

**Report on the
Independent Evaluation of**

**Reform
'25**

July 2025

Prepared for British Gymnastics by
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**Wagstaff
Independent
Evaluation**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the outcomes of an independent evaluation of British Gymnastics' (BG) Reform '25 programme, a 41-point action plan to transform gymnastics following the Whyte Review (2022). The scope of this report was not to evaluate whether the action plan has been implemented per se, but to explore the extent to which Reform '25 has made an impact within gymnastics by seeking stakeholders' experiences and stories. My report is based on a desk-based review of over 100 Reform '25 documents, 52 individual interviews, five focus groups with 31 participants, 70 written and audio submissions (153 submissions in total).

My overarching observation from this evaluation is that BG have made significant progress in terms of transforming areas of gymnastics through their change programme. Reform '25 has been particularly impactful with regard to leadership and culture change, welfare and safe sport, gymnasts' experiences of their performance environments, and policy change. These impacts are being felt at the core of British Gymnastics, particularly among the BG workforce, gymnasts, coaches and staff within the performance programmes, and by a range of stakeholders in terms of how welfare and safer sport are approached within the sport. These impacts have been supported by a growing number of people throughout the organisation who lead by example, role model BG's values, and reinforce associated behaviours.

Perhaps the most meaningful sign of progress has been BG's reprioritisation of what the sport of gymnastics is and could be. BG have deprioritised traditional metrics for success (i.e., medals, money, and members) and shifted from seeking to "fix" the sport or provide false assurance about its culture, and has taken a culturally mature approach that making values-driven change with a focus on

people and experiences. I believe this shift has laid the foundations for sustainable cultural transformation and social impact within gymnastics within Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Despite these overarching positives, the impact of Reform '25 is not as yet being uniformly felt or understood across all areas of the British Gymnastics community. That is, despite substantial initial progress, a deliberate focus must be maintained to realise impact over time and there remain a number of opportunities to continue the work started within Reform '25. Key areas of opportunity to support long term, sustainable culture change within the sport are related to community engagement, systemic trust, governance structures, policy implementation, and the Independent Complaints Process (ICP).

The report is primarily structured according to the nine themes I have developed from the insights shared with me: 1. Cultural change is well underway: The foundations are laid, and building is ongoing; 2. Pride and Prejudice: Staff feel proud and a sense of significant cultural change, but there remains some restructuring fatigue; 3. Architects for change: The significant impact of values-led leadership; 4. Huge leaps for performance gymnasts; 5. Bridging the gap between policy and practice; 6. The challenge of advancing welfare and safer sport amid fragmented truths; 7. Coaches: A change of the guard and a divided community 8. Beyond compliance: Cultivating meaningful impact in Learning & Development 9. An opportunity to reflect on governance.

In light of these themes, I provide seven recommendations and six opportunities to support BG in their work towards sustainable change and their vision of creating an uplifting gymnastics experience for all and their purpose to ensure gymnastics is enjoyable, safe, and open to everyone.

I also offer seven opportunities for British Gymnastics and the Whyte Review Commissioning Bodies (WRCBs). Briefly, these recommendations relate to:

Recommendations for British Gymnastics

1. Replace the ICP with a trauma-informed, fair, and transparent process that includes mediation, and integrates a clear explanations and constructive feedback.
2. Review BG governance to, better connect regional, community and club leaders.
3. Strengthen BG's presence in clubs and clarify the role of the coach developers.
4. Be considerate in the future when engaging and communicating re L&D initiative.
5. Hold clubs accountable for safeguarding failures and include owners in reform responsibilities.
6. Review the approach to policy implementation and impact assessment.
7. Develop momentum and diversity in athlete voice and consistent feedback loops.

Opportunities for British Gymnastics

1. Create a cross-department group to support and mentor new coaches and judges.
2. Promote system-wide responsibility for safer sport through collaborative efforts.
3. Use welfare case insights to inform future learning and culture change.
4. Develop a clear policy for anonymous complaints and enhance mediation options.
5. Expand L&D for parents, especially in recreational gymnastics.
6. Boost staff engagement with BG's social impact framework.

Opportunities for British Gymnastics and the WRCBs.

1. Explore a reconciliation process to support healing and learning.
2. Share BG's cultural reform expertise through research and system dissemination.
3. Liaise with UK Sport to contribute insights to how medal funding impacts culture.
4. Collaborate with Sport England on coach professionalisation and credentialisation.
5. Investigate risks in unregulated clubs and improve public awareness.
6. Plan for leadership succession to sustain cultural reform momentum.
7. Review approaches to cultural "assurance" and clarify its relationship with funding.

To support the communication of this independent evaluation to a wider audience, including BG members, and to support knowledge translation, at the end of this report there is a representation of the findings in the form of composite vignettes – stories, creatively crafted from the submissions to this process. There are six "scenes". These should be read as an accompaniment to the report and could also be used to support education and dissemination.

Conflict of interest statement.

Chris Wagstaff holds a position as a Professor of Applied Psychology at University of Portsmouth. He was previously Head of Service for Performance Psychology at the UK Sports Institute, and has acted as an external advisor to UK Sport and World Class Programmes on culture, leadership, psychological wellbeing, and systemic and organisational change.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

BG	- British Gymnastics
WCP	- World Class Programme
NGB	- National Governing Body
MAG	- Men's Artistic Gymnastics
WAG	- Women's Artistic Gymnastics
WRCBs	- Whyte Review Commissioning Bodies
BG Leader	- A member of the BG Executive Leadership Team or Board
L&D	- Learning and Development
ICP	- Independent Complaints Process
CWO	- Club Welfare Officers
CEO	- Chief Executive Officer
RAG ratings	- A color-coded system used to indicate the status, level of risk, progress, or performance on a project or task
G4C	- Gymnasts for Change
GymPal	- Gymnast-Parents Alliance
PR	- Public Relations

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Throughout the summer of 2020 a number of British gymnasts and former gymnasts made public disclosures to the press about alleged abuse within the sport of gymnastics. These disclosures followed the airing of an American documentary called 'Athlete A' about sexual abuse within the sport of gymnastics in the USA and the failure of the sport to address such abuse and to protect and support its own gymnasts. The allegations made by British gymnasts included descriptions of emotional and physical abuse by coaches. One of the common themes running through these disclosures was a sense that the governing body for the sport of gymnastics in the UK, BG, had not only failed to prevent or limit such behaviours but had condoned them in the pursuit of national and international competitive success.

In August 2020, Anne Whyte QC, was appointed by UK Sport and Sport England to conduct an independent review into the concerns that had been raised in relation to BG. The subsequent Whyte Review is the independent report into examining allegations of mistreatment in the sport of gymnastics. The Review was published on 16 June 2022 and contained 17 recommendations for BG.

In response to the Whyte Review, BG developed a 41-point action plan designed to bring about meaningful change within British Gymnastics. The plan focuses on four key areas:

- **Culture & Strategy:** Developing a unified vision and set of values to guide the sport.
- **Welfare, Safeguarding & Complaints:** Enhancing policies and procedures to protect gymnasts.
- **Education & Development:** Providing training and resources for coaches and staff to support safe practices.
- **Performance:** Ensuring that athlete wellbeing is central to performance programmes.

The Reform '25 action plan stated that BG would be guided in their change programme by five principles:

- **Values-Led:** Our actions will be delivered based on a new, strong set of values and beliefs developed with input from the gymnastics community.
- **People Centred:** Our actions will take a caring, more personal approach, putting people first in everything we do.
- **Prevention First:** Our approach will be proactive in order to prevent the problems, rather than seeking to react to issues when they occur.
- **Involve Others:** We will no longer be insular but instead be open, collaborative and consultative - acknowledging we are stronger together and seeking to work with others to develop and deliver collective action.
- **Long-Term Impact:** Our actions won't be driven by quick fixes - we will seek actions that lead to meaningful and lasting change

In March 2025, British Gymnastics (BG) appointed me, Professor Chris Wagstaff of Lancing Consultancy Limited as an external partner to conduct an independent evaluation of Reform '25 programme and BG's response to the Whyte Review recommendations. The scope of the evaluation was to help BG determine whether the Reform '25 programme is making a meaningful impact on the culture, welfare, and overall environment of the sport, both within BG and across the gymnastics community. From the outset, BG stated that they did not seek a box-ticking exercise regarding completed actions – but hoped for an understanding of the true impact of their reforms. Hence, the key objective was to assess whether BG are truly aligned with their vision of creating an uplifting gymnastics experience for all and their purpose to ensure gymnastics is enjoyable, safe, and open to everyone.

METHODS

Means of gathering insights. The main part of the evaluation was framed around five complementary methods: 1) a desk-based review of documents (n = over 100); 2) Individual interviews (n = 52); 3) Focus Groups (n = 5, with 31 participants inclusive), and; 4) Written and audio submissions (n = 70). In total, 153 submissions were received as part of the evaluation.

Approach to engaging the British Gymnastics community. In collaboration with BG, an organisational map was shared, and subsequently, a list of potential stakeholders to be contacted was developed and mutually agreed with BG leaders. Thereafter, invitations to participate were sent from BG CEO Sarah Powell's email address.

Invitations were sent to the following groups: BG Board (n = 10), Oversight Board (n = 8), BG Staff (n = 189), Head Coaches at Clubs in England (n = 447), Gymnasts who competed nationally/internationally from England, Channel Islands & Gibraltar (communication sent to parents if under 15; n = 6,818), Club Managers in England (n = 1,086), BG Coach Advisory Group (n = 8), BG Recreational Committee (n = 12), BG Club Advisory Group (n = 10), BG Gymnast Advisory Group (n = 10), BG National Technical Committees (n = 23), Ethical Explorations Group (n = 4), English Gymnastics Association (EGA) Board (n = 11), UK Sport Institute (UKSI; n = 10), BG Funded National Coaches (n = 11), Former BG Employees (n = 4), Welfare Officers n = 1242, BG Performance Squads from England, Channel Islands & Gibraltar (communication sent to parents if under 15; n = 720). In total, 10,633 individual stakeholders were contacted to participate in the evaluation.

Further to individual stakeholders, key organisations and groups were also contacted as part of this evaluation, including: UK Sport, Sport England, Gymnasts for Change,

Gymnast Parent Alliance (Gympal), FIG, European Gymnastics, Sport NI, British Olympic Association (BOA), British Elite Athletes Association (BEAA), Working with Parents in Sport, UK Coaching, Sport and Recreation Alliance, Youth Sport Trust, Gymnastics Ethics Foundation, Women in Sport, Women's Sport Trust, CPSS, CIMSPA, and the Home Nations Gymnastics Associations (English Gymnastics, Gymnastics Northern Ireland, Scottish Gymnastics, and Welsh Gymnastics).

Restrictions such as GDPR posed challenges to getting timely submissions from non-BG members and individual stakeholders within the Home Nations. This meant that invitations to participate in this evaluation were primarily sent to current BG stakeholders within England. Nevertheless, both non-member and advocacy groups raised awareness of the evaluation and encouraged others within their networks to participate, resulting in a proportion of submissions (approximately 10%) being received from non-BG members and interested parties within the UK and beyond.

Representation from participating stakeholder groups. The evaluation approach has enabled a diverse range of stakeholder perspectives to be included, which span the BG oversight board and National Governing Body (NGB) board; BG executive team; BG staff across all departments; home nations board members; parents and carers; BG-affiliated performance and recreational coaches, judges and parents; club owners and managers; welfare officers; technical and regional committee members; advocacy groups; Whyte review commissioning bodies; former gymnasts, coaches and club owners; non-BG affiliated club owners, and; complainants and respondents to allegations of abusive practices.

Spanning the five complimentary methods, my report draws on:

- A desk-based review of documents, including WRCB meeting minutes and correspondence, meeting minutes from the BG Oversight board, Advisory Groups, Membership Exit and Returner Survey reports, BG Culture Reviews, Organisation Vision and Strategy documents, Policies, a summary of the “Shape Our Future” stakeholder consultation, and open letters from advocacy groups.
- 52 Individual interviews, conducted primarily online.
- Five focus groups with 31 participants inclusive, conducted face-to-face and online.
- 70 written and audio submissions. These submissions were received via text message, voice note, and email.
- In total, over 100 documents and 153 submissions were received as part of the evaluation.

THEME DEVELOPMENT

The approach adopted resulted in many, varied perspectives being shared and a significant body of information. It is impossible to represent every story, experience or insight, so what is reported is a representation of what I have heard and read in the form of themes. To generate these themes, I have used a rigorous and widely used method from qualitative research called Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). RTA is characterised by a flexible and reflective approach to coding and theme development that emphasises the active role of the researcher in theme development. As such, my own personal and professional background will have influenced my reflections and interpretation.

Using an RTA approach allowed me to treat all stakeholder information as equally important, and does not, for instance, privilege the frequency of times something was expressed. Instead, my intention has been to develop meaningful themes and showcase the rich and varied nature of the stories I have heard.

To promote coherence, each theme reflects a central idea rather than a content category, and I include examples and quotations to illuminate each theme.

Later in this report, to support the communication of insights from the themes of this report to the British Gymnastics community, I have worked with two critical friends to develop composite vignettes of the data. These critical friends, Drs Francesca Cavallerio and Michaela Kousalova are former competitive gymnasts, who have served the sport as coaches and judges within Rhythmic and WAG in the UK, Italy and Czechia. Both have undertaken PhDs programmes of research on gymnastics culture and environments under my supervision. The composite vignettes reflect a form of creative analytical practice, and allow for the representation of complex, rich, and personally meaningful perspectives. In this instance, the vignettes use participants' own words to reflect some of the complex experiences of Reform '25 across different stakeholder groups within BG.

SCENE SETTING

I recognise that the sport of gymnastics has provided positive, healthy and rewarding experiences for the vast majority of its participants and that most gymnastics coaches are diligent, caring and responsible... [BG] has made mature concessions about culture, welfare, education and complaints handling. BG has invested significant thought and work into modifying the culture of the sport during the last two years. Whilst BG is to be commended for this, there is much more work to be done.

p. 4, Whyte Review (2022)

"I think the sport has a way of being that had ingrained itself within the BG organisation; Clearly controlled from the top, by a coach or Director, and they dictate everything, from the time you turn up, to the work you do, to the way you behave, to what you wear, to how you stand. If you look at the sport, that had translated into the organisation. Everything was measured in metrics. Everything was pass or fail. You've succeeded if you do deliver a metaphorical 10. That is ingrained in the sport and in the organisation. Part of Reform '25 has been about bringing in different thinking, values, ways, philosophies. People that understand sport and culture. It was necessary to bring about the scale of value and ethics change that was needed."

BG leader (2025)

"This was all about values, people, understanding and listening, collaborating and involving. If you want to impact the well-being of people you've got to approach things from design to action and impact. In terms of principals of how, it started with the title. Early conversations were about responding to the Whyte Review, I said enough of that, this is about behaviour change, attitudes. If you look up the word 'reform', it is not about change for change sake, it's about changing people's attitudes, behaviours and values to enable sustainable change. So that's why we called it 'Reform'. It captured the scale and complexity of what we were trying to achieve, yes actions, but we needed to get the approach right, and then impact could follow. Some people did want to see the actions and impact straight away. And that's probably been the hardest thing, to keep people on the journey while we said 'this is going to take time and we don't know all the answers, and we are going to learn along the way'."

BG leader (2025)

"Some people have said Reform '25 was PR, but it was our bible. The spine of Reform '25 is values, behaviours, and a shift in approach across culture, L&D, performance. All of that is entwined in the work, and as a board we have to understand that we needed to get that spine right, and everything else will attach to that. The actions are ok, but the fundamental point of it has been a lens and laser focus on changing our approach, not just do the actions, collaborate, listen, and only then co-create outcomes. Otherwise things don't shift."

BG leader (2025)

CONDUCTING THIS EVALUATION

What we want and what we don't want.

It has been three years since Anne Whyte QC published her review into the culture of BG. While Reform '25 is BG's response to Whyte and was planned to conclude in 2025, in reality, BG were acting to meaningfully change their culture from 2020, and it has been consistently reiterated to me during interactions with BG leaders, staff, and external parties that the work to develop a safe, inclusive, and uplifting experience for all, will not, and cannot, end with Reform '25.

From my first interaction with BG leaders regarding the scope of and their hopes for this evaluation, I was struck by their desire to avoid a "tick box exercise with RAG ratings". CEO Sarah Powell, summarised what I perceived to be a refreshing, open and sincere approach, "we know what we've done, we don't want to know what we've done; we want to know about the impact of what we have done". This expressed desire was consistently reiterated to me throughout this evaluation and was importantly matched by behaviour across all my interactions with BG leaders and staff.

I have found CEO Sarah Powell, the Oversight Board, and BG Directors to be consistently open and supportive of this process. I have received substantial valuable project support from the Communications and Engagement team in bringing the evaluation to fruition and supporting me from a communications perspective in terms of the logistics of giving over 10,000 people within the British Gymnastics ecosystem the opportunity to share their insights, experiences and stories about Reform '25. I have tried to be true to BG's request and the spirit in which they instigated this evaluation in my undertaking of the evaluation and the development of my report. It is important to note that I am also aware that the communication of objective progress against the Reform '25 action plan will be reported elsewhere. The report should be considered alongside the reporting on progress toward Reform '25 action plan. Nevertheless, this report focuses on the human impact of Reform '25; it is about people and their rich, subjective, and storied lives in relation to Reform '25.

