

# Where Should Sports Funding Be Aimed?

## From one gold to 27 golds in 20 years

At the end of the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, Great Britain was 36th in the medal table, winning one gold in a rowing competition, together with eight silver and six bronze medals; 20 years later, in Rio in 2016, Team GB came second in the medals table, winning 27 gold, 23 silver and 17 bronze medals.

## £80 million a year for UK Sport

What changed? The answer is the National Lottery. After the Atlanta Olympics, UK Parliament allowed for National Lottery “good causes” to give money to an organisation called UK Sport to support Olympic and Paralympic athletes. By 2016, the lottery proudly supported UK Sport to the tune of over £80 million a year. Being a world-class professional athlete is an expensive business. There are the costs of equipment and training facilities, coaches, performance gear, physiotherapists, dieticians, psychologists, doctors, masseurs and a myriad of other people whose support is critical if an Olympic or Paralympic athlete is to be at the top of their game during the four-yearly Olympics or Paralympics cycle.

### Olympic Gold Medals Rio 2016

Athletics	2
Boxing	1
Canoeing	2
Cycling	6
Diving	1
Equestrian	2
Golf	1
Gymnastics	2
Hockey	1
Rowing	3
Sailing	2
Swimming	1
Taekwondo	1
Tennis	1
Triathlon	1

## Funding for athletes in elite Olympic sports

UK Sport’s key objective is to identify and support athletes who have a realistic chance of winning a medal within the next eight years. Promising athletes are identified early and it is often recommended that they join “elite sports” such as rowing, sailing, cycling, swimming, athletics and gymnastics, or the Paralympic equivalent. Each gold medal represents a total investment of about £4 million. Other Olympic and Paralympic sports such as weightlifting, archery, badminton, basketball and rugby are comparatively low-funded because Team GB is not thought likely to win medals in these sports within the next two Olympics.



Olympic rings

### Funding for grassroots participation

Notwithstanding that the £80 million a year allows a few talented athletes to win medals, an alternative approach would be to invest the money into schools, local sports clubs and good regional sports facilities. In 2016, the UK boasted just five indoor velodromes for cycling and ten Olympic-sized swimming pools. Instead of concentrating all our investment in a few places where the top athletes can train, should we be investing money into increasing the number of good facilities across the country?

Although only around 7 % of all children in the UK are educated in private schools, over 30 % of GB Olympic medallists since 2012 were privately educated. Of course, it may be that this is entirely due to the athletic talent of this group of children, but it would appear more likely that

	Olympic-sized swimming pool	Velodrome
Aberdeen	✓	
Bangor, County Down	✓	
Bristol	✓	
Cardiff	✓	
Derby		✓
Glasgow	✓	✓
Leeds	✓	
London	✓	✓
Manchester		✓
Newport		✓
Plymouth	✓	
Sheffield	✓	
Sunderland	✓	

they had access to better coaches, facilities and equipment.

All Olympians started somewhere and most were talent-spotted by a local coach. Thus, the funding available to grassroots sports clubs is largely concentrated on football and the Olympic elite sports; rugby, cricket, tennis and judo (non-elite sports) all had their funding cut after the 2012 Olympics.

The UK is currently experiencing childhood obesity in 20 % of all children, and it has been shown that children now are generally less active and are less likely to be involved in sports than those 10 years ago. This is probably partly due to the lure of electronic media, but how many more children would be involved in sports if better facilities and training were more widely available and if the cost of participating in a sport was more affordable?



### Elite sports or grassroots participation?

Even lottery funding has its limits. As a country, we can't afford to pump money into grassroots participation as well as into elite sports and Olympic glory. Which is more important? Our top athletes are now known, respected and winning on the world stage. On the one hand, after a successful Olympic games, there is a country-wide "feel-good factor" and more people sign up to sports and athletics clubs – but on the other hand, the evidence is that many soon drop out. What do you think? Would £80 million a year of grassroots investment into equipment, sports coaches and facilities transform sporting participation for you, or are you more likely to get involved in sports having seen successful Olympic athletes?