

Sport England and UK Sport force the resignation of David Moorcroft in an effort to distract attention from their own performance.

On the 1st August 2006, an article by Matthew Syed was published in the Times Newspaper sending a clear signal from UK Sport and Sport England to David Moorcroft, Chief Executive of UK Athletics that his time was up. Today David Moorcroft announced that he was going to fall on his sword, as soon as a replacement was found. Over to UK Sport and Sport England to "work closely with the sport" in selecting a replacement.

It is ironic that David Moorcroft announced his resignation, on the same day that GCSE results showed higher standards in schools. During David Moorcroft's watch as Chief Executive of UK Athletics, Sport England and UK Sport have been allowed to nationalise the sport, imposing their "we know best" attitude, and driving down standards.

UK Sport and Sport England will point out that they have poured millions of pounds into athletics, however when you look closer, it is obvious that they are in denial about the harm the money is doing. The Sports Councils are actively seeking to mask the damage by setting the criteria for measuring success or failure, in ways that they can easily manipulate.

For example, rather than assessing athletics participation by counting the numbers of finishers in important competitions such as County and Regional Championships, Sport England choose instead to use the numbers published in their own "Taking Part" survey.

Instead of judging the success of an athletics club by counting its members, which can be corroborated by the number of members participating in local championships, Sport England prefer to postpone the setting of a baseline figure for club membership until 31st March 2007. What have they been spending millions of pounds on since 1998 if they don't know how many people are doing the sport? Competition results and rankings indicate that standards and participation levels have fallen since the quango's took over from the AAA's.

Athletics Clubs are now distracted by development plans engineered by Sport England to drive through their political agenda. The target is that at least 150 clubs achieve the Sport England "Clubmark" award by 31st March 2007. Who decides whether a club qualifies for the "Clubmark" award? You guessed it, Sport England. Not much danger in missing that target then. Another Sport England benchmark to justify the millions of pounds being poured into athletics is a 1% increase in the number of volunteers actively supporting the sport by 31st March 2007. If they can't count participants, they certainly don't know the number of volunteers, so there we have another easily manipulated Sport Council "key performance indicator", (or "target", or "aim", or "aspiration" depending on the money available to meet it!).

David Moorcroft cannot be blamed for this culture of "control". His job was to employ a person with a job title to satisfy every demand of the Sports Councils, and he delivered. Over 100 people are employed at UK Athletics, and still nobody in the sport knows quite what they do. Responsibility for this farce lays with Sue Campbell, the Head of UK Sport and the Sport England chiefs Lord Carter of Coles, and Sir Andrew Foster.

David Moorcroft might be "moving on", but Sport England and UK Sport are tenaciously fighting to hang on to their power over community sport. Ironically if the quango's paid a fraction of the money wasted on UK Athletics directly to clubs, the sport would thrive and the social benefits they are trying so diligently to engineer would take care of themselves.

Whatever way the Sports Councils seek to excuse their activities, they cannot avoid the accuracy of the tape measure and stop watch in measuring athletic performances. Or possibly they will seek to avoid such accuracy by introducing GCSE exams into athletics in an effort to create the illusion that their expertise is driving up standards.