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Evaluation of the National Sport Organizations Support Program: National Sport Centres Component

Final Report

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Annex A: Sport Canada Management Response

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Study Objectives and Methodology

An evaluation of the National Sport Centres (NSC) initiative was conducted in order to assess the rationale and continuing need for the Centres, the adequacy of current performance monitoring procedures, the degree to which the Centres have been successful in achieving their intended outcomes, the cost-effectiveness of the initiative and related issues. The methodology for the evaluation consisted of: a review of available documentation/data on the NSCs as well as international literature on comparable approaches in the United Kingdom and Australia; 10 key informant interviews with representatives of Sport Canada, the Coaching Association of Canada, the Canadian Olympic Association and six National Sport Federations (NSFs); a telephone survey of 200 nationally carded and non-carded registered athletes and 31 full-time coaches; and small-scale case studies of the six NSCs that were the focus of this evaluation — the Centres in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax.

Continuing Need for NSC Initiative

The evaluation evidence clearly indicates that the National Sport Centres continue to be needed to support high-performance sport and to help improve Canada's performance in international sport competitions. In the opinion of virtually all respondents consulted in key informant interviews and case studies, the NSCs are offering essential services that high-



performance athletes would not otherwise be receiving, certainly not close to their home. A key reason for this is that the National Sport Federations simply do not have the resources to offer the level and mix of sport medicine, sport science and athlete services (e.g., personal, educational and career counselling, media relations) that are available at or through the Centres. Moreover, the survey findings that the majority of athletes regard the opportunity to train close to their home and to discuss training experiences/techniques with athletes from other sports as important further support the need for the NSC initiative.

Compatibility with Federal Government Objectives

The evaluation findings indicate that the rationale and activities of the National Sport Centres are generally compatible with and have contributed to Sport Canada's four key objectives: to support high-performance athletes and coaches (e.g., through the provision of a range of high-performance services at or through the Centres); to develop the national sport system (e.g., through the development of partnerships with NSFs, provincial governments and local communities, the formation of training groups of elite athletes, and the sharing of information nationally); to strategically position and raise the profile of sport (e.g., through the promotion of sport in the media, web sites and publications, and Centre athletes serving as role models to the local communities); and to improve access and equity in sport (e.g., through the expansion of Centres into different regions, the focus on athletes' talent as opposed to their gender or race, the equal billing given to Paralympic and able-bodied athletes and coaches, and the wheelchair accessibility of major events). The federal objective to support excellence and results in high-performance sport is, however, perceived to conflict to a degree with the access/equity objective, causing some confusion over the NSC initiative's rationale and priorities.

Coordination of High-Performance Services

The delivery of high-performance services is quite well coordinated among the different partners, due largely to the fact that communication between the NSCs and service providers is facilitated because they are situated near each other. Service delivery is also well coordinated between NSCs and NSFs though there is room for improvement because some NSFs do not yet have any involvement with a Centre.

Coordination among the different types of service — athlete services, sport medicine and sport science — is perceived to be strong due to the efforts of NSC staff and coaches, particularly at the Centres utilizing Performance Enhancement Teams (PETs) or a similar teamwork approach. One perceived weakness, however, is the duplication between parallel services provided to athletes and coaches. In addition, despite the fact that a draft of Minimum Services at National Sport Centres for Athletes and Training Groups was prepared in May 1998, many respondents in this evaluation observe that levels of service vary too much from Centre to Centre. Related to this, the training template/paradigm utilized in a given sport can vary for different Centres, which creates problems when members of the national team come together, having been trained somewhat differently. Due to this inconsistency in service, there is a perceived need to improve the degree of coordination across the national network of NSCs.

Expanded Regional Approach to NSC Location

The expanded regional approach of the initiative — having the six core Centres located in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax — is generally perceived to facilitate the initiative's contribution to high-performance results. This is mostly because of the provision of a range of high-performance services that were not previously available to many athletes and the improved access to these services for athletes close to their home. In addition, some Centres are strategically located in regions where particular sports have traditionally been strong and have enjoyed community support (e.g., winter sports in Calgary).

On the other hand, many respondents in the evaluation identify potential adverse impacts of the expanded network of NSCs. Given the limited resources available to the initiative, the most common concerns are that the expanded network has resulted in a dilution of resources, expertise and services available to athletes using any one Centre as well as some duplication in administrative tasks and costs for the overall initiative. Views are mixed regarding the value of the additional NSCs in Quebec City and Saskatchewan and of regional centres of excellence, such as the one planned for Edmonton. While some respondents feel that the creation of regional centres affiliated with an NSC offers a suitable and cost-effective approach to increasing the reach of high-performance services, others express concern that recent expansion of the initiative has been unplanned and uncontrolled, arguing that recent decisions to establish new regional centres have been more political than strategic and have not been supported by a thorough needs analysis. They note that these centres do not follow the same partnership model as the six core NSCs and that they may not represent the best use of resources or be ideally located (e.g., in a community with a sufficiently high concentration of high-performance athletes).

Adequacy of Performance Monitoring

There are mixed opinions on the adequacy of current data collection and performance monitoring by the NSCs, and a lack of detailed documentary evidence (e.g., listing of data elements in existing data bases at Centres) to confirm or refute stakeholders' varied perceptions. Considering the majority view and the available documentation, however, it is reasonable to conclude that there is room to improve and standardize the current performance monitoring procedures for purposes of evaluation.

A great deal of descriptive information is collected by each Centre that provides at least partial evidence relating to the eight NSC performance outcomes specified in the Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF) for the National Sport Organizations (NSO) Support Program. This information includes: number, types and qualifications of Centre staff and coaches; amount of salary support for coaches from training group partnerships; services provided and numbers of athletes and coaches receiving these services by sport; detailed financial statements for the Centre; records of athlete training and performance including competition results; subjective data from athlete questionnaires and coach evaluations (e.g., the NSC Annual Athlete Evaluation); and documentary evidence on Centre activities and performance that can be obtained in monitoring reports, progress/status reports, and reports to and minutes of meetings of the Centre Board of Directors. Some of this information is collected to meet the requirements for the annual application and review process for the NSCs and for the Sport Funding and Accountability Framework for NSFs. In addition, there has been some effort to set performance goals and measure progress toward these goals for individual Centres (e.g., in the Strategic Plan and Accountability Framework for the NSC-Calgary).



