

# Modernisation and sport: the reform of Sport England and UK Sport

Barrie Houlihan and Mick Green

## Abstract

This article evaluates the impact of New Labour's 'modernization project' on two key non-departmental public bodies for sport, Sport England and UK Sport. Our analysis concentrates on identifying the sources of the general momentum for modernization in the sport sector, how it has been interpreted by government in relation to the two organizations, the nature and consequences of modernization for both organizations, and the future of modernization. The analysis is informed by a range of public documents produced by government and by the two sports agencies, together with a series of seven interviews conducted with senior staff and members of Sport England and UK Sport and with senior civil servants in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Our conclusions suggest that modernization has resulted in a narrowing of the two organizations' objectives, the adoption of business-like principles and a 'command and control' regime in relationships with key front line delivery partners.

[A]Introduction

Over the past 20 years one of the constant themes in sport policy discussions has been the fragmentation, fractiousness and perceived ineffectiveness of organizations within the sport policy area. While much of government's focus has been on the inadequacies of the national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) the main national agencies of government have also been subject to sustained criticism both by the major political parties and by NGBs. The sports councils that cover England, currently Sport England and UK Sport,<sup>1</sup> have been reviewed at least seven times in the last two decades with a new round of criticism, mainly from NGBs, but also from the Central Council of Physical Recreation and the British Olympic Association, prompted by the award of the 2012 Olympic Games to London. Over the years the critics have accused the sports councils of being: unresponsive to the needs of their clients; overly bureaucratic and complex, especially in relation to the accessing of funds; and incoherent due to overlapping responsibilities, the lack of strategic clarity and the generation of an excess of, often short-term, initiatives. In brief, the national sports system has long been seen as in serious need of reform.

However, the discussion of reform of the national sports system in general and the modernization of Sport England and UK Sport in particular needs to be located alongside a number of recent analyses of change in domestic sport policy. Macro-level analyses have emphasized variously the significance for domestic policy of globalization (Houlihan 2004; Maguire 1999), the intensification of the commodification of sport (Gerrard 2004), and the symbolic significance of elite sporting success (Green and Houlihan 2005). Meso-level analyses have sought to explain policy change in terms of

tensions between national and local policy actors (McDonald 1995), the weakness of the policy community (Roche 1993), the emergence of advocacy coalitions (Green and Houlihan 2004), the opportunities presented for policy entrepreneurs within a policy sector with few interests strongly rooted within the machinery of government (Houlihan and Green 2006), and the interplay of competing policy discourses (McDonald 2000; Penney and Evans 1999). The following discussion of the government's concern with institutional modernization in relation to sport complements and informs many of these macro and meso-level analyses, but also provides an opportunity to evaluate the significance of modernization as an independent variable in the explanation of sport policy.

The election of the Labour Government in 1997 committed to modernization of public policymaking and of the institutions of government was unlikely to leave the sport policy infrastructure undisturbed. The aim of this article is to evaluate the impact of New Labour's modernization project (cf. Finlayson, 2003a, 2003b) on two key non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) for sport, Sport England and UK Sport. In particular, we are concerned to identify the sources of the general momentum for modernization in the sport sector, how it has been interpreted by government in relation to the two organizations, the nature and consequences of modernization for the two organizations, and the future of modernization. The research is based on an analysis of a range of public documents produced by government and by the two sports agencies. The analysis of documents was supplemented by a series of seven recorded and transcribed interviews conducted with senior staff and members of Sport

England and UK Sport and with senior civil servants in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

[A]Modernization: rhetoric and substance

According to the government, modernization involves 'ensuring that policy-making is more joined up and strategic; making sure that public service users, not providers, are the focus, by matching services more closely to people's lives; delivering public services that are high quality and efficient' (Cabinet Office 1999, pp. 6-7; Burton 2006). Beyond this and similar general statements (e.g. see Blair 2002) it is difficult to specify more precisely the content of modernization. Indeed, Finlayson argues that modernization is essentially a rhetorical discourse which is less concerned with describing or prescribing a particular set of practices and more concerned with persuasion and motivation (see also Harrison 2002). For Finlayson (2003b, p. 63) modernization 'is an "up" word, that makes things sound exciting, progressive and positive'.

Despite the lack of precision the concept of modernization is not merely rhetorical and is far from content-less. A wide range of public services have experienced modernization, including local government (Pratchett 2002; Wilson 2003; Cochrane 2004), health (Harrison 2002), welfare services (Humphrey 2003; Lewis 2005), public libraries (Newman and McKee 2005) and environmental planning (Blowers 2002). From a review of the experience

of these services it is possible to build a picture of the themes, principles, technologies and narratives associated with modernization.

As a cluster of themes it is associated with responsiveness, managerialism, responsabilization, teamworking, choice, innovation and citizen-centredness; at a more concrete level it is a set of principles associated with confidence in the market and the development of partnership, participation, stakeholding and social inclusion; as a set of technologies or tools it is associated with public service agreements, inspection, 'naming and shaming' and audit; and finally, as a narrative it is has helped to frame negatively the recent history of professional-bureaucratic government, to problematize current practices, to privilege managerial knowledge, and to equate modernization with social progress. The apparent breadth of the specification of modernization is a product of a conscious pragmatism in its interpretation. Indeed, as Flynn (1999, p. 585) observes, the government is 'proud of its pragmatism' and has argued that 'What matters is what works' (Cabinet Office 1999, p. 40). But Flynn (1999, p. 596) also notes that while Labour's concept of modernization is 'eclectic and pragmatic' it is so within 'a narrow range'.

The roots of modernization lie partly in the evolution of British social democracy and particularly in the redefinition of Labour Party socialism such that the key indicator of progress was no longer the expansion of the public sector but rather the 'progressive expansion of the sphere of individual responsibility' (Leadbetter, quoted in Finlayson 1999, p. 273; see also Temple 2000). However, the genealogy of modernization can be traced most strongly

through Thatcherism and the promotion of managerialism in the 1990s with the concern of the Labour Government being to retain the neo-liberal economic gains of Thatcherism and build upon the Conservative's managerialist legacy.

Modernization consequently has firm roots in the new right's inability to conceptualize public organizations and professionals in anything other than negative terms and their concern to promote managerialism with its unquestioned assumptions about the superiority of private sector values and practices over those operating in the public sector (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; see Cochrane 2004, for a review of the new right critique and Llewellyn 2001, for a discussion of the narrative of modernization and how it shaped perceptions of traditional public sector management). However, in adapting managerialism to modernization New Labour put greater emphasis on long-term effectiveness rather than short-term efficiency, on developing a set of techniques and tools for effecting policy change rather than simply achieving institutional reform, and on collaboration rather than exclusively on competition (Flynn 2000, p. 47).

