

Impact of scottish junior regional novice (jrn) programme on athlete performance

[Business](#), [Management](#)



This study aimed to investigate the extent to which the Scottish Junior Regional Novice (JRN) programme is preparing young riders to make the progression to British Eventing's World Class Scholarship (WCS). Research was carried out in a qualitative and interpretive way with semi structured interviews being conducted to collect data. Interviews were carried out with the providers as well as current and former riders associated with the Scottish JRN programme. The success of the Scottish JRN programme at preparing young riders for elite level competition was evident, in terms of progression to the WCS in particular however little success was seen. Recommendations for improvement were made in the areas of mentoring, sportpsychology, rider fitness and nutrition, funding and the team selection process. Following the implementation of these changes the coordination of the services and support provided by the Scottish JRN programme would be improved. In addition to this an increase in the continuity between the key components of both athlete development programmes would be achieved. In turn it is expected that the preparation of young riders by the Scottish JRN programme for progression to the WCS will be more systematic and effective, easing the transition process to the WCS itself.

Introduction

Becoming an elite athlete, and achieving excellence within a chosen sport is rare. The idea of sporting excellence is complicated – the path of progression from grassroots to elite level being a complex process. The procedure of talent identification is intricate and there are numerous ideas for how success should be measured (Ericsson, 1994). In an attempt to identify and develop talent with the aim of achieving sporting excellence a variety of

development models have been proposed, each with strengths and weaknesses.

Only recently have programmes for athlete development been implemented on a large scale within British Eventing (BE). In 2002 BE introduced the World Class performance program with the aim of winning more medals. The program is split into two sections;

Potential – the higher elite level competitors.

Start – the lower of the selected elite athletes.

Athletes are looked after, developed and inspired to become good competitors. The centre of attention is a balanced line between skill acquisition and physical conditioning to ensure the skill and competencies required to compete at elite level are developed (“Equestrian World Class Programme”, 2010). The implementation of these elements allows progression of the athletes from Start to Potential and then ultimately on to the performance programme. The access to the programme is hugely restricted, only athletes who have been identified as talented with sustained high level performance at elite level are considered for selection (“World Class Development Programme”, 2010). In order to introduce aspiring young riders to this type of competition at the lower levels BE set up the Junior Regional Novice (JRN) programme. The JRN programme has an overall objective of preparing riders for the eventual progression to the World Class Scholarship (WCS) and aims to provide the athletes with the skills and

knowledge they will require to cope with the demands of elite level sport in a variety of fields (“ Under 18 Regional Novice Programme”, 2010).

This study aims to investigate the extent with which the Scottish Junior Regional Novice programme is preparing young riders for the progression to British Eventing’s World class scholarship through qualitative and interpretive research. To determine the success of the Scottish JRN programme in preparing riders for the transition to elite level competition to be determined semi-structured interviews will be carried out with the Scottish JRN Coordinator as well as coaches and riders associated with both programmes, the Scottish JRN programme and the WCS to gain an understanding of their thoughts and feelings on its effectiveness. Following analysis of this research it is expected that a number of recommendations for development and enhancement of the Scottish JRN programme can be presented.

In chapter two a review of literature on sporting excellence, athlete development and the Scottish JRN programme is conducted. The third chapter conveys the method of data collection and analysis used. In chapter four findings are shown and a discussion of the data occurs. The last chapter, chapter five, concludes the points raised in the discussions in chapter four and proposes suggestions for improvements to the Scottish JRN programme.

Review of Literature

Why strive for excellence in sport?

The want for sporting excellence comes from an individual's desire to achieve their personal best performance (Orlick, 1990). This aspiration to become the ultimate competitor within an individual's chosen sport leads to the attainment of progressively higher standards, growth and personal meaning. Through this striving to achieve consistently supreme competitive performances by those with the capabilities it means the standard of competition is always improving. Athletes must strive for sporting excellence to not only achieve the highest standard of performance possible but to out compete their rivals within elite level competition (Millar and Kerr, 2002).

Winning medals at European, world and Olympic level has become the chief objective for virtually all sporting organisations and, in turn, the programs that fund them with British Eventing being no exception. The aim of the WC program, a scholarship that offers funding to elite level riders, is to develop and refine a systematic process to deliver more medals now and in the future on the international stage. The program aims to do this through, talent identification, maximising potential and delivering success (" World Class Development Programme", 2010). The Great British Eventing teams, most notably at senior level, are some of the most successful teams in terms of winning medals at European, world and Olympic level.

What makes an elite sports person?

Excellence in sport

Excellence in sport is in the most part connected to winning in a competitive environment. It is understood though that excellence within a sport is much more than that, as winning is only relevant at that present moment in time. Excellence is more complex, with the assessment and measuring of it being complicated. It has been suggested that sporting excellence is shown when a competitor performs at a consistently superior level than that of their rivals. This superior performance is believed to be related to an individual's ability to master and perform complex skills whilst in a competitive environment, producing a preferred and needed outcome with minimum effort (Kreiner-Phillips and Orlick, 2005). This mastery of skill is thought to be achieved through effective and systematic training, yet it has been shown to be restricted by genetic potential.

