate the Support Services of the programme*

We will...

- Through the WCP Leadership review and revised job descriptions, a senior Badminton England leadership role will have the lead function included for the Para-badminton World Class Programme and Pathway*
- Invest in continuous training and development of the player support team*

Over and above the recommendations raised by the report, we have determined a number of other actions that will help to enhance the programme:

We have already...

- *Commenced a 'system review' to analyse the effectiveness of future talent development*
- *Commissioned architects to create concepts for the development of the National Badminton Centre, with a view to improving the environment and enhance the desirability of the programme*
- *Agreed an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy, to drive changes within Badminton England in terms of diversity of representation and inclusivity in all areas of the organisation (and wider sport)*

We will...

- *Consult with players and coaches on plans to develop the National Badminton Centre to ensure they enhance and support the programme and make it a space that people want to use and be a part of*
- *Embed player representation in our governance structure to ensure views are 'front and centre' in decision making at all levels*
- *Investigate and implement effective ways of preparing players for when they exit full-time badminton, to ensure they have a smooth transition.*
- *As a part of our wider Badminton England work, made internal communication a core requirement of every role and performance appraisal.*
- *Enhance the role of players as Ambassadors, internally as aspiring player mentors, and externally with local outreach and promotion of social causes*
- *Enhance our communications to give greater insight into and transparency of the Milton Keynes training environment for the public*