For Pratchett (2002, p. 331), at the heart of the modernization agenda is 'A dual emphasis on democratic renewal and continuous service improvement'. Part of that democratic renewal is citizen and stakeholder engagement which is deemed essential because 'in the past too many initiatives were imposed from the top down, and not locally owned by staff and users' (Cabinet Office, 1998, p. 1). While the concern to empower communities and government

agencies is, in part, an element in the process of democratic renewal it is also a consequence of the acknowledgement by government that it no longer has the capacity for the detailed planning and delivery of policies from the centre in relation to complex social problems. For Rhodes (1994) the outcome is a hollowed-out state where policy is made within increasingly self-governing networks. Consequently, individual units of government and staff are being made more responsible for their activities and given greater autonomy.

However, there is a strong element of 'centralist conditionality' (Game 1998, p. 26) in the granting of autonomy. Autonomy is earned not simply by being compliant, but by being both excellent and a model or beacon for other organizations. The implication of this process is that the hollowed-out state is being replaced by a 'smart state' (Painter 1999, p. 96) where the focus is on 'governing mechanisms which do not rest on recourse to the authority and sanctions of government' (Wilson 2003, p. 318; see also Taylor 2000; Seward 1997; Dowding 1995). This is a particular strategy, redolent of advanced liberal democracies, of 'government at a distance' (Rose 1999, p. 49).

Modernization, as continuous service improvement not only introduces a substantial array of technologies of audit and inspection, but also has the more significant effect of incorporating, within the realm of business, aspects of public and voluntary activity that previously operated under distinct and non-commercial norms and values. As du Gay (2000, p. 66) notes, 'In keeping with the rationality of entrepreneurial governance, performance management and related techniques function as forms of "responsibilization" which are held

to be both economically desirable and personally “empowering”. The emphasis on ‘empowerment’ and ‘earned autonomy’ is the particular discursive frame within which modernization is presented (cf. Davies 2006). According to Peri 6 *et al.* it is in large part a consequence of a significant degree of arrogance among the government’s modernizing zealots who are frequently unsympathetic towards (and uncomprehending of) the context within which delivery agencies, such as local authorities, schools, national sport agencies and national governing bodies of sport, operate leading them to assume that ‘only the most relentless regime of inspection, incentive, sanction and discipline will produce effective action. This type of impatience results from a lack of trust’ (Peri 6 *et al.* 2002, p. 99).

Indeed, it is the long-term erosion of trust in public service professionals and confidence in traditional public service bureaucracy which has created the cultural space for the modernization discourse to take root (Cochrane 2004; Davies 2006; Pollitt 1993; Hoggett 1996; O’Neill 2002). Trust, as the primary basis of the relationship between the public and public sector professionals, has been replaced by supposedly neutral techniques and objective measures of progress such as audit, inspection and service agreements which are underpinned by a set of values including ‘independent validation, efficiency, rationality, visibility, almost irrespective of the mechanics of the practice’ (Power 1993, p. 17) thus substituting ‘*confidence* in systems for *trust* in individuals’ (O’Neill 2002, p. 481, original emphasis).



The apparent paradox between the rhetoric of empowerment and autonomy on the one hand and the strengthening of the government's capacity to set the strategic direction for policy and also micro-manage the activities of units of the state on the other, has a strong resonance with the debates on power and the state associated with interpretation of Foucault's work on governmentality (see for example Rose and Miller 1992; Raco and Imrie 2000; Burchell 1993; Dean 1999, 2007; Rose 1999). In line with these writers, power 'does not only act upon people, but through them, harnessing their desires and choices to achieve the sought-after social order' (Davies 2006, p. 252). Rather than debating whether the power of the state has been hollowed-out, or dispersed through a plurality of sports agencies as noted earlier, our attention is directed to the kinds of knowledge and technologies through which social activity (sport) is regulated, and through which actors – athletes, coaches, sport scientists, institutions – are constituted as self-disciplining subjects. The comment by Rose and Miller (1992, p. 174) that 'Power is not so much a matter of imposing constraints upon citizens as of "making up" citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom' applies equally to NGBs, sports councils and their staff. As Raco and Imrie (2000, p. 2191) comment, 'increasingly, government seeks not to govern society per se, but to promote individual and institutional conduct that is consistent with government objectives'. The key aim is make voluntary organizations, user groups and indeed quangos fit partners for government.

Programmes, such as modernization, depict or re-present spheres of activity in ways which are essentially self-validating. As Rose and Miller (1992, p.

183) observe, 'they make the objects of government thinkable in such a way that their ills appear susceptible to diagnosis, prescription and cure by calculating and normalizing intervention'. Programmes are operationalized through the application of various technologies of government including audit, benchmarking, public service agreements, target-setting and performance reviews and measurement. Audit, for example, is the process of producing auditable objects, a normative commitment which 'hardens into the routines of practice a new regulatory common sense' (Power 1997, p. 138). The net effect of the application of these technologies is to ensure that organizations are instrumental in their own self-government and engaged in the reflexive monitoring of their organization's actions such that they are able to 'account for what they do when asked to do so by others' (Giddens 1995, p. 35). Thus power is exercised not only by the 'ability to demand accounts' (Power 1997, p. 146) but also in the deep sense of obligation to provide them even if this involves 'divert[ing] resources from what they do to processes of accounting for what they do' (Clarke, Gewirtz, Hughes and Humphrey 2000, p. 256).

#### [A]Modernization and sport

In marked contrast to the Conservative government's 1995 policy document, *Sport: Raising the Game* (DNH 1995), where the engine of change was to be a combination of passionate commitment and the funds from the proposed National Lottery, the Labour Government policy statement, *A Sporting Future for All* (DCMS 2000), was clear that the organizational infrastructure of sport was considered to be an impediment to achieving the primary policy goals of

elite success and the enhancement of opportunities for young people to participate in sport. 'There is a need for a radical rethink of the way we fund and organize sport [and to this end] we offer a modernizing partnership with the governing bodies of sport' (DCMS 2000, p. 19). Cooperative governing bodies 'will gain more responsibility. But if they fail to perform against agreed targets, then funding arrangements will be reviewed' (DCMS 2000, p. 20).

Sport England was also to be modernized. It would no longer prioritize its delivery role and would adopt a role which was 'more strategic' and concerned with ensuring that public funds are 'properly spent' (DCMS 2000, p. 20). Similar conclusions were drawn by the review of elite sport funding conducted in 2001 (DCMS 2001a) where the primary concern was to clarify the relationship between UK Sport and Sport England and ensure that the former was given unambiguous lead responsibility. The need for reform was further reinforced by the Quinquennial Review of Sport England which recommended, inter alia, that Sport England 'establish meaningful, outcome driven targets against which performance can be measured [and] develop agreed and robust reporting procedures that will enable DCMS to measure Sport England's performance against objectives' (DCMS 2001b, p. 44). The work of the Quinquennial Review panel set the agenda for, but was also overtaken by, the DCMS/Strategy Unit study (published in 2002 as *Game Plan*) of long-term sports policy.