Nature Vs Nurture

The Nature Vs Nurture debate is the center of many debates surrounding the idea of excellence in sport. The phrase was initially proposed by Francis Galton (1874) and is now used by academics to depict the elements which work together to produce sporting excellence. The debate relates to not only excellence in sport but also individual talent, and proposes a variety of explanations for individual difference in talent and a person's ability to achieve excellence. The nature idea explains these differences in ability through genetics and the relating factors which supposedly aid or limit an athlete's progression to elite level, suggesting that individuals have a pre-determined capability to be talented within a sporting context. This theory and a number of academics who support it suggest that because an

individual's capabilities to be talented are predestined the support given by outsiders such as coaches is restricted in terms of how successful it can be when helping an athlete achieve excellence (Baker, Horton, Robertson-Wilson and Wall, 2003)

In opposition to this view is the nurture argument, this suggests that environmental factors for example coaching bring about talent and through this excellence within sport. It is proposed by noted academics associated with the nurture argument that the support and social network surrounding an individual are in turn what lead to elite level performance, with the support of parents, teachers and coaches playing a vital role in progression (Baker et al., 2003)

1. Nature debate

An individual's Deoxyribonucleic acid, more commonly known as DNA, is inherited from both parents producing a unique genetic code. This code is believed by a number of academics to account for on average half the discrepancies between individual performances. Studies by these academics have also revealed that the genetic information of an individual determines their muscle fibre composition, which in turn effects their strength, power and endurance capabilities (Blimkie & Bar-Or, 1996). It is these differences and ones like these that are believed to impact on an individual's talent

The nature debate is based on scientific beliefs, suggesting that an individual's talent is innate and due to this their capabilities of achieving sporting excellence are directly associated with their genetic make-up. This

belief does not however take into account how these elite levels of skilled performance that lead to excellence are learned, developed and performed within competition. The debate through this fails to acknowledge the importance of coaching, mentoring and training in the progression process to elite level.

2. Nurture Debate

The nurture debate proposes that talent and through this excellence can be developed and enhanced by environmental aspects surrounding an athlete such a coaching. Research by Bloom (1985) and a number of leading authors in the field highlights a number of key environmental factors which determine an athlete's ability to reach elite level;

Encounters

Interests and opportunities experienced by the individual during childhood

Parental involvement and support

Training and practice.

These suggestions imply that equal opportunity should be given to individuals to nurture sporting excellence (Anderson & Bernhardt, 1998). Due to these factors being key in the progression process it would be suitable to suggest that access to facilities and sufficient coaching were crucial requirements with Baker (2003) adding that the superiority and amount of training act as predictors of future excellence.

Much of the emphasis in the nurture debate centers around training and practice. The idea of an individual taking part in continual practice out with prescribed training hours has been proposed as an explanation for these individuals learning and perfecting quicker than others. To be successful this practice needs to be coordinated and systematic in achieving setgoals, and was deemed ' Deliberate practice' by Ericsson (1994). Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993) state that this type of practice whilst requiring large amounts of exertion and attention is not fundamentally motivating, with no instantaneous rewards being reaped. Ericsson goes on to explain the differences in progress between individuals recognised as being innately talented as being down to the quantity and quality of these deliberate practices adopted by the individual. Due to this Ericsson and Charness (1994) believed that deliberate practice was more influential in achieving sporting excellence than innate ability.

Leading academics also proposed significant relationships between the other highlighted key factors and individual development. Following findings it was concluded that despite the innate levels of talent an individual has they will not develop the capabilities to reach excellence without constant and consistently high levels of coaching, training, support andmotivation, in conjunction with access to required facilities of a adequate level (Schempp, 2003). Highlighting how critical the role of parents, teachers and coaches is in the progression of an athlete to excellence.

3. Alternative perspective

An alternative view proposed is a combination of both sides of the nature vs. nurture debate where it is suggested that specific individuals possess innate capabilities which enhance their responses to the key environmental factors. This innate capacity to learn is known as trainability (Davids and Baker, 2007). It is widely believed though that talent and sporting excellence is down to a particular combination of both nature and nurture.

Each side of the debate gives obvious implications for the development and enhancement of talent through sports programmes and scholarships geared towards achieving excellence.

Athlete Development Programme

From the available literature a variety of key components for an athlete development programme can be identified as highlighted above. A combination of these, with the findings of leading authors in sports development who proposed there to be critical periods in an individual's youth where the outcomes of training can be enhanced, are the basis for many athlete development programmes (Bar-Or, 1996). During these significant periods particular forms of training should be adopted with training being altered with growth to achieve optimal results. Academics also suggested that for an individual to reach excellence it takes on average between eight and twelve years of systematic training. These ideas have led to the development of athlete development models, which recognise suitable training goals during the different stages of an individual's growth and progression. The various key factors identified above; training, coaching, conditioning, competition and practice, as being major influences must be

applied in a coordinated and systematic manner to aid in the development of excellence and meet the individual's need (Schempp, 2003).

Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD)

Long term athlete development is based on growth and development aiming to achieving the best possible training, competition and recovery all through an athlete's career with particular attention being paid to the critical youth periods (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). Individuals who adopt a long term programme like LTAD are more successful in avoiding plateaus in performance during their career where development and progress slows considerably (Rushall, 1998). These plateaus are on the whole down to over emphasis on competition in an

athlete's early career, a period where benefits of training should be utilised fully. The LTAD framework consists of six stages;

Fundamentals

Learning to train

Training to train

Training to compete

Training to win

Retainment

Each stage is implemented at a specific time with a particular purpose and training outcome with the aim being to enhance development and growth of the individual.

Stage one, the fundamentals phase of training, aims to develop the individual's basic movement skills through fun participation in the majority of sports. The main concentration is on the development of agility, balance, coordination and speed, the basis of the essential skills; running, jumping and throwing which underpin the majority of sports (Schempp, 2003).