The major perceived limitations with the current performance monitoring procedures are as follows:

- lack of dedicated expertise in performance monitoring and evaluation for the NSC initiative;
- lack of a centralized, computerized data base designed specifically for performance monitoring for the network of NSCs;
- lack of data and analysis to demonstrate convincingly the need for funding and the causal impact of funding and services provided on high-performance results;
- performance measurement tools and standards/expectations tailored for both the fully equipped Centres such as the NSC-Calgary and the “virtual Centres”;
- lack of standardized data collection, analysis and reporting procedures for each Centre to follow for purposes of performance monitoring and evaluation for the overall NSC initiative; and
- lack of formal procedures for the initiative’s national partners/National Coordinating Committee to review and utilize performance information.

Achievement of Intended Outcomes

It was beyond the scope of the current evaluation to quantify and draw firm conclusions about the incremental impacts of the NSC initiative on high-performance results in sport in Canada. The evaluation findings do indicate, however, that the NSC initiative has made progress toward the achievement of each of the eight performance outcomes specified in the RMAF, as highlighted below:

- Enhanced human resources infrastructure capacity:*** With the establishment of the NSCs, new salaried positions have been created and NSC staff members are regarded as an important asset for high-performance sport. In addition, athletes now have access to a broader network of service providers.
- Enhanced training and lifestyle services for athletes:*** Athletes have access to enhanced services and express high levels of satisfaction with all sport medicine and many sport science and athlete services. Coaches’ views are similar. Athletes who are members of a designated training group are, however, less satisfied with some athlete services than other registered athletes. Most athletes feel the services at or through the NSCs – in particular, athlete services and sport medicine – are more effective than the services they used to receive, prior to using the Centre. Services that appear to need to be considered for addition or improvement include assistance with relocation to and accommodation in the community where the NSC is situated, meal passes, job placement, self-marketing and sponsorships. Moreover, as noted earlier, it is widely perceived that the level of service is inconsistent from one Centre to another.
- Enriched training environment for athletes:*** There has been an improvement in athletes’ access to enriched services (e.g., strength training and massage therapy) at or through the NSCs. In the survey, most athletes and coaches indicate that their training environment has



improved and that the Centre introduces new programs and services quickly to respond to their needs. In addition, half of the athletes belonging to training groups believe that coaching at the NSCs is more effective than the coaching they used to receive, though only one-quarter of other registered athletes observe such an improvement in coaching. Services are also available to under-represented groups such as disabled, aboriginal and female athletes.

- ***Enhanced coaching environment:*** The NSC initiative has had some limited success at enhancing the coaching environment. Financial support in partnership with NSFs and other partners to help cover the salaries for more coaches has been provided through training group partnerships in a number of sports, but there is a perceived need for more highly certified full-time coaches, more funding to provide competitive salaries to attract and retain qualified coaches, and more job security for coaches to help reduce the high coach turnover. In the survey, most coaches do in fact report that their salary has remained the same since the NSC was established in their area. The involvement of NSCs in coach training programs, such as those offered by the National Coaching Institutes, helps to enhance the coaching environment, though some stakeholders believe there is room to improve the quality of coaching education in Canada. Moreover, only a minority of athletes in the survey perceives that the NSC has provided them with the opportunity to train with higher quality coaches, though views on the quality of coaching at Centres is somewhat more favourable among training group members.

- ***Increased opportunities for coach/athlete learning:*** The NSCs have provided some opportunities for coach/athlete learning, for example, through athlete or coaching seminars and information sessions (e.g., at which coaches can share what they have learned about high-performance training), workshops with service providers, and web sites, newsletters or other publications. Moreover, having athletes and coaches from several sports at the same Centre provides more opportunities for information sharing.

- ***Increased collaboration among service providers and technical leaders:*** The NSCs have also provided opportunities for increased collaboration among service providers, coaches and technical leaders (e.g., experts with NSFs and universities), due largely to the fact they are situated near one another. In addition, service providers have received specialized training and attended workshops together, though there is a perceived need for more professional development to help promote a holistic training approach. Performance Enhancement Teams are a good illustration of increased collaboration among various service providers and specialists. The NSC-Calgary is singled out as an optimal example because it is affiliated with a multi-sport training facility and can draw on the expertise of sport scientists from the kinesiology department at the University of Calgary. At “virtual Centres” without the same access to training facilities, however, the opportunities for collaboration are thought to be more limited. Also, results from the survey of coaches suggest that more interaction between coaches and sport medicine specialists could be beneficial for athletes.



- ***Increased resources for athlete services:*** The NSC initiative has helped to increase the resources available for athlete services, for instance: the funding for the initiative from the three national partners; financial and promotional support from provincial and municipal governments as well as the private sector; and in-kind resources from partners, such as free access for athletes to use training facilities at universities and private gyms.

- ***Stronger linkages with the local sport community:*** Some linkages have been developed with local sport communities, but there is room for improvement and progress in this area appears to vary significantly from one Centre to another. Examples of productive local linkages include: extending services for national team athletes to junior national team athletes; coordination of technical programming among the local club, provincial and national levels; partnerships with local universities, businesses and training facilities; participation of NSC athletes, staff and service providers at local conferences or workshops; and promotion of NSC events, athletes and competition results through the local media.