*Game Plan* reinforced the imperative of modernization and argued that both Sport England and UK Sport needed to concentrate on four key activities:

strategy; investment appraisal, contract specification and monitoring and evaluation; advice and guidance, especially in relation to capacity building; and research and evidence collection. The intended outcome of this refocusing was that 'There should be less micro-management and more freedom for partners to deliver against agreed targets' (DCMS/Strategy Unit 2002, p. 175). It was recommended that both organizations should be leaner and more focused with their councils (i.e. boards) selected for their expertise and 'non-executive skills (i.e. strategy, vision, wide business experience, planning scrutiny and leadership)' rather than their representation of some stakeholder interest (DCMS/Strategy Unit 2002, p. 175).

As in other policy sectors (e.g. countryside policy) (Ward and Lowe 2007), *Game Plan* acted as a high-level strategy for setting out government's modernizing ambitions to rationalize the operations of sport NDPBs, and the organizations and institutions expected to deliver front line sport and physical activity services (e.g. local authorities, schools, NGBs). In essence, this meant that, for a policy sector characterized for many years by incoherence, divisiveness and conflicting objectives (cf. Green 2006; McDonald 2000; Roche 1993), some semblance of clarity was about to be 'imposed' upon it. Throughout these years of 'incoherence', government (both Conservative and Labour) at best viewed the sport policy sector as a peripheral priority and at worst treated it with outright disdain. Today, however, modernization of the sector is in part about the current high political salience of sport and physical activity programmes and, as such, as Freedon (1999, p. 46) notes in a related debate on the ideology of New Labour, the government 'has adopted Etzioni's

preference for guided persuasion over [outright] coercion'. Modernization of sport thus serves the dual purpose of a grand project of national renewal (a fit, healthy and active population and the hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games), and as a concerted approach to improving the performance of public services through administrative rationalization and greater coordination and targeting of clarified objectives for delivery of sport programmes at grassroots levels.

Part of the process of transforming Sport England into a modern organization and also one capable of acting as the driver of modernization of the governing bodies was achieved through change in personnel, with the Chief Executive and Chair of the Council both departing to be replaced by Roger Moffett, as CEO, and Lord Carter, as chair who came from a business background. Carter's initial impression of Sport England was 'that it was bureaucratic, relatively passive...', adding that 'they used to remind me of little baby birds sitting with their beaks open expecting someone like the Chancellor to fly over and drop a worm of money into their mouths because they were deserving' (quoted in *The Guardian* 2006, p. 9). Part of the process of modernization was also achieved through a series of reviews of Sport England designed to change radically its culture and management practice.

In 2003 Sport England established a Modernization Project Board chaired by the Head of Sport Division in the DCMS with a brief to implement the recommendations of *Game Plan* and the Quinquennial Review. In the 2004 report, *The Framework for Sport in England*, it was argued that 2003 had been a transformative year for Sport England producing 'A new, modernized

Sport England ready to provide strategic leadership for sport in England – a new board, a new clarity of purpose, and a commitment to bust bureaucracy’ (Sport England 2004b, p. 6; see also DCMS 2004). Perhaps the transformation is best indicated by the structure of the funding agreements signed between Sport England and UK Sport with DCMS, both of which have much clearer statements of targets, baseline data, milestones, and performance measures than previous equivalent documents such as corporate plans (Sport England 2004c; UK Sport 2003).

More recently the Treasury/DCMS and the National Audit Office (NAO) commissioned two reports which reviewed the extent of change and the work still to be done. The Treasury/DCMS (Carter) report (2005) observed that Sport England had ‘radically restructured, devolving decision-making through 9 Regional Sports Boards’ and that UK Sport [had] reviewed its functions and streamlined the organization’ (p. 13) but complained that ‘measurement of baseline data and evidence through research is limited: managing performance is difficult and allocating resources at local level is not well informed’ (p. 17). The tone of the Carter report was echoed by that from the NAO which examined the support provided to elite athletes by UK Sport. On the one hand UK Sport was congratulated for meeting its performance target for the Athens Olympic Games while on the other hand the report identified ‘a number of .... concerns with the way in which the performance framework is operating in practice’ (NAO 2005, p. 4). UK Sport was recommended to ‘secur[e] a better return on investment’, use ‘independent experts to undertake periodic evaluations of programmes’, and cooperate with the home

country sports councils to simplify the funding system (p. 4). The NAO report was reinforced by a report from the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2006) which criticized UK Sport for requiring NGBs to set clear performance targets while not setting any for itself or else setting over-simplified targets. UK Sport was also criticized for mis-reporting previous medal performance over a three year period.

The accumulation of momentum for reform derived from these various reports concerned specifically with the effective delivery of sport policy objectives was augmented by the Gershon review which examined the use of resources across government. The Gershon review set targets for cost savings and staff reductions and not only stressed the importance of moving resources to service delivery functions, but also emphasized the importance of 'auditable and transparent measures of performance' (HM Treasury 2004, p. 32). The changes manifest at Sport England and UK Sport over the past four to five years clearly reinforce the view that Gershon's recommendations have had major consequences for both organizations.

And, although not a key concern of this article, it is notable that the modernization reforms experienced by Sport England and UK Sport have also had consequences for organizations and institutions closer to the point of service delivery. First, new sports indicators developed by Sport England and the Audit Commission for inclusion within the comprehensive performance assessment<sup>2</sup> regime for local authorities have resulted in the implementation of a raft of target-driven sport and physical activity objectives under three key

indicators: i) raising levels of participation; ii) increasing volunteering opportunities; and iii) providing greater opportunities for easy access to a range of quality sports facilities (Institute of Sport and Recreation Management [ISRM] 2006). Running alongside the implementation of targets is the implementation of two major new surveys – Active People<sup>3</sup> and Taking Part.<sup>4</sup> The Active People survey in particular aims to provide local authorities - for the first time ever - with ‘results [that] will make a major contribution towards establishing evidence-based policy in sport’ (ISRM 2006, p. 2).

Second, through the PE, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy schools are now subject to annual auditing of their progress towards achieving government’s target for 85 per cent of children (5 to 16 years) by 2008 to experience at least two hours of high quality sport and PE provision within and beyond the curriculum each week. Third, NGBs, key delivery agents for government’s Olympic ambitions (UK Sport 2006b), as well as for social policy-related objectives in areas such as health, crime, community cohesion and social inclusion (Sport England 2006), are also grappling with the consequences of the modernizing reform of Sport England and UK Sport. For example, UK Sport’s current ‘No Compromise’ funding strategy for elite athlete development requires NGBs to meet stringent performance-related targets aligned to winning (Olympic) medals on the international stage (UK Sport 2006a). Some of the ramifications for NGBs in this respect are considered in our ensuing analysis of the consequences of modernization for UK Sport. In order to evaluate the nature and degree of these consequences for both Sport England and UK Sport, in the next section we narrow our focus



to an analysis of these two main NDPBs for sport in England. The evaluation of both NDPBs is organized as follows: first, we examine the source of the momentum for modernization in the sport sector; second, we interrogate how the general concern to modernize was translated into a series of objectives specific to each NDPB; third, the defining aspects or landmarks of modernization are identified; finally, we assess whether the modernization of Sport England and UK Sport is 'complete', or whether the 'modernization of sport' remains a work in progress.

