

**Alpine Committee Meeting**  
**Monday 16 January 2023 19:00**  
**By Zoom**



**Present:**

Lloyd Jenkins (LJ) SE	Sasha Rearick (SR) Apex/GBS
Debbie Gunton (DG) SE	Anna Lees-Jones (AL) GBS
Gareth Case (GC) SE	Vicky Gosling (VG) GBS
Sally Bartlett (SB) SE	Mark Vinter (MV) SSS
David Chapman (DC) SE	Viki Williams (VW) SSS
Tim Fawkes (TF) SE	Robin Hutchinson (RH) SSS
Megan Whitmarsh-Ali (MW) SE	Heather Cowie (HC) SSS
Andrew Hjort (AH) SE	Christy Mackinnon (CM) SSS
Paul Telling (PT) SE	Josef Tautscher (JT) SSS
David Manns (DM) SE	Robin Kellen (RB) SSW
Diane Sarkar (DS) SE	

PT questioned why SR was on the call as no other Clubs/Academies had been invited to the meeting, does he now work for GBS? SR confirmed he is representing both GBS and Apex.

LJ welcomed everybody to the meeting and asked VG to give an overview of the APEX GBS new partnership.

VG advised GBS' remit is to support a World Class brand at the elite level across all disciplines. At present a gap exists just below the World Cup programme, this partnership has been established to support the Alpine World Cup programme and bridge the gap. With funding being cut by UK Sport for Alpine; GBS needed to establish a sustainable programme moving forward. GBS have been in discussions with Apex for the past 18 months on how they could support the World Class programme and with SR's knowledge; GBS felt this was a good opportunity to bridge the gap between the World Class programme and the Academies and ensure GBS has a sustainable World Class programme for the future.

LJ confirmed as a reply to questions raised by members has not yet been received from GBS, the questions raised would set the agenda for the meeting.

- I, like many, question if the required audits and checks (especially around safeguarding) have been undertaken and why no open process has been followed especially when GBS' remit is Elite and they have never been bothered with U16 and below before.*

VG confirmed all audits around due diligence and safeguarding have been completed in terms of Apex and they are the only Academy FIS accredited. The Home Nations have been involved in the process over the past 18 months, TF has been attending GBS board meetings and RK sits on GBS board. Scott Simon (Chief Executive Snowsport Scotland) and TF visited Apex on behalf of GBS to assess the facilities, GBS is aware of

all the Academies facilities, and they all do a fantastic job. In terms of the Partnership, it was felt Apex could offer what was needed to help bridge the gap between the World Class Programme and the Academies and for GBS the main focus is to provide a sustainable World Class Programme going forward.

PT asked has TF been through all the safeguarding issues, TF confirmed he has not completed a full audit but from what he saw when he was there, he was comfortable with safeguarding procedures.

VG confirmed that for GBS to sign up on the heads of terms an annual independent assessment by NSPCC will be carried out. Apex have 3 safeguarding officers qualified at level 3 in addition to an independent advisory board. They also have a highly qualified independent safeguarding governor and the GBS safeguarding officer is also comfortable with the policies in place currently.

VW asked if prior safeguarding issues had been addressed and are GBS happy with the outcome? VG confirmed only 1 case has been raised in the past, but no official complaint was logged.

- *The education side of things is our priority at the moment (and we envisage will be for the duration) - we know families who are at Apex and whilst the facilities are I am sure second to none, we certainly would not want the children leaving their home schools and joining a full-time boarding school in France to study the IB.*

VG confirmed that it is personal choice where parents send their children. The GBS children's selections will remain totally independent and whichever academy an athlete is attending will not disadvantage them in anyway going forward.

VW asked about training camps at Apex that athletes are being asked to attend, if these are mandatory then that is biased.

VG confirmed they are not mandatory. However, GBS camps will be available for U14's. SR replied that athletes need steppingstones along the way, elite athletes need pathways, and this partnership will cater for these. It is proposed there will be National U16/U18 teams. For U14 there will be pool camps available; run by GBS in various locations. These camps are designed to bring the best athletes and coaches together and will be by invitation only.