THEMES DEVELOPED IN THIS EVALUATION

Table 1. A thematic summary of experiences of Reform '25

Themes	Subthemes
1. Cultural change is well underway: The foundations are laid, and building is ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The jigsaw is taking shape as more pieces fit” • From pariah to reluctant poster child
2. Pride and Prejudice: Staff feel proud and a sense of significant cultural change, but there remains some restructuring fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pride. Changes in the BG work environment have instilled pride and removed fear • Prejudice: The lingering impact of restructure
3. Architects for change: The significant impact of values-led leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driven to make change, but lifting the lid to find a system more fractured than expected • “From Response to Reform”: Changing tack from tick-box to purpose-driven impact
4. Huge leaps for performance gymnasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A different daily experience: Fun, more dialogue, athlete-centred, and holistic • Is it legit? Scepticism is reducing, but rebuilding trust takes time • Athlete voice opportunities • Hope for continuity, and the risk of complacency
5. Bridging the gap between policy and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform '25 has prioritised performance and is “not cutting through” to recreation • Policy rejection and manipulation • Community mistrust, cynicism, and resistance. • Mixed views on policy communication and consultation
6. The challenge of advancing welfare and safer sport amid fragmented truths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant progress on welfare and safer sport • The Independent Complaints Process was needed, and is rigorous, but has undermined Reform '25 • An opportunity for restorative practice
7. Coaches: A change of the guard and a divided community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More able and empowered, but it's like ceasing to practice a religion after 30 years. • Coaches in fear: We've had to have hard hats on, but it's settling
8. Beyond compliance: Cultivating meaningful impact in Learning & Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximising the impact of coach developers. • Challenges facing the modernisation of L&D delivery formats
9. An opportunity to reflect on governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of unregulated activity • Double-edged sword of business responsibility • In/out groups within the governance structure • British Gymnastics exists within a wider governance system that impacts culture and behaviour

What follows is an overview of each of the eight main themes that I developed after analysing the available data. Each main theme is numbered, and contains within its subthemes, which highlight particularly

relevant or nuanced aspects or elements of that theme. Themes and subthemes are summarised in Table 1. To illuminate each theme, I have presented direct quotations from submissions, and these are presented in italics.

1. CULTURAL CHANGE IS WELL UNDERWAY: THE FOUNDATIONS ARE LAID, AND BUILDING IS ONGOING

This theme should be considered as an overarching observation within this evaluation and which was perhaps most prevalent in the stories shared with me. My general sense is that British Gymnastics has made significant progress in “*laying the foundations*” for cultural transformation across the sport, particularly within the organisation’s workforce and performance programmes. The use of construction or building metaphors was common within stories shared with me, with others noting that “*groundwork*” was complete, or that “*strong foundations*” had been laid. To extend this metaphor, cultural transformation in sport takes time, care, and typically great effort, and like in any other sector, can often fail if the foundations, or “*conditions for cultural change*” are not well set, as an oversight board member noted:

“The conditions for cultural change are excellent in BG. You have willing leaders, who are open to being challenged. Their priority was culture. They have brought in new leaders; the evidence is there – the burning platform was there. There was pressure from within within from advocacy groups and pressure from outside from the WRCBs. Those conditions aren’t often there in other sports. And saying that, all those important conditions are there, and culture change is still really hard. There are good people, they want the culture to be better, we are spending hours thinking about it; prioritising culture, and it is still hard.”

The quotation above captures the difficulty of undertaking culture transformation in a sport with over 300,000 athletes, 10,000 coaches, and over 1,000 clubs. Yet, through Reform ‘25 BG have made transformational leadership change, undertaken substantial policy and learning and development work, and demonstrated a dramatic shift in how welfare,

safeguarding and safer sport can be approached and managed. As the quotation indicates, within Reform ‘25, BG leaders have prioritised culture change, and a palpable culture shift is being felt within the workforce and performance areas of the sport. One BG leader shared a reflection on the historical influences on the culture of gymnastics, and a balanced but optimistic view of the BG culture change work:

“things have changed since the 1980s. They did things that would not be remotely acceptable now. It was brutal in some countries, but some fantastic gymnasts came through it. We didn’t think too much about it, until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when coaches from the Eastern Block had spread around the world. They were great technicians, just with certain coaching mentalities. Some adjusted their style to suit their new context, and in some areas the environment adjusted to them. The question is ‘who moved?’. Local clubs fully bought into the ideas that some coaches carried with them. And there are plenty of examples in Western Europe and North America that a culture developed that shifted strongly towards a strict, disciplinary, slightly militaristic approach to coaching athletes. I don’t believe it was universal... but it was clear around the time of the Whyte Review that BG had to treat it seriously; there clearly was a community in the performance end that thought ‘this is the way to go; if you want success, if you want medals, suck it up, this is what it takes’. My experience is totally different, and we have since shown that we can have lots of successful athletes come through who have not experienced that disciplinarian culture. You can have success in other ways, but there were pockets who didn’t believe we could, and maybe some still do, and are longing for

BG and the current crop of athletes to fail, thinking 'frankly they're just not working hard enough'. This started in the 1990s and it blew up in the 2020s, for lots of people in this sport they still hold deep views about what success looks like, but then there are more recent arrivals who didn't have that history and come at it from a very different perspective. With a societal shift, we've only fairly recently faced up to the conversation about how hard we expect athletes to work".

The crisis that emerged within British Gymnastics in 2020 and was brought into focus by the Whyte Review posed an existential threat to the sport, and yet, what has been achieved was both unprecedented and remarkable. That BG is now considered by key external bodies, such as the WRCBs to be sector-leading in parts of their governance that were so criticised in the Whyte Review; that advocacy groups, such as Gymnasts for Change (G4C) and the Gymnast-Parents Alliance (GymPal), now have a constructive bi-directional dialogue with BG, and can work together with less hostile and largely constructive working relationships; and that the leaders of BG do not seek false assurances regarding their culture and risk, and willingly recognise that culture work within gymnastics is ongoing, are all observations to be celebrated. Indeed, I think the most significant impact of Reform '25 is not the changes BG have implemented, but the manner and philosophy of approach to this work. The transparent perspective towards "success", was reflected by one BG leader:

"Success' isn't the right word in this space, but we have definitely made 'change', in terms of the foundational changes in values, behaviours, and ways of thinking. I think that has been the most significant shift; people genuinely recognise that they have to approach their work in a different way. Particularly within the BG workforce, I'm not talking about the community, but what is in

my sphere of influence. Definitely we have people who think in the right way around this. They think people-first, they think care, values. They don't think about protecting BG from criticism or funding loss. BG only exists because we serve the community. We're 70% there in leadership and organizational culture. The biggest challenge still is reaching into the community. Within the clubs we may only be 30-40%."

"The jigsaw is taking shape as more pieces fit". In addition to the dominant metaphor of having built the foundations for sustainable culture change within BG, another metaphor often used as a template for stories shared with me about Reform '25 relates to that of jigsaw puzzle pieces being placed. That is, there was a general sense among many respondents in this evaluation that *"the big pieces are in place"* of a metaphorical culture change jigsaw, and that *"the jigsaw is taking shape as more pieces fit"*. A BG leader shared:

"I think we are systemically doing what we can; from the policy work to how we've approached that policy work, it's much easier to read, it's more connected and aware. So, all the actions we're putting in place we're starting to put the jigsaw together, but there will still be pieces of the jigsaw that are missing.

I interpreted the use of these "jigsaw" narratives to reflect: the agile, learning-centred problem-solving undertaken by BG leaders; work that is incomplete and ongoing; the value of having a clear picture (i.e., vision) of what is being created; the need to persevere and manage frustration, and; to some degree, the benefits of building incrementally and in sections, before the full picture becomes clear.

Both the foundation and jigsaw narratives might be useful frames of reference when considering the nuance, complexity, and future opportunities noted throughout this report.

From pariah to reluctant poster child.

One BG leader noted a sense of a positive relationship shift with the WRCBs and the importance of interorganisational collaboration throughout Reform '25. I preface this quotation from a BG leader, with a reflection of my own, that for several years within the UK high performance system, there has been a narrative that has cast gymnastics as a pariah. In my work, I regularly hear people express sentiments such as, “we don’t want to be the next gymnastics” or “we’ll be on the naughty step, like gymnastics”, which reflect narratives of fear held by people within the sport system of a cultural crisis and the potential consequences it could have for their sport:

“We felt initially that the WRCBs, at least in public, understandably they didn’t want to be contaminated by the fallout of the Whyte Review - it couldn’t be about funding for medals, and was seen as a Gymnastics problem. But they [the WRCBs] are very supportive and helpful getting us where we needed to be; while we wouldn’t choose to be put on a pedestal, it’s kind of strange how the system now has us as a sort of poster child

with the strides we’ve made. Other sports are looking to us and how professionally we’ve dealt with this... it feels fine now, 5 years on, we’ve done a lot of work, and they see we’ve done a lot of work, and the stories about us now tend to be more positive.

It is important to note that being seen as a “poster child” made BG leaders uncomfortable, and it is a label they would not use to describe BG (“it’s not where we feel we are at”, “we wouldn’t call ourselves a poster child”). Indeed, while BG leaders would point to notable milestones in their work to date, there is a strong reluctance to be seen individually or as a sport as a role model for culture change. Nevertheless, the view that BG have made significant progress away from being “the pariah of the system” was shared by a number of people in this process. Notably, such views were typically held by stakeholders from outside of BG, but within the UK sport system, and the work that BG have undertaken has been used and adapted by other sports (“it’s been a bit slow, but the ethical explorations and terms of reference for culture have placed BG as a leader in this space”).

2. PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: STAFF FEEL PROUD AND A SENSE OF SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL CHANGE, BUT THERE REMAINS SOME RESTRUCTURING FATIGUE

This theme is divided into two subthemes: the experiences of Pride and Prejudice held by the workforce within BG. Their stories are presented here because the theme most closely relates to the culture change progress reported in theme 1.

Pride. Changes in the BG work environment have instilled pride and removed fear.

Numerous people employed by BG shared their sense of pride in their work and organisation, *“I feel proud to work for BG, there are amazing people in the organisation.”* This pride was frequently associated with both a contrasting experience of the previous culture (*“it was a culture of fear”, “you had to really watch what you said to [leader]”*), and in light of significant praise by staff, board members, and external partners of the impact of the CEO.

Staff generally describe a dramatic shift toward a values-led, empowering, and inclusive working environment, with widespread praise for the openness and inspirational behaviours of the current leadership. Indeed, the impact of Reform '25 has been felt most deeply visible internally, where recruitment, restructuring, and a focus on safer sport have led to a significantly improved atmosphere and sense of pride among employees.

“I’ve held a lot of different roles within and outside of BG. When “Leap without limits” (the vision for a new era) was launched, I was “external” and wasn’t part of its development, yet was overwhelmed with how the vision resonated with my personal perspective of gymnastics and so incredibly happy that BG was being bold with their aspirations for improving culture throughout the sport.

I can categorically state that the work internally has been focused and relentless, striving for cultural change across the community to value the people, support with their aspirations and remain committed to inclusion. Clarity has also been retained, with staff clearly understanding the focus of their time and efforts in delivering safe and positive experiences for people in gymnastics.”

Another staff member shared how the values of Reform '25 were now “ingrained” in their work, how they now felt a sense of *“togetherness and care from BG”*, and that the sport was *“safer”* after the Reform '25 programme of work:

“I believe Reform '25 has given the organisation a focus and a direction for safer sport. It’s provoked positive change – in our decisions, in our thought processes and ultimately in the work we’re doing. From my personal perspective, Reform '25 has been an integral part of my work at BG. It has been a massive part of my role, and I believe our vision and purpose have been so ingrained into me that they will continue to influence my work even after Reform '25 ends. Regardless of what I’m working on, I see the value and importance of creating safe and positive environments for everyone in gymnastics, and I know I will take this into everything I do at British Gymnastics. Reform '25 has encouraged me to reflect on my own past experiences as a gymnast. I feel a sense of togetherness and care from British Gymnastics as an organisation now that I never felt as a gymnast. When training, I rarely felt the gymnastics environment was a safe place. There were of course moments of happiness, success and fun, but gymnastics

often brought on feelings of stress, pressure, and anxiety, even though I loved the sport. Now, being part of the organisation as an employee rather than a gymnast, I feel a change. I feel the desire to ensure gymnastics is a safer sport than it used to be. I feel we're heading in a more positive, modern direction that puts the gymnast at the heart of everything we do. Is that feeling also felt by our community, or is it just because my work has been so driven by Reform '25? I'm not sure. Nevertheless, I'm proud to say that I've played a part in Reform '25 and the journey we've started to make gymnastics a safer sport"

Extending this positive perspective, it was common for staff to use words like "safer", "empowering" and "open" to describe their workplace culture. This was also often contrasted with what several staff referred to as a "culture of fear" prior to the appointment of the current CEO, and the implementation of Reform '25 and the Leap without Limits vision work. One staff member explained, "There is more safety, people will speak up now. They wouldn't under the previous CEO."

Prejudice: The lingering impact of restructure.

While the majority of the BG workforce shared stories that reflected the positive culture change that had resulted from Reform '25, an organisational restructure and some staffing changes have impacted how some staff feel about their role. One observer shared a reflection that echoed the sentiments of several staff:

"99% of people within BG say it's better now than it was; there's just a bit of cynicism and sense of feeling stretched among staff. I'd say there's been a mindset shift, but maybe not a culture shift. The organisational set up may hinder real culture change; it's quite top down in terms of decision-making, and people describe role overload, change fatigue, and siloed working. There's also a degree of resentment towards Whyte among some staff- you hear "survivor" and "crisis" language

from some who've been through multiple restructures, a sense still that it's 'all hands to the pump', and where people feel a reporting burden, unable to think strategically, wrapped up in a cycle of feeling stretched and "doing"; but people admire the CEO, so I think it can continue to move in the right direction."

Some people have experienced significant disruption due to the organisational restructure of the BG workforce in 2022. For some staff, primarily those whose role was impacted or who had close relationships with affected colleagues, the changes were experienced as top-down, closed, decision-making processes, prompting some disillusionment among staff, and for a small number, as an (over)reaction to the Whyte Review. The restructure was justified by BG leaders as "a difficult necessity", with one leader noting that they were "completed to enable BG to reprioritise and deliver Reform '25". Another perspective was provided by one former employee, who felt that the organisational restructure had not gone far enough, noting that BG had faced financial strain, and "could have been more ruthless on our cost management".

It is understandable that staff have experienced a range of responses to the restructure. BG should remain cognisant that organisational change results in opportunities and disruption, both of which can have a lingering impact on trust, morale and engagement. Despite the time that has passed since the restructure, some staff still share stories infused with the negative emotional and motivational impacts of the change, and this can offer insights that can inform future change processes. The restructure was challenging, but it has resulted in a growing number of people throughout the organisation who lead by example, role model BG's values, and reinforce associated behaviours. BG must continue to harness - but not take for granted - the sense of pride in and love of gymnastics that is felt by many people in the workforce.

3. ARCHITECTS FOR CHANGE: THE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT OF VALUES-LED LEADERSHIP

Overseeing Reform '25 required excellent leadership, and the oversight and BG board or the executive team, but these leadership groups have navigated unprecedented challenges to make real and substantial cultural, governance, and personnel change over the last 5 years. In the last three years, this change process has been guided by the Reform '25 action plan and the Leap without Limits vision work. I have reviewed the policy documents, records of meetings and other internal documents that record the significant time invested in decision-making. Reading these documents, I consistently felt that the BG leadership were modelling the values they espoused, and that they have worked tirelessly to improve the sport for its members, and have been steadfast in their pursuit of developing a sport that is fun, uplifting and inclusive for all. Despite this perseverance, undertaking a significant culture change programme like Reform '25 required BG leaders to listen, and consider the perspectives of various BG stakeholder groups. The result has not been a linear process, and the BG leaders have faced many *“bumps in the road”*, requiring them to have *“lots of challenging conversations”* as they have sought to make meaningful impact through Reform '25.

Driven to make change, but lifting the lid to find a system more fractured than expected. In sharing their experiences of being appointed to BG leadership positions, several individuals shared that they felt a sense of duty, responsibility, and motivation to make real change. Yet, what many people within the BG leadership during this period didn't anticipate was the scale and urgency of the governance and cultural transformation required. What initially appeared to be a manageable crisis quickly revealed deeper

fractures. Despite having significant experience and expertise as individual professionals, oversight board members shared with me experiences of being confronted by what they encountered as they *“lifted the lid”* on the governance and culture changes, as well as the scale of complaints. One leader shared a typical reflection among those joining during or following the Whyte Review, *“I thought I knew what I was getting myself into, but the reality was that there was so much more to do than I imagined”*. Another leader noted their initial experience of joining the oversight board *“it was a baptism of fire”*, while another described the fallout from Whyte as a *“fireball”*. Encouragingly, despite the scale of the challenge that faced them, several leaders who joined BG post-Whyte Review disclosed that the *“opportunity to make real change”*, *“create a legacy in a key sport”*, via a *“values-based proposition”* were important motives for them.

An employee from one of the WRCBs shared an upbeat view on how BG had navigated a challenging journey of change, while also noting the importance of its leaders:

“What BG have navigated has been both bumpy and brilliant; they are ahead of all other sports and are pushing boundaries across welfare and education. But I do wonder what would happen if leaders moved on.”

Since her appointment as CEO of BG in 2021, Sarah Powell, with the support of the BG Board and Oversight Board has personally driven the cultural change process within BG. As part of this change, Powell has led a process of reimagining the leadership of BG, to the extent that, *“of the 24 Department Heads or Directors at the time of the Whyte Review, only two people remain in post”*. This leadership change has been labelled

by some as “transformative” and the impact “transformational”, and the resultant workforce structure “is well placed to undertake the work ahead... and we may need to look at governance reform”.

Throughout this evaluation, the CEO’s leadership has been consistently singled out for praise by a range of stakeholder groups, including board members, staff, advocacy groups, and the WRCB. Consistently, she has been described to me as being “exceptional” and “inspiring”. Directors and staff alike have noted how they value, among other skills, her leadership (“she hasn’t managed me, she’s led me”), resilience (“she has consistently demonstrated patience and perseverance”), and her openness (“Sarah entered BG and I feel listened to. We can disagree professionally, for sure, and I worked just as closely with her predecessor, but you had to be very careful what you said with her – people were on edge”).

One WRCB representative noted the contribution of several BG leaders to strengthening the relationship with the WRCBs throughout Reform ’25:

“there’s been significant leadership shift and within the board; they genuinely believe in the change they are trying to make. I’ve seen them shift from a RAG rating/tick-box approach to a more sophisticated approach focused on impact. The initial response was to assemble a crisis group, but it’s more business as usual now, more trusting. The relationship has shifted from instructing, to one more akin to coaching. That’s been due to Sarah’s credibility, Mike’s honesty and openness – these have been key – there’s more fluidity and collaboration between the Directors; Geraldine has been revolutionary.”