Factors Influencing Success

Key factors thought to facilitate the success of the National Sport Centres include: the high quality of the Centre Presidents, Boards and staff as well as their continuity; partnerships at the national, provincial and local levels, including sponsorships; the Centres' clear mandate to support high-performance sport and their focus on multiple services for multiple sports at/through each NSC; innovative approaches such as Performance Enhancement Teams; the regional approach to service delivery across the network of Centres; and strong leadership from coaches. On the other hand, factors that may be impediments to the success of the initiative are: a lack of coordination, national service standards and centralized accountability for the national network; insufficient funding for the NSCs to reach their full potential; lack of access to training facilities for "virtual Centres" which limits athletes' training and makes it difficult to attract corporate sponsors; high coach turnover; and a lack of involvement of some NSFs with NSCs.

Cost-Effectiveness of NSC Service Delivery

The consensus is that the delivery of services by the NSCs is more cost-effective than delivery of the same services would be by single-sport National Sport Federations. This is primarily because the Centres can leverage resources from several sports and there are economies of scale associated with the provision of services to athletes from several sports (e.g., discounted rates for service due to the large volume of athletes). It would not be financially feasible for a single NSF to endeavour to offer services to athletes in one sport in different regions of the country. Furthermore, there are benefits to be derived from the multi-sport approach of the Centres, such as information sharing among coaches and athletes from different sports.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned from Other Countries

Although most respondents in the evaluation generally believe that the network of NSCs represents the best approach for supporting high-performance sport in Canada, there are features of the sport systems in other countries that may be worth considering should the NSC initiative be adjusted or enhanced in future years. These best practices from Australia, the United Kingdom

and the United States include the following: (1) creation of one centralized, national multi-sport training institution for elite athletes; (2) regional single-sport centres of excellence; (3) setting of national performance targets (e.g., winning a specified number of medals at Olympic competitions); (4) more funding for amateur sport; and (5) corporate sponsorships to support athletes and the hosting of international exhibition events which provide developmental athletes with exposure to international-level competition.



Recommendations

Based on the evaluation evidence, the following recommendations are made for improving the National Sport Centres initiative:

Clarify rationale of NSC initiative in relation to Sport Canada objectives. There is some confusion over the rationale of NSCs, particularly in relation to Sport Canada's objectives. This confusion stems from a perceived conflict between the excellence versus access/equity objectives, the view that government decisions related to sport in Canada are quite political and do not necessarily facilitate the achievement of podium results, as well as a lack of clarity as to what the national sport system is supposed to be. Therefore, some communications efforts targeted at key sport stakeholders to clarify these points would be helpful. Setting national performance targets for high-performance sport, as is done in Australia, could also help to clarify the goals and priorities for the initiative.

Strengthen national coordination, service standards and accountability of NSC network. A number of issues raised in this evaluation could be addressed with improved centralized coordination, national service standards and accountability for the network of NSCs. It is perceived that the level of service varies greatly from Centre to Centre, that there is a need for a more formalized information sharing mechanism among the Centres (particularly related to sport science and sport medicine since professionals in these fields are too busy to coordinate communications themselves), and that the governance model of the Centres — whereby NSCs are accountable to their own Board of Directors rather than to a central authority — compromises the national-level coordination and consistency of service delivery for the NSC network. To address these issues, there may be a need to give the initiative's National Coordinating Committee more centralized authority as well as more resources to coordinate the NSC network. Although some decentralization and local flexibility for the NSC network is clearly desirable, many respondents in this evaluation appear to think that the balance needs to be shifted somewhat in the direction of stronger centralized coordination and accountability.

Improve coordination of service delivery between NSCs and NSFs. Due to the fact that some NSFs have no involvement with NSCs and to the perceived lack of cooperation and/or resources for the sharing of service providers between some NSFs and NSCs, there is a need for further efforts and possibly more resources to coordinate service delivery between NSCs and NSFs.

Carefully assess rationale and need for any expansion of the NSC network. It would be advisable to conduct an independent needs analysis before any further expansion of the NSC network is considered because of the perception that some recent decisions in this respect have been more political than strategic and also to ensure that the best decision is made (e.g., whether to open a new NSC or just a regional centre of excellence affiliated with an existing NSC and in what location) and that limited resources are put to best use.

Refine and standardize performance monitoring procedures to meet RMAF requirements. Using the performance framework for the NSC initiative in the RMAF as a guide, refine and standardize the current data collection and reporting procedures to ensure that the eight performance outcomes are adequately and consistently monitored for each NSC. Although some useful descriptive information and data are currently available to address these performance outcomes, there is a need



to refine the measurement procedures so that they are more closely aligned with the indicators in the RMAF and to consolidate data from different sources into one standard instrument and one centralized data base specifically designed for performance monitoring and evaluation. If resources are available, it would also be useful to incorporate a brief annual survey of athletes and coaches into a performance monitoring system. For example, an abbreviated form of the survey instruments used in this evaluation could be used to monitor satisfaction with and perceived impacts of services, with the current results serving as a baseline. In addition, standardized reporting requirements compatible with the RMAF (e.g., an adapted version of the current semi-annual and annual monitoring reports) as well as formal procedures for the National Coordinating Committee to review and make decisions based on monitoring reports need to be established.

Improve services with which athletes and coaches are dissatisfied. In order to address some concerns about inadequate or needed services as well as the low satisfaction ratings given to some services by athletes and coaches in the survey, consider adding or improving the following services: assistance to help athletes with relocation and accommodation in the community in which the NSC is situated; meal passes; “leading edge” services and more hi tech equipment; a broader range of services to meet specialized needs, such as acupuncture and chiropractic therapy; job placement; and self-marketing and sponsorships. If feasible, also provide more funding to enhance existing services and provide professional development for service providers.

Devote more effort to developmental athletes. In order to facilitate the development of a seamless sport development system, look for opportunities to establish more linkages with local sport communities, for example, by sponsoring junior age group teams and working with local clubs. This support for developmental athletes would help to ensure that there is a pool of talented young people with the potential to become high-performance athletes.