[A]Sport England

[B]Sources of momentum for modernization

Before interrogating the nature and degree of the consequences of Labour's modernization project on Sport England, it is worth commenting briefly on sport's remarkable rise in salience to government in recent years (cf. Green 2006; Green and Houlihan 2005). In so doing, it is possible that we might uncover the sources of the general momentum for the modernization of the sport sector. Writing on the issue of 'Tony Blair and the jargon of modernization', Finlayson (1999, p. 24) points to Labour's 'frequent connection of modernization with the nation', which invokes a particular brand of 'celebratory patriotism' (p. 13). Indeed, in Blair's first speech to the Party conference after becoming Prime Minister he argued passionately for Britain to be 'nothing less than the model twenty-first century nation' (Blair 1994, p. 1). It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that a Prime Minister who, according to

a former senior official at Sport England, is 'passionate about sport' (Interview A, 4 July 2005), and who is nothing if not pragmatic about instrumental policy making (see Newman and McKee 2005 for a pertinent example in respect of the public library service), should 'engage' with a policy sector (sport) that has moved from a peripheral policy concern to one that is currently promoted as a cross-cutting solution to policy problems in key sectors such as education, health, crime, and social inclusion (Green 2006; Sport England 2006).

Indeed, Tony Blair states in the Foreword to *Game Plan*, 'Sport is a powerful and often under-used tool that can help Government to achieve a number of ambitious goals' (quoted in DCMS/Strategy Unit 2002, p. 5). Concerns regarding low physical activity rates and rising obesity levels in the population generally, and amongst children and young people in particular, are at the heart of government's contemporary engagement with sport (Sport England 2006). Indeed, Lord Carter argues that 'we've moved from the manual to a sedentary society and there are ... great arguments to say that sport is part of the answer to all the problems that brings' (quoted in *The Guardian* 2006, p. 9). This then is one persuasive argument for Labour's enthusiastic engagement with sport and physical activity policy over the past decade. A second and related reason was offered by a senior civil servant in the Sports Division at the DCMS, who observed that, in order for government to realize its sport and physical activity goals, it must ensure that the organizations expected to deliver on these policy goals are modern, professional and 'fit for purpose' (Interview G, 27 June 2006).

There is another other line of reasoning, however, which arguably provides a valuable perspective from which we might identify an additional source of the momentum for the radical modernization of the country's leading governmental agencies for sport. That is, over the past ten years we have witnessed growing political and policy legitimization of, and funding support for, the development of the nation's elite (Olympic) athletes (Green 2004; Green and Houlihan 2005). In this respect, the decision by the IOC in July 2005 to award London the right to host the 2012 Olympic Games provided significant political legitimization for policy decisions taken over the past decade to prioritize elite sport development. Indeed, on the issue of political support for the 2012 bid, Andrew Rawnsley reports in *The Observer* (2006, p. 31) that 'Blair shrugged aside opposition once he got seized by the notion of adding a *grand projet* to his legacy'. It is the grand, symbolic, almost mythical rhetoric used by politicians about elite sport success and the hosting of an Olympics Games that interests us here. Such rhetoric is evident in comments by Tessa Jowell, then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 'who argued that a credible bid was crucial to the future not just of sport but of national aspiration' (quoted in *The Observer - Olympics 2012 Special Report - 2005*, p. 3).

The winning of Olympic medals and the hosting of a successful Olympic Games thus emerge as crucial political referents for the story New Labour promotes in its discourse about the construction of a modern twenty-first century Britain (cf. Finlayson 2003a, 2003b). In Labour's first 'annual report' in 1998 modernization was part of the 'story' they had to 'tell about Britain'

(HMSO 1998). We were reminded that, although the country is 'filled with creative, innovative compassionate people' (HMSO 1998), we had for too long 'relied on past glories' (Finlayson 2003a, p. 85), and now needed to adapt to the new world and the global economy. It is not such a great leap then to argue that, in prioritizing the development of the country's elite athletes, and in the backing of the London 2012 bid, New Labour seized upon a golden opportunity to use 'success' at the Olympic Games as an exemplar of its progressive project of modernizing the nation - both in the number of Olympic medals won, as well as through the process of re-branding the country as a 'model twenty-first century nation', characterized by the successful hosting of the world's major sporting event.

[B]Translating modernization into specific organizational objectives

Signposting the general momentum for the modernization of sport by government is one thing. Palpably more problematic is the translation of that general momentum into clear objectives for the organizations charged with implementing change: in this case, Sport England. To put it another way, was the source of the momentum for change wholly external to Sport England, or was there already an internal lobby for modernization that not only understood the prevailing modernizing climate but was also willing and able to see through a radical programme of reform? There is some evidence that within Sport England there was a recognition, at least, of the need for reform. For a senior civil servant at the DCMS, 'The Labour Government came in with a very clear agenda for sport ... and obviously it's easier for the government to

change bodies for which it is directly responsible and in that sense therefore it was Sport England and UK Sport that came under the microscope' (Interview G, 27 June 2006). In respect of Sport England, this civil servant went on to add that, 'I can't honestly say to what extent Patrick Carter's reforms were widely welcomed but I think my impression is that there was a feeling within Sport England that ... things needed to be sharpened up, tightened up'. And a former senior official at Sport England made the point that 'It was perceived in the sector that Sport England was up for change, right for a change in a sense of declining incomes, and a new policy framework to do something different' (Interview F, 5 May 2006). A current senior Sport England official also provides credence to the argument that Sport England was aware of the need for reform in arguing that 'I suspect that there was a recognition inside the organization that things could be better' (Interview B, 9 March 2006).

While there is some acknowledgement in these observations that there was a recognition within Sport England of the need for change, this has to be tempered by the former Sport England official's further insight that the thinking behind, and publication of, *Game Plan* in 2002 indicated a real drive, politically, 'to increase the number of people that do this [sport and physical activity] for health reasons, for crime and disorder reasons, so a whole range of government policy agendas came together [but] alongside all that, government was looking at ways in which its non-departmental public bodies could become more efficient' (Interview F, 5 May 2006). A rather more trenchant view was put forward by another former senior official at Sport England, who argued that 'there was a view in the late nineties, early turn of

the century, that Sport England couldn't deliver ... you know, we [government] don't trust them' (Interview A, 4 July 2005). Moreover, although this respondent acknowledged that the Quinquennial Review was important, it 'was not tough enough ... so just as the Review was coming to an end, [Richard] Caborn [Minister of Sport] gets told by Blair, I'm going to get the No 10 Delivery Unit on this. So all of a sudden we are just coming to the end of the Quinquennial Review and these two or three heavyweights arrive from the No 10 Policy Unit'.