Building on this praise, other insights shared with me regularly touched on the impact being made by BG Directors who were appointed as part of Reform ’25. For instance,

the leaders of the Performance, Learning & Development and Welfare & Safe Sport teams were frequently singled out for praise by a range of stakeholders (e.g., board, staff, coaches) for their values and for how they collaborate as a Directorate. The focus of this praise related to both their efforts and dedication to driving change, but also how they went about this work, with people noting how these individuals had brought professionalism (“fronted up to difficult conversations”, “met the challenge head on”), modelled a values-led approach (“a great role model for the culture change”), and were “making a significant difference” within their portfolio of work. Moreover, the leader of Communications & Engagement team, was praised for listening and leading a shift in communications within the organisation.

While the overwhelming balance of reflections I received about the BG leadership were positive, it is also important to note that there were some voices who felt that leaders had not been quick enough to instigate change, or that change (e.g., policy and learning development, complaint case resolution) had been too slow. Yet, a second prominent cluster of experiences regarding the impact of BG leaders during Reform ’25 related to how they had listened, reflected, and adapted.

“From Response to Reform: Changing tack from tick-box to purpose-driven impact”.

The oversight board have individually and collectively experienced growth and transformation during Reform ’25. This transformation has been characterised by a shift from a reactive, overly-corporate crisis response designed to meet compliance-focused approach that prioritised its appearance among members and the WRCBs, to an approach that is intentional, proactive, values-led, person-centred, and which prizes impact-driven reform.

“As an oversight board, we initially focused

on volume – the number of cases couldn't be ignored – but we've shifted from response to reform; it was not just about actions, the approach was key"

What was once a defensive stance marked by box-ticking and reputational caution has evolved into a more open, collaborative, and deeper commitment to social impact, accountability, and lasting cultural change. One leader noted the strategic shift within the oversight board from one of responding to the Whyte Review, to seeking meaningful impact and actual reform:

"We have shifted from all our communication being overly-corporate and not very humane or particularly member-focused, and where lots of what we put out there was reactive, seeking to assure, fix, be seen to be clean, to being much more proactive, trying to listen more, appreciate that this is a journey. It's gone from tick box to "so what?" and impact. From responding to Whyte to seeking impact through the theory of change."

Another leader noted the shift in communications:

"We shifted massively. The communications team have made massive strides. Early on, we were stuck. One moment that stands out was when the list of banned coaches was released; the press release was terrible, it was all about how good we are as an NGB for doing this. Too much of it was about 'look, you said we did, look what we've done... action, action, action'. It wasn't approached from a perspective of 'who this is about? Who it is helping? Has anyone noticed? Is it having any impact?'" It was a breakthrough moment and the comms since then have been much better. *It shifted from input ("what we've done") to impact ("whose life has this changed?").*

Significantly, the strategic shift of the oversight board was noticed and welcomed a range of stakeholder groups, including advocacy groups, the WRCBs, the BG board,

staff, and some coaches. One member of staff shared:

"There's been such a shift in thinking from the board, who now want quotations in reports, not numbers. There is a sense that the '3Ms' (money, medals, members) fixation has been 'retired', and replaced by desire to move toward a focus on experience instead. Even though there are still pockets of resistance in the wider BG ecosystem."

While oversight board members and Directors were regularly singled out for role modelling the values of Reform '25, the roots of the strategic shift appeared to begin within the oversight board discussions. To elaborate, the "check and challenge" of the independent advisor to the oversight board, Cath Bishop, was frequently cited as being "fundamental" and "instrumental" in this evolution in the strategy and approach. One Oversight board member noted, "Cath really made us think differently. She helped us shift from approaching R25, from a fixation on what, to how, to understand impact. This was inspirational." Another stated, "if you asked anybody on the oversight board, they would say Cath has been instrumental because she's really challenged our thinking, particularly around culture."

The BG board and oversight board have also played a key role in supporting the recruitment of new Directors, implementing a restructure of their portfolios, and, importantly, enabling these Directors with the resources to deliver sector-leading outcomes. One BG leader noted the valuable impact of this support, as well as the role of WRCBs in helping through additional funding support:

"Thankfully I've been given the license to be innovative. We've invested heavily in coach development. We've secured some additional funding from UK Sport and Sport England. There was no such thing as the coach development team two years ago by the end of this summer, we'll have a team of five full-time employees. To my knowledge, it will be the biggest, most highly resourced coaching

coaching the team anywhere in the world apart from the Football Association. We'll have five full-time employed people plus a contracted-for-service team of about 30 people supporting our coaches across the sport; it's a massive investment."

Many valuable lessons have been learned on this journey by the BG leadership; Perhaps the most prominent of which has been emancipatory feeling and impact of rejecting of traditional outcomes (i.e., the 3Ms of medals, money, and members) and a focus on people and experiences which have laid the foundations for sustainable cultural transformation and social impact. The work and role of the oversight board and senior leaders, as well as lessons learned about communication, have also been pivotal.

Moreover, the BG have shifted to an approach that creatively and dynamically attends to culture. This shift, is best characterised by BG, with support of WRCB culture and leadership advisors to reconsider the use of mechanisms that can provide false assurances (e.g., culture surveys), and an approach that is informed by exploring how voices are heard and experiences are felt; how these are sensitive to the pressures of performance and influenced by the historical and current gymnastics landscape, that prioritises safeguarding and integrity, and focusses on the development of sustainable environments where people can thrive. While these changes have not yet fully changed the culture, the change in approach to culture itself is significant, and these positive shifts must be captured for BG and the wider sport system.

4. HUGE LEAPS FOR PERFORMANCE GYMNASTS

This theme has been developed to attempt to capture the experiences of current performance gymnasts. It is skewed towards the experiences of senior gymnasts within the WCPs of WAG, MAG, and Trampoline due to the representation of athletes that shared their experiences.

A different daily experience: Fun, more dialogue, athlete-centred, and holistic.

A number of current senior performance gymnasts gave accounts of their experiences, and reflected on how these experiences had changed since the Whyte Review and implementation of Reform '25. In general, these insights reflect a sense of a clear cultural shift from an authoritarian, performance-driven environment to a more empathetic, athlete-centred environment, where athletes, to their own surprise are allowed to have fun:

"I think there's been some huge leaps forward, um... overall, really positive with Reform '25. Definitely seen some improvements." Another senior performance gymnast noted, "Now it's 'What do you need? When do you need it? We'll get it for you'... In the beginning, it really... felt like a bit of a tick box... but now I do believe it does revolve around us."

Another gymnast, from the trampoline WCP, shared similar thoughts:

"I definitely feel like there's a lot more of a conversation around how we do things, and being able to have a bit more input into how things are designed, like camps and how the programme's designed. I must admit, I definitely initially, thought it all felt quite performative, but once we got into it, when we did the stuff like the Olympic Games review, and then the subsequent reviews after that, I could see there was genuine buy-in. Even in terms of how many people showed up to the first review compared to how many people showed up to the second, and how many people showed up to the third. There was definitely a lot more buy-in."

A WAG gymnast also shared their perspective on the impact of Reform '25 and the potential impact of the next generation of performance gymnasts in WAG:

"I do think that how they [BG performance staff] try to look after you as a person, and not just in the gym, all of the support that the girls get now outside the gym is great. They genuinely want you to be building a life and doing other things, and... that's encouraged, whereas that actually was really frowned upon before Reform. So, I've actually seen some really positive changes, and I agree that they're still a way to go with certain things. I think, from my experiences, I know that the younger generations coming through now will never experience, kind of, the harshness that we did, and that to me is, like, a massive job done in a good way."

A major improvement celebrated across all disciplines is in the daily experience of training and athlete wellbeing. One WAG athlete summarised her experiences of Reform by noting:

"I couldn't be happier to see just the women's side happy. From what gymnastics was for us, like... it's a drastic transformation. To be encouraged to eat is massive. To know that, you know, you can actually communicate a problem...massive."

In another reflection, this gymnast also noted:

A massive thing for us was the weight and food part of gymnastics, and I've seen a massive shift in that. I think the older generation of gym must still have their struggles there, but seeing the younger generations and in clubs being encouraged to go and get a snack. Have a break, take food around the gym, that was just... it would never have happened before. And again, when we go away to championships, they now make sure we actually are in a city where we're near a shop. Whereas before, the girls couldn't go anywhere near a shop."

So those type of things have really changed... that athlete-centred approach."

One gymnast contrasted her experiences of WAG with the current WCP environment the shared learning curve people in gymnastics had been on, and also that they had seen a change among young recreational gymnasts:

"I would say that... growing up in the culture of women's artistic, it was... a very... hard environment, um... a lot more, I would say in my younger years. The changes were coming even the year before Whyte Review, people were really starting to change their methods, but it took too long to get there. And through Reform, I think coaches actually learned a lot, and we've learned a lot together. Before you'd have been nervous to challenge, but now there's a shared understanding... you don't need to do the same amount of workload, you can do it differently, and I think it was a really big learning curve... What I see in gymnastics clubs now, if I do a club visit, it's just really nice to see happy gymnasts. Genuinely, like, the kids are happy."

Another athlete from trampolining, described how training now includes elements of playfulness and enjoyment:

"I would definitely say, something that's positive that's come from Reform in terms of training environment, I think we're given a lot more room now than we ever have to... sort of... enjoy training, and, we have a lot of fun. The last two, three years have definitely been so different. Sometimes we'll play games in session, or we'll do, like, challenges in session, and that's, like, encouraged. Before, I think it would have been seen as, like, "oh, you're not taking it seriously". But that's been very beneficial from Reform that we didn't have before... just being given that room to sort of be a bit more playful with training and... actually enjoy coming to training and being at camps, which is so nice."

This more holistic, collaborative, and person-

centred approach seems to be one of Reform's most successful and widely felt outcomes among performance gymnasts.

Is it legit? Scepticism is reducing, but rebuilding trust takes time. There was a view shared by several current gymnasts that the initial approach to Reform felt "tick box", and that some of the athlete voice initiatives had felt "performative". While these feelings had largely dissipated, thanks in part of consistent values-led leadership from the current PD, some of the athletes' stories did illustrate some lingering trust challenges and low-level scepticism towards the BG due to their previous negative experiences. Moreover, while all of the performance athletes I spoke with acknowledged the positive impact of Reform '25, they all also expressed some element of caution or wariness —particularly those who had experienced "the old culture". One WAG gymnast expressed this tension directly:

"it took me a while to adjust. And I am still a bit sceptical, I think purely because of my own experiences. Is it genuine? Is it legit?... It's definitely had a positive impact on myself, and I think the people that are in charge now, especially with the PD, I think they've been really good in terms of how they're managing a lot of previous tensions with the programme. Some coaches and some athletes were quite sceptical, because obviously they've had quite negative experiences, and I think the PD is doing a really good job at, sort of, hearing those concerns out and just being able to find a productive place to put those concerns, and also twist them positively, the PD's done a really good job of that so far, from what I've seen. I would also say, because I've had a very uniquely um, positive, view of... our programme compared to some other people, but I definitely think it's a bit more... positive than it was before."

Another gymnast, referred to this waning scepticism:

“there’s a bit of scepticism from coaches, probably more from coaches than from athletes in some cases. But I feel like we’re getting to a point where that scepticism is starting to be managed a bit better.”

Athlete voice opportunities. Athletes repeatedly noted that there are now mechanisms for listening and gathering athlete input, but also stressed the importance of being heard—and being heard meaningfully. There is a sense that the gymnast advisory panel (GAP) as a *“great mechanism”*, but that this has yet to gain full momentum due to the dominant focus on gaining athlete input on policy development, *“For 2 years... we’ve wanted to talk about athlete voice... but for 2 years, non-stop, we’ve had policy, policy, policy.”* The same gymnast also felt there was room for more athlete inclusion:

“Again, my frame of reference comes from a positive perspective, but the one thing I will say is that athletes are still out of the loop and I think there’s still room for inclusion. There’s got to be a way to get that athlete voice and sort of influence the rest of the organisation, but overall, really positive.”

Among performance gymnasts, there was also a sense that there is an opportunity improve clarity in communication and follow-through after athletes have been consulted:

“For me there’s a bit of frustration, other athletes; it doesn’t always feel like what we say is being registered sometimes, or at least maybe it’s not explained, like, “we’ve listened, but we haven’t been able to”, so I have the confidence to speak up, but there’s sometimes that lack of clear follow through that adds a bit of a communication barrier.”

Several current WCP gymnasts felt there was inconsistency in terms of timely and clear feedback loops and follow up after they had provided input, *“They’re asking all the right questions, but I’m like, ‘Where’s the action?’”*, another noted, *“You want to*

have trust... and I feel like that can be a bit 50-50.” I interpreted these experiences as indicating that while gymnasts are feeling a shift in how they are being invited to contribute to their WCP training programmes and environment, there is a need for ongoing consistent, credible, and transparent dialogue in response to athlete voice.

Other gymnasts shared mixed views on whether gymnasts feel confident enough to speak up, noting that this may be difficult for athletes who have never been asked to input on their programme:

“It’s a cultural thing and there is a shift – all the coaches and staff are saying “we want to know”, that that is happening, but... for the older, experienced athletes we’ve been kind of indoctrinated from a young age and most are just not brave enough to... nobody would communicate a problem until it was too late... how do we get over that communication barrier? For the younger girls coming through, it should be better for them if they know from the outset that they can talk and be listened to.”

Later the same gymnast concluded her reflections on Reform '25 by stating:

“Okay, some problems aren’t always addressed as we’d like, but there’s been a huge shift, and it’s definitely going in the right direction. Athletes are being asked the right questions, which is a great start, now there just has to be clear communication after... where’s the action and how are we actually following this up? That’s what builds trust... If you have those conversations, and they’re actually...you know that they’re going to be actually acted upon. They might not always be able to act on everything as you would want, but to know, you know, there was someone was trying, and you can at least get feedback, then that’s gonna hopefully encourage people to actually continue to talk... But yeah, it’s going in the right direction, and that’s really positive to see.”

These reflections highlight that meaningful reform has begun around athlete voice and inclusion in training and environment design, but that this must include a consistent feedback loop—not just asking for views, but showing how those views are (or are not) acted upon.

Hope for continuity, and the risk of complacency. Despite the positive experience of their WCPs, the performance gymnasts who shared their experiences of Reform '25 also expressed a sense that work was still needed, cautious hopefulness that initiatives (e.g., the gymnast advisory group) would continue beyond Reform '25, and some concern that complacency could creep back into performance gymnastics.

One trampoline athlete noted, *“It’s not finished yet. I think that’s the main thing, we just need to keep going”, later adding “I think everyone’s trying really hard to get it right, but it’s going to take that little bit longer.”*

Another gymnast, from MAG, warns of the dangers of budget cuts to the continuance of reform initiatives or a loss of momentum:

“And my concern is that Reform '25 coming to an end. I know there’s been conversations about the future of that group, the future of the coaching group etc., it would be a shame if it all ended, because of some budget reason... if that all finishes, you haven’t got a hope in hell to gather athlete or coach voice.”

In their summary reflections of Reform '25,

another athlete also noted the value of the changes, but warned about complacency:

“There’s definitely a positive change, and we’re definitely moving in the right direction. I guess... The main thing would just be to not... I guess, get complacent now that the big overarching objectives and the headlines are sort of ending, and just to, like, carry on with that approach and not slip back into our old ways in terms of gymnastics culture, because it’d be very easy just to revert back to it. And we as athletes need to push through it too; maybe it’s not going to be perfect in areas, and we have to accept our feedback adds more work for those that have to act on it, but there is actually a lot of value in it, and everyone is obviously experiencing a lot of value in it.”

In summary, the current performance gymnasts within WCPs who shared their experiences shared a sense that Reform '25 has had a significant positive impact on their day-to-day experiences, but, they also agree, that momentum must be sustained and embedded beyond Reform '25’s formal timeline to ensure lasting change. Moreover, the gymnasts’ reflections offer a rich, nuanced picture of Reform '25 as defining a period of both healing and growing pains. Reform has undeniably delivered tangible progress in athlete-centred practices, wellbeing, and dialogue, but it is also clear that trust must be continuously earned through action, transparency, and consistency.

5. BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

While many people have acknowledged that British Gymnastics has made notable policy and learning and development changes through Reform '25, particularly regarding hydration, weighing and safeguarding, there is widespread concern that these efforts have not yet translated into meaningful change in clubs, particularly at the recreational level. Resistance to implementation, mistrust of the BG, and inconsistent engagement with policies among recreational coaches, gymnasts, and parents remain major barriers to long-term impact.

Reform '25 has prioritised performance and is “not cutting through” to recreation. While many people shared stories with me about how they had experienced a shift in how BG had approached changes within the sport, people from all of the major stakeholder groups expressed concern that Reform '25 had not “cut through” to meaningfully change the day to day practices within recreational gymnastics. For some, this lack of cut through was combined with a sense of not being listened to. One parent of a pathway gymnast noted:

“While I appreciate British Gymnastics’ stated commitment to cultural change through Reform '25, my recent experience suggests there remains a significant gap between policy and practice. In our case, a coach openly prioritising medals over athlete wellbeing - the very culture Reform '25 aims to change.”

The sense that there remains a gap between policy and practice within the community was expressed numerous times and reflects a narrative that has been adopted among a range of stakeholder groups. For instance, an advocacy group concluded their written statement on Reform '25 by stating, “In summary, despite positive organisational and policy shifts, a significant gap remains

between policy and practice in gyms.” Beyond advocacy groups, this narrative was also the template for the stories shared by other stakeholder groups, such as BG leaders, staff, coaches, and parents.

In part, the mixed views on the “cut through” are made intertwined with views about the true understanding of the scale and nature of the issues raised in the Whyte Review. One former BG leader noted:

“Performance has moved faster than rec’. Okay, why? Is that because there was more of a light shone on performance? But, remember, rec’ didn’t have to move so quickly. It goes back to how we entered into this; we never really understood the scale of the issue. Was it the 90%? No. The issue is 10% of our population - performance - 90% of our members are recreational gymnasts who had no issues with what was going on. You know, you could go to clubs, and they would say, ‘what’s the Whyte review?’ and get ‘Never heard of it’. So, remember, we never had an issue in recreational. In exit interviews we would always get 5% negativity about little Johnny didn’t enjoy gym anymore... but the issue is primarily a performance one about coaches wanting to push their gymnasts to be Olympic medallists, and all the things that go into performance, and it’s no different from what other sports have gone through, it was because it was gymnastics, and it was young girls, it was a better story. That’s why people are saying the performance space has moved forward, because it had to. Go back to risk management; You don’t deal with the issue that’s amber or green, you deal with the issue that’s red; and the red issue was performance. I’m not saying recreation was perfect, and there are probably examples in the White Review where you can pick out an example which was recreational, but with 2.5 million kids going through the BG system over the 8 years Whyte covered, if there was a problem

in recreational gymnastics, firstly, membership would be going down, and secondly, the exit interviews wouldn't be 92% positive, they'd be 75%."