Assess the feasibility of increasing funding for coaches’ salaries and development. To address the problem of high coach turnover and the perceived need to provide competitive salaries to attract and retain more qualified full-time coaches as well as provide more development opportunities for aspiring coaches, NSFs and NSCs together need to assess the feasibility of injecting more funding into coaching.

Assess the feasibility of building dedicated training facilities for “virtual NSCs”. Given the widely held view that the potential benefits of the NSC initiative are limited by the fact that most of the NSCs (with the exception of the NSC-Calgary) are in effect “virtual Centres” without significant access to multi-sport training facilities, assess the feasibility of either building training facilities for some of the NSCs in major centres with a high concentration of high-performance athletes such as Vancouver and Toronto or, at the very least, working with the owners of existing facilities to improve access. The costs and benefits of such a major undertaking would need to be carefully assessed within the broader context of the sport system in Canada as well as competing priorities for government funds.



SOMMAIRE

Objectifs et méthodologie de l'étude

L'initiative portant sur les Centres nationaux du sport (CNS) a été soumise à une étude dans le but d'évaluer la raison d'être et l'utilité des Centres, la pertinence des procédures de suivi de la performance actuelles, le degré de réussite des Centres dans la réalisation des résultats escomptés, la rentabilité de l'initiative et d'autres questions connexes. Pour ce faire, la méthodologie suivie comprenait : l'examen des documents et des données disponibles sur les CNS ainsi que de la documentation internationale sur des approches comparables aux Royaume-Uni et en Australie; dix entrevues d'information avec des représentants de Sport Canada, de l'Association canadienne des entraîneurs, de l'Association olympique canadienne et de six fédérations sportives nationales (FSN); une enquête téléphonique auprès de 200 athlètes nationaux brevetés et non brevetés inscrits et 31 entraîneurs à plein temps; une étude de cas à petite échelle des six CNS faisant l'objet de la présente évaluation, soit les centres de Vancouver, de Calgary, de Winnipeg, de Toronto, de Montréal et d'Halifax.

Nécessité de poursuivre l'initiative des CNS

Les résultats de l'évaluation indiquent clairement que les Centres nationaux du sport sont toujours nécessaires pour soutenir le sport de haut niveau et aider à améliorer la performance du Canada lors des compétitions sportives internationales. De l'avis de pratiquement toutes les personnes consultées lors des entrevues et des études de cas, les CNS offrent aux athlètes des services de soutien essentiels qui autrement ne seraient pas disponibles, du moins pas dans leur région. Cette situation découle notamment du fait que les fédérations sportives nationales n'ont tout simplement pas les ressources suffisantes pour offrir le niveau et la gamme de services de médecine et de sciences du sport ainsi que de soutien aux athlètes (p. ex. un encadrement personnel, scolaire et professionnel, des relations avec les médias, etc.) qui sont disponibles à ces centres ou par leur entremise. De plus, selon les conclusions de l'enquête, le fait que la majorité des athlètes estime important de pouvoir s'entraîner près du lieu de résidence et de discuter des expériences et des techniques d'entraînement avec des athlètes d'autres sports vient renforcer la nécessité de l'initiative des CNS.

Conformité aux objectifs du gouvernement fédéral

Selon les conclusions de l'évaluation, la raison d'être et les activités des Centres nationaux du sport sont généralement compatibles avec les quatre principaux objectifs de Sport Canada et ont même contribué à leur atteinte. Ces quatre objectifs sont : soutenir les athlètes et les entraîneurs de haut niveau (p. ex. grâce à la gamme de services de haut niveau offerts par les centres ou par leur entremise); édifier le système sportif canadien (p. ex. par l'établissement de partenariats avec les FSN, les gouvernements provinciaux et les collectivités locales, la formation de groupes d'entraînement composés d'athlètes d'élite et l'échange d'information à l'échelle nationale); positionner le sport de façon stratégique et rehausser son image (p. ex. par la promotion du sport dans les médias, sur Internet et dans les publications, ainsi qu'en présentant les athlètes des centres



comme modèles à suivre au sein des collectivités locales); enfin, accroître l'accès et l'équité dans le sport (p. ex. par l'établissement d'un centre dans diverses régions, en mettant l'accent sur le talent des athlètes, et non sur leur sexe ou leur race, en desservant autant les athlètes et les entraîneurs paralympiques que ceux non handicapés et en assurant l'accessibilité des fauteuils roulants aux grandes manifestations). Cependant, on estime que l'objectif fédéral de soutenir l'excellence et la performance dans le sport de haut niveau entre quelque peu en conflit avec l'objectif d'assurer l'accès et l'équité, ce qui crée une certaine confusion quant à la raison d'être et aux priorités des CNS.

Coordination des services de haut niveau

La prestation des services est assez bien coordonnée entre les divers partenaires, surtout grâce à la proximité géographique des CNS et des fournisseurs de services, ce qui facilite les communications. La prestation des services est également bien coordonnée entre les CNS et les FSN, bien qu'il y ait place à amélioration puisque certaines FSN sont toujours absentes des CNS.

On estime que la coordination entre les divers types de services (services aux athlètes, médecine sportive et sciences du sport) est solide grâce aux efforts du personnel des CNS et des entraîneurs, surtout au sein des centres qui ont recours aux équipes d'amélioration de la performance ou à une approche similaire du travail d'équipe. On dénote toutefois une faiblesse : le dédoublement des services parallèles offerts aux athlètes et aux entraîneurs. De plus, malgré la rédaction, en mai 1998, d'un document provisoire sur le niveau minimal des services à offrir aux athlètes et aux groupes d'entraînement des centres nationaux du sport, plusieurs participants à la présente évaluation constatent un trop grand écart entre les niveaux de services offerts d'un centre à l'autre. À ce propos, le modèle/paradigme d'entraînement utilisé dans un sport en particulier peut varier selon le centre, ce qui pose problème lorsque vient le temps de former une équipe nationale puisque les membres ont suivi un entraînement quelque peu différent. À cause de ce manque d'uniformité des services, on estime nécessaire d'accroître le degré de coordination dans l'ensemble du réseau des CNS.