HC questioned how does bringing your coach with you work? SR confirmed the pool camps will run over 35-45 days prep period divided into different camps where athletes can choose to attend and bring a coach to certain camps. Camps will be run in various locations to try and keep costs to a minimum. HC asked will it just be for coaches to observe? SR replied camp structures will be 8 boys and 8 girls led by a GBS head coach, PT asked has a coach been appointed? SR confirmed nobody has been appointed yet.

VW asked if the pool camps are for just U14 or will U16 also be involved? SR confirmed pool camps will focus on U14 but could be extended to U16. The National Development Team would be a separate project and would involve selecting a few high-level performing athletes to create a squad, currently the criteria for selecting the children's team and FIS team are too low.

VW asked how the National Development Team fits in with the existing Snowsport Scotland Home Nations squad? TF advised his understanding was the National Development Team would be a higher-level criteria than the current Home Nations criteria so would create a much smaller squad.

RH asked for clarification that the new GBS pathway for U16/18 will be an additional layer to enhance the existing Home Nations pathways but with a higher level entry criteria for a select few athletes. SR agreed.

VG confirmed GBS is trying to improve current systems to enhance current pathways for British Alpine Athletes. GBS wants to build on the successes and strengthen the pathways to ensure we have a sustainable World Class Programme going forward. Athletes need clear pathways to succeed.

CM asked if this going to be a new version of the existing Home Nations pathway at an enhanced level, what will happen to the current pathway?

VG replied anything GBS does will only enhance what we already have with the expertise and guidance of SR, the Home Nations will still be responsible for the pathways and existing pathways must not be damaged.

SR confirmed that it is how we can enhance what we already have and look at the current pathways and assess what further support is needed for these athletes.

AH asked is this a funnel mechanism to draw on work done by Academies and Home Nations to become something that runs under Apex or will this become a potential pathway? Is this designed to pull everyone together or just an alternative to what already exists? SR confirmed that the Junior National team is targeted at athletes destined for World Juniors and aims to pull these athletes together to make them more competitive. The Junior National team will not be at Apex but will be supported by aspects of what Apex has to offer. The Europa Cup team will be smaller and is an essential steppingstone into World Cup. The National Development team will prepare athletes for the Junior National team and Europa Cup team.

RH commented that whatever steps are taken we need to ensure that this does not impact on Academies/Clubs to ensure the base of the pyramid stays strong. SR confirmed that we need to ensure grass root skiing continues and the pool camps allows this to happen as athletes will attend camps then return to their clubs/academies.

DC asked with regards to the elite level U16/U18, if you are selected are you expected to leave your current Club/Academy and follow the new GBS pathway? SR replied the criteria needs to be established first which needs to be of a high standard. Every athlete is on a different journey and it's how best they can be supported going forward it is not mandatory but an opportunity for support.

- *The suggestions in the announcements that children from U14 upwards would transfer to Apex seemed absurd - not only would this have financial implications for most families but greater implications with respect to their ongoing education.*

SR commented this has been answered previously, athletes do not need to come to Apex to be part of these projects.

- *How would GBS / Apex re-assure a young talented athlete that they can still pursue their dream in their current environment & any future selection will not be prejudiced if they are not a member of Apex.*

SR replied we need to have clear criteria for selection which is set by committee's and will be outside of Apex and GBS.

- *Fairness - from a parents' perspective, where is the objectivity if GBS is so closely tied with one Academy.*

VG commented the recent selection for the Children's team saw 31 athletes selected 8 were from Apex, 8 or more were from Ambition the selection panel is 100% independent and based on results therefore cannot be prejudiced. The bigger picture is looking at what needs to be achieved and from a GBS prospective we want more British Athletes on podiums than ever before in British history. It's not in GBS interest to favour a particular academy or athletes but support those that are doing well and look at how we can enhance that journey for them and increase the number of athletes coming through the system.