While this former leader pointed to the BG performance programmes as a priority focus for change following the Whyte Review, and performance was one of the four priority foci for Reform '25, the view that *"we never had an issue in recreational"* is not a view held by many stakeholders within this evaluation. While the vast majority of the BG membership appear to have a positive and uplifting experience, these assertions about recreational gymnastics appear to be indicative of denial and foreshadow future risk. As a comparison, one staff member reflected on many positives from Reform '25, but also questioned if Reform '25 had focused sufficiently on recreation:

"there were 252 negative submissions - 125 related to WAG with 79 of those relating to performance gymnasts (so 46 submissions regarding WAG were not about performance gymnasts; what are we doing about those?), but the report didn't seem to provide detail on what the other 127 submissions were about...? Were these from rec' gymnasts and if so, why were the actions within Reform '25 so heavily focussed on performance gymnasts?"

Another BG staff member noted the existence of resistance amid positive changes:

"It's easier to make an impact at the top end... culture change takes time, it's a double-edged sword... we have now got consistent messaging on diet, training load, and I am hearing good news stories from rec', but there are still pockets of resistance and denial."

For some leaders, they made sense of this mixed impact on the recreational area of the sport by pointing to norms and opportunity, *"there are some very normalised ways of coaching, and there aren't enough opportunities to impact these people"*.

Other leaders agreed that performance was prioritised in Reform '25, and that there was a "trickle down" theory, whereby recreational coaches would be influenced by performance:

"Performance moved quickly, L&D is moving with significant size and scale. It's a reflection of where we are at; R25 was mainly about performance, which is just 10% of our membership. We didn't have recreation within the Whyte Review, the real issue was WAG performance, so we focused there first. The trickle down is coming; I've seen how the performance coaches in clubs influence the recreational coaches. It is filtering through"

Policy rejection and manipulation. A number of people shared reflections on the Reform '25 guidance about training hours. While a significant number of people welcomed this change, some viewed this as a failed policy change. One coach held the view that the changes had resulted in an 'ironic effect':

"gymnasts on a performance pathway are no longer allowed to miss school for training. Previously, they might have missed a PE lesson or non-academic time to attend focused training sessions during quieter hours. This change has led to more evening and weekend training, reducing gymnasts' rest, recovery, and quality time with family and friends. We have observed increased fatigue and reduced enjoyment of the sport as a result... There is no doubt that gymnast welfare is being more rigorously protected, which is a positive outcome. However, the impact on coaches and staff has been significant. Many have had to reduce or shift their working hours, often resulting in financial hardship. The increase in evening and weekend work has affected both coach and gymnast mental health. Unfortunately, this consequence seems to have been overlooked in the reform process."

While members wanted clarity and felt that BG should have been clearer on setting training hour limits, the perspective of several staff was different. One BG member of staff noted that *"the policy is evidenced-informed, training load is very individual"*, while those involved in the policy development have reported in this evaluation and to the BG membership via social media the challenges of setting a maximum hour load per week. For instance, one staff member with responsibility for policy development, shared that there

was a concern that hour limits could have an undesirable negative effect, whereby gymnasts are pushed to increase their training hours up to the limit. One BG leader noted that, *“the training time work created hell with clubs as it was seen as taking money from them. For some, there’s a sense this harms business and has resulted in owners seeking ways to work around this ‘restriction’”*.

Further to the sense that this policy has caused a restriction on the business of clubs, other people noted the ways that a range of stakeholder groups are seeking ways around training hour guidance. While some clubs are simply ignoring the guidance, I have received concerning submissions disclosing that parents have resorted to home-schooling their children or disguising the contents of the policy from schools and requesting their child is withdrawn from school to work around the policy. Moreover, while coaches were reported to be generally aware of the training hour guidance, there is poor awareness among schools and parents about this policy or its rationale.

Other Reform '25 policy areas that drew commentaries included feelings of anger towards BG among coaches and parents of clubs who were judged to have fallen foul of dual registration rules. Among these stakeholder groups was a common feeling of conflict with people viewing BG to have been overly legalistic in communication and lacking compassion. The division nature of this policy appeared to be something BG were aware of, with one leader noting *“the dual registration thing has been a nightmare to handle”*. Lastly, the list of sanctioned coaches shared publicly by BG, was praised by some, but there was uncertainty whether this was being updated regularly which leads to a lack of clarity.

Community mistrust, cynicism, and resistance. A significant proportion of the submissions to this evaluation described how the engagement of the gymnastics community remains one of the most prominent barriers to long term social and cultural impact within the BG ecosystem.

Despite the sense that significant work has been put into policy development, many within the community – especially regional committee members, club owners, recreational coaches, gymnasts, and parents – express a mixture of mistrust of BG, long-held cynicism toward BG initiatives, limited awareness of Reform '25, and for some, an outright denial of past cultural issues, instead labelling these as *“a WAG performance issue”*.

Among many of the club owners who provided submissions, mistrust and cynicism of BG were prominent. In turn, there was an underlying resistance to engage with BG policies, and these stakeholders expressed little goodwill towards BG initiatives. Further, both club owners and a proportion of experienced coaches appear to view BG as a depersonalised bureaucratic *“blob”*, and BG is the target of many of their dissatisfactions. Additionally, club owners regularly reported a sense that BG was *“out of touch”* or *“didn’t care”*. The principal concerns of many club owners were not positive coaching, proactive welfare actions, and cultural change but the financial challenges of running a business, the lack of visibility of and interaction with BG, and the challenges of retaining coaches, judges, and gymnasts.

Taking these perspectives together, it would appear that trust has eroded between some areas of the BG membership and the organisation. This is perhaps not uncommon within sport, but amid a major culture change programme, this mistrust poses a significant barrier to progress.

Mixed views on policy communication and consultation. The experience of about Reform '25 policy and procedure initiatives, such as mandatory flexibility training, has been mixed. The community regularly praised the development of new policy or the development of new training, and praised recent attempts to translate policies for varied audiences. Yet, the gymnastics community were frequently critical about general

communications associated with Reform '25. For example, a small proportion of people in this evaluation were critical of the associated costs of mandatory training, with some expressing scepticism of the necessity for the training or cynical views about this training serving as a revenue driver for BG. Whilst these perceptions are highly subjective, and only held by a minority of the membership, with thousands of people having completed the mandatory training without sharing such criticisms, the insights are reflective of the mistrust that remains within the BG ecosystem. Somewhat relatedly, BG staff shared how they faced challenging decisions about communication of mandatory training and how to fairly price this, in light of significant associated costs to BG. The BG L&D team shared that they had anticipated potential challenges and are listening to feedback on these matters.

How to connect with the community has increasingly been at the forefront of the BG oversight board, with the challenges associated with this acknowledged, as one BG leader reflected, *"We developed some exceptional documents around policy, but were the community engaged? In terms of communications, we still hear that we haven't connected Reform '25 with the community. We needed a drumbeat, we haven't always got it right, and we know we now need to drip feed information."*

The learning regarding communication related to a range of aspects of Reform '25 work. For instance, one leader reflected on the lessons learned when BG did not publicly comment on the content of social media or tv documentaries, *"so many times early on, we didn't comment on anything public – like of social media or on tv – because we were legally bound not to. We wrote an open letter to gymnastics, but it was overly legal in language, and we've since said 'sorry' multiple times, but I'm unsure it is heard"*. Commenting on the shift in policy communication, one

leader noted that *"the impact work, and the way the policies are now being communicated has really shifted"*. Another leader noted with a sense of regret, that *"the Leap without Limits vision work has been a huge success – it's a great piece of vision work – but there was disappointment that there wasn't much community input. To be honest, it was the lack of community trust that obstructed input to the vision and mission work."*

Looking beyond Reform '25, one external partner commented:

"The community is next; coaches, clubs. There's a need to listen initially and get BG to look to working more collaboratively in terms of impact. It's been mainly about information giving and working in silos and less about listening... but the 'branding' of policy work is more humane now, and the shift in language in the performance department has been massive".

On balance, I believe these policy changes have been a significant success, and far surpass many other sports within the UK sport system. Unfortunately, the relationship challenges between BG and its community have been barriers to consultation and continue to act as the primary barriers to engagement with these policy change and Reform initiatives. What remains clear is that there exists a disconnect between BG's Reform '25 intention and efforts and the perception and engagement of the gymnastics community beyond the BG workforce and performance area of the sport. While the conditions for culture change are very good in large parts of the BG ecosystem, the conditions for change are poor where the relationship between BG, club owners, and coaches is characterised by mistrust and cynicism. Work underway to translate policies and communicate them in a range of accessible ways should help with policy communication, but ongoing relational work is required to rebuild trust between these parties.

6. THE CHALLENGE OF ADVANCING WELFARE AND SAFER SPORT AMID FRAGMENTED TRUTHS

A large proportion of submissions to this evaluation related to views on welfare, safer sport, and the independent complaints process (ICP). I have deliberately used “safer sport” here given the widespread views within BG and the academic literature that indicates that sport is rarely completely safe. Moreover, it is important to note that there are many truths relating to people’s experiences of welfare and Reform ’25, and that these experiences are deeply personal, meaningful, and sensitive. In many instances, the various parties involved in complaints are experiencing pain and frustration; looking at the same issue, but seeing very different things.

Significant progress on welfare and safer sport. Undoubtedly, significant improvements have been made within BG regarding welfare and safe sport. Indeed, BG is now looked to as a leader within the UK’s sport system regarding how it has undertaken changes in safeguarding practice and policy. One club director noted:

“There is no question that the environment of gymnastics is now more accountable and aware of the issues that have caused so much concern and damage to some individuals. The Reforms were exactly what clubs were trying to confront and without question has helped.”

A WRCB response to this evaluation noted the amount of work and pointed to several initiatives, while stopping short of commenting on their impact:

“British Gymnastics has undertaken a significant amount of work which aimed to improve the welfare and safety of those involved in gymnastics, including: Improving Safeguarding policies; Launching the welfare and safe sport strategy; Safe and fair sport campaign; Annual welfare conference; Partnership with True Athlete Project; Changes

in approach to the learning and development team. Work in some of these areas is still ongoing to drive further improvements. Whilst these actions should provide stronger foundations for the sport, it will be for those directly involved in the sport to comment on the actual impact of these measures and the difference that it has made.”

Several welfare aspects of Reform ’25 that were highlighted as particular successes were noted by one club leader:

“beyond policy and procedure change, the introduction of Event Welfare Officers and the development of a social media page for CWOs. This has been incredibly successful with over 220 members; this is an excellent initiative with plenty of activity taking place. ... communications, directives are frequent, unlike previously... the counselling service has been received with an incredibly high level of delight - again, members are now believing and seeing evidence of the support they can receive as part of their membership. I would suggest this is possibly the biggest win British Gymnastics has had within the safe sport work”

Relationships between the BG Welfare and Safe Sport team, clubs, coaches, and advocacy groups have generally shifted from adversarial to collaborative. Indeed, the Welfare and Safe Sport team have been widely praised for how they have approached their work in the last 2 years:

“The welfare team are much more personable and now handle complaints compassionately and collaboratively. Previously, people within gymnastics, and especially staff or welfare officers, feared having their head bitten off and facing criticism for how they might have handled an initial safeguarding conversation, before it was escalated. But now, so many different parts of gymnastics seem to have

a good relationship with that team; people really appreciate the supportive conversations they have with welfare.”

One performance coach shared, *“Safeguarding has improved massively; the processes are much better, and the people in the team understand the impact of this stuff on people; they are more efficient and more humane. The people are more collaborative and curious.”*

During this evaluation, I heard from current gymnasts who disclosed having disabilities, and who described the positive experiences they had within their recreational clubs. I also heard from coaches who felt that Reform '25 had resulted in positive changes regarding the inclusion of gymnasts with learning and physical disabilities.

The Independent Complaints Process was needed, and is rigorous, but has undermined Reform '25. Despite the significant progress on welfare and safer sport, the ICP, case resolution and communication, and the historical complaints handling process within gymnastics are seen as deeply divisive and damaging to Reform '25. The ICP has been heavily criticised by *all* stakeholder groups for its *“slow, legalistic, and harmful”* nature. To elaborate, for many who have had interactions with the ICP, they feel it is dominated by *“legalese”*, and while some feel this legalistic approach was needed (*“safe sport wasn't happening before”*, *“if you want rigorous and robust, there it is”*), the experience for many has been deeply negative. Some complainants who provided submissions to this evaluation labelled the ICP *“retraumatising”*, while the fact that there remain open complaints cases for over 4 years is entirely unacceptable for claimants, respondents and their families. One advocate for change summarised their reflections on Reform '25, with particularly negative views on the ICP:

“the BG championships felt different and are an indicator of what could be. We can see a

phenomenal amount of work being done, but it is not leading to culture change fast enough. Meaningful change and enforcement are needed to address deep-rooted issues, which continue to be influenced by funding model... ICP is a travesty. The changes being felt are not entirely by BG's design and there is a need to be bold and examine the intergenerational trauma playing out within the sport. We see coaches being supported to develop, with significant resource being provided, but what about whistle-blowers? They get no support. Counselling is too little too late and people are being retraumatised by the ICP. An impartial, legal process, is not trauma-informed. The ICP process is actually retraumatising survivors and has completely undermined the Reform '25 efforts. It must change to enable the vision of Reform '25 to be successful.”

The ICP and the complaints processes have been characterised by complexity, *“the ICP dealt with the historical Whyte review complaints and these were handled by Sports Resolutions or BG, while there were also current complaints outside of the ICP and civil action involving numerous complaints that were also logged within the ICP”*. These various avenues and processes had to be triangulated and led to significant delays. One BG leader reflected that the ICP and the Whyte Review had been set up with a legal tone, and also noted the complexity surrounding the avenues for complaints, which ultimately resulted in significant delays to case resolution:

“The ICP process and the way the Whyte Review was set up was a challenge. It appeared knee-jerk; that everyone was complaining and complaining about [former BG CEO]. Bringing in a QC brought a legal view and approach to this work straight away and has led to a huge amount of legal expense. The Whyte Review is very good but the way it was set up led some to think that it was there to investigate complaints. With the ICP, the historical context and nature

of disclosures made the resolution of these case more challenging – could these have been resolved with mediation? Were expectations managed effectively from the outset? There was a clear desire to sort out the complaints. And just to complicate it, complaints were significantly increased because of Athlete A. All of these complaints needed to be triangulated and that took time and had an impact on each other. Similarly, it was a complaints process and not a safeguarding process. A complaints process that was cold and investigative. Hindsight is a powerful thing, but we would not do it like that again. Whyte led to a belief that people would be heard and believed, and that the Whyte Review in itself was ‘the investigation’ rather than a listening exercise; but the ICP must follow a process and test the information provided. The length of time to resolve these complaints has been the biggest challenge. Over 4 years and you can see the hurt and pain this is causing to gymnasts, coaches, parents, loved ones. No one in this is happy. This is not questioning the outcomes or the Independent Person as we know the process is robust and fair but for the people involved this has been a very difficult, drawn out and unsatisfactory process. Those involved had very little understanding of the ICP process, and what would happen at each stage; from investigations, cross examination, hearings etc. the people involved were not equipped to manage or deal with this. A lawyer would say it’s ‘robust’, but if you look at it through the lens of what we were hoping to do – build relationships, support, understand and care for those involved – and then the experience of this process constantly undermines everything you do because it’s not culturally-, care- or people-led. We will change the process, but we can’t do that halfway through.”

As this quotation notes, while many stakeholders believed that an independent complaints process was necessary, and initially welcomed its potential to hear their complaints, the real experiences of staff,

leaders, claimants and respondents relate to perceptions of: bias, historical aggressive investigative style, poor communication during and at the conclusion of panel decisions, information sharing across investigation silos, and the financial and psychological toll on all involved.

An advocacy group noted that, *“Four years on from initiation of the ICP, it is clear to all those who brought complaints, that the process has not been ‘open’, ‘transparent’, ‘timely’, ‘fair’ or ‘independent’, which is what the ICP protocol says it is intended to be”.*

One BG leader acknowledged challenges with the ICP, accepting that it had *“caused reputational issues”*, and that *“the ICP has acted as a barrier to trust”*, adding that while the delays had caused much concern among the BG leadership, and despite leaders facing up to these challenges, BG *“might have moved earlier on reconsidering the ICP.”* Another BG leader acknowledged the challenges associated with people’s experiences of the ICP, and noted that once closed a new process would be developed once the case backlog was cleared:

“I understand why the ICP was persisted with, but a replacement is needed, that: simplifies language, clarifies and expedites the complaints process, clearly communicates the process, expected timeframe, and outcomes to relevant parties.”

Since the Director of Welfare & Safe Sport joined BG an overhaul of the Welfare and Safe Sport team has been undertaken. She was singled out for praise by numerous respondents in light of her contribution to driving process and policy changes, for *“fronting up”* to challenges around complaint handling and case management.

At the height of the 2020 crisis, there was an initial bottleneck regarding complaints, with hundreds of complaints being submitted to BG and statutory bodies. Because of their nature, some of these complaints bi-pass BG and are handled by statutory bodies

(i.e., the police), and others still are approached through civil litigation. As such, BG's opportunity to act or engage in dialogue is compromised and lessons have been learned by BG on how they approach communication with those involved in complaints processes:

"Significant changes have been made to case management, handling, and supervision. A 'learning log' has been kept by the team to gather insights, and have supported further changes, such as the offer of pro bono legal advice and counselling support."

Despite these changes, BG must continue to be open to the opportunities associated with its Leap without Limits vision. One parent shared their positive experience of gymnastics, while also pointing to some issues that may offer opportunities to BG for future change:

"Our child LOVES gymnastics! The club and coaches are very supportive, friendly and welcoming. That said, I feel that gymnastics as a sport still has a couple of issues linked to Reform '25 that I would like to take this chance to raise. 1. Cost/Safeguarding. Competitions are expensive which puts the sport out of reach of many, but my real problem is the requirement for a parent to pay to watch. The entry for one upcoming competition will be over £100, but then it will be an additional £25 for a parent to watch. From a safeguarding stand point, a parent should always be there, so I propose that all entries include one parent spectator ticket. Additional tickets can be whatever price you want. 2. Line-ups. The only major upset our child has had at gym has been caused by the line-up. Being small (even for a gymnast) and constantly be told to stand at the end of the line is demeaning, especially when younger children join the squad but stand "higher" in the line. . I know it looks "nice" but it is degrading and it would not be accepted if it was done by waist size, but it's still body shaming. Our gym changed this policy slightly

when we raised it but it does seem to be a universal procedure."