From this evidence, at least, it appears that the momentum for change at Sport England was driven largely by a government which had come to accept the salience of sport and physical activity programmes as a solution to a number of policy problems, in particular, in health and education. And the corollary of this was that Sport England could not be trusted by government to effect such large scale reform. In the words of one interviewee, the perception of Sport England by government was that it 'was a constant thorn, no bloody good. They're centralist, dictatorial, prescriptive, London-centric ... they're arrogant and they don't listen' (Interview A, 4 July 2005). This critique has been addressed in part by the government's devolution/regionalization agenda, in particular, the commitment by New Labour to devolve power to the nine regions of England in the form of Regional Sports Boards. To paraphrase Fairclough (2000, p. 5), does this mean that the centre has given up control in respect of the sport sector? Or does it entail a new form of control through the shaping and guiding of the conduct of Sport England and its regional bodies through new ways of working rather than government controlling directly what

these sporting bodies do? In short, is the critique that 'New Labour's attitude towards power is schizophrenic' (Davies 2006, p. 249) being played out in the modernizing reform of Sport England (and UK Sport)?

A major part of the process of the modernization of Sport England appears to be the rationalization of staff and organizational procedures. Thus one of the defining aspects of modernization has been the reduction in staff from some 550 to around 250 today; these redundancies have affected primarily Sport England staff at its central London headquarters. This rationalization has been driven in large part by the recruitment of senior staff with business backgrounds. Pre-dating Lord Carter's appointment as Chair, was the recruitment of David Moffett (a former Chief Executive of the All Blacks) as a new Chief Executive, brought in, according to one of our interviewees, because 'he was a hard nose change merchant' (Interview A, 4 July 2005). However, according to this observer, Moffett 'didn't understand about sport, sport development, didn't have a clue about that'. Moffett's agenda for modernization included the 'reduction of back office costs, getting more money to delivery, to be more business-like, devolve more and simplify things' (Interview A, 4 July 2005).

The subsequent appointments of Lord Carter as Chair, Roger Draper as Chief Operating Officer (who eventually replaced Moffett as Chief Executive), and the recent appointments in 2006 and 2007 of a new Chair and Chief Executive, both of whom are extolled for their wide business experience (cf. Sport England 2007b), all serve to support the broader argument that New

Labour is involved in a 'reinvention of government' which 'entails new forms of control from the centre based upon business corporation models' (Fairclough 2000, p. 5). Another strand of this rationalization following business-led models is the clarification of the organization's strategic focus, resulting in 'reducing 75 programmes to just two funding streams' (Sport England 2004a, p. 6). Lord Carter's business experience once again appears as a dominant driving force as, according to a senior DCMS civil servant, 'it was Carter that led the reduction of funding streams at sport England ... I mean any businessman coming to an organization with a background like Lord Carter would see that this is ludicrous' (Interview, G, 27 June 2006).

In order to operationalize these new ways of working, Sport England has adopted the business techniques of performance management and key performance indicators in order to provide measurable outcomes upon which its 'performance' might be judged. Thus, for a former senior Sport England official, 'if one strand of modernization was strategic clarity and vision, a second strand was this thing around performance management ... can we provide evidence that what we are investing in ... is driving that strategic agenda' (Interview F, 5 May 2006). As noted, two major new surveys, Active People (Sport England) and Taking Part (DCMS), are now at the heart of building this evidence base for sport. Overall this type of reform is very much about increasing accountability throughout the sport sector. As a former senior Sport England official related, 'Carter's focus at every level ... is to have clear accountability and responsibility, and if people don't deliver, then they don't get the money' (Interview A, 4 July 2005). The spectre of sanctions



for not meeting targets under this new, 'modern' regime was also endorsed unequivocally by a senior DCMS civil servant who stated that:

what you're finding in sport is that the government has got a very clear idea what it wants, and through the DFAs [Departmental Funding Agreements] in particular, this is what we want them to do. So, the funding agreement spells out what we want to do, and we monitor very closely that they [Sport England and UK Sport] are delivering what we want. (Interview G, 27 June 2006)

The drive for accountability is very much in line with New Labour's rights and responsibilities agenda, which according to Fairclough (2000) combines a moral discourse with a contractual discourse. The distribution of rights and responsibilities is interpreted metaphorically as a 'contract' or a 'deal' between government and society (or individuals and organizations). Or, as Gordon Brown (1998) put it in a parliamentary speech on a forthcoming spending review, 'all new resources should be conditional on the implementation of essential reforms; money but only in return for modernization'.

In the sport sector, Lord Carter introduced the term, 'spine of accountability', as a guiding framework within which Sport England should operate, and which captures neatly not only the new expectations from government of its NDPBs but also from those bodies (e.g. NGBs, local authorities) in receipt of public monies further down the 'sporting foodchain'. At local authority level the introduction of a new performance management framework – Towards an Excellent Service (TAES) – for culture/leisure services (within which sport is located) is characteristic of the contemporary environment within which sports

organizations now operate. As explained by a Sport England official, at the heart of TAES is 'the development of national performance indicators that align local delivery with national priorities' (Interview B, 9 March 2006). For this official, the modernization of Sport England has percolated down the 'spine of accountability' and evolved into an agenda of 'continuous improvement' for local authorities.

Under conditions set out by the latest comprehensive spending review it is clear that 'government intends to improve public services through performance management' (Allison 2004, p. 23). Thus the development of TAES and its related key performance indicators (such as percentage increases in sport and physical activity participation rates, increased numbers of volunteers in sport, and providing greater choice and opportunity for sport and physical activity), was in large part aimed at convincing the Audit Commission to include sport in the 'culture block' in the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) for local authorities. There is, however, a certain inevitability in this process, which appears to preclude any dissenting voices: within the CPA framework, local authorities ignore culture/leisure/sport services at their peril. According to one of our interviewees, if a local authority is classified:

as poor or weak it loses its excellent tag. So some local authorities with the excellent tag, what this will force them to do, is not to ignore culture ... in effect, it's a back door way of making the service statutory. It's not making it statutory but they have to do it because if they do not they are going to lose their money. (Interview A, 4 July 2005)

Moreover, as a Sport England official explained, 'where the CPA identifies serious weaknesses, the first stage is to try and encourage them [local authorities] to drive their own improvement. If that fails, then they go into special measures' (Interview B, 9 March 2006). In short, as this respondent went on to add, if a local authority is categorized as 'failing', then central government 'takes over ... and it [local authority] can only do what it wants to do by getting permission from the government to do it'. Put rather more bluntly by a former Sport England official, 'there is now an intense focus on performance management at this level [national] and this is going to filter down [to regional/local levels], so much so that County Sports Partnerships now have to deliver TAES, and you have got to deliver otherwise you don't get any money' (Interview A, 4 July 2005).

