

Chairman's Report – Mark Ridsdale

Introduction

Once again, welcome to the Welsh Fencing AGM, this time using technology at its finest. When we incorporated back in 2011, we introduced this option in the Articles, which means that we are now able to use the technology to support such important governance meetings. We have also been able to use it to support our Board Meetings – something that would not have been possible under our old Articles – and the various meetings to support our pandemic response. This has opened up opportunities that we previously more challenging. For example, I have been able to attend the recent BF Board Meeting (admittedly only usually in London), but more impressive was attendance at the Commonwealth Fencing Federation AGM, running out of Australia. I think we will continue this for future AGMs, because it will give access to a wider audience, even if we can use go face-to-face. For Board Meetings, we have increased them to bi-monthly from quarterly, both in respect of the importance of managing guidance through the pandemic but also recognising it's just much easier. We have also been able to schedule some very quick ad-hoc meetings – something quite difficult normally.

I plan to cover off my normal topics of governance, safeguarding, and volunteering, plus the ever-present pandemic topic.

Pandemic

I think we should start with the pandemic, and our approach to managing it. Early on, we were invited to join a cohort of sports, meeting together with the Welsh Sports Association. They were acting on behalf of Sport Wales in an advocacy role, representing all sports in communication with the Welsh Government. This gave us a single voice, plus a route to raise questions about interpretation. This has worked pretty well, unlike in Scotland where some sports tried to go direct. That wasn't well received. Overall, I have been fairly content with the approach, although not necessarily the results, as it has left us in a difficult position in having different rules from England. All the sports had difficulty with this. We were also invited to join a subgroup, focused on indoor sports, once again sharing best practice. Those meetings have been run over Zoom, every 3 weeks or so, in cadence with the Government communications. We rarely received advance notice of what was to be communicated, unless it was something specific we needed time to prepare for.

Our overall aim, at all times, has been to best understand **how** we can deliver on the regulations put in place by the Welsh Government, and not **whether we should**. We may not necessarily agree with them, but we have a responsibility to conform. I think we have a long way to go yet. The recent BF

Board Meeting included feedback from the DCMS, who are anticipating a very difficult February and March following Christmas. BF are starting to see memberships no longer being renewed, which will inevitably cause difficulties down the line. I would urge you to maintain your membership, unless you really can't afford it. While we get a cut of that fee, it's slightly less of an issue to us, as we don't have the ongoing costs of BF required to support the sport.

We opted early on to use the website as our primary communication, as it's visible to everyone, as and when they need it. Our guidance was also included on the BF site, and SW. We have tried to keep it as up-to-date as possible. I have occasionally had queries (although, frankly, no more than a couple), that required me to dig deeper into the regulations and .gov notifications. Where that happened, I carried those updates into our comms on the website. We also arranged Board calls to make sure we were joined-up in that guidance, and to make sure we had a shared understanding.. We considered running Zoom calls for the clubs, but concluded that there wasn't a great benefit, or even a demand. All the guidance is available online, and we are all at the end of an email if there were any queries.

We will continue with this process for as long as it takes.

Governance

I mentioned last year that the Sport Wales Investment Model was changing, and that the implementation would be phased in. The first stage was introduced last year, and required a much more 'light touch' approach. I explained that we have to self-certify against seven key questions, enabling us to submit funding requests. We did exactly that last year, and to support it Caroline & I met the SW team & their consultants to review our financial procedures. That went very well. We provided all the evidence to demonstrate that our processes were solid, and they were shocked when we provided a 5-year financial plan. I don't think they had received one before. It's important for us because of the various Commonwealth cycles, with junior and cadet on 3 year cycles, and senior/vet on 4 year cycles. We need to save up in the 'off' years to cover the costs in the 'on' years. It's now time to re-submit for the upcoming year, so that's a piece of work to complete in the next few weeks. Also, as part of the new Framework, we have been asked to undertake a Governance Review in 2021, so we will be working with GSports Consulting and Sport Wales to complete that. That's something that Matt and I will lead on.