Individuals are also introduced to simple but fundamental rules and ethics of sporting participation. The fundamental stage takes place between the ages of five and ten years old with physical activity being performed through structured programmes five to six times per week with monitored progression.

Athletes then move on to the learning to train phase where they learn basic sports skills between the ages of eight and twelve. The objective of this stage is to not only enhance the skills acquired at the fundamentals stage but to introduce readiness, basic tactics and most importantly cognitive and emotional growth. Individuals obtain a basic knowledge on the ancillary capacities; stretching, nutrition, hydration, recovery, focus, warm up, relaxation and cool down. These aims are achieved through challenging practices five to six times a week with the introduction of skill improvement during competition. Although practice is sport specific individuals are encourage to spend some of their time participating in other sports than their preferred to ensure a broad range of skills are developed. Phase two is crucial if an athlete is to reach their full potential (Bar-Or, 1996).

Next the individuals acquire specific sports skills and knowledge on building fitness in the training to train phase, stage 3 another critical period in athlete

development. This phase takes place between the ages of eleven and fifteen, and for those wishing to progress in their chosen sport, practice takes place six to nine times per week. During this stage the established objectives become progressively more refined and sports specific. Individuals obtain knowledge on fitness training, mental preparation decision making, whilst their sport specific skills are enhanced and the ancillary capacities are established (Viru, Loko, Volver, Laanetos, Karelson & Viru, 1998).

Competition goals are introduced and individual progress is monitored using both broad and thorough evaluations.

Following the training to train stage, the skills and knowledge acquired by individuals are refined in preparation for competition in the training to compete phase, stage four. Training becomes very distinguished in its objectives with practice being geared towards a specific event or position. Further enhancements are made to the athlete's physical conditioning, techniques, tactics and mental preparation with the objective of being able to performing them successfully within a competitive environment. The ancillary capacities are at this stage tailored to the individual making sure they meet the individual's needs. Athletes at this phase will typically be between fourteen and eighteen and will train up to twelve times a week.

Following the development of these skill within competition an athlete then moves on to training to win, stage five, where competition performance is maximised. In addition to developing and refining the skills from phase four in an effort to make the most of them in competition, rest periods and injury prevention are also considered. These two additional areas increase in

importance with the increased levels of training, with athletes now practicing around fifteen times per week. Phase five continually changes and progresses with the athlete development to ensure advancements are made and maintained towards sporting excellence.

Some sports have introduced a sixth phase, retainment. The retainment phase concerns individuals who are retiring from competitive sport yet aim to remain not only physically active themselves but also play an active role within their sport. Salmela, Young and Kallio (1998) highlight the fact that the experience of these elite individuals is precious to the progression of the sport and also the up and coming athletes within it. The need to retain these individuals has led to an increase in the introduction of Masters Programmes across many sports.

Junior Regional Novice Program

BE's Junior Regional Novice programme is an educational programme within a competition environment for young riders under the age of eighteen. The programme aims to develop the rider's knowledge and understanding of the sport while increasing their competitive experience against competitors of a similar age. Through this the JRN programme provides a natural step in the progression for riders who are ready to move on from initial grassroots, pony club level, to under sixteen European (pony teams) and those wishing to become eligible for selection for the under eighteen European team.

Following a succession of trials from March to September a team of 6 riders from those register with the programme is selected from each of the JRN regions across the United Kingdom to represent their particular region at the

JRN Championships at the end of the year. In turn the Programme aims to help young riders further their riding career by aiding their transition to elite level competition whilst still being enjoyable.

Eight individual regions make up the JRN programme in the United Kingdom with Scotland being one. The regions have an appointed under eighteen regional coordinator who deals with all affairs associated with their specific region, as well as coaches who carry out the prescribed training programme for the registered riders. This appointing of two coaches to each region to work under the coordinator is a new structure for 2011. The restructuring has also meant that a national coach will be chosen to provide additional support to the regional coaches offering extra guidance. In early years each region was only required to provide coaching and support services for riders selected for the team, although the levels and quantity of training and the riders included in this training was at the discretion of the coordinator. The new structuring of the JRN programme means that coaching offered is open to all registered riders not just selected team members. Due to this the programme is aimed at not only identify young riders with the potential to win medals at all European levels but to improve skill acquisition and enjoyment for all involved (" Under 18 Regional Novice Programme", 2010).

Methodology

- 1.

To acquire and understanding of the extent that the Scottish JRN programme is preparing young riders for the progression to British Eventing's WCS through qualitative and interpretive research five research questions were identified, in relation to the findings of the literature review and prior knowledge of the researcher;

What level of importance does the Scottish JRN programme give to assisting young riders turn elite

What services/ support are offered to young riders

To what extent are these services/ support coordinated and systematic

How effective is the support in helping young riders make the transition to the world class scholarship

Are there any weak areas in the services/ support provided that need more consideration/ improvement

2.

The research was carried out in a qualitative and interpretive way.

Qualitative research seeks to understand ' why' something occurs through the use of unstructured information or data. Studies conducted in a qualitative nature allow the researcher to gain an insight into participant's attitudes, behaviours, values, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyles (Walle, 1997). Qualitative research centres on the social ideologies that come to be the basis for reality. This type of research tends to be less time consuming and expensive as a smaller number of participants are required with less extensive methods being used. Topics can be explored in

more depth than the opposite type research, quantitative, however findings cannot be quantified or generalized across a larger population like findings from a quantitative study. Quantitative research is a systematic and empirical study of data is completed where mathematical models, theories and hypotheses are used to develop an understanding of the relationships present (Walle, 1997). This study aimed to understand the beliefs, opinions and perceptions of the providers and associated riders of the Scottish JRN programme including riders who have progressed onto the WCS programme and riders who haven't yet been able to make the transition.