Thus these increasingly contractual arrangements, from the DCMS to the Sports Councils, down through the spine of accountability to County Sports Partnerships, to NGBs, to local authority culture/leisure services require an acceptance of the rules of the game. Under New Labour's modernization project, to not play this game indicates that an organization/service is anti-modernization, out-of-touch and 'conservative'. It also means, more pragmatically, that an organization will be named and shamed, and fail to acquire the requisite high CPA categorization (3 or 4 star rating) with the consequent likelihood of funding restrictions in the future. The paradox of this scenario is captured by Finlayson (2003a, p. 86), who argues that 'To modernize is to create a situation in which people are able to deploy

themselves, or be deployed, in a way that maximises their output'. This is very much in line with the TAES framework and the 'continuous improvement' agenda now promoted by Sport England. Yet, as Finlayson (2003a, p. 94) also observes, 'Accompanying the decentralization of modernization is the centralization of control through the introduction of ever more rigorous targets and more complicated systems of performance measurement'. Thus, although a central plank of the modernizing reform agenda of Sport England was to not only devolve power but also to *empower* its constituent organizational 'partners', such as NGBs, it appears that this has yet to be fully realized. According to one interviewee, 'I get the impression that Sport England is reverting to type [and] that if this [reform] is a mechanism to control and not to actually delegate ... then all the power, even more power is here than it was before' (Interview A, 4 July 2005). Such evidence is very much in line with one strand of Davies' (2006, p. 254) critique of the shortcomings of New Labour's devolutionary agenda: 'the growing nakedness of state coercion'.

[B]The future of the modernization project

There is clear evidence here then of the consequences of the fundamental modernizing reform of Sport England in particular, and the sport sector more generally. Our final area of interrogation in this section concerns whether or not this project is complete, or whether there is still some way to go before Sport England is perceived by government as a modern, fit-for-purpose organization. While Lord Carter's comment that 'We have made the changes, [at Sport England] but not without a lot of pain' (quoted in *The Guardian* 2006,

p. 9) is indicative of a less than smooth transition and acceptance of reform, it does not tell us much about whether there is still more work to be done.

However, one of our interviewees commented that:

I think we're at another watershed ... we've achieved quite a lot over three years, turning back office money into front line [investment] but the whole thing now depends on moving forward to that next stage, sustaining investment in the right things, really delivering on that performance management thing over a sustained period. (Interview F, 5 May 2006)

A Sport England official also valorized performance management techniques and focused on the need to embed the 'continuous improvement' agenda at regional/local levels. Interestingly, this respondent's comments also give credence to our recourse above to the language of coercion and control. Commenting on 'the next stage of our evolution' of embedding the culture of CPA into local authority service departments, this interviewee argued that:

if we're [sport] going to stay in the CPA, [there needs to be] improvement planning to get better for those that aren't bad, and inspection and intervention for those that need help to be where they want to be. So it goes from complete freedom to complete control depending on how well you perform. (Interview B, 9 March 2006)

Such comments invoke New Labour's rhetoric of 'earned autonomy', which in itself raises questions of autonomy on whose terms? Along the 'spine of accountability', for Sport England, NGBs and local authority service departments, 'autonomy' is currently circumscribed by a series of targets tightly 'controlled' by central government. There is also a sense that, whatever

is achieved in the meeting of predefined targets, there will always be more for Sport England, and other sports organizations to do. Indeed, Andrews (1999, p. 17) argues that 'Modernization is the ideology of the never-ending present'. Evidence that modernization does not have an end is clear from a Sport England official, who maintained that 'Modernization is a continuous process but I prefer to call it the improvement agenda' (Interview B, 9 March 2006). On the other hand, a former Sport England official offered a rather more sceptical appraisal of the future. In respect of the efficacy of Lord Carter's 'spine of accountability', this official maintained that 'I still think there's a big job to be done in joining this up in sport ... there are still disconnects with this between government bodies and the Regional Sports Boards and the County Sports Partnerships, and between what's going on in school sport' (Interview A, 4 July 2005).

Finally, and perhaps somewhat ironically, the recent lack of clarity about what is to be 'measured' within parts of the new regime of performance management within which Sport England currently operates has been replaced by a narrowness and precision which has substantial implications for sport policy. Although the DCMS official explained that the 'area where further work is required is around physical activity, the lead department for that is the Department of Health, but our PSA [Public Service Agreement with Sport England] is around driving up participation in sport' (Interview G, 27 June 2006). It is now clear that sport is required to contribute to the achievement of physical activity targets. In 2007 Sport England announced that its target was to increase participation in physically active sport by one percentage point

each year to 2012, thus removing funding from sports, such as fishing, which are considered to involve insufficient physical activity. It appears then that Sport England is now working within what Rose (1999, p. 22) terms, 'a space of regulated freedom'. The contractual arrangements inscribed in the PSA target between Sport England and the DCMS prescribe what is to be measured, i.e. *physically active* sport. Within this environment of demarcated freedom there is little space for the professional autonomy of Sport England officials to adopt a more inclusive view of sport and physical activity given the government's stated aim in this sector 'to contribute to ... areas such as social inclusion ... and to build stronger communities' (Tessa Jowell, quoted in DCMS/Strategy Unit 2002, p. 6, 7).

[A]UK Sport

[B]Sources of momentum for modernization

The scale of modernizing reform undertaken at and by UK Sport has not been as wide-ranging or cut so deeply, regarding staff reductions/changes and organizational procedures and objectives, as that experienced by Sport England. Nonetheless, over the past five or six years, UK Sport has undergone a process of modernization that bears many of the hallmarks of Sport England's experience. Perhaps the most compelling explanation for disentangling the different experiences of the two organizations is provided by a UK Sport official who argued that 'the task for Sport England was significantly more difficult than for UK Sport because of who they were,

because of their track record, because of the culture and reputation that they had in certain quarters' (Interview D, 23 March 2006). This respondent went on to add that Sport England's reputation was one of being 'unwieldy, they weren't helpful, bureaucratic, pots of money, running after initiatives, all of that'. Summarily, as discussed, Sport England was perceived by government as an organization in need of serious reform.

Although the level of disdain shown by government for Sport England was not as evident in respect of UK Sport, it is clear that this organization, established as recently as 1996-1997, was also perceived by government as in need of modernization. As the same UK Sport official explained, 'The driver for UK Sport, and the modernization of the Sports Council [Sport England], came about because of the higher government agenda [of modernization] and that was something that was very much expected' (Interview D, 23 March 2006). More specifically, there were evidently concerns about the organization's performance at the highest levels of government. According to a senior UK Sport official, the genesis of government's concern emerged at a Cabinet meeting, chaired by the Secretary of State for the DCMS, 'which was a very unpleasant affair, where there was a considerable amount of unpleasantness about UK Sport, let's put it that way, about its role, it's place in the order of things' (Interview E, 7 April, 2006).