Another parent and coach also noted challenges around inclusion for smaller clubs:

"BG-run competitions show a clear bias towards large, affluent clubs. Gymnastics for All (GFA) competitions are often dominated by "GFA squads" from elite clubs training at higher standards, marginalising smaller clubs... Entry requirements demanding a judge for every 10 gymnasts make it nearly impossible for small clubs to participate due to lack of access to qualified judges... BG must develop a fair and accessible competition structure with regulation preventing elite gymnasts from dominating GFA events."

An opportunity for restorative practice.

What remains clear is that there are many people still experiencing hurt associated with their experiences within gymnastics, and their experiences the complaints processes. There is an opportunity for BG to act to develop restorative practices for a range of stakeholders that is both independent and spans the sport system, as one BG leader noted:

"I think sport can look at the reconciliation piece. Maybe not "reconciliation" because it has legal connotation, but maybe "restorative" practices to support people should be considered. There's a difference too, with sexual abuse, the harm is somehow easier to observe. When it is harm or maltreatment over a 20-years from a controlling environment or coaching style has led someone to feel that it was emotionally or physically harming, then there's a restorative opportunity. I think the sport system could do something collective and independent around that."

There appears to be an opportunity to facilitate reconciliation process, and to also empower people with the voice and choice to share their stories. This could offer both healing and learning opportunities.

7. COACHES: A CHANGE OF THE GUARD AND A DIVIDED COMMUNITY

The gymnastics coaching community provided very mixed responses relating to Reform '25. Those currently working within performance sport (primarily MAG and WAG), praise Reform '25, and have, in turn, been praised for being a “breath of fresh air” in terms of their coaching practices. The current head coaches across a number of disciplines model the values of Reform '25 and Leap without Limits, and were all independently praised for this from numerous sources. The majority of senior coaches within the sport at the time of the Whyte Review are no longer in position. Some of these individuals contacted me to share their experiences, which were largely critical of Reform, the ICP, policy changes and several expressed concerns about the negative impact of Reform '25 on the performance of BG squads.

More able and empowered, but it's like ceasing to practice a religion after 30 years.

A former performance coach, expressed the opinion that Reform was having an impact on performance and pathway coaching:

“In the past few years I have travelled extensively to numerous competitive Clubs, and have been immersed in high level programmes that have successfully produced medal winning athletes, as well as supporting gymnasts throughout their journey in our sport. I am proud and inspired by the overwhelming positivity, and safe, nurturing environments that our excellent coaching cohort have developed in Clubs and at national training. In my experience, the training and competition halls are inspirational places to be and I continue to be impressed by the enthusiastic and fun environments that our coaches have created. I think that, due to the numerous support tools that BG have created, coaches now feel more able and empowered to challenge any poor coaching practice that they might encounter, something that was quite difficult to do a few years

ago. We still have work to do in continuing to support and develop our coaches, but the positive steps that have been taken have dramatically changed the sport in GB for the better.”

Among those coaches who have previously been involved in high performance gymnastics, it would appear that while some have embraced change, others remain resistant, fearful, or feel unsupported - especially when navigating increased expectations and complex relationships with parents. Legacy coaching practices, often shaped by personal experience, and historically - and culturally-ingrained beliefs and practices, pose an ongoing challenge to culture change, and are likely to remain for many years due to the scale of ongoing change required, the extent to which these beliefs and practices remain idealised, and because they remain unchallenged in the recreational level of the sport, where the “trickle down” from the positive progress in performance and unhelpful, prominent voices from an “old guard” impede widespread change. One respected current performance coach shared “The turnover of coaches in WAG performance was needed. There was too much ‘old school’”.

A leader at BG noted the impact of factors including the current funding model for performance sport and deep-rooted coaching practices on sport culture, and also warned that BG needed to remain alert:

“We’ve had a bash as what “winning well” means, but there was a highly respected culture team at UKS, but they are no more. While the funding model remains as it is, there will be risk... I am nervous that if the medal target is not met what might happen then... behaviours that this leads to have become entrenched and hard to shift. Among some of our coaches, it's like someone whose followed

a religion for 30 years. We need to keep our finger on the [cultural] pulse for a generation, to keep an eye out for natural slippage and allowing complacency to creep in. This crusade could last a lifetime. Anecdotally, the fear that Whyte put into everyone is fading.”

The efforts of British Gymnastics to revise coach and judge education, and their strategy for recruitment to and resourcing learning and development seem well devised, and the general approach to implementing meaningful policy change regarding coach development should be commended. The reality is that sustainable reform on these matters will take time. The Learning and Development team acknowledge that coach development requires greater mentoring, support, and regulation. BG must continue to seek to work with non-engaged groups, those holding positions of power within regions, committees, and clubs, and the sport system must remain conscious of the number of coaches and clubs leaving BG, for whom there appears to be little oversight.

Coaches in fear: we’ve had to have hard hats on, but it’s settling. Several individuals wrote to express concern that while children and vulnerable individuals must be safeguarded, they felt concern that more was not being done to safeguard coaches, judges, and staff, noting, *“To feel safe from allegations from gymnasts and parents we are forced to wear bodycams. So, no one can come and accuse us of neglect a few years down the line”.*

One current performance coach reflected on their experience of what has been a challenging time for gymnastics coaches, but that the journey was making positive changes, *“coaches have had to have their hard hats on, but it’s settling...It’s been a tough time in performance as a coach. I thought Reform ‘25 was a tick-box exercise, but there’s been more dialogue with parents since the action plan was implemented, safeguarding are much better prepared, and vexatious and financially-driven allegations are reducing. It takes time*

to build confidence, but it is coming back. We are on a journey and we are now preparing gymnasts through the right means.”

Below, an ex-coach reflects on why they made the painful decision to stop coaching:

“As a coach that does not coach high performance gymnasts, nothing has changed. Unless you were doing something outside of the new policies, there was no need to change. The policies just confirmed I wasn’t doing anything wrong. What has changed is the fear of repercussions from parents. As soon as you are required to speak to a parent regarding their child’s behaviour or attitude, you live in fear of them quoting a policy or making a complaint against you. It means that as a coach I had to document every single interaction with a parent and the events leading up to such incident to ensure I have evidence to fall back on. This took away the joy of coaching and as such contributed to my decision to step away from coaching.”

Acknowledging the difficult experience of coaches, one BG leader felt that *“there is a risk of over-correcting and disempowering coaches; creating another type of risk altogether”.* Noting similar concerns, one club owner noted significant coaching practice changes within performance, but not within recreation, and highlighted the sense of fear that exists among the coaching community. In doing so, the owner, who was also an experienced WAG coach, appears to acknowledge both the need to change and a commitment to old “performance focused” values. Moreover, the opinion expressed in the following quotation that *“performance standards have dropped”* was not expressed by many people contributing to this process, and should be interpreted accordingly:

“At the recreational level, the impact has been minimal. Our recreational department has not had to alter any practices or procedures significantly. The children continue to enjoy gymnastics in a fun and engaging

environment, and new policies introduced under Reform '25 have had little practical effect at this level. In contrast, day-to-day performance coaching has been fundamentally transformed. Abusive coaches have been removed from the sport, which is positive and has helped to create a safer environment. However, many high-level coaches (who were not abusive or inappropriate) have also left the sport, leaving a knowledge gap, lack of mentors and creating a significant challenge for the remaining coaches. The coaches who are left are overworked and lack support. Many feel increasingly undermined and undervalued and reports of coaching paralysis are rife as nobody is confident about what is considered appropriate in this new climate. There is a growing fear of coaching with confidence

due to the risk of criticism or unfounded allegations from parents. These concerns, even when unsubstantiated, can have severe consequences for coaching careers. While some aspects have improved, for example, raised voices are no longer accepted in the gym, and gymnasts are better protected from discomfort, this has also led to a reluctance to challenge athletes. As a result, gymnasts are not being pushed to reach their full potential. Flexibility and strength levels have declined, and overall performance standards have dropped. In many ways, competitive gymnastics now resembles a recreational or "Gymnastics for All" model. The gymnasts/parents still have high aspirations but the mindset is more recreational which is challenging for all involved."

8. BEYOND COMPLIANCE: CULTIVATING MEANINGFUL IMPACT IN LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

The L&D team has made commendable progress in shifting focus from compliance to meaningful impact. Moreover, in collaboration with the BG Communications team, a shift in approach based on feedback and listening to the membership has resulted in storytelling, values, and engagement being at the forefront of the team's approach. The resourcing of a new coach developer team has significant potential, and yet, there remain concerns that this team may be used to support performance and pathway gymnasts and their impact may not be felt within recreation or BG-funded disciplines.

Maximising the impact of coach developers.

BG are making a number of coach developer appointments, with the intention of supporting coaches. Commenting on this strategic investment, one BG leader interestingly highlighted how gymnasts may need time to adapt to changes in coaching practices:

“Coach developers will help impact clubs. There is a reality that some gymnasts have been very used to a coach-led environment and experienced their early career with very little autonomy or voice, while other gymnasts are coming through the pathway with different expectations and skills to challenge and have voice.”

There is a general sense that mentoring for new coaches is poorly implemented and that there is a need to care for and support the welfare. This risk is exacerbated where many of the individuals undertaking their first coaching qualifications are very young. Some stakeholders believe that within the recreational area of the sport, there remains a “cookie cutter” approach, whereby “a generation of people coach how they were coached”.

“We must invest in mentoring and tutoring – that’s a real potential breeding ground for problematic behaviours beginning to be perpetuated. I get the sense that the new coach developers will be working mainly in the pathways, but the coaches in that part of the system are motivated to progress, and in my experience, are quite engaged and open to growing and learning. The risk lies in the clubs. We have coach education, but then then there’s no follow up; the mentoring happens (or doesn’t) in the clubs. It’s a risk, when we don’t have much of a presence or visibility in these environments.”

In contrast to this perspective, L&D staff have been praised by many people in this evaluation, and a member of this team also reported experiencing a sense of pride regarding their work:

“For the last year and a half, I’ve been working on improving the safeguarding courses we offer to our Coaches and Welfare Officers to address this recommendation – both stakeholders that play an extremely important role in creating safe gymnastics environments. In this work, I’ve felt the weight on ensuring that these courses contained the most up-to-date safeguarding knowledge and best practice in our sport. As the Whyte Review highlighted the lack of safeguarding in gymnastics, I’ve definitely felt the pressure of needing to get this content right, to ensure our department is doing the best it can in informing clubs of essential safeguarding topics (e.g. types and signs of abuse, reporting safeguarding concerns, and how to create safe and positive environments). I’m proud of the work my team and other supporting teams have done to provide our community with safeguarding courses that contain the key safeguarding knowledge and

expertise that Coaches and Welfare Officers should know when creating safe environments for their gymnasts - all of which has stemmed from Reform '25."

Challenges facing the modernisation of L&D delivery formats. Despite undertaking consultation work and seeking an inclusive approach, there exist contrasting views about L&D delivery formats. Some contributors felt vehemently that coach and judge education should not be online, but face to face, while conversely, another contributor expressed a preference for online learning.

"Having been a coach educator on behalf of BG for almost 20 years, I am sad that there appears to have been precious little communication or involvement with the education workforce about what is happening with coach and judge education moving forwards. I continue to rally against the online learning platform being the primary mode of delivery for coach education courses at Level 1 (or any level for that matter). I have decried this as a valid model for the effective teaching of any discipline syllabus, and have observed many many clubs and senior coaches commenting on the drop in the standard of coach performance coming out of these courses (despite clubs being increasingly relied upon to do BG's work for them in the training of coaches, and those clubs doing their very best under difficult circumstances). As a vocational, hands-on sport, that requires extensive practise, discussion, observation, peer/tutor feedback to develop the requisite skills to effectively operate as a coach, BG must take on board the feedback from the community that these online courses are ineffective! Whilst I recognise that there are several benefits to this route (such as not having to travel with gymnasts to venues, availability etc), this digital route should not be the ONLY option available. I believe that clubs/coaches should have the opportunity to choose what delivery method they wish to

opt for based on their own preference and circumstances, meaning that face to face delivery should ALWAYS be available for every level of course."

Another regional committee member noted, *"Historically, education was undertaken face to face and used realistic timescales to meet the needs of the courses. Over time, courses have become shortened and many now use distant learning, run without the real-time support of a tutor or delegates available to share opinions, suggestions, and experiences. This is where partnerships are formed. and knowledge sharing takes place. Notwithstanding education has come a long way, albeit I disagree with modular, on-line self-teach because if a delegate does not understand a specific point, the remainder of the course can be lost, and this type of learning feels more of a tick box exercise."*

Relatedly, some contributors to this evaluation noted a preference for more content and to have more hours of learning and development, some would like less content, delivered in a medium of their own preference. It is ultimately difficult to tailor learning and development to such a large and diverse audience and meet the preferences of everyone. What is necessary is to seek to meet the development needs of the community and communicate that a delivery format that meets the needs of all parties is likely unrealistic.

Further to the diverse views on delivery of L&D initiatives, there is a growing recognition that coach and judge training that infuses psychology, child development, and pedagogy is required to better support people in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities that will make gymnastics fun, inclusive, and safer for all, *"there is hope that the forthcoming changes to foundation coach development (i.e., Levels 1 and 2) will balance coach behaviour, psychology, good pedagogy practice, and technical development. Historically, the balance has been too much on the technical"*.

9. AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON GOVERNANCE

One BG leader, believed that *“the next Whyte”* will emerge from one of two sources; and speculated that *“there are 150,000 kids involved in non-regulated or non-affiliated gymnastics in England. The other potential source is from a WAG club going rogue, but both are hard for BG to control”*. Indeed, there are several governance opportunities relating to both the risk of unregulated activity within gymnastics, and the club responsibility, in/out groups, and sport governance beyond BG.

Risk of unregulated activity. BG have acted wisely to address dual registration in clubs. In the long term, this will better safeguard gymnasts and clubs. Yet, the scale of public awareness of non-affiliated gymnastics activities poses a potential risk, with several stakeholders offering suggestions for raising awareness of such risks:

“There is a risk to gymnastics in the form of unregulated activity from non-BG affiliated clubs and other bodies. 95% of parents wouldn’t know if their club was BG-registered or not – nor the importance of this. It’s a risk to children and to BG. BG must go into schools and leisure centres to communicate this.”

The key message here is to communicate to parents and organisations the importance of joining BG-affiliated clubs, and while schools and leisure centres are not the only places where awareness can be raised, they represent a potential location for such messaging.

Double-edged sword of business responsibility. There is also a sense that a shift in approach to regulating safer sport and welfare opportunities, can lie in the employment status of coaches. Several people noted that employment law might precede NGB policy, and thus, while there are a large number of volunteers within the sport, those undertaking volunteer work, and paid work as coaches might be considered as

employed by clubs, then the onus is on clubs to mandate and regulate safer sport initiatives. There was a sense among some in the gymnastics community that there is a significant opportunity to more closely and proactively work with owner-operators. A contrary view related to the risks associated with the difficulty BG faces regulating clubs for the same reasons. Regardless, there was a sense among some respondents that this governance-employment issue plays into the culture of gymnastics in the UK. One BG leader noted that, *“We must work with clubs – they want more connection, but we don’t own or run the clubs, so there is a disconnect and challenge with accountability.”*

In/out groups within the governance structure. Related to the sense of mistrust between BG and some of its members noted in other themes, resistance to culture transformation is prevailing within the governance structure of BG, and this structure itself was viewed by many as a barrier to future progress for the sport. Regional committees are widely-perceived to be withholding information, being ambivalent about reforms, or operating in self-interest and not in the interests of BG. Indeed, several parts of the British Gymnastics ecosystem have been identified as “resistant”, “disengaged”, and “actively undermining” the Reform ‘25 implementation. Aspects of the governance structure that were criticised in this evaluation include the coaching technical committee (e.g., a sense of the *“old guard”*, *“dominated by certain clubs”*), regional committee (e.g., within the home nations and country structure), and some inter-departmental silos and distrust among the BG workforce.

The “othering” of stakeholder groups within the BG governance structure also impacts on members’ experiences of events. There’s an assumption that gymnastics event decisions are made by BG, but there’s confusion over

jurisdiction, and it could be a regional decision. One parent reflected on their experience of a gymnastics competition where the event seemed to be run in a way that was not in line with BG policy and the need for consistent communication through the BG governance structure:

“At my child’s club, the coach stormed up to the parents and said, ‘Gymnasts must wear this leotard, not allowed shorts, can’t wear any knickers, hair in a French plait...’ And I thought, I thought we were trying to create an inclusive sport? Is this an uplifting experience for all? The club just put on an in-house club competition. In-house, recreational, the lowest level that you can get... the tagline is to create an ‘uplifting experience for all’, and yet now my daughter’s now panicking that if she touches a leotard, she’s going to get points taken off if a hair’s not perfect she’s going to get points taken off. And I think wonder if these messages being reached to everyone and is it is it actually an uplifting experience for all because if we’ve not got people on the ground in those recreational clubs supporting those coaches, then I’m not sure change will happen. When you get to performance coaching anyway you’ve already got some knowledge understanding drive desire to want to learn develop And I know we’ve had lots of bad practices, but for me it’s about capturing those coaches much earlier on in their journey like when they’re coming through at level one and they’re 16, like I watched my daughter’s gymnastics class, they’re 16 years old. It’s their first experience of having anything to do with children they only know what they know from their own environment and their culture.”

