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Board Meeting - 12 June 2020

**Board Paper No. [1]**

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| --- | --- |
| **For Decision** | **Recommendation**  Board members asked for feedback. |
| **For Monitoring** |
| **For Information** |

**DIRECTOR’S REPORT**

**Overview**

After a positive strategic board event at Old Milton, Kingussie, on 12-14 March, attended by eight of 11 board members plus adviser Iain More, the focus for the Observatory for Sport in Scotland was swiftly altered in common with most organisations by the arrival of the COVID-19 coronavirus and government decision to enforce a nationwide lockdown. This was enacted on 23 March, a fortnight after the OSS Away Days, and remained in place until 28 May.

With widespread concern around the impact of lockdown on physical activity and long-term future of sport, leisure and recreation, I felt that the value of OSS could become clearer in this period by shifting priorities to respond more obviously to COVID-19 and fresh uncertainties across the community sport sector in Scotland.

We looked at three clear objectives:

1. Raise awareness of OSS and its ability to bring clarity through academic research, evidence and analysis to the sport, leisure and recreation sectors;
2. Strengthen relations, and grow contacts and credibility with key stakeholders from government to community levels; and
3. Increase OSS fundraising potential through positive steps in the first two objectives.

To achieve this, we planned work to:

1. Produce short-term research surveys to fill knowledge gaps and provide interesting content;
2. Launch a series of online webinars to bring together key stakeholders and position OSS as an opinion leader and facilitator;
3. Develop and shape research projects to take cognisance of COVID-19 and be relevant to potential funders; and
4. Install a new CRM system to bring strategic focus to stewarding existing donors, potential donors and fundraising programmed, and capitalise on new contacts generated.

At all times, we sought to keep the work focus closely aligned to the OSS Strategic Pillars - Evidence & Analysis, Influencing, Organisation and Sustainability. In this report, I seek to outline how we have developed since March board meeting, progress that has been achieved and challenges experienced.

The one key area that remains a concern is finance. The arrival of coronavirus postponed two meetings with prospective donors nurtured through 2019 (Dunedin LLP and Hampden & Co Bank), who had indicated interest in donations of around £10,000-£20,000 each, of core plus research funding. Both postponed discussions until autumn 2020.

The development of a new CRM system and re-shaping of research plans has also impacted on approaches to donors, however, the launch of a new Fundraising Strategy and OSS stewardship programme in June is a key priority.

**STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT**

1. **EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS**

**Progress**

Due to the challenges around producing quality content with which to establish OSS credibility in research, evidence and analysis, I have been developing a ‘third way’ in 2020, guided by RAG members. So, our research content now focuses on:

1. Developing existing and re-shaped research projects; (costing 5k-200k)
2. Commissioning and developing existing and new research papers (costing 1k+); and
3. Collating research from a variety of sources in Scotland and around world, and sharing on OSS website a regular diet of articles, think pieces and less academic ‘research’ (at no cost).

This has enabled us to build our content and communications, and grow from 13 website articles in 2017-18 to 18 in 2019 and 60 in the 23 weeks of 2020 to date, working to publish at least two new articles per week.

Nick Rowe’s research (June) and the November Summit event attracted widespread national media coverage, and, as well as publishing monthly newsletters, we now have three social media channels in Twitter (619), LinkedIn (160) and Facebook (170) – follower numbers in brackets - to share research, evidence and analysis, stimulate discussion and widen awareness of OSS.

Four papers, that represent our high-quality, academic sport research/analysis USP, have so far been published on the OSS website in 2020:

* *Sport and Social Inequality* Research Paper written by Professor Tess Kay (30 March)
* *Sport, Obesity and the Coronavirus: A Tale of Two Epidemics,* written by Nick Rowe (28 April)
* *Sport Participation and Ageing,* written by Professor Richard Davison (12 May)
* *Gender and Sport,* written by Jane Dennehy of the Gender Hub (4 June)

The portfolio of research projects produced in 2018 have been re-examined by Nick Rowe, Richard Davison and myself, and updated, added to and re-shaped to provide variety of projects and costs, in an effort to align more closely with new knowledge gaps and attract funding. We have produced shorter outlines for wider sharing and more detailed versions are in production.

As part of re-imagining research projects, Nick persuaded his son Tom to review the ‘Sport Research Information Hub’ idea. This had a 25k price tag, for a sophisticated, staffed hub. However, we looked to combine this with desire to organise new website content and create a ‘Research Library’, within existing means and, with support from website manager Lesley Duncan, this launched on the OSS website, with over 30 articles, including eagerly sought research and analysis related to COVID-19.

**Challenges & Solutions**

The OSS system of commissioning and publishing research is convoluted and lacking in clarity and responsibility. The first OSS research, produced by Nick Rowe, Prof Simon Shibli and Dr Larissa Davies, was published in June and July 2019, despite being completed up to nine months earlier. The delay dated research based on 2016-17 figures. Nick re-wrote his research to include 2019 figures, enabling us to garner coverage for him and OSS across national and local newspapers, and BBC Scotland, but it was not possible for others to do this for the £1,000 paper fee.