[B]Translating modernization into specific organizational objectives



These general concerns from government for reform at UK Sport found expression within the organization in at least two important ways. The first, and arguably the most important, was the appointment, in 2003, of Sue Campbell (then acting as non-political cross-departmental adviser on school sport and PE to the DfES and DCMS) as Reform Chair. One UK Sport official was adamant that it was Campbell's 'appointment that signalled the start of something very different, that change was about to happen' (Interview D, 23 March 2006). As was the case at Sport England, senior personnel were replaced. Within months of Campbell's appointment UK Sport 'lost' its Chief Executive and Head of Anti-Doping, although it was explained that 'neither were sacked' (Interview E, 7 April 2006). The second important manifestation of reform was an internal review of UK Sport and, again, as was the case at Sport England, this meant a culling of staff, internal restructuring, a clarification of objectives and the writing of new business plans. The focus was on UK Sport's Performance Directorate, which 'lost most of its team in December 2004' (Interview D, 23 March 2006). Performance Development Consultants (PDC) were renamed as Performance Programme Consultants (PPCs) and, crucially, as a UK Sport official explained, 'the PDC job description and focus was totally changed so that almost exclusively the new PPCs now focus on world class performance and high performance issues. They do not get pulled into general governing body day-to-day issues such as governance' (Interview D, 23 March 2006).

This particular strand of reform is very much in line with the recent sharpening of UK Sport's wider strategic goals. As noted earlier, in 2006, as part of its bid

to the Treasury for increased funding for 2012, UK Sport set out its 'No Compromise' approach. The No Compromise approach is unashamedly about achieving Olympic success, and one crucial aspect of this strategy is to ensure that the organizations upon whom UK Sport relies to deliver this success - NGBs – are modern, fit-for-purpose and professional. UK Sport has made it very clear that over the next four to five years its No Compromise investment strategy for Olympic sports will target 'resources solely at those athletes capable of delivering medal-winning performances' (UK Sport 2006a, p. 1). This new funding strategy clearly epitomizes a narrative or storyline constructed around a broader discourse of ensuring elite sport success in 2008 and in 2012 in particular. A recent press release from UK Sport helps to make the point (UK Sport 2006b). UK Sport's Chief Executive stated that 'we must ... ensure that the money is not wasted – huge amounts of public funds are being invested and our job is to challenge the sports [NGBs] to spend it to maximum effect' (quoted in UK Sport 2006b, p. 1).

UK Sport's readiness to intervene into governing body affairs is not new however. Between 2001 and 2005, it invested £5 million of Exchequer funding into 114 UK-wide governing body projects as part of its dedicated Modernization Programme for NGBs (UK Sport 2005). As a UK Sport official explained, 'it's in our interest to make sure [NGBs] are in good shape ... we need to support and assist these governing bodies but at times we also need to influence and intervene' (Interview D, 23 March 2006). Moreover, this official went on to add that part of the rationale in this respect was to reduce NGBs' dependency on UK Sport; for them to become much more self-

sufficient, but at times this amounted to 'enforced self-sufficiency'. Another UK Sport official confirmed the importance of shaping the ways in which NGBs use the funding drawn down from UK Sport: 'It's about us trying to, you know, influence, be assertive at times, be supportive at others ... our biggest risk in our risk register is the fact that we have to achieve through other people' (Interview C, 10 March 2006). The shaping and guiding of NGBs' conduct and the threat of funding reappraisals if NGBs fall short of the high standards now required under the No Compromise approach, draws attention to one of the central insights of governmentality research. That is, as a government agency, UK Sport's power does not rely 'upon the traditional Hobbesian means of sovereignty plus coercion' (Davies 2006, p. 254), but draws increasingly on a range of disciplinary techniques of manipulation.

In respect of the ways in which modernization translated into tangible objectives, one notable area of concern, as explained by a senior UK Sport official, was the 'growing disquiet from the home countries ... and the issues of devolution' (Interview E, 7 April, 2006). Home country (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) interests in conflict with UK/GB level interests has bedevilled the organization and administration of sport in the UK for many years (cf. Green and Houlihan 2005). At the heart of the issue is the conflict, mainly at NGB level, where a NGB has a UK-wide remit but also has representatives on its governing board from the four home countries. As one UK Sport official argued, 'you cannot go into that boardroom and be fully committed to that British [UK] entity if you are carrying your home country agenda ... there is a conflict of interest' (Interview D, 23 March 2006).

To take one prominent example, the sport of swimming has long grappled with the enduring problem of the role of the Amateur Swimming Federation of Great Britain (ASFGB). Historically, the ASFGB's primary function had been the selection of teams for international events where England, Scotland and Wales compete as Great Britain. For many years the relationship between the ASFGB, and the more powerful and wealthier governing body for the sport in England – the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) – was 'beset with organizational, administrative and financial ambiguity' (Green and Houlihan 2005, p. 133). In 2000, following numerous reviews over the past 30 years of the ASA/ASFGB relationship, the ASFGB was reconstituted as a limited company and branded as *British Swimming*. The ASFGB is now constitutionally distinct from the ASA, with a wholly-owned subsidiary company – High Performance Swimming Ltd – set up to administer National Lottery funding. A very similar issue also plagued UK Sport at its governing council level. However, one of Sue Campbell's significant achievements was to restructure the council so that the Chief Executives of the four home country Sports Councils no longer have a place on what is now known as the UK Sport Board. According to a UK Sport official, this is a 'system ... which now works' (Interview D, 23 March 2006).

Overall, then, UK Sport has not experienced such a traumatic and wide-ranging programme of modernizing reform as Sport England. However, such is the importance placed upon securing a successful outcome (i.e. defined medal targets) at Beijing (2008), and London (2012) in particular, by

government it is not surprising that UK Sport has also been compelled to reform and sharpen its strategic focus. Once again, we have evidence of recourse to business techniques in order to achieve such reform. As one UK Sport official explained, 'there is no big bang to modernization because it's about good business management ... being good custodians of the funds ... being efficient and making sure that we get value for money out of the things we purchase' (Interview C, 10 March 2006). In UK Sport's 2006 Annual Review the organization's Director of Performance not only helps to substantiate the contemporary valorization of business techniques but also draws attention to UK Sport's 'expectation' that NGBs 'perform':

We are using our expertise and a modern business approach to help create a world class environment ... [but] As we are responsible for public funds, it is crucial that sports are 'fit to deliver' ... [and] We will not shy away from withholding funding from any sports that do not meet [the set] criteria. (quoted in UK Sport 2007, pp. 20-21)

[B]The future of the modernization project

Finally, is the modernizing reform of UK Sport over, or is there still work to be done? One UK Sport official explained that 'I think we're nearly there ... the fact that we've got a performance management system across the whole organization ... that's a key difference' (Interview D, 23 March 2006). With regard to building more effective relationships with NGBs, which has been/is a key strand of UK Sport's broader programme of modernization, this respondent argued that 'there's still a lot of work to do' but NGBs are 'now

much more professionally set up ... it's still not quite right but at least it's a step in the right direction'. It was also explained that NGBs now go through a 'self-assurance process which requires them to reflect on what they have and haven't done ... but to be very honest, and it's been interesting, I think it's been a very good process because it puts the responsibility back on to them'.

