

Elite Dispensation Briefing Note

15 January 2021

Elite training was granted an exemption from the national lockdowns and regional restrictions by the Department of Culture, Digital, Media and Sport (DCMS) and allows athletes to continue to train, subject to full compliance with a number of detailed Covid-19 requirements laid out in the government measures.

The responsibility for interpreting and applying this guidance sits with the National Governing Body for each sport with the decision making process guided by advice from and in consultation with UK Sport and Government, Covid-19 risk assessments and management and consideration of the impact on all athletes affected.

We have prepared this note to set out the basis upon which this definition has been agreed.

Decision making-process

In lockdown three, significant restrictions are being placed on many of our athletes who are not in receipt of lottery funding on our WCP.

At all times, British Canoeing has followed the DCMS Guidance, as originally published in May 2020. The most up to date version can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phasedreturn-of-sport-and-recreation/elite-sport-return-to-training-guidance-step-one--2>

Please note, decisions that apply to activities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be regulated by the relevant devolved administrations.

Definition of Elite Athlete

DCMS define an 'elite athlete' as a person who is:

- an individual who derives a living from competing in a sport
- a senior representative nominated by a relevant sporting body
- a member of the senior training squad for a relevant sporting body, or
- on an elite development pathway.

British Canoeing defines an elite athlete as any lottery funded athlete in the Canoe Sprint, Canoe Slalom or Paracanoe World Class Programmes (WCP). We are grateful to the National Water Sports Centre, Lee Valley White Water Centre and Dorney Lake, who have worked in partnership with us in order to facilitate these arrangements.

Elite Development Pathway

The DCMS guidance defines an "elite development pathway" being "a development pathway established by the national governing body of a sport to prepare athletes (a) so that they may derive a living from competing in that sport, or (b) to compete in that sport in the Olympic or Paralympic Games."

The mission of the British Canoeing England Talent Programme is: “to support talented athletes, coaches and clubs to be the best they can be and to equip athletes for successful transition into the Olympic and Paralympic World Class Programmes.”

It also states that “it is hoped that some paddlers will become world class performers, however for those who do not, through supporting their development, we hope to build a competence and enjoyment of the sport and to have a positive impact on their development as a person”.

Therefore, although the England Talent Programme hopes to develop young paddlers to become world-class athletes, we do not view the England Talent Programme as existing specifically to prepare athletes to compete in the Olympic or Paralympic Games (or to derive a living from competing in sport); that aim is specific to the World Class Programme.

Safety

It is vitally important that managing a return to training, during this pandemic, is done in the safest way possible. For that reason, British Canoeing has not sought to apply the definition of ‘elite’ more broadly and we are required to meet very clear expectations set out in the Government guidance.

As part of these requirements, British Canoeing organised a Covid-19 Performance Planning Group. This group has met weekly since March and committed a lot of time collectively and with the training centres and athletes to ensure their safety.

This has included ensuring government guidance on social distancing can be followed, developing and implementing appropriate risk assessments, managing frequent issues and concerns arising, and responding to positive Covid-19/self-isolation cases.

Prior to a return to training, each athlete has had to have a one-to-one session to ensure they understand, agree to and are comfortable with the Covid-19 secure practices and requirements. British Canoeing has a Chief Medical Officer in place to provide medical cover for WCP athletes who supports all athletes returning to training.

With these significant operational issues, there are genuine concerns that to extend the definition of elite beyond the World Class Programme, and increase the number of athletes returning to training, would outstretch capacity and compromise the safety of the provisions that have been put in place.

British Canoeing has also worked closely with the Elite Training Centres throughout this time who share concerns about increasing the number of athletes able to access their venues.

Other sports

Comparisons made with other sports will inevitably vary because of the different frameworks each sport operates in, their relative risks and the resources they have. Some sports have taken a broader approach than British Canoeing, and others have taken a similar or narrower application of the definition.

Conclusion

We hope this note has provided context to the many factors and challenges we have faced whilst considering this issue.

Drawing the line at the World Class Programme in this way provides clarity and transparency for athletes which is important. However, we do recognise that non-WCP athletes will miss out as a consequence and it is appreciated that there will be a significant impact not only on training but also on the wellbeing of these athletes.

We hope that athletes and coaches who are unable to access facilities at this time will continue to train in other ways, not only for their continued development but also for their wellbeing. It is important for everyone to stay active and connected to others as much as possible during these difficult periods of lockdown, and even more so for athletes who want to stay fit and healthy and to maintain their social relationships within the sport. Please call upon your support networks to help you to do this.

We'd like to signpost you to the resources compiled [here](#) that may provide ideas to add value to your training plan at this time when physical training session may be limited.