Plans to publish new research in August, September, October and November, and use to raise awareness of the OSS National Sport Summit, ran aground on research delays. All have been published in the past four months.

Key issues identified:

* Lack of agreed Research Commissioning Strategy, deadlines and expectations of authors
* Lack of resource to manage research process and contributors, and unrealistic expectations placed on research consultant and volunteers
* Lack of knowledge of Director of time required for research from start to publication.

Solutions:

* Commissioning strategy written by RAG Chair Nick Rowe and Richard Davison to be agreed by RAG and followed for all future research papers;
* Projects to have clear research contract agreed and signed by all parties;
* Research paper process streamlined to reduce timely peer review, to one peer;
* Sourced four researchers (OSS Research Assistants) to help with data collation and analysis, and writing of reports and articles, from recently graduated Masters students;
* Now educated on fluidity of research, OSS Director will seek to manage all papers and projects, utilising guidance and support of Nick Rowe, RAG Chair, and RAG members when available, until research position can be funded.

1. **INFLUENCING**

The Summit strengthened OSS credibility, and early 2020 follow-up meetings with stakeholders improved understanding of wider research need. COVID-19 lockdown led to stakeholders “battening down the hatches”, but we have worked hard to maintain contact.

This includes over 40 online meetings with key stakeholders and involvement in external webinars, a strong submission to government consultation on the new National Planning Framework (NPF4) written by board member and former planner Bob Reid, and seeking of further opportunities to support and influence government, sport organisations and individuals.

That work secured meetings with the Scottish Government’s Interim Director of Policy for the inaugural Cycling World Championships 2023 ([more info](https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/about/article/20190208-about-bc-news-Scotland-to-host-inaugural-UCI-Cycling-World-Championships-in-2023-0)), Joel Lavery, involving myself, Nick Rowe, Richard Davison and Fiona Reid. After lengthy, but positive discussions, we were asked to produce a proposal for a 4/5-year research project, 2021-2025, exploring the event’s and stakeholders’ ability to produce a lasting legacy of cycling in Scotland. Nick and Richard, with RAG support, are developing proposal for presentation to Scottish Government in early June.

**Stakeholder meetings**

**Fundraising**

* Douglas Smith – financial adviser
* Douglas Noble – financial adviser
* Ricky Cowan – AAB Director
* OSS Business Advisory Group

**Policy**

* Andy Sinclair and Caspian Richards - Scottish Government Active Scotland Division
* Suzanne Hargreaves – Education Scotland
* Joel Lavery – SG Director of Policy Cycling World Championships 2023
* Gavin Leask - Improvement Service
* Jude Reid – Senscot
* Anthony McReavy – VOCAL (Voice of Culture and Leisure)
* Morten Kabell – European Cycling Federation CEO

**Sport**

* Stewart Harris, Forbes Dunlop & David Williamson - sportscotland CEO, COO, Head Strategy
* Keith Russell – CEO, Badminton Scotland
* Craig Burn – CEO, Scottish Cycling
* Judy Murray – Scottish tennis
* Gregor Muir - Scottish Sports Association
* Gail Prince - Scottish ClubSport
* Ann Park - Hearts FC
* Svend Elkjaer – UK sports consultant
* Alistair Gray – former chair sportscotland, British Swimming, hockey, basketball; Winning Scotland Foundation board; Professor at Strathclyde Uni; & Euro sports consultant.

**Research**

* Remco Hoekman, Fiona Reid, Maja Pilgaard, Brett Hutchins, Shirley Gray and David Kirk
* Tom Rowe, Ryan Brown & Oliver Thomson - OSS research assistants
* Neil Ross & Brian McLaren – local authority & trust research consultants
* Mark Thomson - TRKR research company
* Aidan Gallacher – Actify Scottish digital research hub

**Leisure trust sector**

* Robin Strang & Kirsty Cumming – Community Leisure Scotland Chair & Manager
* Billy Garrett – Director of Sport & Events, Glasgow Life

**Private sector**

* Scottish Leisure Network
* Jonny Curley, CEO Origin Fitness
* Les Mills UK Scottish Manager Ian McGregor

**Media**

* Magnus Llewellin – Times Scotland Editor
* Jason Allardyce – Sunday Times Scotland Editor
* Frank O’Donnell – Scotsman Editor-in-Chief / now DC Thomson Editor-in-Chief, Aberdeen
* Geoff Webster – BBC Scotland Sports Producer/Presenter

1. **ORGANISATION**

**Board**

In the shift of responsibilities proposed by the Executive and agreed by the Board in December, to better support OSS staff, the Chair has taken on responsibility for closer liaison with and updating of board members, and I report to Vice-Chair and treasurer Richard Davison.

Richard and I have fortnightly catch-ups on OSS business, with more frequent discussions in the past three months around finance, and the development of research and webinars related to COVID-19.

