



House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee

London 2012 Games : the next lap Sixth Report of Session 2007–08

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its associated public bodies.

Summary

Page 6

We also call on the Department to make representations to the International Paralympic Committee to lift the ban on allowing athletes with a learning disability to compete in the Paralympic Games.

Athletes with an intellectual disability

193. One distinct issue which was brought to our attention was the position of athletes who have an intellectual disability and who are at present banned from participating in Paralympic Games. The ban stems from a decision by the International Paralympic Committee, taken after it had been established that the Spanish basketball team competing at the Paralympic Games in Sydney in 2000 had included members falsely claiming to suffer from an intellectual disability.

194. The consequences of the ban are far-reaching. Grant aid for the development of elite athletes' talent is predicated on their potential to participate in competition at the highest level, namely Olympic or Paralympic Games. As a result of the ban, neither the national governing body for athletes with a learning disability—UKSA—nor individual athletes can receive grant aid for performance development from UK Sport. Few athletes with a learning disability can afford to cover the costs of training from their own resources, and little, therefore, is being done to improve their performance. In theory, such athletes can compete in world-class events not held under the auspices of the International Paralympic Committee; but, to do so, they need to undergo the process of registration and certification drawn up by the international governing body for athletes with a learning disability, INAS FID. The UK Sports Association (UKSA) pointed out that the cost of this process ranged from £300 to £1,000 for each athlete, beyond the means of most. Because of the decline

in grant aid which UKSA is receiving, its resources are dwindling and it is no longer in a position to pay for athletes' registration and certification.

195. The UK Sports Association for People with Learning Disabilities argued strongly in evidence to us that the ban should be lifted without delay, as athletes genuinely suffering from an intellectual disability were being denied the chance to take part in competition with their peers. We were told that the former Secretary of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had been asked to support the ending of the ban but that her response had been "evasive"

196. We raised the matter with witnesses. LOCOG told us that it was "absolutely behind" efforts to resolve the problem in time for the 2012 Games, and it recognised the need for resolution well in advance of competition. The British Paralympic Association (BPA) said that it believed "wholeheartedly" that athletes with an intellectual disability should be part of the Games but only under "fair and consistent rules which are comparable to those of the other disability organisations". The BPA had urged the International Paralympic Committee to set a target of 2012 for readmission and had urged that the decision should be taken soon so as to enable athletes to train and receive development support. The Minister agreed that the issue needed to be addressed, although he added that "it may mean that we have to look for some investment in trying to sort out the definitions". His impression, however, was that there was a general willingness to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

197. We accept that action needed to be taken in the light of flagrant abuse of the rules of sporting competition. However, the ban must one day be lifted. We note the statement by the British Paralympic Association that the ban will need to be lifted by January 2009 if athletes with an intellectual disability are to be equipped to compete in the 2012 Paralympic Games.

Conclusions and recommendations

³⁵⁸

39. It is unfair that athletes with a genuine learning disability who have reached their peak in performance since 2000 have had no chance to compete at Paralympic Games and only limited opportunities to compete at the highest level in other theatres. Their chance will not come again. The ban imposed by the International Paralympic Committee is no longer just a punishment: it now appears discriminatory.

We recommend that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport should make representations to the International Paralympic Committee that to prolong the ban would be totally unacceptable and that the time has come to show flexibility and to take the steps necessary to enable athletes with a learning disability to compete at the Paralympic Games in London in 2012.

Extract from the Report of the DCMS Select Committee Enquiry into the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games – published 30th April 2008.

Read the full report in Volume 1 and the formal minutes of the Enquiry in Volume 2 at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcmds.htm#reports