Safeguarding

I don't have a lot to say, as Tania will be covering this off. It's a key leg of our capability framework, so critical to our ongoing funding. There have also been changes in process, that will change the way dbs are managed, including the use of Vibrant Nation, the commercial arm of WSA. These are changes driven by British Fencing, but that will hopefully streamline the process for everyone. The process will be portal-driven, rather than paper-based. You will hear more about that later. While I'm in this section, can I just thank Michael for his diligent work in this space. Its often misunderstood, but critically important. He has done a great job over many years, and I certainly want to offer him my thanks as he steps down from this role at the end of the year.

Volunteers

I always talk about volunteers, and this year is going to be no different. They are fundamental to our existence. Pretty much everyone involved in fencing in any way in Wales volunteer. Whether you are helping manage governance, as do we on the Board, or running a club, or organising events, or fixing weapons – all volunteers.

I want to just highlight a few.:

- Certainly everyone on the Board – my thanks to you – for helping to manage the sport;
- to our armourers, who support many of the Welsh events, ensuring everyone's weapon are 'fit for purpose'. So thanks to Nigel & Simon, also to Michael at the Welsh
- To Michael for managing our membership data and dbs process. This is always a challenge interfacing to the ever-changing world of Sport80
- To Gethin, the face of our Twitter Social media (particularly the Welsh face)

I also want to talk about the Welsh Open. This is one of the few 6W events still running (with the Birmingham International) & the Senior British Nationals, and the next event is scheduled to be the 50th. We will continue to run this in its current format (provided we can!) as it always generates positive feedback. Fencers love coming to Wales because of the way we put them at the heart of the event, ensuring they are well looked after, with quality referees, quality armourers, a quality hall, good pistes & great organisation. Organised by Allan, well supported by Tom & Sarah, and offering full electronic checkin & online results. Allan has now stepped down as he is no longer a Board member, but we have a cunning plan to keep him involved.

I will close with just a few personal comments. I have really enjoyed my 4 years, but I have always believed that this role should rotate, to breathe new life and ideas into the organisation.

I look forward to supporting Matt's Chairmanship (which actually hasn't been formally announced yet) in any way that I can. I wish him all the very best in the next four years.

Mark Ridsdale

Financial Statement – Caroline Wheeler

The financial statements reflect the transactions of the year ended 31 March 2020 and include accrued amounts for the period.

As expected this year has been better financially. We had no major additional international events so our costs were lower falling from £40,340 last year to £8,507. All of these costs relate to the 2020 Poland trip which was unfortunately cancelled due to the pandemic. We have received £5,145 towards these costs as fencer contributions. We hope that our credit with Traveleads will be able to be used in the future.

The costs of Domestic events has also fallen from £39,549 to £24,522. This is because some events were organized at a lower cost.

Competition entry fees of £27,414 is also lower than last year, as with fewer events taking place income is less.

We were pleased to receive the same £18,000 grant from Sport Wales but our talent Cymru grant was reduced from £3,000 to only £1,000, all of the talent Cymru grant has been distributed to the individual fencers

Income from membership subscriptions has fallen from £8,440 to £7,820, we often see a drop in membership following a Commonwealth year as some fencers chose to affiliate to Wales for the commonwealth year only. However in the current year membership has continued to fall as fencing activities have not been possible during the current restrictions.

We have continued to provide subsidised coaching events including first aid courses spending £3,290 on these areas and collecting in a nominal sum of £90 towards the costs. Our intention is to continue to heavily subsidise all coaching and training events as we believe this is of benefit to all fencers whether elite or grassroots.

The £550 repair costs relate to having our equipment checked and maintained by armourers.

Administration costs have remained stable as although the depreciation charge has fallen we have spent more on other areas in particular we stocked up on medals. The general admin costs includes the purchase of medals, tea and coffee for Board meetings, train travel for attendance at meetings and other minor expenditure.

Included with in the administration costs is £155.61p which relates to the costs of tea and coffee when the Board meets, tea and coffee for the AGM and room hire.

Overall we have returned a surplus of £9,958, which goes some small way to recouping last year's deficit of £29,857.

The Directors are not remunerated, and the Company does not operate a PAYE scheme. Occasional out of pocket expenses are reimbursed to the Board executive members on receipt of a valid invoice. In the year ended 31 March 2020 no amounts were paid to Directors in their capacity as a Director, some Directors supported Welsh Fencing events in the role of team manager and were then reimbursed for their costs in respect of those specific events.