3.

For the interviews to be successful in gaining an insight into the reality of the situation surrounding the Scottish JRN programme they were conducted in a systematic manner. Interviews can be structured in three ways, structured, semi-structured or unstructured. Structured interviews seek to ensure that all interviews are conducted in the same manner with the respondents being presented precisely the same questions which are asked in the same structured order. This allows for interviewees responses to be collaborated and combined so that reliable and valid comparisons can be made across groups and time frames for example. Structured interviews are appropriate when the researcher already has a basic understanding of the relationship between the respondents and the research area. Due to the inflexible nature of the structured interview it does not allow for further investigation into topic areas in an effort to gain a more in depth understanding.

In opposition to the structured interview is the unstructured interview a non directive interview where there are no set questions, just a selection of previously formulated key points the researcher wishes to discuss. The researcher is free to discuss these points in a manner they choose based around the interviewee's responses. This informal nature allows for more in depth investigations to be carried out on specific topics of interest. Due this versatility however an unstructured interview lacks reliability when it comes to analysis.

Falling in between the two previously discussed structures is the semi structured interview. The semi structured interview allows for critical questions, which have been formulated in advance, to be carried out in a structured way whilst still allowing the researcher freedom to ask more information. For the purpose of this study a semi-structured interview has been used, this permits the researcher to investigate specific areas gaining examples for a better understanding while still maintaining enough structure to allow for reliable aggregation of data.

To ensure that the interviews produced valid and reliable data it was essential that the interviews were personalised to each respondent as much as possible. It was also necessary for the researcher to develop empathy with respondents. Through doing this the researcher was able to gain their confidence in an effort to discover a more in depth understanding of their thoughts and feelings. The researcher aimed to be unobtrusive therefore not influencing a participant's response.

4.

To gain a broad and in depth understanding of the services and support provided by the Scottish JRN programme there were two types of interviewees involved in the research process; the providers and the associated riders. The providers gave an overview of the JRN programme from their personal perspective. This allowed the researcher to study whether or not the key components of an athlete development programme were being implanted by the JRN programme and whether or not they felt that the JRN programme could do more to aid and support transitional riders. Three providers were interviewed; the Scottish JRN coordinator, the current regional coach and the previous head of the Scottish performance programme who also provides coaching. To ensure that the thoughts and opinions gained on whether the JRN programme meets the needs of transitional riders from the interviews was not limited or biased riders who were or had been previously been associated with the Scottish JRN programme were also included. Seven riders were included in the study; three current JRN riders, one rider who made the transition to world class and three who have not yet managed the progression. The associated riders allowed us to gain an insight into their views on the services and support that are provided. Each interviewee was formally asked to take part in the study and following their agreement semi-structured interviews were conducted. In the case of the riders, the respondent's anonymity was ensured allowing them to talk openly about the JRN programme and whether it meets their needs.

5.

Three different interview schedules were devised; one for the coordinator and coaches (providers), one for current JRN riders and one for current and post transitional riders. In each of the three interview schedules a number of key topic areas were set up and a variety of questions were formulated on these areas (see appendix 1 for interview schedules).

Through interviewing the providers we gained an insight into their level of knowledge comprehension in the areas of services and support requirements, athlete development and the systematic objectives of the JRN programme on its own as well as in relation to the world class scholarship. Due to the basis of the interview being semi-structured it meant that the providers could draw attention to their individual expertise and aims, giving examples to further the understanding of the JRN programme from their point of view. The interviews with the Scottish JRN coordinator and coaches allowed the researcher to discuss the services and support offered and how athlete development is achieved through these provisions, the structure of the programme and the benefits for the associated riders including the mentoring of riders during and post programme participation.

The current JRN rider's interviews looked into why the riders got involved in the JRN programme. Secondly what they felt the aims of the program to be, discussing in detail the provisions offered talking about their strengths and weaknesses and whether they met their needs. The riders were asked about the levels and quality of the coaching and if there were any services they did

not make use of. The differences between JRN level riders and elite world class competitors were discussed and any gaps in provisions or improvements that could be made from their point of view were proposed. As a concluding point riders were asked all in all how they felt about the JRN programme as a whole. In addition to these questions the world class and transitional riders were also asked if they were encouraged to make the progression to the WCS and whether or not they felt prepared to make the transition. To aid in the development and proposition for improvements following data collection these riders were also asked if, in the future they would be willing to help new JRN riders in making the move to elite level competition. During the interviews the researcher aimed to achieve in depth thought about responses instead of quick answers.

6.

The initial interviews were conducted with the JRN programme providers so that a basic outline of the programme was attained before the associated riders were interviewed this ensured that questions that were asked were relevant. All interviews were completed following formal consent and took place at a decided location and time. The interviews lasted no more than thirty minutes, on average around fifteen minutes, and were recorded using a dictaphone to aid data collection, aggregation of findings and in turn discussion of findings. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed each respondent to make clear their answers giving details of examples where possible ensuring clarified understanding was achieved.

7.

