



## Going for gold

Can the official targets for 2012 be hit?

**Duncan Wood-Allum**, Director of Sport and Leisure Consulting at Capita Symonds, highlights the issues that need to be addressed if the Government's wider legacy objectives are to be achieved.

The Government has been working hard behind the scenes to get its act together in establishing the Olympics Bill, the ODA and LOCOG alongside the development of its Olympic objectives. They are the key drivers for delivering the main aspects of 'Olympic legacy', which of course has many different elements, from the economic and environmental regeneration of the East End of London, to sustainable world-class sports facilities and increased levels of participation in sport throughout the UK. It is hoped that the last of these will result, ultimately, in greater sporting success as a nation. But can this be achieved, and how?

### How active is the nation?

The Government's target is to increase by 1% per annum the number of adults in England who participate in at least 30 minutes of moderately intensive sport and physical activity on five or more days each week. It has established the £6 million 'Active People' survey to assess levels of physical activity in England, due for completion in November 2006. There are some real concerns about the approach being taken, namely a survey funded only for one year, which does not encourage additional compatible data from other sources to be integrated into the research. Other concerns involve the fact that this target is being driven by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport through Sport England, not Health or Education and Skills. If the health of the nation is so important shouldn't this be a joined up target with real momentum and resources from the big hitters in Whitehall?

## ***“The Government needs to drive change in the sporting sector, rather than leaving the sector to fix itself.”***



The aspirational target of a 1% annual increase in participation has not, in the opinion of many, been fully thought through. It will take years to strengthen the infrastructure required to get and keep more people more active, more often. Increases in the early years are likely to be negligible. (The billions invested in sports facilities over the last 10 years through the Lottery Sports Fund increased participation by less than 1%.) One final concern is the funding to follow this research up. Cash strapped local government sport and leisure departments will need to find the resources to invest in future research, something they will feel obliged, rather than compelled, to do.

### **Increasing participation**

If the Government's highly ambitious target is to remain achievable, a wide range of issues need to be addressed. The Government is seeking to build the capacity of what it

calls the sport 'delivery system'. This features key roles for coordinating organisations such as the County Sports Partnerships, which after three years are still yet to deliver convincingly. Critically, the capacity and capabilities of sports clubs will need to improve dramatically, supported by focused, joined-up investment in facilities. It's all too easy to forget that volunteers, coaches, officials and kit washers are the foundry within which our future Gold medals will be forged.

Clear leadership in bringing about the change and improvements to address these issues will be needed, but this is from a disjointed sports sector that traditionally has been lacking direction and clarity of purpose.

### **Improving national success rates**

Another Government target is for Team GB to come fourth in the 2012 medals table. Again, is this realistic? The Government is enhancing the support network for elite performers. In the last budget, an investment of £200 million of Government funding for Olympic and Paralympic Sports was announced, backed up by an additional £100 million, pledged by Government on behalf of the private sector. Leading up to 2012, new world-class facilities and venues will take shape and support the development of our elite athletes. But at a strategic level, the spaghetti of quangos and elite sports organisations will need to be rationalised to ensure focused investment. The Government needs to drive change in the sporting sector, rather than leaving the sector to fix itself. However, local and national political sensitivity leading up to the 2012 Games may hinder rather than help the drive for radical change. There is a real risk of a 'fudged' solution.

### **Legacy is ours to lose**

The intended legacy of increased participation, levels of activity and greater sporting success as a nation is ours to lose. This and future generations of children should have their lives transformed by the collective efforts of this nation's sporting infrastructure. But there will be no legacy if we leave everything up to the Government. We eagerly await the Olympic objectives from the ODA, and the opportunity for the private, public and voluntary sectors to collaborate up to and beyond 2012.

The UK needs to transform its approach and work smarter with what we have. So maybe we should ask not what legacy can do for us, but what we can do for legacy.

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