Approche régionale élargie pour l'emplacement des CNS

De façon générale, on estime que l'approche régionale élargie adoptée par l'initiative (soit l'établissement des six principaux centres à Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montréal et Halifax) facilite la contribution de l'initiative à l'atteinte de résultats de haut niveau. Ce fait est en grande partie attribuable à la prestation d'une gamme de services de haut niveau dont bon nombre d'athlètes ne profitaient pas auparavant et à la disponibilité accrue de ces services près de leur lieu de résidence. De plus, certains centres sont stratégiquement situés dans des régions où certains sports sont bien implantés et jouissent du soutien de la collectivité depuis longtemps (p. ex. les sports d'hiver à Calgary).

D'autre part, plusieurs participants à l'évaluation définissent certains effets défavorables que peut entraîner le réseau étendu des CNS. Compte tenu des ressources limitées mises à la disposition de l'initiative, on s'inquiète surtout de la dilution des ressources, des compétences et des services offerts aux athlètes qui fréquentent l'un ou l'autre des centres, ainsi que d'un certain chevauchement des tâches et des frais administratifs pour l'initiative dans son ensemble. On ne s'entend pas sur l'utilité d'établir d'autres centres à Québec et en Saskatchewan ainsi que des



centres régionaux d'excellence, comme celui prévu à Edmonton. Bien que certains participants estiment que la création de centres régionaux affiliés à un CNS constitue une solution convenable et rentable pour accroître la portée des services de haut niveau, d'autres se disent inquiets du manque de planification et de contrôle constaté lors de la récente expansion de l'initiative, affirmant que la décision d'établir de nouveaux centres régionaux a davantage été politique que stratégique et qu'elle ne se fondait pas sur une analyse approfondie des besoins. Ils indiquent que ces centres ne suivent pas le même modèle de partenariat que celui adopté par les six principaux CNS et qu'ils n'offrent peut-être pas la meilleure utilisation des ressources ni l'emplacement idéal (soit dans une collectivité offrant une concentration suffisamment élevée d'athlètes de haut niveau).

Pertinence du suivi de la performance

Les avis sont également partagés quant à la pertinence des méthodes de collecte de données et de suivi de la performance adoptées par les CNS, et l'absence de preuves documentaires détaillées (p. ex. la liste des éléments de données contenus dans les bases de données existantes des centres) ne permet pas d'appuyer ou de réfuter les opinions divergentes des parties concernées. Toutefois, compte tenu de l'avis de la majorité et de la documentation disponible, il est raisonnable de conclure qu'il faudrait uniformiser les procédures actuelles en matière de suivi de la performance pour les besoins d'évaluation.

Chacun des centres recueille un grand nombre de données descriptives qui fournissent à tout le moins certains éléments probants liés aux huit résultats des CNS en matière de performance précisés dans le Cadre de gestion et de responsabilisation axé sur les résultats (CGRR) du Programme de soutien aux organismes nationaux de sport (ONS). Parmi ces données, mentionnons : le nombre, le type et les qualifications des employés des centres et des entraîneurs; la somme de l'aide obtenue des partenariats des groupes d'entraînement pour rémunérer les entraîneurs; les services offerts et le nombre d'athlètes et d'entraîneurs recevant ces services par sport; les états financiers détaillés de chaque centre; les registres d'entraînement et de performance des athlètes, notamment les résultats obtenus lors des compétitions; des données subjectives provenant des questionnaires remplis par les athlètes et des évaluations des entraîneurs (p. ex. l'évaluation annuelle des athlètes du CNS); ainsi que la preuve documentaire des activités et des résultats d'un centre qui découle des rapports de suivi, des rapports d'étape ainsi que des rapports à la direction et des comptes rendus des réunions du conseil d'administration. Une partie de cette information est recueillie pour répondre aux exigences du processus annuel d'application et de révision, auquel sont soumis les CNS, et à celles du Cadre de financement et de responsabilité en matière de sport, auquel sont soumises les FSN. De plus, on a tenté d'établir des objectifs de performance pour chaque centre et de mesurer les progrès vers leur atteinte (p. ex. dans le plan stratégique et le cadre de responsabilité du CNS de Calgary).



À l'heure actuelle, les procédures de suivi de la performance semblent présenter les principales lacunes suivantes :

- manque de compétences spécialisées pour effectuer le suivi et l'évaluation de la performance de l'initiative des CNS;
- absence d'une base de données informatique centralisée conçue spécifiquement pour faire le suivi de la performance du réseau des CNS;
- manque de données et d'analyses pour illustrer de façon probante les besoins de financement ainsi que l'incidence déterminante du financement et des services fournis sur les résultats de haut niveau;
- outils de mesure de la performance et normes/attentes conçus sur mesure à la fois pour les centres entièrement équipés, comme le CNS de Calgary, et les « centres virtuels »;
- absence de procédures uniformes en matière de collecte de données, d'analyse et de rapport que doit suivre chaque centre pour assurer le suivi et l'évaluation de la performance de l'initiative globale des CNS;
- absence de procédures formelles applicables par les partenaires nationaux ou le Comité national de coordination de l'initiative pour examiner et utiliser les données sur la performance.