The Executive Committee has met on four occasions since last board meeting (23 March, 24 April, 22 May and 3 June), and myself and Cécile share minute-taking, and preparing of agendas and papers.

**Staffing**

OSS continues to operate with two full-time staff – myself as director and Cécile Dermit as Programme Officer. As well as leading on the development of the eTapestry CRM system (see below under Sustainable), Cécile manages the Fundraising Committee in conjunction with Chair Stuart Armstrong, overseen by me. Since 16 March, OSS has engaged Tom Rowe as a part-time research assistant on a three-month contract to 5 June (£700 per month), involving writing articles, researching and collating of research for an OSS Research Library. We will continue to develop a group of research assistants, offering the opportunity to collaborate, have research and articles published, and receive advice and guidance from experienced RAG members. Due to demands, we have increased Nick Rowe’s retainer to two days per month (he is contributing around 5-10 days). However, there are no plans for extending Tom’s contract, or further staff expenditure, and I would like to thank Tom for his ideas and enthusiastic approach.

**Research Advisory Group**

The Research Advisory Group met twice since the last board meeting – 27 March and 21 May (minutes attached). Membership reduced to eight with the resignation of Jon Best due to personal issues, and I have written to Jon thanking him for his work and wise counsel. We are, however, strengthening our research resource with ‘OSS Research Associates’ - experienced researchers with specialities not covered by existing RAG members, and who cannot afford the time commitment for RAG, but are supportive of OSS and willing to contribute when required. Jon is one of ten new Associates who have joined OSS in May, 2020.

RAG members Nick and Richard are due huge thanks for an incredible amount of voluntary work in supporting me to re-develop OSS’ research focus this year.

**Business Leaders & Sport Advisory groups**

Led by Chair Charlie Raeburn, meetings have been held the Business Leaders Group (2 June) and Sport Advisory Group (8 June), which helps to bring more guidance and advise into the organisation, but also ensure that we retain a good connection with community sport and the business community, and I would like to thank Charlie for his work developing this.

**University Forum**

The annual University Forum meeting was held on 11 June on Teams/Zoom, led by OSS Vice-Chair and RAG members Richard Davison and John Taylor. Plans for a coordinator and more formal series of forum events, proposed by Tess Kay last summer, have not developed after Professor Kay’s withdrawal and the lack of available time among remaining RAG members.

However, we are continuing to widen our database of researchers and university contacts, many of whom attended the Summit in November and/or, pleasingly, contacted OSS as a result of publicity.

1. **SUSTAINABILITY**

Income generated since the last board meeting amounts to £15,629 (ASICF £12,500), taking income for 2020 to date to £44,276, all contributing towards core funding.

The loss or postponement of expected income due to coronavirus ruled out the prospect of two potential spring donations of 10k-20k, and a separate paper outlines the financial concerns if income generation does not improve. However, by creating and implementing a new strategy, clearer messaging around OSS and research projects, new CRM system and stewardship programme, all of which has been developed by OSS staff and fundraising advisers over the past three months, we now have a stronger strategic fundraising focus, and expect to increase income generation in the remainder of the year across five key audiences:

1. Existing Donors
2. Major Individual Prospects
3. Trusts and Foundations
4. Corporate Supporters and Corporate Partners
5. Government and other external agencies

A key development is the introduction of a CRM system to bring all donors and prospect details into the one central online hub, with ability for proper management, tracking and updating. It had been recognised in the second half of 2019 that the OSS fundraising approach lacked cohesion and strategic direction, relying largely on volunteer adviser Iain More’s fundraising expertise and solicitation, and chairman Charlie Raeburn’s donations and persuasion of friends to support OSS.

After considering various options, and, with powers delegated by the board in December, the Executive agreed in February to purchase eTapestry, at a total cost of £9,000 for three years, including VAT, training and IT support. Cécile Dermit and I undertook two full days of training in system management in March, and Cécile completed a training series provided by eTapestry through March/April. In May, helped by fundraising committee members, Cécile completed a lengthy process of detailing all OSS donations and contact details for over 700 people, and inputting these to the new system with key links to ensure they can be easily discovered. The success of webinars has now added a further 1200 contacts to the database to date. This provides OSS with nearly 2,000 potential donors, compared with 250 18 months ago, and its first online system of identifying, segmenting, managing and communicating with contacts strategically and personally, and ability to launch more effective stewardship plans for all donors and prospects.

In addition, Cécile has worked closely with Fundraising Chair Stuart Armstrong to scrutinise over 2,000 UK trusts and foundations and identify those relevant to OSS objectives. A programme of applications to trusts and foundations launched in June, guided by the fundraising committee.

I would like to thank Cécile for terrific work beyond her paid hours; to volunteers Iain and Stuart personally for giving to OSS a significant amount of time, effort and expert guidance (and patience), in helping us establish an accurate new system; to Iain for single-handedly sourcing individual donations on a regular basis; and to Claire for valuable support, notably with financial reports.

DAVID FERGUSON

June 2020