

Scottish Archery Selection Process for Chandigarh 2022; an independent review

A review of the processes used, and how the outcomes were managed, by Scottish Archery around the above selection process

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Consulting

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An independent review of the Scottish Archery Selection Process for Chandigarh 2022

Introduction & Background

HunterSearch Consulting were asked to pick up on the process to review the situation that Scottish Archery found itself in following complaints around the selection policies, and their implementation, for the Commonwealth Games Championships scheduled for Chandigarh, India in January 2022. Ultimately, that tournament was cancelled as part of the COVID pandemic. Irrespective, it was felt that it was important to carry-out this review and whilst some initial work had been done by another reviewer, we effectively had to start again.

When it was confirmed that Archery would not feature in the Birmingham Commonwealth Games, a separate Commonwealth Championships was announced which was due to take place in India in January 2022. During 2021 Scottish Archery developed selection criteria and opened the application process for Archers with aspirations of representing Scotland to apply for a place on the training squad. The team for the Commonwealth Championships would be selected from this squad.

Following the process, Scottish Archery selected those archers to be included in the training squad, however, the organisation received several complaints and made the decision to commission an independent review into the criteria and processes used in the selection.

Methodology & Process

It is important to note that this is not being carried out by legal professionals so should be understood and treated in that regard; equally, to protect the confidence of those involved, no direct attribution will be made to anything said during the conversations that were carried out.

We met and spoke to almost all of the available complainants as well as those directly involved in the decision-making end within Scottish Archery. We didn't speak to others involved in the wider process, nor did we have access to those who were successful in being selected.

Having no background in Archery whatsoever – but experience of other sports at an international level – we began the process with the basic knowledge that Archery is a sport dominated by scores. Medals, placings and tournament outcomes are all decided by the scores archers achieve. This understanding and view of its' importance has been further strengthened by the process of compiling this report. Again, this is an important factor in understanding the views reached in this report.

It is also critical to understand that the selection process at the time was undertaken during the time of COVID lockdowns and the pandemic – and that will have had an impact upon the thinking of both the selectors and the athletes at the time. To that end, our suggestion is that weight is given by both sides of this discussion, and empathy shown by all, to that effect.

We were asked to consider three areas:

1. Was the selection policy used clear and fair?
2. The impartiality of the application of the process
3. Areas that can be improved (in terms of policy application, athlete follow-up, and any recommendations for the future)

We are clear that the remit for our work was relatively narrow and we have aimed at all times to keep it as brief and succinct as possible, whilst also attempting to make clear why we reached the conclusions that we have.

We would also like to place on record our sincere thanks to all those who contributed to this, particularly the affected athletes and the fact that simply by taking part they were having re-live at least part of what, for some, was a traumatic experience.

Approach & questions

Having been asked by Scottish Archery to undertake the review process, we spoke to those involved as mentioned earlier. We sought to ask the same questions of people for consistency.

The questions covered the following areas:

- Archers understanding of the aims and objectives of the Scottish Archery performance programme
- Their individual experience of the application and decisions process
- Selection criteria – positives and areas for improvement
- Application and selection process – positives and areas for improvement
- Appeals process
- Any other feedback

Observations & consistent themes

Through the interviews that were conducted, there were some recurring themes that emerged. These have been summarised throughout this report.

Aims and objectives of the Scottish Archery Performance programme

There appeared to be a reasonable understanding of the aims and objectives but varying opinions on whether these were realistic or achievable. They felt that:

- The selection criteria was perceived to be set at Olympic level; it was felt that given the size of the archery population in Scotland this was unattainable and that Scottish Archery should do more research to set a realistic and attainable scoring level for selection
- Many of the unsuccessful archers viewed their non-selection as being based on the detail of their training plans, rather than their performance
- Scottish Archery were seen by some as trying to replicate the Archery GB pathway without having the same resources to support the archers

- There was a belief that more needs to be done to increase the facilities, coaches and resource in the performance programme. There are too few coaches overall in Scotland and not enough performance coaches
- Scottish Archery could provide more information on how to help the archers work towards GB level
- Not all archers aspire to gain a place on the GB pathway, and this left some in an impossible situation in this regard
- Increased connection from Scottish squad to the Archery GB squad would strengthen the skill and depth of athletes in Scotland
- Scottish archers want to improve individual performances and increase the level of performance in Scotland overall



1. Was the selection policy used clear and fair?

In short, given what we learned during the interviews, we're not sure it was either particularly clear or fair. There were elements that were clear, and elements that were clearly relatively fair. The sense was, however, that overall there was a lot of perceived bias within the selections made, and the importance given to the use of training diaries and logs was never given clear justification. Equally, the level of scores given as the entry point appears to have been used because it represented the aims of Scottish Archery at the time (aiming for a minimum of 6th place), but there seems to have been no clear pathway towards achieving those scores or assessing the potential of those who may make that level by the time the tournament had come around.