Atteinte des résultats escomptés

Le cadre de la présente évaluation ne permet pas de quantifier les impacts différentiels de l'initiative des CNS sur les résultats de haut niveau dans le sport au Canada, ni d'en tirer de fermes conclusions. Cependant, selon les constatations de l'évaluation, l'initiative des CNS a permis de progresser vers la réalisation de chacun des huit résultats en matière de performance précisés dans le CGRR et présentés ci-dessous :

- Capacité accrue de l'infrastructure des ressources humaines*** : Grâce à l'établissement des CNS, de nouveaux postes rémunérés ont été créés, et les membres du personnel des CNS sont considérés comme un atout important pour le sport de haut niveau. De plus, les athlètes ont désormais accès à un plus vaste réseau de fournisseurs de services.
- Services accrus pour l'entraînement et le mode de vie des athlètes*** : Les athlètes ont maintenant accès à de meilleurs services et se disent très satisfaits de l'ensemble des services de médecine sportive ainsi que de nombreux services liés aux sciences du sport et au soutien des athlètes. Les entraîneurs partagent les mêmes sentiments. Toutefois, les athlètes qui font partie d'un groupe d'entraînement désigné sont moins satisfaits de certains services aux athlètes que les autres athlètes inscrits. La plupart des athlètes estiment que les services disponibles aux CNS ou par leur entremise (en particulier les services aux athlètes et ceux liés à la médecine sportive) sont plus efficaces que les services dont ils bénéficiaient auparavant, c'est-à-dire avant d'avoir recours au centre. Les services qui semblent devoir être ajoutés ou améliorés sont notamment une aide à la réinstallation et à l'hébergement dans la collectivité abritant un CNS, des cartes-repas, un service de placement, l'automarketing et les commandites. En outre, comme mentionné précédemment, il est généralement convenu que le niveau de service varie d'un centre à l'autre.



- **Conditions d'entraînement enrichies pour les athlètes :** L'accès des athlètes à des services améliorés s'est accru (p. ex. entraînement de la force et massothérapie) au sein des CNS ou par leur entremise. Lors de l'enquête, la plupart des athlètes et des entraîneurs ont constaté l'amélioration de leurs conditions d'entraînement et la mise en place rapide de nouveaux programmes et services par les CNS pour répondre à leurs besoins. De plus, la moitié des athlètes appartenant à un groupe d'entraînement estiment que l'entraînement qu'ils reçoivent au CNS est plus efficace que celui dont ils bénéficieraient auparavant, bien que seulement le quart des autres athlètes inscrits ait constaté une telle amélioration. Les services sont également offerts aux groupes sous-représentés, comme les athlètes handicapés, autochtones et féminines.

- **Meilleurs entraîneurs :** L'initiative des CNS n'a que partiellement réussi à améliorer le bassin d'entraîneurs. Une aide financière provenant des FSN et d'autres partenaires pour offrir une rémunération à un nombre plus élevé d'entraîneurs a été obtenue par l'entremise des groupes d'entraînement dans un certain nombre de sports, mais on constate toujours le besoin de recruter des entraîneurs à plein temps encore plus qualifiés, d'obtenir des fonds supplémentaires pour offrir un salaire concurrentiel et ainsi attirer et maintenir en emploi les entraîneurs qualifiés, de même que d'offrir aux entraîneurs une meilleure sécurité d'emploi pour tenter de réduire le taux de roulement actuellement élevé. Lors de l'enquête, la plupart des entraîneurs affirment en effet qu'ils touchent le même salaire depuis l'arrivée du CNS dans leur région. La participation des CNS à des programmes de formation des entraîneurs, comme ceux offerts par l'Institut national de formation des entraîneurs, aide à rehausser le bassin des entraîneurs, bien que, de l'avis de certains intervenants, la qualité de la formation offerte aux entraîneurs canadiens laisse quelque peu à désirer. De plus, seule une minorité d'athlètes ayant participé à l'enquête estiment que le CNS leur a offert la possibilité de s'entraîner auprès d'entraîneurs mieux qualifiés, mais les membres des groupes d'entraînement ont un avis un peu plus favorable sur la qualité des services d'entraîneurs offerts aux centres.

- **Meilleures possibilités d'apprentissage pour les entraîneurs et les athlètes :** Les CNS offrent certaines possibilités d'apprentissage aux entraîneurs et aux athlètes, par exemple au moyen de séminaires et de séances d'information (notamment ceux qui permettent aux entraîneurs de partager leurs connaissances de l'entraînement de haut niveau), d'ateliers avec les fournisseurs de services, ainsi que de sites Web, de bulletins et d'autres publications. De plus, la fréquentation du centre par des athlètes et des entraîneurs provenant de divers sports offre une plus grande occasion d'échanger de l'information.

- **Collaboration accrue entre les fournisseurs de services et les dirigeants techniques :** Les CNS ont également permis une plus grande collaboration entre les fournisseurs de services, les entraîneurs et les dirigeants techniques (p. ex. les experts des FSN et des universités), qui s'explique surtout par la proximité de tous ces gens. De plus, les fournisseurs de services ont tous reçu une formation spécialisée et assisté aux mêmes ateliers, bien qu'un perfectionnement professionnel semble toujours nécessaire pour faciliter une approche holistique de l'entraînement. Les équipes d'amélioration de la performance illustrent bien la collaboration accrue entre les divers fournisseurs de services et spécialistes. Le CNS de



Calgary en particulier est cité comme l'exemple à suivre puisqu'il s'est affilié à un centre d'entraînement multisports et peut profiter de l'expertise des chercheurs sportifs du département de kinésithérapie de l'Université de Calgary. Toutefois, les centres « virtuels » qui n'offrent pas le même accès aux installations sportives ne permettent pas un tel niveau de collaboration. Les résultats de l'enquête effectuée auprès des entraîneurs suggèrent en outre qu'une plus grande interaction entre les entraîneurs et les spécialistes en médecine sportive pourrait profiter aux athlètes.

- ❑ ***Ressources accrues pour les services aux athlètes*** : L'initiative des CNS a permis d'accroître les ressources consacrées aux services aux athlètes, entre autres un financement des trois partenaires nationaux; le soutien financier et promotionnel des gouvernements provinciaux et municipaux ainsi que du secteur privé, de même que des contributions en nature de certains partenaires, comme l'accès gratuit des athlètes aux installations sportives d'universités et de gymnases privés.