Beyond parents, among some staff, there is in/out group tension, which manifests between staff and volunteers and between staff and staff. Taking the latter, there exists a sense that not all BG departments were “pulling in the same direction”, characterised by views such as “that department is

dominated by gym people, who’ve generally been at BG for a long time, and perhaps haven’t developed like others; they have a stance of ‘we’re gym people and we know best’”. Staff within BG can be protective of their own work and department, and there exists some divergent thinking among staff (e.g., “that team is very resistant to change and challenge from outsiders”, “there’s been a lot of non-gym people coming in – and some of them are amazing – I don’t have a PhD, but I have a lot of valuable skills”). Clearly, there is value in embracing the divergent experiences and skills of others, and there is an opportunity for BG staff and leaders to seek and be open to knowledge and expertise from those with a gymnastics background and those who have experiences from other sports or sectors.

British Gymnastics exists within a wider governance system that impacts culture and behaviour.

BG is not the only national governing body in sport to have encountered culture and leadership challenges or allegations of abuse. Neither is BG an outlier in terms of gymnastics organisations and bodies. It is beyond the scope of my evaluation to seek to impact the cultures that are perpetuated within global gymnastics, but there are insights for the UK sport system in relation to BG.

In the following quotation, one BG leader reflected on the lead up to the Whyte Review and Reform '25 work in regard to the wider UK sport system. In doing so, they noted the opportunity that exists within this system to act early to take steps on cultural issues in sport:

“Gymnastics were suddenly winning medals, and the system was aware that there were complaints. Gymnastics was not the only sport. There was a voice that was saying, “that’s what it takes”. The shining light of medals was blinding people to some things we should have been looking much, much

harder at. We had a huge amount of success as a sport system around 2012 and then we were 2nd in the medal table in Rio, but the system needed to recalibrate in a way; the sport system including UK Sport as its leader. I think UKS are in that place now, but have they really articulated what they are looking for? I could ask several people and I'm not sure I'd get a consistent answer. We need to collectively understand 'Winning Well' from a culture perspective, and not just winning."

For some stakeholders, there is a sense that, *"cultural assurance is a red-herring"*, and a sense of pride that Reform '25 has undertaken a strategic reorientation to minimise the use of metrics for culture. I note several highlights: stripping back on false assurance mechanisms such as surveys, minimising the use of reductionist RAG ratings for reporting purposes except where requested by the WRCB's reporting mechanisms; prioritising an impact framework to try to listen meaningfully, address root causes, and lead with integrity in the face of complex and sensitive issues. BG have led this implementation, but the innovation was influenced by the work within the BG oversight board, and via collaborative projects with external WRCB representatives. For example, there has been excellent work on ethical explorations led by the UK Sport Coaching team, and a Culture Assurance Exercise in partnership with the UK Sport Culture and Leadership team. In line with these successes, the BG board now places emphasis on individual experience, voice, safeguarding and integrity, social impact, and narrative richness rather than traditional metrics (e.g., *"the 3Ms; money, medals, members"*). Reflecting on the Reform '25 journey, an oversight board member noted:

"I think people still push for that 10 out of 10. Those voices that still want "assurance". Being asked can you assure us this will never happen again?' is the wrong question. It should be "were anything to happen, do you have every means of finding it as quickly as possible to uncover it quickly?'. This desire for the end point to be zero shows a real cultural immaturity within the system. That's not the game; culture is about seeking to understand the varied picture of what's happening. We needed to notice different stuff, to monitor not measure, and the work is never done. And some people have just never grasped that about culture; it's beyond 'are we good or bad?' You need your higher forces to change how they see culture - move past risk and false assurance - and say 'that's the game' or we'll see this problem in another sport"

A BG leader explained the difficulty associated with terms like "cultural assurance", and the opportunities that lie in taking a different approach within the sport system:

"People will still choose to behave in a way that we would not see as appropriate because that's their own personal choice. We can't manage that, but if we have a consistent standardized way of working, that is preventative. It's not where we are now. We need people in every sport to get the same messages. They're going to get the same philosophy, they're going to get the same expectations around care trust, openness, transparency you know all those things You can't just do it in gymnastics. You've got to do it system-wide. If you took a no compromise approach to the care, support and well-being of athletes across the system you'd see the same returns but we're doing it piecemeal and it needs scale."

THEMATIC INTEGRATION

British Gymnastics has undeniably demonstrated significant progress in reforming its internal culture, leadership, and welfare and safer sport practices. It is refreshing that the leaders of BG consistently expressed the view to me that the journey is far from over. It is also encouraging that they have taken the lead to reconsider what culture transformation might look and feel like. It is inspirational that they seek real social impact rather than neatly tick the boxes of responding to Whyte Review. Instead, they have embraced reform. As I look ahead, I am encouraged by BG's openness to exploring how voices are heard and experiences are felt, and their intention to weigh up this information with historical and contextual factors to support advancements in safeguarding, integrity, wellbeing, and voice. They are creating the conditions for the development of sustainable environments where people can thrive.

The dominant narrative is one that uses building-related metaphors, such as the "foundations" have been laid for change, or where pieces of a "jigsaw" are coming together, but stories based on these narrative templates all reinforce that the change process is ongoing. I would support the assertion that the foundations for change have been well-laid, and appear solid. I also see significant pieces of a cultural jigsaw, or even a patchwork or cultural assemblages, taking shape. I am encouraged that the BG leadership does not see the end of Reform '25 as the end of the building process, and perhaps, to extend the "foundation" metaphor, it is likely that "new ground" must still be broken as meaningful, lasting impact beyond the constraints of Reform '25 are approached. This will take time, but I believe the foundations are in place to build an inclusive, safer and positive environment.

The current executive leadership team are central to the success of the ongoing change efforts, and careful consideration must be

given to the transition from the oversight board to normal board operations and new "business as usual". Beyond Reform '25 - the next phase of the build - BG leaders must determine how they will bridge the policy-practice gap, and continue to rebuild trust between the organisation and its wider community. While the overwhelming majority of BG members experience a positive and uplifting experience, there is a disaffected minority within the sport. The development of an ICP was necessary, but its prioritisation of legal matters resulted in a hurtful experience for many individuals involved as well as their friends and families. This hurt remains and acts as a barrier to realising the vision and potential of Reform '25.

Current performance gymnasts have experienced a tangible change in their WCPs. They feel like their voice and input is better sought by coaches, leader, and staff. In places, communication and feedback loops around this consultation could be improved, but this demonstrates a significant success in terms of impacting the daily wellbeing and experiences of current performance gymnasts.

BG must remain attentive to the parts of their system that might undermine their well-intentioned actions. Vocal minorities do continue to dominate some narratives and absorb resource, limiting BG's ability to work proactively, innovatively, and compassionately. I would encourage them to be brave and look forward not backward, while retaining their humanity and empathy for all stakeholders within the gymnastics ecosystem. Building trusting relationships with the gymnastics community through consistency, visibility, and impact will be the equivalent of laying "the keystone"; that is, the most important stone in construction for structural soundness. It will be fundamental to have collaboration and care at the heart of this work, embracing relational and trauma-informed approaches to work closely with advocacy groups, clubs, and members to realise the impact they desire.

OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BRITISH GYMNASTICS

While Reform '25 has set a strong foundation for change, British Gymnastics must maintain its values-led focus on continuous cultural evolution. I provide seven recommendations and six opportunities to support BG in their work towards sustainable change and their

vision of creating an uplifting gymnastics experience for all and their purpose to ensure gymnastics is enjoyable, safe, and open to everyone. I also offer seven opportunities for British Gymnastics and the WRCBs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BRITISH GYMNASTICS

- 1** The ICP has a planned end, but should be replaced with a more person-centred, trauma-informed, timely, and balanced process. Embed mediation within this new process and seek to better balance the integration of conduct and disciplinary, civil litigation, and safeguarding risk. BG should prioritise transparency, timeliness, fairness, and independence. Ensure that even when complaints are not upheld, sufficient explanatory information is provided, and where appropriate constructive feedback and improvement recommendations.
- 2** Review the governance structure of BG and examine ways to better engage the regional and county structure and community leaders. Review event jurisdiction to reduce inconsistency of policy implementation at events and competitions.
- 3** Enhance the visibility of BG within clubs to extend the positive relational work to clubs. There are concerns that the coach development team being assembled will focus primarily on performance and pathway programmes, and therefore, could miss the opportunity to extend reforms to the recreational community. If this is not the case, BG should communicate how this team will support the community.
- 4** Revisit how community consultation and relationship building is undertaken regarding planned learning and development initiatives, particularly relating to coaching, judging, mentoring, and the regulation of policy manipulation and non-adherence. This might include revisiting the membership, term lengths, terms of reference, representation, and onboarding of advisory groups and representative committees.
- 5** Create stronger accountability for clubs operating without proper safeguarding policies. Welfare, safe sport and positive cultural leadership are “everyone’s business”. Club owners, must also be considered accountable partners and have responsibility in reforms.
- 6** Review the approach to policy implementation and impact assessment, ensuring open and responsive mechanisms are in place to monitor the range of potentially positive or unhelpful behaviour changes. Use these insights to communicate to the membership. There is also an opportunity to better communicate the policy to education providers and local authorities.
- 7** Develop momentum and diversity in athlete voice that balances input on policy with idea flow from current and former performance and recreational gymnasts.

In doing so, BG should develop creative ways to hear voice and experiences and uses adaptable ways of providing restitution of voice through feedback loops. These mechanisms must also seek a broader representation of voice beyond performance gymnasts to better reflect the diverse BG membership demographic.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRITISH GYMNASTICS

- 1** Develop a cross-departmental working group to consider how to engage, support and care for coaches and judges, particularly those who might experience anxiety and fear of athlete or parent allegations, and also those who are young and taking their first steps into coaching. The current mentoring process has preventable points of failure and there is an opportunity for BG to disrupt the transmission of damaging intergenerational practices through the unchecked replication of harmful behaviours or patterns.
- 2** Develop a cross-department BG working group to advance collaborative work to optimise how safer sport is embedded operational endeavours and to ensure a shared responsibility for this. A whole system, proactive accountability for safer sport, means safer sport is everyone's responsibility, not solely the responsibility of welfare officers.
- 3** Capture and collate insights from welfare cases to inform future L&D and culture work. Consider for integration within this, creative representation of research that has shared survivors' stories.
- 4** Anonymous complaints can be unhelpful in some instances. BG might develop a process for determining the necessity for anonymity for complaints. This should not include whistleblowing. Evolve mediation support with the aim of reducing the necessity for legalistic processes and improve experiences of complaints processes.
- 5** Expand L&D work with parents. While workshops within the pathway have been well-received, the recreational community have received limited opportunity. There is an opportunity to continue to provide parental guidance on their role in holistic development and inappropriate coaching behaviours. I would encourage BG to consider the richness of knowledge and expertise available within the field of sport psychology here beyond individual providers.
- 6** The social impact framework is aligned with the BG values and a potentially valuable component to guide further reform. Staff engagement with social impact has increased through the establishment of the Learning & Evaluation Cycle Group (LECG), yet the level of engagement is inconsistent across staff, and there is an opportunity to increase collaboration, reflection, and adaptation.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRITISH GYMNASTICS AND THE WHYTE REVIEW COMMISSIONING BODIES (WRCBS)

- 1 Explore the development and independent facilitation of a reconciliation process to empower people with the voice and choice to share their stories. This could offer both healing and learning opportunities and may be piloted within gymnastics as a precursor to an independent, cross-sport initiative within the UK sport system.
- 2 Capture and communicate via research and dissemination activities the sector-leading expertise gained through the operational, strategic, and communications experiences of the BG leadership and oversight board. This might best be done collaboratively with the WRCBs and provide a useful frame for future culture change endeavours. It will be essential to capture the strategic shift from response to reform (i.e., a defensive, corporate focus on demonstrating cultural assurance to an approach that prioritises listening, care and how the social impact framework has been negotiated and its outcomes).
- 3 Liaise with UK Sport on the potential to use medal funding as a driver of cultural excellence within the sport system. That is, to use funding to recognise and reward those sports that have created environments that enable people to sustainably perform well.
- 4 Liaise with Sport England regarding the professionalisation and credentialization of coaching. This may include input on a multi-organisation (e.g., SE/UKS/CIMSPA) initiative that considers issues relating to coach licensure and regulation, and may include the establishment of a union-like body that can support and advise coaches.
- 5 BG and the WRCBs should collaborate to examine the scale and risk of unregulated gymnastics activities and clubs. There appears to be the potential of risk to children posed by non-BG affiliated clubs and uncertainty about insurance. Moreover, there is a sense that parents and carers are poorly informed about these matters.
- 6 BG and UK Sport must consider leadership succession planning given the impact of BG leaders in the ongoing cultural transformation.
- 7 Review approaches to cultural “assurance” and clarify how this weighted in funding decisions. BG has challenged the extent to which culture can be “assured” and the way such processes might be approached. They have also demonstrated how traditional metrics for success can be reprioritised in favour of a focus on people and experiences. The impact of this work may take significant time – perhaps even several Olympic cycles – but there remains uncertainty and anxiety regarding what the current “Winning Well” strategy means in practice, and how social and cultural impact, medals, and governance may be weighted within funding decision processes. There is an opportunity to support and recognise an approach to cultural excellence that is based on how individuals construct meaning and make sense of their experiences within their own culture, and avoids the pitfalls of seeking a single, objective, external, and universal truth or standard about culture that functions as a proxy for risk mitigation and assurance.

COMPOSITE VIGNETTES OF STAKEHOLDER SUBMISSIONS

UNDERSTANDING COMPOSITE VIGNETTES

What are composite vignettes?

They are scenes written to creatively bring to life the themes within this report. They are a type of nonfiction, so while they are creatively developed as stories, they use actual words from respondents, which are marked in italics.

The following composite vignettes have been developed in collaboration with Drs Francesca Cavallerio and Michaela Kousalova to support the translation of the insights from this evaluation to a range of audiences. The vignettes are presented as six scenes, intended to represent roughly 24-hours within stakeholders' lives within BG.

Scene 1 reflects the late-night thoughts of a fictional BG leader about the future of

Reform '25 in light of seeing some of the submissions in this evaluation. Following on the next morning, Scene 2 represents a discussion during a break in training and signals the fragmented experiences of the coaching community. In Scene 3, we present an illustration of parents sharing stories in a car park as they discuss Reform and policy implementation. Scene 4 displays two complaint letters. They are intentionally presented side-by-side to not privilege any one story or truth. Scene 5 presents two interactions, one year apart, between a coach and parent and seeks to reflect the challenges of culture change. Scene 6 presents a lunchtime gathering of current performance gymnasts in the athlete lounge sharing reflections on Reform '25.

SCENE 1: THE (NEVER-ENDING) TO DO LIST

The sun is starting to set on the horizon, I can see it from the window in my office, as I slowly sit down at my desk. Today has been good, finally it seems the tide started turning a bit and we are not the sport everyone looks at with horror in their eyes.

“We can see a phenomenal amount of work being done. The BG championships felt different and are an indicator of what could be.”

I can still hear Hannah’s voice today; Hannah from the Advocacy group. I recall again the warm feeling I felt when I heard those words. The praise. The hope. Advocacy groups are on board, they will still challenge us, and rightly so. But we have “*laid the foundations for change*”... “*still work to be done*”. Fair. We are on a journey...

“...but it is not leading to culture change fast enough. Meaningful change and enforcement are needed to address deep-rooted issues”, her voice continues. The air around me remains intact, my fist is luckily still in my pocket, and it feels heavy now.

They are right, I know.

I take the printed copies of various reports out from my beaten work bag, spread them out in front of me. While I skim read the words on the pages again, similar ideas jump to my eyes.

“British Gymnastics has undertaken a significant amount of work which aimed to improve the welfare and safety of those involved in gymnastics, including...”

“We would like to acknowledge the positive changes we have seen from British Gymnastics, notably new leadership, rewritten policies, and stated commitments to athlete welfare... A clear shift in values was visible at the 2025 British Championships.”

Reading the positive shift, I am feeling quietly pleased again, but not complacent. Never complacent. I think back to those hours spent in our meetings, six, eight hours sometimes, purely thinking about cultural issues. It looks like we did get something right there.

But then. There’s always a “but”...

“Despite these changes, there has been no consistent, lived change for gymnasts across the UK. Children remain at risk, and many clubs still operate with outdated and harmful practices.”

“Work in some of these areas is still ongoing to drive further improvements. Whilst these actions should provide stronger foundations for the sport, it will be for those directly involved in the sport to comment on the actual impact of these measures and the difference that it has made.”

They are right, I know. We know. Cultures don’t change overnight; policies are not magic bullets. At the beginning, there was this sense of, ‘Look at all the things we’ve done. We’ve got more safeguarding officers, we’ve got this new policy.’ The changes in the performance team, L&D, welfare and safe sport, but in reality, we don’t know what has changed in the community. Who reads them? Whose changed what they’re doing as a result?

Maybe not as much as we’d hoped, based on these reports.

I mean, one of the things I’ve learnt in the past few years is that actually the biggest challenge for the organisation with a sport this big is not who to select for the Olympics – as the money, medals, members narrative seemed to suggest. No, it’s “*how do you reach that coach in Grimsby on Tuesday evening?*”

Ok, ok. Stop going off task, Amy. Let’s be proactive, let’s gather a few more perspectives, thinking points, suggestions

before Thursday's board meeting. We are moving to 20 minutes on cultural issues on a broad agenda, so I need to be on top of this.

What are the risks? What are the key points we are still missing... or maybe the key people we are not reaching? Why? Words from the many conversations I had at the Welfare event today come back to me...

What is being put in place to ensure every gymnast that comes through the sport is supported holistically by their coaches and the governing body? Where is athlete voice, Amy? Not just elite athletes... Comms all seem have been seen as a *"telling"* rather than an *"enabling tool"*. We are shifting, but will people come on the journey with us?

"The communications that we hear sometimes, that the communications we send don't reach go to some regions all parts of the BG membership and not others... some committees say they don't receive them, or just don't pass them on to clubs. Different ways of working in different regions."

How are you taking care of the coaches?... And remember that new contracted member of staff from the British Champs? New to the team and she introduced herself to me as someone 'wearing different hats': former

athlete – survivor, BG employee, mother of young gymnast. Mother of a former gymnast, actually, another member we seem to have lost to poor coaching practice. I can still hear her words in my head while she told me her experience at her child's club... the coach storming up to the parents and saying, *"Gymnasts must wear this leotard, they are not allowed shorts, can't wear any knickers, hair must be in a French plait... I thought we were trying to create an inclusive sport – she said, her piercing blue eyes looking at me – Is this an uplifting experience for all?"*

It doesn't sound like that, no.... We're expecting coaches to create uplifting experiences, but are we giving them the support and skills to do that?