Having heard from people involved across all parts of the process, it seems that some athletes felt that it counted against them if they stated, or it was believed, that competing at Chandigarh 2022 would be the peak of their archery career. Yet, in the criteria sent out to athletes, it is noted that it "can" indeed, "be the highlight of an athlete's career":

Competing for Scotland at a Commonwealth Championships can be the highlight of an athlete's career and it can also serve as a great preparation step for Olympic/Paralympic games and the World Cup circuit. Furthermore, the opportunity to compete at a Championships is a privilege experienced by few athletes.

This sense of injustice for some was further evidenced by the use of the Archery GB pathway as a selection indicator.

As regards the importance of scores being paramount in Archery, we further discovered that this was indeed the pre-eminent method of selection for equivalent Scotland squads in the past. To that end, the addition of the training diaries and logs – whilst understandable in some ways (particularly in aiming to develop the approach towards athlete development and the development of the sport at the performance end) – was new, and appeared to be added without prior understanding, training or even a template given with clear instructions upon how to complete it in a standardised way (such that fair comparisons may be able to be drawn). In this sense, there was an apparent lack of clarity. Again, the authors of this report note that no conversations were had with successful athletes –

only those who were unsuccessful and those on the decision-making end of the process.

We also note that this topic appeared to be covered during the online zoom sessions held by Scottish Archery as they sought to explain the process and the methodology being used. Without comparisons of successful athletes, we cannot obviously give a completely comprehensive view.

Equally, the concept of a “training squad” seems not to have been adequately understood, nor a definition agreed upon. Questions were reasonably asked about why there wasn’t a larger training squad selected at the outset of the process, from which the final team could have been selected. The training squad could easily have included those whose scores were seen to be heading in the right direction (or even those with the potential to achieve those), but who weren’t perhaps achieving at the level deemed appropriate at that time. The selection process as carried out appeared not to be aiming for that kind of approach.

Furthermore, the policy asked for a number of things which don’t seem to have a clear basis for decision-making, for example:

- List a clear history of coaches and training partners they have worked with along with current training groups and how this aligns with their planned progression

It’s not clear to the report authors why this might be particularly helpful information; and is certainly our view that it is likely to lead to a sense of bias and / or perception of bias towards athletes and coaches who are somehow seen to be “acceptable”. In a scores-based environment, this simply seems to lack natural justice.

Some of the other feedback received is summarised as follows:

Selection Criteria

We asked what archers felt were the positives in the selection criteria?

- Score based makes sense, clear for everyone and fairer way to compare athletes

We also asked what areas for improvement there could be in the selection criteria:

- There was lack of clarity regarding how much importance was placed on the training plans or what level of detail was expected

- The timing of the process was difficult as restrictions were still in place which limited opportunities to compete and therefore there was no 'current' form on which to base decisions
- Scottish Archery could look at building individual athlete profiles to assist in decision making
- Compound score target was fine, but recurve scores were a bit high and seen as less attainable. It was felt that Scottish Archery may have lost the potential to develop athletes
- Overall, the bar was set too high in 1st category – question over whether anyone in Scotland had shot the scores to meet category 1 (662 and 62% win rate)
- There is a need to increase transparency through the Scottish rankings

Application and selection process

We asked what archers felt were the positives in the application and selection process?

- The application form was seen as a good general starting point to gather some initial information on the archers with the chance then to follow up with the interviews
- Zoom meeting was a good idea to provide information
- Overall structure of process appeared to be good and easy to follow
- The fact that a selection criterion was published was seen as positive

We asked what archers felt were the areas for improvement in the application and selection process?

- Perception that it was not an impartial process, it was perceived that some people were assisted to write their training plan whilst others were not
- There was a clear perception that the only people who produced training plans that were acceptable were those already within the training squad at the time
- The very small number of athletes selected for the training squad limited the opportunity for others to compete for selection
- If there were other factors limiting the size of the squad, then these could have been communicated
- Suggestion to increase the size of the training squad in future

- More information could have been provided on the expected standard and detail of the training plan
- Perhaps more time given between criteria being published and the information zoom call to allow time for people to consider questions. Timeline between publishing criteria and close of applications was tight
- Given the lack of competition, would it have been feasible to arrange a selection shoot?
- Clearer communication of a timeframe for when decisions would be made
- Email confirmation to confirm receipt of application would be useful
- The email sent to unsuccessful applicants could have included details and timelines for appeal process
- More support for those not selected to understand rationale and what steps they need to take to attain level for future selection, especially for younger or less experienced archers

Pre-selection zoom call

- Information zoom call was a good idea to share plans and details on the process
- Helpful for application
- The call suggested a bigger squad would be selected than was eventually selected



2. The impartiality of the application of the process

Fundamentally, again without speaking to all of the athletes involved – successful and unsuccessful – we cannot give a totally complete view on this either.