- ❑ ***Liens plus étroits avec la collectivité sportive locale*** : Certains liens ont été noués avec les collectivités sportives locales, mais il y a encore place à amélioration et les progrès à ce chapitre semblent grandement varier d'un centre à l'autre. À titre d'exemples de liens fructueux à l'échelle locale, mentionnons : l'élargissement des services destinés aux athlètes de l'équipe nationale aux athlètes de l'équipe nationale junior; la coordination de la programmation technique entre le club local et les niveaux provincial et national; des partenariats avec les universités, les entreprises et les installations sportives de la région; la participation des athlètes, du personnel et des fournisseurs de services des CNS aux conférences ou ateliers régionaux; ainsi que la promotion des activités des CNS, des athlètes et des résultats obtenus lors des manifestations par l'entremise des médias locaux.

Facteurs de succès

Les principaux facteurs considérés comme facilitant le succès des centres nationaux du sport sont entre autres : les présidents, conseils d'administration et employés de grande qualité des centres ainsi que leur continuité; les partenariats à l'échelle nationale, provinciale et locale, y compris les commandites; le mandat précis des centres, qui est de soutenir le sport de haut niveau, ainsi que l'accent mis sur les services multiples offerts aux divers sports à chaque centre ou par son entremise; les approches innovatrices, comme les équipes d'amélioration de la performance; l'approche régionale de la prestation des services dans l'ensemble du réseau des centres et le solide leadership des entraîneurs. D'autre part, certains facteurs peuvent entraver le succès de l'initiative, notamment : l'absence de coordination, de normes de service nationales et de responsabilité centralisée du réseau national; le financement insuffisant des CNS qui empêche d'exploiter tout leur potentiel; l'inaccessibilité des « centres virtuels » aux installations sportives, ce qui limite l'entraînement des athlètes et complique la tâche d'attirer des commanditaires privés; le taux de roulement élevé des entraîneurs et l'absence de certaines FSN au sein des CNS.

Rentabilité de la prestation des services des CNS



Tous s'entendent pour dire que la prestation des services assurée par les CNS est plus rentable que le serait la prestation des mêmes services par les fédérations sportives nationales unisport. Cela s'explique surtout par le fait que les centres peuvent orienter les ressources provenant de plusieurs sports et par les économies d'échelle que permet de réaliser la prestation de services à des athlètes de multiples sports (p. ex. des services à taux réduit en raison du grand nombre d'athlètes desservis). Il serait financièrement impossible pour une seule FSN de tenter d'offrir des services aux athlètes d'un seul sport dans diverses régions du pays. De plus, l'approche multisports adoptée par les centres offre certains avantages, comme l'échange d'information entre entraîneurs et athlètes provenant de sports différents.

Pratiques exemplaires et leçons apprises d'autres pays

Bien que la plupart des participants à l'évaluation estiment généralement que le réseau des CNS constitue la meilleure approche pour soutenir le sport de haut niveau au Canada, les systèmes sportifs qui existent dans d'autres pays présentent certaines caractéristiques intéressantes qui pourraient être considérées advenant la nécessité d'ajuster ou d'améliorer l'initiative des CNS au cours des prochaines années. Parmi ces pratiques exemplaires, mentionnons celles de l'Australie, du Royaume-Uni et des États-Unis : 1) création d'un organisme d'entraînement multisports national centralisé pour les athlètes d'élite; 2) centres d'excellence unisport régionaux; 3) établissement de cibles de performance nationales (p. ex. remporter un nombre précis de médailles lors des épreuves olympiques); 4) financement accru du sport amateur; 5) commandites d'entreprises pour soutenir les athlètes et accueil de manifestations hors-concours internationales offrant aux athlètes de la relève l'occasion de participer à des compétitions d'envergure internationale.

Recommandations

À partir des résultats de l'évaluation, il convient de formuler les recommandations suivantes pour améliorer l'initiative des centres nationaux du sport :

Clarifier la raison d'être de l'initiative des CNS par rapport aux objectifs de Sport Canada. La raison d'être des CNS porte toujours un peu à confusion, surtout par rapport aux objectifs de Sport Canada. Cette confusion découle du conflit perçu entre les objectifs visant l'excellence et ceux visant l'accès et l'équité, du caractère politique des décisions prises par le gouvernement en matière de sport au Canada et de leur peu d'incidence sur l'obtention de médailles, ainsi que de la définition vague de ce que doit être un système sportif national. Par conséquent, il serait utile de consentir certains efforts de communication auprès des principaux intervenants du sport afin de clarifier ces points. L'établissement de cibles de performance nationales pour le sport de haut niveau, comme le fait l'Australie, pourrait également permettre de préciser les objectifs et les priorités de l'initiative.

Renforcer la coordination, les normes de service et la responsabilisation du réseau des CNS à l'échelle nationale. Un certain nombre de questions soulevées par la présente évaluation pourraient être abordées par une coordination accrue et centralisée, des normes de services nationales et la responsabilisation du réseau des CNS. On estime que le niveau de service varie grandement d'un centre à l'autre, qu'il faut instaurer un mécanisme d'échange d'information plus formel entre les centres (surtout dans les domaines de la médecine et des sciences du sport puisque



les professionnels de ces disciplines sont trop occupés pour assurer eux-mêmes la coordination des communications) et que le modèle de régie des centres — qui rend les CNS responsables auprès de leur propre conseil d'administration, et non d'une autorité centrale — compromet la coordination nationale et l'uniformité de la prestation des services qu'assure le réseau des CNS. Pour aborder ces questions, il peut être nécessaire d'accorder au Comité national de coordination de l'initiative des pouvoirs plus centralisés ainsi que davantage de ressources pour voir à la coordination du réseau des CNS. Bien qu'il soit nettement préférable que le réseau des CNS permette une certaine décentralisation et une souplesse à l'échelle régionale, bon nombre de participants à la présente évaluation semblent juger nécessaire d'entreprendre un certain virage vers une coordination plus serrée et une responsabilité centralisée.