Ok. To Do List, Amy, write down a list and it's time to go to sleep!

- How do we reach recreational clubs: the owners, the coaches, the young gymnasts?
- How can we make the governance structure actually work?
- Policy vs practice: what can we do?
- Coaches: how to prepare them and how to support them?

SCENE 2: THE QUIET COSTS OF COACHING: COFFEE, BISCUITS, AND CRACKS IN THE SYSTEM

“Alright team, 15-minute break!” Coach Grace (head coach) called out, clapping her hands as the gymnasts scattered toward their water bottles and stretching mats, taking out their snacks.

The coaches exchanged quick glances — the kind that said we need caffeine, now — and slipped out through the side door of the gym. The corridor was quiet, echoing only with the muffled thuds of tumbling. The hum of the vending machine was the only sound in the room as four coaches gathered around the small table, tearing open biscuits and sipping on warm coffee.

“Can I just reflect on a few things guys, while there’s a few of us?” Matt (head coach) asked the other coaches. “it’s about all the stuff that goes on related to the Reform and based on seeing the gymnasts today”

Coach Grace nodded, brushing biscuit crumbs off her lap.

“I have been involved in gymnastics for many years and have been committed to maintaining good practice in working with young people.” We have been “keeping up to date with BG policies; being mindful of the risks that competitive sport presents; and being vigilant about gymnasts’ safety and well-being,” and “I would like to thank you for that and say that I appreciate your hard work and working as a team.” We “have always had food, beverage, toilet and rest breaks as part of our training structure and discouraged gymnasts from “dieting” and weighing themselves.”

Coach Dan looked up from his coffee. “There’s no doubt that gymnast welfare is being more rigorously protected, which is a positive outcome.”

Ring ring, ring ring

[Matt’s phone comes to life and he picks up] “Hello Lena, how you doing?” he answers. “We are just talking about Reform and how “as a club we are committed to try and keep up with the changes required and are ready to adapt for the benefit of our gymnasts, especially now we know we are in line with BG practice.”

“I know”, said Lena (coach from another club) *“My heart goes out to gymnasts who have had bad experiences, it’s not acceptable to cause any one harm or hurt, but that should be both ways.”* She coughs and continues. “Wait Lena, this sounds valuable for others to hear, I’ll put you on speaker, you know all the coaches here.” “OK,” Lena says and continues. I mean *“The reform info is good and, in most places, clear but as coaches we don’t know where we stand so many coaches in my region alone have left the sport for lots of different reasons. I believe BG are doing their best, but I feel like they sit on the fence on important matters at times, I also feel the decisions made, sometimes are made by people who aren’t working in day-to-day busy gym environments and the decisions made don’t fit with everyday gym life.”*

“Yeah, that’s it” Matt is nodding, *“the impact on coaches and staff has been significant. Many have had to reduce or shift their working hours, often resulting in financial hardship. The increase in evening and weekend work has affected both coach and gymnast mental health. Unfortunately, this consequence seems to have been overlooked in the reform process.”*

“Parents are starting to come in” Lena said, standing up slowly, brushing her hands off. Some coaches turn their heads briefly towards the glass doors and window of the office, seeing parents starting to come in for the end session, to pick their gymnasts up.

Yes, and *“while some aspects have improved, for example, raised voices are no longer accepted in the gym, and gymnasts are better protected from discomfort, this has also led to a reluctance to challenge athletes. As a result, gymnasts are not being pushed to reach their full potential. Flexibility and strength levels have declined, and overall performance standards have dropped,”* Dan is sharing while cleaning up his cup. *“In many ways, competitive gymnastics now resembles a recreational or “Gymnastics for All” model. The gymnasts/parents still have high aspirations but the mindset is more recreational which is challenging for all involved.”* Also, *“gymnasts on a performance pathway are no longer allowed to miss school for training. Previously, they might have missed a PE lesson or non-academic time (such as Golden Time) to attend focused training sessions during quieter hours. This change has led to more evening and weekend training, reducing gymnasts’ rest, recovery, and quality time with family and friends. We have observed increased fatigue and reduced enjoyment of the sport as a result.”* Dan added while drying his hands with a towel.

Can I just say, *“I have spoken to Sarah Powell recently whilst dealing with a gym related issue telling her that coaches, myself included in my club and region feel very isolated and at a loss when dealing with parents and gymnasts or complaints scared to make decisions in case, they make the wrong ones,”* Lena added on the phone. *“Oh, listen guys, I’ve got George (the club owner) just coming in visiting me.”* Lena presses mute and asks George, *“I’ve got a couple of coaches on the phone, you know them all, do you want to join the conversation?”*

“Yes, that’s fine, hi everyone” George agrees and greets everyone.

“Where was I?” Lena thought aloud, *“Oh yeah, as a club I have purchased independent cover*

for my coaches to cover us for legal fees if in the event they need it, this covers us for legal matters up to a set fee. We used to get this with our membership it gave coaches peace of mind, up until BG removed it without telling us.”

“Yes,” Dan agreed. Also, *“many high-level coaches (who were not abusive or inappropriate) have also left the sport, leaving a knowledge gap, lack of mentors and creating a significant challenge for the remaining coaches. The coaches who are left are overworked and lack support. Many feel increasingly undermined and undervalued and reports of coaching paralysis are rife as nobody is confident about what is considered appropriate in this new climate. There is a growing fear of coaching with confidence due to the risk of criticism or unfounded allegations from parents.”* *“Right, I’m gonna go back to the gymnasts, bye Lena, bye George,”* Dan and Grace say while leaving the room.

George, Lena and Matt left in the room.

While you’re talking about this, *“how can British Gymnastics claim to seek honest, unbiased feedback while deliberately excluding those of us who have left - those who’ve borne the brunt of its failings long before Reform ’25 was conceived?”* George speaks with certainty and a touch of anger. *“Once again, this appears less like a genuine attempt at reform and more like another PR exercise. But who am I to judge?”*

Silence.

“Well, I’ll tell you.” George continues with a strong voice, *“I am one of many whose life has been devastated by British Gymnastics’ repeated failures to govern responsibly. Yet I wasn’t invited to contribute to their review? How convenient.”*

Silence.

“To help you understand the depth of my feelings,” George starts with lower voice. “...an email I sent to British Gymnastics earlier this year,” might explain a little bit more. “It was in response to an offer of counselling—made four years after the fallout began, three years after my complaints were concluded, two years after my complainant was sanctioned for harassment, a year after I left the sport had a mental health breakdown and tried to take my own life and just one day after legal advice from their solicitor. That timing says everything.”

No one speaks out of fear of taking sides, leaving George to say what he needs.

“This isn’t just about losing a career. It’s about losing everything: my passion for the sport, my social circle, members of my family, my financial stability, my health, and my identity. British Gymnastics’ systemic failings created this outcome, and yet BG continue to ignore the devastating impact on individuals like me.”

Matt looks out the window, at the setting sun, and watches parents start to congregate in the car park, chatting, while some others walk towards the entrance to the gym.

SCENE 3: THE WAITING SPACE: WE ARE NOT JUST SPECTATORS

The late afternoon sun cast long shadows before setting across the car park as a few parents trickled in, coffee cups in hand, jackets slung over their arms. The automatic doors of the gymnastics centre slid open with a soft hiss as Sophie and Helen stepped inside. They hear a faint sound of music and tumbling echoing through the corridor from behind the close doors of the gym.

They walked toward the viewing corridor, chatting casually about work and weekend plans — until they reached the gym doors.

“Closed, again?” Helen stopped short, her brow furrowing. “Seriously? Again? I thought it was against the new rules to keep the doors shut,” Helen said firmly. Well, let me tell you, *“I believe my experience highlights significant gaps between the stated intentions of Reform ‘25 and its practical implementation. Despite providing extensive documentation including emails, text messages, and corroborating testimony from multiple families reporting identical concerns, all allegations were dismissed without adequate explanation. This paradoxical approach—acknowledging that coaching issues existed but then taking no action to address them—raises serious questions about BG’s commitment to improving coaching standards and implementing the cultural changes outlined in Reform ‘25. ““Sorry, Sophie — I kind of jumped right in, didn’t I?”*

[In the car park in front of the gym]

Jane has just arrived at the gymnastics centre. Jane’s friend Anna has walked past with Catherine, they both waved at Jane and walked towards her. “Hello,” they said to each other.

Anna continues the conversation from earlier when on the phone with Jane. *“It’s quite appalling and unbelievable really to me that we are like five years on and British Gymnastics didn’t get on top of this in time*

for my children.” Anna continues. “Did I tell you,” Anna whispers, *“one of my children fell off the beam, really hurt herself, and was crying on the floor. And she’s a young child let’s remember. She’s fallen off the high beam and instead of coming over and checking if she was okay, she got shouted at told to get back on the high beam and do it again. And she was put on the high beam crying. A young child!”* AND *“then my other*

child had a very old school coach who’d come through the system who was a lot older, and he was completely oblivious to how unhealthy his behaviours were.”

“And what did you do?” Jane asked.

“...we have taken both the children out of the British Gymnastics clubs, and they now do gymnastics in an independent club.” Anna answered.

“Unfortunately, our experience was far from safe, inclusive or encouraging,” too, Catherine replied.

And “there is still a small group of parents in the club who still really believe that tough coaching is the only way. Was the coach’s approach going to give their child an edge a competitive edge? They were actually actively seeking some of the behaviours that the British gymnastics are trying to stop!

They didn’t see long hours as a bad thing or a problem in any way. And we’re talking the sort of hours that were kind of really a disproportionate for the age of the child and probably for the level as well. Our children were competing in club grades - they weren’t elite - but I think these parents thought ‘well they can never be elite if they don’t do these hours and they don’t start now’.” Like I said, Anna reiterates, “you had some parents who really want this sort of brutal coaching and they think ‘yes, that’s going to make my kid a champion and they were actually actively

seeking out these coaches. Just as I was trying to remove my child from one of these really unhealthy coaches there was another parent telling me how much they wish that their child was there receiving this sort of coaching, and that this brutal coaching approach would make their child a champion. That's going to be really difficult for the club

to manage. I did see a number of parents remove their kids from club when they didn't get what they wanted in terms of 'a top coaching style' and really long hours. To be fair, our club has always been quite good on training hours, but the unbelievable thing is that parents were actually in conflict with the club over that!"

SCENE 4. TWO COMPLAINTS

Insufficient Evidence: No further action

In May 2024, I submitted a detailed safeguarding complaint regarding coaching practices at Enlite Forest Gymnastics Club and the mishandling of concerns by the Club Welfare Officer. The complaint specifically highlighted a coaching culture that prioritised medal winning over athlete wellbeing – precisely the issue Reform '25 aims to address. Despite providing extensive documentation including emails, text messages, and corroborating testimony from multiple families reporting identical concerns, all allegations were dismissed without adequate explanation.

I want to emphasise that British Gymnastics has now formally closed my case with no option for appeal or further action. Two other families who submitted similar complaints received virtually identical dismissal letters.

What I find particularly troubling is that while BG initially categorised our concerns as “poor coaching” issues, their final response after investigation made zero suggestions for improvement or coaching development. This paradoxical approach – acknowledging that coaching issues existed but then taking no action to address them – raises serious questions about BG’s commitment to improving coaching standards and implementing the cultural changes outlined in Reform '25.

Perhaps most concerning of all, I informed BG during the investigation that three sets of parents had previously taken their children out of this same club due to the coach’s behaviour and had even initiated legal action against her before placing their children in new clubs. BG completely dismissed this information, stating it was a “civil case that didn’t go through BG” and therefore irrelevant to their assessment. This wilful disregard of a clear pattern of concerning behaviour directly contradicts Reform '25 stated commitment to prioritising gymnast welfare.

Balance of Probability

How can British Gymnastics claim to seek honest, unbiased feedback while deliberately excluding those of us who have left – those who’ve borne the brunt of its failings long before Reform 25 was conceived? Once again, this appears less like a genuine attempt at reform and more like another PR exercise. But who am I to judge?

Well, I’ll tell you. I am one of many whose life has been devastated by British Gymnastics’ repeated failures to govern responsibly. Yet I wasn’t invited to contribute to this review? How convenient.

To help you understand the depth of my feelings, I’m sharing below and email I sent to British Gymnastics earlier this year. It was in response to an offer of counselling – made four years after the fallout began, three years after my complaints were concluded, two years after my complainant was sanctioned for harassment, a year after I left the sport had a mental health breakdown and tried to take my own life and just one day after legal advice from their solicitor. That timing says everything.

For four years, I’ve been left to navigate this nightmare alone, enduring the fallout of broken systems and a complete disregard for my wellbeing. Had British Gymnastics cared about the welfare of its coaches, meaningful help would have been provided far earlier, without the need for legal advice to compel you to do so.

For your information, I have been self-funding my own counselling – something you would already know if you’d done your research, as I informed Ann about this in October last year. Although this is currently on hold due to the cost associated. Your offer now is not only too little, too late – it’s patronising and offensive.

I should also note some particularly concerning examples from our experience: documented text messages about injury management were dismissed despite being clear written evidence; BG initially acknowledged the CWO's breach of confidentiality (sharing my complaint directly with the coach) but later claimed "insufficient evidence" of this same violation; one parent reported a serious anaphylactic reaction where no ambulance was called, yet she was never even interviewed about this incident or asked to provide her evidence (which included photographs, ambulance records, as she called the ambulance as soon as she arrived at the club, and medical documentation) – her complaint was simply dismissed as "insufficient evidence" without any investigation; and young gymnasts felt pressured to accept social media follow requests from the coach despite having no social media policy in place.

Throughout the process, BG failed to properly communicate investigation timescales, leaving complainants in limbo for extended periods. These examples represent clear violations of BG's own Complaints & Disciplinary Policy, including the failure to provide written reasons for decisions and to ensure a fair approach to evidence gathering.

While I appreciate British Gymnastics' stated commitment to cultural change through Reform '25, my recent experience suggests there remains a significant gap between policy and practice.

In our case, a coach openly prioritising medals over athlete wellbeing – the very culture Reform '25 aims to change – was effectively protected by an investigation process that appeared designed to dismiss complaints rather than address them.

It won't change the fact that:

- Your complaints process allowed by accuser to remain anonymous, leaving me powerless to gather evidence to properly defend myself.
- I had to accept a result based on "balance of probability" only to find out my list of witnesses were never even contacted (I presume due to the anonymity issue) while the complainants' witnesses were.
- I received little to no support after the process, despite continuing to coach for three years while battling crippling anxiety and paranoia.
- Even after sanctioning my complainant for two years of harassment, British Gymnastics failed to follow through when the harassment continued – choosing instead to prioritise protecting their public image.

This isn't just about losing a career. Its about losing everything: my passion for the sport, my social circle, members of my family, my financial stability, my health, and my identity. British Gymnastics' systemic failings created this outcome, and yet you continue to ignore the devastating impact on individuals like me. I also feel compelled to say how petrified I am about what the future holds. Every time I feel like I am getting back on my feet something else my complainant does crops up. I have every reason to believe that the complainant will not stop at this settlement. She has shown time and again that she is willing to harass and target me in any way possible. I am terrified amongst other things that if I secure a new job, she will target my new employer, damaging me further, just as she has done relentlessly for the past four years. I am ultimately living in constant fear and there's nothing anyone can do about it.

How can British Gymnastics ever hope to bring about lasting, meaningful change to create a safer sport without engaging with those who have been the backbone of the sport?

SCENE 5: CULTURE CHANGE CHALLENGES

“Ada had a fantastic session today, she really enjoyed walking on the beam, pretending there were crocodiles ready to bite her in the river flowing underneath it... and then she was a fantastic monkey moving from one bar to the other in our jungle exploration.”

“Wow, this sounds like so much fun! I can see why she has such a big smile on her face, thank you! She always talks about you and how we are going to see Coach Megan!”

“Well, about that... Our Head Coach was in today and noticed how talented Ada is, so he wanted me to ask you if we could make her try in our pre-squad team? She’d get to be in the gym more days and for longer, which will be great for her!”

“Oh wow...pre-squad? She is only 5, I didn’t think it could be a thing, we never considered gymnastics being anything beyond fun times and a way to release all her energy...”

“Trust me, pre-squad will help with that! Haha!”

“Well, why not then? She always wants to be in the gym; we might as well make her happy taking her more often.”

[1 year later, in a supermarket lane]

“Mrs Rosen, hello! So nice to see you! It’s been a long time. How is Ada? I heard she left the club...?”

“Megan, how lovely to see you! Ada will be gutted when I tell her I saw you, she still talks about you and being a monkey, and all the fun stories and times she had with you! I realise now how that first contact with a coach is so significant!”

“Aaaaw, that’s so sweet!”

“...unfortunately, the coach she had after you was not so positive, I’m afraid.”

“I am so sorry to hear this! I loved coaching Ada so much! But I guess I am not too surprised.

I like the Head Coach, but he had to take over coaching another group, so I heard he couldn’t work with the pre-squad anymore. And the coach that took his place... between you and me, I was never a big fan, always thought she was a bit... old school, I guess.”

“Yeah, it was really not a great experience. The coach you mentioned... she didn’t seem to recognise or notice how unhealthy her behaviours were... she really caused a lot of harm to Ada. She started wetting her bed at night, which she had not done since she was three, and she was crying before training... *One day she fell off the beam, really hurt herself, and was crying on the floor. And she’s a young child let’s remember. She’s fallen off the high beam and instead of coming over and checking if she was okay, she got shouted at, told to get back on the high beam, and do it again. And she was put on the high beam crying. A young child! I mean, at this point she had not even done a competition yet – it was pre-squad, they were building up to competition. It’s just insane. So yeah, we have taken Ada out of the club, and she now does gymnastics in an independent club.*”

“The poor little one! Mrs Rosen, I am so, so sorry! I left to go to uni and had not realised how bad the situation had become!”

“It’s not your fault, Megan. You were fantastic! Positive, supportive, effective. Ada was thriving with you, both emotionally and physically. Honestly, I kept wondering how you managed to be such a lovely coach with such poor examples around you!”

“Thank you. I guess I was just lucky enough to have had a positive coach myself, who inspired my way of doing things...”