We can, however, say that based upon the evidence we have seen – in writing and in verbal testimony – there are legitimate questions to be asked about how impartial the selection process was.

The feedback given to unsuccessful candidates was, understandably, varied. Positively, this can be seen to display the clear attempt to be specific, personal and direct in communicating why an athlete had been unsuccessful. What we remain unclear about is why different messages appear to have been given to athletes which appear to be somewhat contradictory. A major area of concern in this regard is that Archery remains a “solo” sport, yet enormous weight seems to have been given to the “team” aspect; yet the application of such judgements appear to have been very subjective and lacking in objectivity; hence understandable concern from unsuccessful athletes.

The questions and concerns raised by the athletes we spoke to seemed entirely legitimate and should be able to be fixed in future by the clear and consistent messaging and organisation of the process as mentioned below.

Specific athlete feedback suggested the following too:

Appeals process

- Experience of appeal process was described as ‘hostile’ and ‘horrible’
- Minutes were not an accurate reflection of the discussion
- The appeal process was also described as ‘confrontational’
- Could have been a more open and constructive discussion

Other feedback stated

- Concerns were expressed that the process was manipulated for Scottish Archery to select ‘preferred’ archers
- A perception was evident that if anyone were to complain it may affect future selection chances

- Clarity should have been much more forthcoming for athletes living outwith Scotland, particularly around expectations to attend training and the commitment expected as a member of the squad; this would help people to make an informed decision before committing or applying
- There was certainly a perceived conflict of interest within the selection panel due to connections between some archers and those making decisions (even if it seems that mitigations were made in this regard)

Feedback on individuals' experience of the application and decisions process

- The response to complaints was viewed as condescending
- Not enough focus placed on the scores people were shooting
- Reasons for decisions given were inconsistent



3. Areas that can be improved (in terms of policy application, athlete follow-up, and any recommendations for the future)

There should be more clarity around selection criteria for future events. It seems incongruous to us that scores were not the vast majority of the initial selection criteria and training plan data only used in a more marginal sense; it also seems unwise to have not selected a much larger initial squad from which to then select a final team. Such an approach would seem more in line with both natural justice and more “normal” procedures used across many sports.

Athletes should have the opportunity to learn about selection opportunities through various mediums – not just through one single Facebook post (for example) as appears to have been the case on some occasions. Equally, athletes should have the opportunity to receive follow-up, advice and support in their journey to improvement at a level appropriate to their ability; leaving aside any other considerations such as age or a sense of whether they may be suitable for/interested in Team GB selection.

In a very practical sense, there are a few things we believe could make such processes easier and more efficient to manage in future, such as:

- The selection policy itself should be reconsidered to avoid conflicting messages. For example, if the rationale for participation in Scotland Squads is to already be part of the GB training pathway, then that needs to be explained, and sound, performance-reasons given. Without such clarity, the policy leaves itself open to either being misused, or at the very least perceived as biased
- There should be some form of virtual space / area where Scotland squads, and those in the wider reckoning for such, are included. Such things are usually easily achieved within any automated/CRM system. That would allow for easier communication and dissemination of information regarding upcoming events and opportunities.
- As a minimum, emails should be sent directly to those registering an interest in representing Scotland and any other form of performance activity; alongside relevant social media activity

- In relation to athlete follow-up, there should be a clear and consistent process for communication. Whilst it's acknowledged that there was a good attempt at providing individual feedback in relation to this, the process involved – certainly for those involved in receiving negative outcomes – seems to have fallen quite a long way short in providing them with supportive, consistent, practical and considered support
- We would also suggest speaking to the successful athletes to understand their feelings and perceptions as this may also be helpful in further developing the plans of Scottish Archery in future

Other athlete feedback

- More investment is clearly required to support those ambitious archers to help them achieve the levels required; including to gain GB representation for those who seek that, or simply to develop to the best of their ability, even if their ambition is to represent Scotland
- Overall communication between Scottish Archery and the athletes could certainly have been better; this would undoubtedly have helped to improve understanding of selection decisions and reasons for those outcomes
- Scottish Archery could have consulted with archers ahead of releasing criteria to gain feedback and suggestions, especially given the impact of and the difficulties with selection at the time

In conclusion, the review of Scottish Archery's selection process hopefully provides some helpful insights into what happened and how it may be improved for the future.

By addressing key areas for improvement and implementing evidence-based recommendations (over and above what's mentioned here – we appreciate the passage of time since these events occurred), Scottish Archery can hopefully continue to enhance the fairness, transparency, and effectiveness of its selection policies and procedures. We thoroughly recommend further ongoing collaboration and dialogue with ALL stakeholders, such that Scottish Archery can foster a culture of excellence and inclusivity within the sport, ensuring the continued growth and success of archery in Scotland.