TF commented tonight discussions have been around working collaboratively and the challenge seems to be the word 'Preferred' in the title as part of the deal, does that need to be there? The perception out there is that 'Preferred Academy' is what is causing the upset, anger, and frustration amongst members. Is there any chance this can be changed to GBS 'Partner' rather than 'Preferred'? VG agreed to take this back to the Board and Apex. However, the reality is that funding for Alpine was cut, we have a gap between the Home Nations and World Class Programme, GBS needed an official partner that filled the brief for facilities, funding and the expertise needed. Apex is our official Alpine Partner but I'm happy to discuss the title 'Preferred' with the Board again.

- *How are GBS going to ensure all athletes & academies / Clubs have a fair opportunity & any future selections are based on a recognised points structure (BASS for example) & not based on subjectivity alone.*

SR suggested going forward, children's selection should be based on head-to-head competitions wherever possible and proposed that these take place in December in Italy or Switzerland, where all GB athletes can come together and selection for the children's team will be between the best athletes.

- *From a business/organisation viewpoint - where was the public tender? Where are the details regarding the factors taken into account when selecting the preferred academy?*

VG confirmed it came down to needing additional funding, we selected Apex as it was extremely collaborative, has World Class facilities and they can support the World Class Programme. Dave Ryding was consulted and gave his full endorsement which was extremely important to us and without Apex we wouldn't currently have athletes on snow.

HC asked did you only discuss this with one Academy or were other Academies given the opportunity to contribute to these discussions that started 18 months ago?

VG responded GBS and the alpine directors are aware of all the Academies/Clubs but Apex were the only ones who stepped forward to support us with the well-known fact that funding was needed. We felt they were the only ones who could enhance what we already have, we also have access to SR and his World Class experience, knowledge, and success rate. HC commented that it's unusual to only speak to one preferred provider, PT commented he had not been consulted and was surprised it hear that it was not being put out to tender but assumed it was largely down to funding and financially driven. HC asked whether GBS have the right to just pick somebody, does GBS own the pathway?

VG commented the Home Nations own the pathways, GBS is responsible for ensuring we have a World Class Programme and ensure we can support the World Class athletes we currently have therefore, we are entitled to resolve the problem to ensure we have a sustainable World Class programme going forward. The academies/clubs do a fantastic job and it not about taking anything from them, but we need to enhance the pathway and ensuring we have a World Class Programme.

VW commented that the process should have been transparent, but if assumed for a moment that the success of the programme went as well as GBS was saying it was going to go. Would there not be a concern that APEX would deliver this product for other nations and we would be left in a weak position with things that had been built to depend on them? VG replied wouldn't that be great if the problem was that it was so successful however, we must look at here and now and what we can do to enhance the system, bridge the gap, but also build something better for the future.

AH questioned that GBS identified an issue but did GBS approach Apex or vice versa? How do you envisage supporting the other Academies when you have a preferred partner? VG commented they have been working with Apex for the last 18 months, Apex approached GBS when funding was cut with a potential partnership solution. GBS needed somebody to support them to bridge the gap between World Cup level, Europa Cup level and Academy level. SR has outlined his vision going forward and all the Academies have a role to play in this if they are willing to work collaboratively and be supportive.

AL outlined that the urgency for GBS was the World Cup Programme, the cut in funding and the gap with the Europa Cup. For the younger years we have time to build on the brilliant work the Home Nations and Academies/Clubs are already doing collaboratively going forward.

VW asked will there still be a Europa/World Cup level focussed on technical discipline and what about speed events. SR commented the current Europa Cup model within Scotland is good but to create a full Europa Cup speed and technical programme is not possible, but we need to ensure the younger athletes have a wide variety of skills.

- *How are GBS going to ensure they select the best available talent, irrespective of ability to afford. A great deal of exceptional talent has grown from Dry slopes / Artificial how are you going to ensure these areas of talent are not ignored.*

SR confirmed dry slope is not an area of his expertise but feels there is an opportunity to select a few high-level performing athletes from dry slope to join the pool camps.

- *What money is involved and where is the transparency? Is this a direct result of GBS failing to secure funding this season? Please provide feedback from the granting authority so we collectively don't make the same mistakes again How much of our Snowsport England membership is put in to GBS and in turn Apex?*

VG confirmed it is a commercial arrangement with Apex and no funding is being used to fund the World Class Programme or Apex. TF confirmed none of the Home Nations puts any money into GBS directly. SR advised this is where Apex can help GBS to generate funds going forward and help fund the World Class Programme.