“But don’t all coaches have to go through qualification courses and so on? Wasn’t there a mandatory safeguarding training after all those stories came out and that review... what was it, Whyte Review, I think... was published? *I was curious, so I’ve probably spent more time than your average parent reading up*

on progress on the internet; I'd look at the BG website for updates, and I read some newsletters that British Gymnastics sent out to members. So, I got updates, but I had to be quite proactive."

I remember being really concerned with what I saw in the news, but I just thought, 'well, no one's going to abuse Ada; by the time she's old enough to compete, BG will be surely on top of this and there won't be any of these problems and if there is any abuse it will be stamped out really quite quickly. I never thought we would find ourselves in this situation."

"Well, I have been out of the sport for some time now, and I think this is partly because I grew disenchanted the more the whole Reform '25 kept being developed. As a coach that did not coach high performance gymnasts, nothing had changed for me – nor for many of the other coaches in the club. Unless you were doing something outside of the new policies, there was no need to change. What changed was the fear of repercussions from parents. As soon as we were required to speak to a parent regarding their child's behaviour or attitude, we lived in fear of them quoting a policy or making a complaint against one of us. This meant that as a coach I had to document every single interaction with a parent and the events leading up to such incident to ensure I had evidence to fall back on. I mean, I was 18, supposedly on a gap year to figure out what I wanted from my life. Gymnastics had been such a big part of it that coaching felt a natural choice, but all this really took away the joy of coaching. When uni time arrived, it wasn't a difficult decision to move far away and step away from coaching."

"Yeah, I can see your point...and it makes me wonder if there was a bit of fear of the coaches leaving and what would happen then - who would coach? When I complained to the Welfare Officer, everyone seemed a bit... apathetic... I can see now that there was a

complete lack of alternative coaching options, so if the club actually did say 'okay this coach's behaviour is just too inappropriate, now we're going to get rid of them', it would just leave a group with no coach."

"Still, this doesn't justify how Ada was treated. And many other 'talented' kids like her, I am sure."

"I couldn't agree more. Quite recently I was reading a post from another gym parent on BlueSky on how a so-called 'medal-focused culture' still persists. How coaching staff and club leadership appear more aware of the language they should avoid, but the underlying culture has not changed. It remains rooted in fear, pressure, and a lack of genuine care for the children's wellbeing. It really saddens me, but I could not agree more. British Gymnastics really needs to do more than change the language used—it must change the culture!"

"Indeed, Mrs Rosen. But... I hope you don't mind me asking, I don't want to look like I am snooping around, nor judging, but I love Ada and would hate for her to go through any further negative experience. You know, I am studying Sport Management at uni and I was recently reading a case study about non-BG gymnastics providers that don't even require safeguarding training for coaches. You clearly are very well informed, so again, I hope my comment doesn't come through as unpolite... But have you checked that this new club has appropriate insurance, their staff is qualified, and all that? Because the Whyte Review focused on BG as an NGB, but so many other gymnastics providers were not shone upon, and they often don't have even half of all the safeguarding checks that BG clubs need to have in place."

"Well...ehm....not really, Megan. Not really. We just went because one of her friends went there. She seems happy. But I will keep an eye out, thank you! Who would have imagined gymnastics participation would have been so tricky to navigate safely?"

SCENE 6: IN THE ATHLETE LOUNGE: HUGE LEAPS FORWARD

Three athletes have assembled in the Lilleshall athlete lounge in response to an email request the day before encouraging athletes to gather to share their reflections with each other about Reform '25. Charlie from MAG, Ella from WAG, and Isaac from trampolines slip into the room. They each notice some snacks on the side. Charlie and Isaac stride over to the snacks and help themselves. Ella, cautiously looks around, as if wondering who might be watching, walks past the snacks and finds a seat...

Charlie, swallowing, begins, "I guess they wanted us senior athletes to connect and share stories about Reform". *I can start. I've had a... a largely positive experience in my career. Even pre-Whyte Review I never really had any problems, so I have a skewed point of view, because... you know, that's not what the Whyte Review is about, but, I think in general, for me, having been around for a long time, I've definitely seen a shift in attitude. In the way people work, what's expected of people."*

"Yes!" Ella responds, before Charlie continues, *"I think it sort of... it came late, that shift. Obviously, Whyte was the catalyst, but for me, I think I've definitely seen some changes in a broad sense; some really targeted around the performance side of things. There's been a real focus on centring everything around the athlete. It's making sure we have everything we need. That's changed. In the beginning, it really... it really did feel like a bit of a tick box, which was also sort of what I was used to. In the past, that was my negative experience, but now actually do believe that it does revolve around us a little bit now, especially on the MAG side. Now it's "What do you need? When do you need it? We'll get it for you"*

Ella jumps in, *"I think there's still work to be done. My pre-Whyte review experiences were probably very different to yours. I would say that... growing up in the culture of women's*

artistic, it was... a very... hard environment, um... a lot more, I would say in my younger years. The changes were coming even the year before Whyte Review, people were really starting to change their methods, but it took too long to get there. And through Reform, I think coaches actually learned a lot, and we've learned a lot together. Before you'd have been nervous to challenge, but now there's a shared understanding...you don't need to do the same amount of workload, you can do it differently, and I think it was a really big learning curve. It was a bit of a shame when everything came out with the review. I actually, by that point in time, had a really good relationship with one of the coaches at the centre of it. Maybe they were, not unfairly targeted, because I know that there was a lot of poor practice and a lot of gymnasts were affected with the older methods, but they were actually one of the coaches that I actually really did see change, and was embracing that change. It was pretty bad times all round.

What I see in gymnastics clubs now, if I do a club visit, it's just really nice to see happy gymnasts. Genuinely, like, the kids are happy.

A massive thing for us was the weight and food part of gymnastics, and I've seen a massive shift in that. I think the older generation of gym must still have their struggles there, but seeing the younger generations and in clubs being encouraged to go and get a snack. Have a break, take food around the gym, that was just... it would never have happened before. And again, when we go away to championships, they now make sure we actually are in a city where we're near a shop. Whereas before, the girls couldn't go anywhere near a shop. So those type of things have really changed, and I'd agree with Charlie, like, that athlete-centred approach, it took me a while to adjust. And I am still a bit sceptical, I think purely because of my own own experiences. Is it genuine? Is it legit?

I do think that how they try to look after you as a person, and not just in the gym, all of the support that the girls get now outside the gym is great. They genuinely want you to be building a life and doing other things, and... that's encouraged, whereas that actually was really frowned upon before Reform. So, I've actually seen some really positive changes, and I agree that they're still a way to go with certain things. I think, from my experiences, I know that the younger generations coming through now will never experience, kind of, the harshness that we did, and that to me is, like, a massive job done in a good way."

Isaac enters the conversation, slightly more tentatively, *"Um, I would say, with trampoline, I definitely feel like there's a lot more of a conversation around how we do things, and being able to have a bit more input into how things are designed, like camps and how the programme's designed. I must admit, I definitely initially, thought it all felt quite performative, but once we got into it, when we did the stuff like the Olympic Games review, and then the subsequent reviews after that, I could see there was genuine buy-in. Even in terms of how many people showed up to the first review compared to how many people showed up to the second, and how many people showed up to the third. There was definitely a lot more buy-in, so..."*

"That's amazing", Ella chipped in.

"Yeah it has. I think in terms of people believing in the Reform objectives, actually working and doing something, I definitely see a lot, lot more, like, belief in it now than I did originally, which is really good. I definitely feel like... there's a lot more positive around... around the sport. It's definitely had a positive impact on myself, and I think the people that are in charge now, especially with the PD, I think they've been really good in terms of how they're managing a lot of previous tensions with the programme. Some coaches and some athletes were quite sceptical,

because obviously they've had quite negative experiences, and I think the PD is doing a really good job at, sort of, hearing those concerns out and just being able to find a productive place to put those concerns, and also twist them positively, the PD's done a really good job of that so far, from what I've seen. I would also say, because I've had a very uniquely um, positive, view of... our programme compared to some other people, but I definitely think it's a bit more... positive than it was before."

Ella picked up the conversation, as Isaac pauses for further reflection. *"Isaac just made me think, when he was saying about the reviews post-competition. From the women's side, I'm not sure there is full trust that we can actually speak and be heard. I know that I can personally speak to who I need to within the team, because I have the experiences that I've had, and I'm brave enough to, but I think, from the women's side... I still don't really know how we're going to kind of get over what they saw happen to me. It's like, the more that they're encouraged to speak, the more some think "is this genuine? Is it a trick? That's kind of you, but where's it going?" I guess it just takes time to rebuild trust, but then a domino effect will happen, but... it's not... it's not quite there on the WAG side.*

It's a cultural thing and there is a shift - all the coaches and staff are saying "we want to know", that that is happening, but... for the older, experienced athletes we've been kind of indoctrinated from a young age and most are just not brave enough to... nobody would communicate a problem until it was too late... how do we get over that communication barrier? For the younger girls coming through, it should be better for them if they know from the outset that they can talk and be listened to."

Sophie enters, *"sorry I'm late, I just had physio, which ran over..."*

Charlie taking the lead, brings Sophie up to speed, we were just talking about the changes since Whyte. What's it been like in your discipline? Sophie, takes a breath, before responding with careful consideration, *"I guess that in the past it's not been super great, and I have had negative experiences, and also felt that feeling of... not wanting to speak up or talk about anything, but as an older athlete, and one whose been around a bit longer, I'm probably one of the people that is more comfortable. Sometimes I feel like there's this belief that if it comes from me, then it's... gonna go down better, or we're more likely to get kind of the opinion across. For me there's a bit of frustration, other athletes; it doesn't always feel like what we say is being registered sometimes, or at least maybe it's not explained, like, "we've listened, but we haven't been able to", so I have the confidence to speak up, but there's sometimes that lack of clear follow through that adds a bit of a communication barrier."*

Ella nods, adding, *"For me, I think there's a lot of things in place now that still feel a bit of a tick box, you know, because we know they have to ask the question, but who really wants to... we are having reviews now... they're asking all the right questions, but I'm like, but "where's the action?". You want to have trust that somebody's going to follow through on what you've said, and I feel like that can be a bit 50-50. Take it to that next step and actually make a change, and I think that's the only way we're going to get that culture shift."*

What about you Sophie? Which bits do you think have been good?"

"Not a good thing, but another frustration is that we don't get asked about big things like who the new coaches will be. The big decisions are kind of made for us. We don't get the ins and outs on how budget is spent – on comps and travel etc., if we knew how it is used we'd feel clearer on the decisions

being made. Sometimes, I think, if they're, like, 'you don't know what you need'. We get told how much the budget is, and then we have to propose how we'd spend it... I definitely don't want to have the responsibility for deciding, especially with a team of athletes, but it's nice to just have an idea."

Ella nods, adding, *"Not being consulted just feels like it's an excuse sometimes. Sometimes, it's like 'here's a hugely important decision, can we have your thoughts on it by tomorrow?'" I just don't think things are thought about until it's too late. That's the most infuriating thing that I find. It's always damage control, but why? People can make mistakes, anybody can, but you learn from the mistakes. But for me, we make the same mistakes year on, year on year, and it's like, what are we learning? That's really frustrating."*

But, we've had so much change post-Whyte. At times, it's been left, right, centre, and there's been a high degree of staff turnover too. So many physios came in and out, and they were, like, crucial people... hopefully we don't... we won't be needing them as much now that we're looked after a bit better... but they were such crucial people for us, and we've had no stability there, like, at all. And a lot of that was because of the poor culture. They didn't enjoy the environments they were working in, they didn't feel like they were treated with respect, and they ended up going. From a coaching perspective, our old coach, it wasn't just me, there were so many gymnasts and staff that put in reports and problems and I have no idea why they were kept on. I don't know what the rules are around contracts, but to me, there were enough complaints put in that something should have been done way sooner. What happened to our team, and all the injuries, that was a by-product of what they allowed to happen for so many years, and I'm like, I don't know why you're all surprised now, because we told you. Like, years and years ago,

and it's not just one, like I say, but that call should have been made way, way earlier. But now that we have now got the new coach in... it does feel like a very different environment... you can feel the shift. It has been encouraging enough for a few people to want to, you know, give this another shot."

"How about you Charlie, you've gone quiet?"

"When I think about it, we've got the gymnast advisory panel, that is a great mechanism, but it's also faced problems because of policy changes. For 2 years on that panel, we've wanted to talk about athlete voice. Really tried to get it going, but... for 2 years, non-stop, we've had policy, policy, policy, so I think we've been a little bit stunted. And we've raised that issue, but only now, in the last... three months, have we had real momentum towards athlete voice. It's only just starting but we've got loads of ideas. We've been left to our own devices, which is great, because we've got complete autonomy. I genuinely think there's some wins. We've had some great conversations recently amongst the group, there's some real power to that, but maybe a balance is need - could we get input from other groups and senior leaders? And my concern is that Reform '25 coming to an end. I know there's been conversations about the future of that group, the future of the coaching group etc., it would be a shame if it all ended, because of some budget reason... if that all finishes, you haven't got a hope in hell to gather athlete or coach voice."

Sophie, picking up this thread of positive experience, continues

"Yeah, totally agree with that. I think the gymnast advisory panels will be great moving forwards. It's like having our own little union to give our opinions and ideas and experiences, and have them documented. I also like that they brought in all the personal coaches to meet each other, and the PD spoke about selection policy. And the point for being being together was the selection policy, but

we were also asked, "what do you want talk about, what would benefit you most?, which was way more meaningful. We needed the selection policy, and we did that first, but then, the way autonomy was given, the way they did that, it created a kind of fishbowl of ideas, with people tagging in and out and sharing. It was a great way to approach collaboration, and that wouldn't have been done pre-Whyte. Relationships were strengthened and it was nice to come together as a community."

Isaac's attention is grabbed and he becomes more animated,

"That's interesting... there's a bit of scepticism from coaches, probably more from coaches than from athletes in some cases. But I feel like we're getting to a point where that scepticism is starting to be managed a bit better, definitely in terms of feedback from the reviews; actionables from the reviews would just help reinforce that trust. Something is happening, I guess it's just the timeframe of that feedback. There's so much going on, so it's easy to just do a review, and then forget about it, and then three months down nothing has changed. The quicker we can get communication about decisions the better and it would reinforce that trust... and get rid of some of the scepticism around reviews. But I would definitely say, something that's positive that's come from Reform in terms of training environment, I think we're given a lot more room now than we ever have to....sort of.. enjoy training, and, we have a lot of fun. The last two, three years have definitely been so different. Sometimes we'll play games in session, or we'll do, like, challenges in session, and that's, like, encouraged. Before, I think it would have been seen as, like, "oh, you're not taking it seriously". But that's been very beneficial from Reform that we didn't have before... just being given that room to sort of be a bit more playful with training and... actually enjoy coming to training and being at camps, which is so nice."

Charlie, checking his phone, and shuffling forward in his seat,

"I feel that too... hey listen, getting together like this has been awesome. I wish we would do it more! I am due back in the gym in a minute, but let's play a game before we go. Why don't we go around and give our summary feelings about Reform?"

"I'll go. I think there's been some huge leaps forward, um... overall, really positive with Reform '25. Definitely seen some improvements. Again, my frame of reference comes from a positive perspective, but the one thing I will say is that athletes are still out of the loop and I think there's still room for inclusion. There's got to be a way to get that athlete voice and sort of influence the rest of the organisation, but overall, really positive."

Charlie looks to Isaac, nudging him to share,

"I would just say, yeah, happy. There's definitely a positive change, and we're definitely moving in the right direction. I guess... The main thing would just be to not... I guess, get complacent now that the big overarching objectives and the headlines are sort of ending, and just to, like, carry on with that approach and not slip back into our old ways in terms of gymnastics culture, because it'd be very easy just to revert back to it. And we as athletes need to push through it too; maybe it's not going to be perfect in areas, and we have to accept our feedback adds more work for those that have to act on it, but there is actually a lot of value in it, and everyone is obviously experiencing a lot of value in it."

Isaac, pauses, and takes a reflective breath. It's Sophie's turn...

"Um, yeah, just the expansion of what everyone else is saying. It's just definitely... big improvements over the last few years. There's still a little bit... more to come. But yeah, don't get complacent with it, and keep moving in the right direction. It's not finished yet."

I think that's the main thing, we just need to keep going. It's involving the athletes and the personal coaches in discussions for big decisions, not just the little ones. And then just the communication around... why decisions have had to have been made if they're not in line with what we've asked for, just a little bit of understanding of why. Communication and... just getting people more in the loop of discussions and decisions is going to be really impactful... Oh! And I think people are becoming more approachable, and people are starting to feel more encouraged to bring, and... kind of getting more capable of providing opinions, and communication is going to be helpful to enforce trust so people want to provide their opinions and ideas again."

The gymnast's eyes shift to Ella, unsure how she will respond. Ella speaks with authority, as the gymnast in the group who the others feel needs to be most convinced of the impact of Reform...

"Yeah, I'd say really similar. I'd say, um... for me, it's just... so... I mean, I couldn't be happier to see just the women's side happy. From what gymnastics was for us, like... it's a drastic transformation. To be encouraged to eat is massive. To know that, you know, you can actually communicate a problem... massive. Okay, some problems aren't always addressed as we'd like, but there's been a huge shift, and it's definitely going in the right direction. Athletes are being asked the right questions, which is a great start, now there just has to be clear communication after... where's the action and how are we actually following this up? That's what builds trust... If you have those conversations, and they're actually... you know that they're going to be actually acted upon. They might not always be able to act on everything as you would want, but to know, you know, there was someone was trying, and you can at least get feedback, then that's gonna hopefully encourage people to actually

continue to talk... But yeah, it's going in the right direction, and that's really positive to see."

Before we go guys, there's something I've been thinking, Sophie shares,

"Knowing that there's some accountability somewhere, that they actually have to continue, that's important. But, um, look around, look at who is here talking; it kind of also shows who's most comfortable talking to people, and we're experienced, older athletes... I don't know if everyone was asked for their opinion on this. Yeah, I just got an email literally yesterday, I think it was, or the day before."

Charlie follows up, curious, *"Was that the first email that you got?"*

"Yeah", Sophie replies.

"Yeah, same. Yeah." Ella echoes.

Charlie, nudges, *"I think there was an email..."*

"Not me", Ella responds. *"I had an email yesterday, and it was just like, looking for athletes to share thoughts together."*

Sophie, taking the lead now, *"I think everyone's trying really hard to get it right, but it's going to take that little bit longer."*

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