Once all the interviews were completed each one was then transcribed. This transcription allowed for a thorough, more in depth content analysis of each interview to take place. The transcriptions were analysed on an individual basis initially, where responses to the questions where possible were compared in a general way. This initial study of the data allowed for key areas for discussion and possible improvement to be identified. Following the identification of these key areas the interviews were then compared within groups and between groups, this allowed for a variety of views to be aggregated on these areas. Through doing this these key areas could be discussed from the points of view of all individuals associated with the program itself, allowing for an in depth discussion of the key points to occur. The key points provided the basis for the structure of the discussion and were in turn related to the previously discussed literature where comparisons could be made. These comparisons with the reviewed literature in addition to the associated views of the respondents were the cause of any proposed improvements to the Scottish JRN programme itself. The combination of the two allowed for a solid foundation to be set up in the discussion of these improvements while providing good argument for them. Through combining the two a better understanding of the potential benefits that may be reaped by the young riders as a result of these changes can be gained.

Discussion of Findings

How committed is British Eventing's JRN program towards developing elite competitors?

British Eventing believes that committing themselves to developing elite competitors is an integral goal of their organisation, in terms of winning medals at championships be that at Europeans, world or Olympic level:

“ The JRN programme aims to be fun for all involved but introducing riders to participation in elite level competition is the ultimate objective”

Coach

The JRN coaches believe that introducing riders to elite level competition at an early stage in turn aids in producing elite riders capable of achieving sporting excellence which is the long term goal for those associated with the running of the program.

These competitions also act as a spring board into further competitions and enable the riders to show case there skills in front of the selectors and talent spotters that are involved in progressing riders to more advanced squads:

“ Doing well at the JRN championships meant that when I competed in the Under Twenty One trails I was more confident of doing well”

Rider

Riders who show potential to win medals by consistently performing in high level competition are engulfed by BE's World class athlete development programme. These riders receive invaluable services and support in all the key components required to produce excellence, with the quantity and quality of the provisions being of the highest standard available. Although

the JRN programme can be advantageous in terms of trying to gain selection for these teams, the selection process for these riders is extremely selective with the programme being in most parts completely elitist.

On a regional level the JRN programme aims to introduce riders to the early stages of elite level competition. Through these JRN competitions and rider performances following team selection BE are able to set up a systematic talent identification model, where riders who show potential at the early stages are invited to attend BE team training days:

“ When I got my letter in the post to say I had been invited onto the B squad training for the under twenty one I was surprised but excited”

Rider

BE believe that these riders display the characteristics and have the capabilities of performing successfully at elite level and are keen to see that these do not go unnoticed. The riders are mentored and checked up on whilst receiving additional training of the highest standards this enables not only the selectors but the coaches to monitor the improvements of individuals. This displays a clear systematic goal of BE to enable these riders and others who are identified, to progress through the team programme and selection and ultimately they hope that these riders achieve selection onto the world class scholarship if they continue to perform at the highest level.

The structure of the JRN programme allows communication between providers and riders alike. However it has been expressed that ideally riders

associated with the JRN programme would find it beneficial to have correspondence with former JRN riders some of whom have made the transition to the world class programme:

“ I would be happy to help future JRN riders as I definitely would have appreciated being able to learn from their experience myself”

Rider/Coach

As expressed by the current JRN riders contact with previous graduates of the programme would be extremely useful in terms of gaining knowledge and understanding through the former JRN riders experiences. Further they could learn what to expect from elite level competition and performance programmes. Although riders in this study have expressed the want to pass on their experiences it would not be practical to involve all past competitors due to differing factors. Structurally however it may be suitable to introduce a system where by all riders that are part of BE's programmes get together to discuss experiences and learn from each other. For this to function appropriately the most experienced riders would need to be enthusiastic about helping the younger generation. This system could also be used to establish rider feedback and enable the providers to access how the programmes are functioning and if any adjustments in the short or long term need to be considered.

What difference are the support provisions making?

Although there has been great success by riders who have been associated with the JRN programme it is difficult to determine what differences the programme has made specifically it is difficult to determine if these riders would not make the progression to elite level without the support of the programme:

“ The JRN’s was a great beginning for me although I certainly wouldn’t have done it [world class selection] without my back up team”

Rider/coach

The JRN programme as a whole has contributed to the development of a large number of riders currently on the world class programme in the last five years, with nearly all team riders being associated with the programme at some point in their career. Although, these riders do not solely believe that the JRN programme has been the factor responsible for them making the transition to the world class programme. The respondents identified two main criteria that were constant among all riders, the support network that they had out with the support from BE and, the primary reason riders believe that contributes to success is “ hard work” – something that is essential in any sport to achieve excellence.

Looking at the Scottish JRN programme individually the success of the programme at preparing riders for the transition to the World class program is not so clear. The Scottish JRN programme has aided many riders in making the progression to towards selection for teams and in some cases selection

on to these teams, there has however only been one rider who has made the transition on to the WCS in the last five years:

“ Unfortunately I didn’t make it into the World Class programme after I left the JRN but it wasn’t for the lack of effort”

Rider

In recent years the provisions and support offered by the JRN program have improved dramatically, with most restructuring changes occurring this year. To aid in the development of riders and to increase the chances of producing elite athletes with the potential to win medals, BE have proposed training for all. Previously the coordinators only had to provide training for riders selected for the team who would be representing their region at the championships however this year, as well as continuing this talent identification, training is to be offered to all registered riders. This means that riders who struggle to access high level facilities and coaches are given the opportunity to develop their talent through association with these programmes in the same ways as more experienced riders can and may aid in developing a more successful transition for riders to the World Class programme.