- *By the announcement made by GBS & Apex and to me just seems to be another show of elitism and that it doesn't really matter how much you love skiing or how talented you are, if you don't have the money, you simply aren't what GBS are looking for and there is no help coming your way for them.*

VG advised the most important part for GBS is fund-raising to ensure we can continue with the World Class Programme but also to ensure we have funds available for individual scholarships.

SR confirmed that scholarships will be available and will be ability based.

AL confirmed that a new fund-raising initiative will be announced shortly and is an essential part of the way forward for scholarships.

- *The announcement suggests that the relationship is an inclusive one involving clubs and other academies, as far as I can ascertain no club or academy has been approached about the relationship or the benefits of the relationship discussed with them. Furthermore, a communication from Apex to their "community" that has been circulated via social media warns of the expectation of a negative backlash.*

LJ suggested that clearer communication need to be published, SR agreed that more open communications are needed.

- *Some members advised that they understood Apex2100 had stepped in to assist with the salaries of the WC coaches. Questions followed with regards to this being the "buying" of a relationship with GBS and that GBS perhaps feel they are obliged to comply with the requests of a private academy. Stronger allegations were also made.*

VG confirmed it's not that GBS had to comply but were given an opportunity to use the skills of SR to assist with supporting the World Class Programme and help bridge the gap between Home Nations and World Class Programme.

- *Confused because the publicised announcement has not made it at all clear what this means for existing GBS athletes, all of which have come to this point in their career with the support of and long-standing relationships with existing academies, academy directors and coaches. To assume that existing athletes will want to drop their current arrangements for one 'preferred training provider' is more than arrogant. There has been no mention so far of cost, but I do understand that the fees at Apex 2100 are comparatively high, further limiting the opportunities for some athletes. Can GBS clarify the situation is this a preferred option only or an obligatory one? the fact athletes train elsewhere will not be detrimental any future selection processes.*

VG confirmed that athletes training elsewhere will not be detrimental to future selections.

- *The approach of Apex to academies, young athletes and their parents. We understand that Apex has consistently sought to poach top athletes from other academies both directly and via social media. In the past they have offered financial inducements and suggesting that if an offer was not accepted then and there it would be difficult for an individual to progress in the sport. We were approached in just such a manner in 2017.*

SR confirmed that Apex has not approached any athletes directly in the past.

- *Given this history it seems entirely reasonable that there is no trust between the other academies and Apex, and it is not clear to me how that can be restored without a major change of behaviour. Tignes. Whilst the base is well resourced it is an unfathomably expensive and inaccessible base to choose for a base for an Alpine program. Tignes is not a ski racing resort, nor is it close to one - it is a 4-hour drive/400 euro transfer from the nearest airport. Comparing vary unfavourably to the bases of all the other academies. This is hugely detrimental to inclusivity in the sport. The great majority of British Child and FIS ski racers are based in Austria, which has a ski culture and set up much better suited to ski racing and where the costs are significantly lower.*

SR replied this is an unfair comment, Tignes is high so guarantees good snow conditions and late season training. The pool camps will also be run in different locations.

- *Why are GBS not working with all established academies?*

VG confirmed GBS' main priority is to deliver a World Class Programme and the partnership will deliver this but also to look at the gap between the Academies and World Class Programme.

AL advised it's important for all clubs and academies to be successful to build the bottom of the pyramid to ensure we get more athletes through to the World Class Programme.

- *What controls are in place within GBS to demonstrate with clarity responsibility & accountability?*

VG confirmed GBS will be constantly reviewing the partnership with Apex.

### **AOB**

GC asked what are we doing to help the next generation?

SR confirmed by the 1 April we will have clear programme's going forward for next season.

GC asked with the amount of work needed how do we move forward?

SR replied we have a lot of work to do on fundraising, we need to look at the existing committee structures, we need clear selection criteria, new committees need to be formed for the pool camps.

LJ commented we need better and more frequent communications going forward to make this successful.

LJ requested that VG still provides a written response by GBS to all the questions submitted which can then be circulated.

LJ thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.