Our balance sheet shows we hold funds of £57,995 in cash at the bank and £6,185 in assets.

The Board regularly reviews the financial position of our organisation and carefully considers how to allocate funds to obtain the best value and return for Welsh Fencing. Although this year has seen

Welsh Fencing return to a surplus the Board is not complacent as we recognise that the current year will be challenging in a different way and that we will need to fund commonwealth events in 2021/22 so will need to improve our reserves further to support our fencers. We have met with Sport Wales representatives twice this year when our financial procedures and resilience have been reviewed and we have been happy with both the results of these reviews and the support that we have received from the staff at Sport Wales.

Director Report – Fran Russell

In normal circumstances, we would now be getting ready to select the team for the 2021 Cadet and Junior Commonwealth Championships, in the usual way of using the current and up to date GB rankings for the cadet and junior age groups. This year the board recognised that there may need to be a different approach due to the lack of competitions that have taken place. The rankings as they stand, unchanged from the end of the last season in April, may not reflect what might have been, if not for the disruption surrounding the Covid-19 situation. We agreed that a different approach would be needed this year.

With this in mind, I proposed to the board the idea that we should first see who was available and hoping to be selected. Without competitions we have no way of knowing who is still active, with the last selections we made being in January for the Youth Five Nations. The idea of the Declaration of interest was to tell us who we needed to consider, where they were at the end of last season, and where they realistically hoped to be by this point where selection would be happening. This was to be backed up by coach testimonials and evidence of continued training over the lockdown period.

The rest of the plan is still a working progress, but the next stage will be an opportunity for the selected coaches to meet the athletes hoping to go, and assess their suitability for the trip. Using as much resources as available including the information provided by the athletes, the coaches professional evaluation, and 2020 starting rankings, as well as any previous performances for Wales, the team will be selected by the board, with those who need to abstain due to conflict of interests doing so.

We appreciate this isn't perfect, what selection process is? But we believe that to respond to the situation as it is, this year we need to show flexibility in how we select for this important event.

We plan to be as transparent and open as possible about the process, and make it a positive experience for all involved, whether selected or not.

If the event runs in 2021 as originally planned, the board hope to petition Sport Wales, permission for the team to be able to receive lessons from their coach, and spar between each other on selected training days, in order to correctly prepare for this high level event. We agree that it would be irresponsible to send a team to India that are not properly ready or have not had a reasonable amount of training before they go.

This is obviously all up in the air, surrounded by many what ifs and the chance that the event may be postponed a year until 2022. In this instance, we will still look to select on time for the fencers to have as much time as possible to ready themselves.

I hope we will have more news for you soon, but in the mean time I urge any one who is interested in attending the event, whether as staff or fencer, to email me at secretary@welshfencing.org and put your name in the hat. We don't have all the answers to the many questions you may have, but we will be as supportive and informative as we can be.

Thank you.

Welsh Fencing Safeguarding 2019-20 – Tania Craig

- Due to Covid it's been a very quiet year.
- Had two cases referred to me as Safeguarding Lead, both dealt with successfully, in conjunction with the relevant club.
- Even though few clubs are meeting and fencing at the current time, please remind your members (especially the U18s) that if they have any worries or concerns they can still come and ask for help through their clubs. Mental health has become a great concern during the lockdowns and we need to maintain contact with all our members at this challenging time.
- Training has gone on line and this seems to be working well. Please keep an eye on the WF website for dates of any upcoming courses.
- From January 2021 DBS checks will be done as an online application through Vibrant Nation (who British Fencing use). Instructions were sent to all clubs from British Fencing last year, but I will resend to all clubs in readiness for the changeover. This will also give people the opportunity to sign up for the online update service, which will support clubs moving forward and it allows for movement of DBS clearance more easily from club to club ie. If you coach at two different clubs you will only need the one DBS completed **IF** you sign up to the update service and you give access to this to both clubs.
- Can I take this opportunity to remind clubs that as the Safeguard Lead for Welsh Fencing you can come to me at any point for advice, support etc. My contact details are on the website.