The Programmes restructuring has meant that each region has two appointed JRN coaches who have been selected following a vigorous selection process. These coaches work under the guidance of the JRN coordinator for their region as well as the national JRN coach who oversees all eight regions. Through introducing these permanent coaches all riders on

the program now have more readily available to quality consistent training at all times. With coaches getting to know riders and their horses in more depth leading to more goal orientated coaching being put into place, with the hope of greater improvements and results occurring:

“ I have a great relationship with the coaches and Caro [coordinator] I know I can go and talk to them anytime”

Rider

The Scottish JRN programme is seen to be systematically structured with performance development support being the basis. The riders associated with the programme are constantly being judged on their performance as team selection is crucial to being successful in competition for this reason the structure is systematic. The programme and the transition following the programme is progressive. Riders are initially accepted onto the programme from where they can progress to the JRN team for their region and if they show the capabilities following the team competition they will be invited on to European team training, this has added coherency to the programme which was previously lacking.

In opposition to other sports the geographical positioning of the Scottish regional base is seen to be of a disadvantage. Other sports consider having one central base for the country to be a significant advantage when it comes to team performance and team relations as all members are brought together for the delivery of provisions. While travelling a long distance to attend training is suitable in most sports, riders have to take in to

consideration the effect of travelling on their equine and also, for the purpose of one day of training for example transportation is sometimes not financially viable. Due to this a number of riders out with the central area were unable to make full use of all the support and services provided. This geographical disadvantage also affects the training offered and the coaching sessions given. Due to the limited number of potential elite level athletes in similar age groups able to attend all the training sessions it has to be offered to those out with the under eighteen age bracket to make holding some raining events feasible. This means that JRN riders are not always receiving coaching sessions with other JRN riders and because of this coaching cannot be competition specific. Riders may not receive what they feel to be adequate training if paired with a rider of a different ability to themselves. Team moral takes longer to form than the regions in England where training is attended by only under eighteen riders and can be geared at the most elite of these as their bases are more easily accessed by the associated riders so a better turn out is seen.

How are the support and services being received by the associated riders?

On a whole the support and services offered to the riders registered with the Scottish JRN programme is well received. All rider respondents held the programme in high regard and agreed that it contributed to their success and for some aided them to make the transition to elite level:

“ I would recommend that young riders take part in the JRN's it was fun and improved my riding a lot”

Rider

While still being fun the programme was able to introduce riders to a high standard of competition, primarily increasing their competition experience but also their understanding and knowledge of what elements are involved on the day of competition and during preparation to ensure the best possible chance of success.

The team aspect of the programme is well received, with riders feeling comfortable in the team setting. Riders felt that being surrounded by people willing to help them was very reassuring and meant that there was help whenever required. This support offered to the riders by others involved in the programme was similarly very well received and is in line with the progression of the programme. Transitional riders commented on the support saying that it was continued even after they left the JRN programme through the provider's eagerness to aid in any way they could. The team aspect also meant that riders could be introduced to elite competition while not feeling under pressure to perform individually through having the back up of the team.

While the riders appreciate the support and provisions offered they do acknowledge the lack of funding available to the coordinators to provide provisions:

“ I think Caro [coordinator] and the coaches do a great job at making the funding go as far as it does. We do pretty well I suppose”

Rider

The riders do not see the lack of funding as too much of a hindrance to their individual performance however this could be due to a lack of education or knowledge about what could be available to them with increased funding. Although the general response was of “funding could improve anything” they did not express that any individual part of the programme needed to be readdressed. Through analysis of other elite performance programmes it can be concluded that the greater the quantity and quality of facilities made available to athletes the more opportunities they have to improve their all round performance.

Riders were well informed of how to ensure the well being of their horse at home and during the competition, a part of the program which riders believed to be invaluable. Information was provided on horse nutrition to make certain that the horse was receiving all the enrichment needed to perform at it's best ability. Fitness was also discussed, increasing the guarantee that all the horses were at an appropriate level of fitness to compete. Riders were taught about banned substances learning about what substances to avoid and how to prevent contamination for example, this exposure to lifestyle knowledge is extremely valuable and a huge improvement in terms of service provision.

A key element of the programme which was stressed by the riders was that the JRN funding eased the work and financial load of the parents and, as well

as this, the parents could relax knowing that their children were well prepared for competition:

“ although themoneydoesn’t cover all costs involved It’s good to know someone is helping you out and the services we have would cost money if JRN’s wasn’t providing them”

Rider

The programme also meant that the riders had the opportunity of the highest levels of training which may not have been accessible for all of the riders due to funding constraints but through the support they are able to make use of the best facilities and coaching available, vital components in the progression to excellence. Further to this the programme was seen to develop a sense of realism in the riders, making certain that they know what to expect when taking part in elite competition. Taking part in elite competition itself is costly so making the most of opportunities is often crucial. Due to this the riders are often subjected to stress but having a support structure around them enables them to concentrate more on the riding itself. An insight into what should be expected of riders and the standard of performance that needs to be achieved and the potential progression to the WCS, preparing them for making the best possible transition.

Are there gaps in the provisions?