Thus, on the one hand, NGBs receive funding and support from UK Sport to modernize and to work towards greater autonomy in the ways in which they work. On the other hand, however, there is now a much greater expectation from UK Sport that NGBs are instrumental in their own self-government and engaged in the reflexive monitoring of their actions such that they are able to 'account for what they do when asked to do so by others' (Giddens 1995, p. 35) Thus, as previously noted, power is exercised not only by the capacity to demand accounts but also an acceptance of the need to provide them. Choice is tightly regulated, though the extent of regulation is disguised by the powerful rhetoric of enhanced agency under New Labour, resulting in what Rose (1999, p. 154) refers to as a double movement of responsabilization and autonomization. This process has no end. All public sector organizations that receive government funding – and not just those in the sport sector - are now caught up in a vortex of 'continuous improvement' for, as one UK Sport official acknowledged, 'we have to continually improve' (Interview C, 10 March 2006), and for another, 'the improvement agenda around the sector is ... probably growing to be almost the only thing we do' (Interview B, 9 March 2006).

[A]Conclusion

It is readily acknowledged that both Sport England and UK Sport, for much of the 1990s, lacked a clear organizational rationale, and that Sport England (and its forerunners) in particular had been at serious risk of being abolished on a number of occasions. Yet the modernization process is treading a fine line between defining a clear set of organizational objectives and lapsing into 'excessive formalization' which can prove to be 'organizationally dysfunctional [by] diverting energies away from service and programme delivery' (Painter 1999, p. 97). Particularly with regard to Sport England there is a danger that 'measurement becomes everything and judgement become nothing' (Lipsey, quoted in Gray and Jenkins 2001, p. 209).

And despite its modernizing reform of Sport England and UK Sport an enduring dilemma remains for government. That is, as UK Sport strives to realize its own very stringent objectives of 60 medals and fourth place in the Olympic medal table in 2012, reconciling the Scylla of Olympic medals with the Charybdis of improved mass participation in sport and physical activity (cf. Green and Houlihan 2005; McDonald 2000) remains a daunting task. Although mass participation is primarily the responsibility of Sport England (and the Youth Sport Trust), and not UK Sport, the claim that achieving sporting excellence and greater participation are mutually compatible policy objectives has not only endured over many years but also masked the inherent difficulties in achieving both objectives. As Green and Houlihan (2005, p. 189) argue in their study of elite sport policy change:

it is hard to avoid the conclusion that elite sport development and achievement on the one hand and mass participation and club

development on the other are deeply incompatible functions within the policy frameworks current in Australia, Canada and the UK.

Part of the impact of modernization on UK Sport and Sport England has been to clarify what were perceived by government as overlapping and confused organizational objectives. Evidence of, or at least claims for, greater policy clarity does not immediately eradicate the problem however. In a climate of continued and continual rhetoric around the compatibility of elite-mass sport objectives, and despite evidence from other countries to the contrary (cf. Green and Houlihan 2005; Houlihan and Green 2008), it remains to be seen whether 'modernization' of the sector is the answer to this thorny policy conundrum.

Perhaps the most striking conclusion to emerge from this review is the extent to which modernization of Sport England and UK Sport has resulted in the narrowing of objectives – a substantial simplification, indeed over-simplification, of a complex policy field. The UK's engagement with international sport is narrowed to the primary objective of the pursuit of Olympic medals while the immensely complex cluster of issues around lifelong participation in sport, health and physical activity, and sports club development and social capital, is reduced to the pursuit of one percentage point increase in participation over the next five years. It is almost as though modernization requires simplification on a par with the clarity and simplicity of 'bottom-line' accounting in commercial enterprises. Furthermore, there is a clear paradoxical element to the modernization process of Sport England and UK Sport as the requirement of certainty of movement toward objectives



implied by modernization sits alongside an intense scepticism towards the capacity of public sector professionals to deliver certainty for, as Harrison (2002, p. 481), notes, 'professionals cannot provide certainty and are in any case not trusted to do so'.

If one important consequence of modernization is the constraint placed on professional staff through the routines of audit, KPIs, inspections and the like, then a second important consequence is marginalization of sports interests – often behind a rhetorical façade of empowerment. Both Sport England and UK Sport have replaced board/council members, and some very senior staff who were representative of particular sports interests or had a management background in sport, with members and staff who possess business skills/experience which were often not gained in a sport context. It is arguable that, just as Blairite modernization sought to make the state apparatus as a whole more 'business-like' rather than make business more responsive to the needs of people, so too modernization of Sport England and UK Sport is designed to make these organizations more attuned to business practice rather than more responsive to the partners on which they rely.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the price paid for modernizing Sport England and UK Sport and, admittedly, saving them from likely abolition, has been to create a democratic deficit. Lines of accountability for both organizations are more firmly drawn upwards to government (e.g. through mechanisms such as public service agreements) and outwards to commercial sponsors than downwards to key 'partners' such as national governing bodies

of sport (and their traditional stakeholders, e.g. clubs, members, volunteers, officials, coaching bodies, area associations and so forth). Today, these two increasingly powerful organizations manage through a 'command and control' (cf. Newman 2001) regime in order to shape, channel and guide the ways in which 'street-level' implementation of government sport policy is administered.

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## [A]Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The Great Britain Sports Council was restructured during 1996-1997. Previously, it had responsibility for sport in England, and for elite sport development across the UK. The UK Sports Council was also created during 1996-1997, with responsibility for elite athlete development, anti-doping, major events and international development. A separate sports council for England was also established, known as Sport England.

<sup>2</sup> Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the performance management framework used by the Audit Commission and central government to measure local authority performance and drive improvement in the sector. Local government spends approximately £1 billion per year on sport and leisure, more than 50 per cent of the total resources available to sport (Sport England 2007a).

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<sup>3</sup> The Active People survey was commissioned by Sport England and is the largest sport and recreation survey ever undertaken. In total, 323,724 people were interviewed (a minimum of 1,000 in each local authority area) by telephone across England between the period October 2005 to October 2006. Sport England is now conducting this survey on annual basis.

<sup>4</sup> The DCMS's current Public Service Agreements have a significant focus on increasing participation in Arts, Sport, Museums and Heritage, particularly by a range of 'priority groups'. The Taking Part survey is the mechanism for monitoring progress against several of these targets. The survey gives detail on adult (16 plus) participation and attendance covering all DCMS sectors that will provide the ability to carry out statistically robust analysis at cross-sectoral, socio-demographic sub-group and regional levels. The Taking Part survey began in July 2005 and will run continuously for three years, with an annual sample size of around 27,000 per year.