A lack of funding has been highlighted by the JRN coordinator and riders. As a result there are gaps in provision evident due largely to the lack of funding made available by British Eventing to each of eight separate regions:

“ We are only provided with five hundred pounds to fund a programme of training for the registered riders, this money also goes towards paying the expense of having coaches available throughout the time of the championships”

Coordinator

The JRN coordinators are given five hundred pound at the beginning of each season by BE, this is to fund training for the riders registered with that region and also to pay for the time spent by the coaches at the championships at the end of the year. The programme of training provided by each region is at the discretion of that regions coordinator and they have the final say on how the money is spent. This lack of funding in relation to the number of under eighteen riders registered with BE, who make up over twenty percent of BE registered riders, makes it suitable to suggest that funding should be reallocated in terms of participation and demand for service provision.

Following selection for the JRN team riders receive no additional funding. Taking into account that participation in the JRN championship cost in excess of five hundred pounds per rider, not including the extra expenditures of the week, plus the disadvantage to the Scottish riders of the Championships being located in England means travel expenses are higher than that of riders from other regions it starts to become very costly for riders involved.

To combat additional cost to the Scottish JRN riders, BE funding should be reevaluated with geographical inhibitors considered. This would enable all regions access to the relevant support budget with the varying factors of individual regions considered during the allocation process. Not only addressing variations in expenditure but also go some way to ensuring equality among provisions made available. Any additional funding sought by the riders and their helpers must be self raised by all involved, with an attempt at securing a sponsor to provide at least team attire being the main objective.

The rider respondents acknowledge that there are missing elements in support and services, although they can see that additional funding would benefit the programme they are realistic of what to expect from the JRN programme with the budget provided:

“ It would be easy to agree that new investment would improve anything but this is not always feasible and I feel the programme has helped me a lot”

Rider

Although there are varying disadvantages to the regional programme the riders express that they are generally happy with the provision they have access to and the way in which it is delivered. The respondents identified two main themes; the quality of the support they have received as being “ of a high standard” and secondly that the amenities not offered through the JRN programme the riders do not view as being “ essential” elements in which to improve their preparation. Despite this view the riders have not had

experience of these missing components resulting in a distorted view of the importance of these to their preparation and the impact of these on performance.

A key component which was initially considered largely unnecessary but was highlighted by rider respondents was the absence of rider fitness and nutrition support being available through the JRN programme. The services offered by the programme concentrate entirely on the well being of the horse with nothing on rider fitness or nutrition being offered:

“ I suppose rider fitness would be something I would make use of if I had the option”

Rider

A number of factors need to be taken into account when considering implementing a new initiative into the programme, the elements that are most important when it comes to competition preparation and the level of competition that the individual is required to reach. At one star level (the level of the JRN Championships) rider fitness does not play an essential role in performance, riders are expected to be fit enough to compete but the level of fitness required is nowhere near as high as at the elite level associated with the world class programme, where a minor lack in fitness may prove to be hugely detrimental to performance. However the horse's well being, levels of fitness and nutrition, is crucial at all stages. Taking this all into account and considering the level of funding available it is on a whole accepted by the riders that this must be the priority. Despite this rider

fitness and nutrition become a necessity at the levels moving on from JRN, and within the WCS the elements are viewed as fundamental to achieving success. For this reason it maybe of a benefit to the riders to gain the basic understanding of how a nutrition and fitness system programme functions. Through introducing key elements of athlete development programme at this primary stage it would ensure continuity throughout the athletes' transition to the elite level.

A further area of support offered by the WCS and considered to be of high importance in other sports at all levels is sports psychology. The majority of riders at JRN level are uneducated in the importance of sports psychology as an aid to progress in their sport and therefore did not suggest it as a recommendation for improvement to the Scottish JRN programme.

Sportsscienceand sports psychology have however been shown by Weinberg and Gould (2007) to improve performance levels in competition through basic goal setting, positive thinking and visulisation. These basic skills should be introduced to grassroots level riders and developed with the progression of the rider eventually becoming part of the rider's pre competition routine at high level competition (Zaichkowskyand Naylor, 2005). Due to these findings it would be suitable to suggest that the programme educates the riders of the fundamentals to a mental preparation routine or at least ensures that they are aware of its importance in elite level competition. This would mean that riders could begin to implement basic sports psychology into their training as an initial step and progress to using it in pre competition routine at major competitions.

The level of performance expected of Scottish JRN riders is notable as being less than that of the elite level world class riders but interestingly in comparison it is less than that expected or required by the English regions of the JRN programme. The level of talent in England is as a whole higher than in Scotland and for this reason Scottish riders are not pushed or required to improve their performance and produce better results to gain a place on the Scottish JRN team like their English counterparts:

“ I would love the chance to compete against the English JRN riders more, the Standard of their riders is so high. If you are good up here, you might only be average down there”

Rider

It is difficult to propose a recommendation to improve this situation without requesting that the riders spend more money, something that has been previously highlighted as a problem. It should be suggested that the competitions which would count towards qualify results towards selection on a JRN team, no longer be regionalised but be restructured to include all regions JRN competitions – riders from Scotland being able to compete in English JRN competitions and vice versa. Through doing this it would encourage riders to, when already travelling down south to compete in no JRN events with other equines, enter JRN competitions in other regions making the journey more cost effective. This widening of the competitions being considered as selection trials would mean that Scottish JRN riders would have the opportunity to compete against riders of a similar age in

other regions allowing them to become aware of any improvements that could be made and to learn what is expected of them if they want to be successful at the Championships. Enlightening the Scottish riders through doing this would improve the Scottish JRN team as a whole and hopefully increase the level of riding achieved by Scottish riders ultimately leading to a higher number of riders from the region progressing to the WCS.

The most striking area identified for improvement was the lack of provision in terms of having a mentoring structure in place for riders. Following progression from the Scottish JRN programme riders who show potential for teams were seen to make a natural progression to team training and quickly moved on to being mentored by BE team providers. Contrary to this others received little in the form of a mentor; there was no coherent system or systematic framework to seek mentorship:

“ I didn’t have a mentor after moving on from the JRN’s but I kept in contact with some coaches and Caro [Coordinator]”

Rider

The riders however did say they felt able to contact any of the Scottish JRN providers if they needed any guidance even after moving on from the programme itself. A coach suggested that an under twenty one mentor should be introduced in Scotland to aid the smooth transition to elite level for all riders not just those who have previously shown potential. This would mean that the progression of riders who have moved on can be monitored and those that struggling can be helped. This monitoring of riders following

the early stages of progression is extremely valuable when it comes to ensuring that as many riders as possible are making the progression to elite level. Through contact with these riders the providers can consult on how successful the programme was at preparing them to make the transition to elite level. This would allow for improvements and refinements to be made to improve service provision. With a view to ensuring that the JRN programme is as effective as possible. Consulting the regional coaches would also be a recommendation, through doing this the coordinator would gain an understanding of how successful the training is being conveyed and received, meaning future provisions could be tailored to fit the needs of the riders more accurately.

Conclusion

The improvement made to the standard of the individual rider progressing through the levels of elite competition has been greatly improved over the years through the introduction of the Junior Regional Novice programme by British Eventing. The success of the JRN programme is evident when the number of graduates from it who have progressed on to representing Great Britain at European, World and Olympic level is considered. Riders selected for these teams can in the majority of cases be linked to the JRN programme at some point in their career. The achievements by the English JRN competitors however have increasingly outnumbered those accomplished by Scottish JRN riders. The English regions of the programme have been superior to the Scottish JRN region in terms of athlete development, with these regions preparing riders suitably for progression on to the WCS. The

Scottish JRN programme despite being linked to a number of riders who have represented Great Britain, has struggled to reach the level of athlete development that is need to prepare riders for making the transition to the WCS with only one Scottish JRN graduate in the last five years being selected. The services and support provided by the Scottish JRN programme however were well received by riders and little was suggested for improvement initially. When further investigation was carried out during interviews gaps and weaknesses in provision became more evident and recommendations for change could be made.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the Scottish JRN providers; the coordinator and coaches, initially allowing for a basic understanding f the programme to be gained. Following this, interviews were conducted with current riders registered with the Scottish JRN programme as well as riders presently making the transition to the WCS and the sole Scottish rider to be selected for the scholarship itself. These interviews allowed for an in depth understanding into the perceptions, thoughts and feelings of the associated riders to be gained. This meant that the insight obtained on the success of the Scottish JRN programme at preparing riders for the transition to the WCS was as unbiased as possible.

In keeping with the fundamental goal of BE to increase the number of medals won on the international stage the Scottish JRN programme place high levels of importance on athlete development. The programme aims to introduces riders to elite level competition in an effort to prepare them for

the transition to BE's team programme and ultimately on to selection for the WCS.

The competitions have been shown to be an excellent vehicle for progression for athletes with the capabilities to be successful at the highest levels. Riders who show potential in JRN competitions, in particular at the JRN championships, were seen to make a natural transition on to BE team programme where they received invaluable levels of mentoring, coaching and additional services of the uppermost quality. This progressive nature of the programme means that athlete development is always at the forefront of the programmes aims, therefore meaning that the importance of preparing riders for the transition to elite level is always maintained.

Dramatic changes to the JRN programme has occurred in recent years, with most restructuring occurring in the last year. This restructuring has meant that two regional coaches have been introduced to each of the eight regions, these coaches work alongside the coordinators and under the guidance of the new national coach. Through increasing the accessibility to coaches huge improvements have been made to the provisions that the Scottish JRN programme offer. In previous years coordinators were required to provide training to riders selected to represent their region at the championships however new aims have been implemented. The Scottish JRN programme whilst still maintaining the goal of talent identifications, has the new objective to provide training for all. The introduction of this new objective has meant that the highest levels of training and facilities are now accessible

to all riders, meaning that all riders are given equal opportunity to aid their growth and development.

The support and services provided to the Scottish JRN riders was well received with the quality of the provision being highlighted. Riders received training in all three disciplines as well as on horse fitness and nutrition, with the introduction of lifestyle knowledge this year. It was evident that the support and services offered by the Scottish JRN programme were restricted by the limited amount of funding made available to each region by BE. This lack of funding was acknowledged by the riders but was not seen to be too much of a hindrance on the provision they were offered. In addition to the limitations imposed on the Scottish JRN programme by lack of funding, geographical constraints were also seen to inhibit the success of the programme itself. Riders believed they received the information they required to prepare themselves for tackling the initial stages of elite level competition, with gaps in provision being in areas they deemed 'non essential'.

On further investigation though several areas for improvement were highlighted most notably rider nutrition and fitness, sports psychology, mentoring and the regional team selection procedure. Through the introduction of riders to the basics of rider nutrition, fitness and sports psychology at JRN level initial steps can be taken to implementing these key components into the rider's development programme and ultimately as part of their pre competition routine at major events. These key components are part of the fundamental services offered by the WCS so by introducing them

at lower levels the systematic structure and continuity of the programme will be improved easing the transition process for riders. The transitional period would also be eased with the introduction of an under twenty one mentor who would communicate with riders, ensuring they are receivi