Améliorer la coordination de la prestation des services entre les CNS et les FSN. Étant donné l'absence de certaines FSN au sein des CNS et d'un manque apparent de coopération ou de ressources pour assurer le partage des fournisseurs de services entre les FSN et les CNS, il faut redoubler d'efforts, voire investir davantage de ressources pour coordonner la prestation des services entre les CNS et les FSN.

Évaluer soigneusement le bien-fondé et la nécessité de tout ajout au réseau des CNS. Il serait utile d'effectuer une analyse des besoins indépendante avant d'envisager l'ajout de tout nouvel élément au réseau des CNS pour ainsi s'assurer d'employer les rares ressources à bon escient et de prendre la meilleure décision qui soit (p. ex. ouvrir un nouveau CNS ou simplement un centre d'excellence régional affilié à un CNS existant? À quel endroit?), puisque certaines décisions prises récemment à ce chapitre sont davantage considérées comme des décisions politiques que stratégiques.

Préciser et uniformiser les procédures de suivi de la performance afin de répondre aux exigences du CGRR. En se fondant sur le cadre de performance pour l'initiative des CNS contenu dans le CGRR, il faut préciser et uniformiser les procédures actuelles de collecte de données et de production de rapports afin de s'assurer que les huit résultats en matière de performance sont soumis à une surveillance adéquate et constante au sein de chacun des CNS. Bien qu'on dispose actuellement de certaines données et informations descriptives utiles pour faire le suivi de la performance, il faut préciser les procédures de mesure afin qu'elles s'harmonisent davantage aux indicateurs contenus dans le CGRR, de même que consolider les données provenant de diverses sources en un seul instrument standard et en une seule base de données centralisée conçue spécifiquement pour surveiller et évaluer la performance. Si les ressources le permettent, il serait également utile d'intégrer une brève enquête annuelle auprès des athlètes et des entraîneurs dans le système de suivi de la performance. Par exemple, une forme abrégée des instruments d'enquête utilisés dans le cadre de la présente évaluation pourrait permettre de surveiller la satisfaction envers les services et leur incidence perçue, en se fondant sur les résultats actuels. De plus, il faut instaurer des exigences uniformes pour la production de rapports afin qu'elles soient conformes au CGRR (p. ex. une version adaptée des rapports de suivi annuels et semestriels actuels) ainsi que des procédures formelles pour s'assurer que le Comité national de coordination fonde ses examens et ses décisions sur les rapports de suivi.

Améliorer les services qui ne satisfont pas les athlètes et les entraîneurs. Afin de répondre aux préoccupations concernant l'absence ou la faiblesse d'un service ainsi qu'aux faibles taux de satisfaction accordés par les athlètes et les entraîneurs envers certains services lors de l'enquête,



il faut envisager l'ajout ou l'amélioration des services suivants : aide à la réinstallation et à l'hébergement des athlètes dans la collectivité abritant le CNS; cartes-repas; services « de pointe » et davantage d'équipement de haute technologie; plus vaste gamme de services pour répondre aux besoins pointus, comme l'acupuncture et la chiropraxie; service de placement; automarketing et commandites. Si c'est possible, il faut également accroître le financement des services existants et offrir aux fournisseurs de services un perfectionnement professionnel.

Consentir plus d'efforts auprès des athlètes de la relève. Afin de favoriser la création d'un système de développement du sport uniforme, il faut chercher les occasions de nouer des liens avec les collectivités sportives locales, par exemple en commanditant les équipes junior et en travaillant avec les clubs locaux. Un tel soutien aux athlètes en développement permettrait d'assurer la création d'un bassin de jeunes gens talentueux ayant le potentiel de devenir des athlètes de haut niveau.

Évaluer la faisabilité d'accroître les fonds destinés à la rémunération et au perfectionnement des entraîneurs. Afin d'aborder le problème du taux de roulement élevé parmi les entraîneurs et l'apparente nécessité d'offrir un salaire concurrentiel pour attirer et maintenir en emploi des entraîneurs à plein temps plus qualifiés ainsi que des possibilités de perfectionnement aux futurs entraîneurs, les FSN et les CNS doivent ensemble évaluer la faisabilité d'injecter des sommes supplémentaires au métier d'entraîneur.

Évaluer la faisabilité de construire des installations sportives réservées aux « CNS virtuels ». Puisque, de l'avis général, les avantages potentiels de l'initiative sont limités par le fait que la plupart des CNS (à l'exception du CNS de Calgary) soient des « centres virtuels » ayant un accès négligeable aux installations d'entraînement multisports, il faut évaluer la faisabilité de construire des installations sportives pour certains CNS dans les grands centres contenant une concentration élevée d'athlètes, comme Vancouver et Toronto, ou à tout le moins de collaborer avec les propriétaires des installations existantes pour en accroître l'accès. Les coûts et les avantages d'une entreprise d'une telle envergure devront être soigneusement évalués dans le cadre plus large du système sportif canadien et des priorités concurrentes de financement gouvernemental.



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The federal government has assumed a role in sport policy since 1961 with the passing of the *Fitness and Amateur Sport Act*, an important initiative to promote amateur sport and provide funding to sport. The Government's role in sport increased when it took an active role in high-performance sport and the national sport system, as a result of the Task Force of Sport for Canadians, which was tabled in the House of Commons in 1969. The National Sport and Recreation Centre, the Coaching Association of Canada, ParticipACTION, the Canada Games Council, and Hockey Canada were born from this initiative. On April 1, 1973, the federal government set up the Fitness and Amateur Sport Branch. Its mandate was to provide contributions funding to fitness and sport organizations across the country. During the 1980s programming continued to expand by targeting support to women athletes, and athletes with disabilities. The Government also actively promoted bilingualism, international relations, and fitness. Sport Canada became a Branch within the Department of Canadian Heritage in 1993.

Sport Canada's mission is to support the achievement of high-performance excellence and the development of the Canadian sport system to strengthen the unique contribution that sport makes to Canadian identity, culture and society. Towards these ends, Sport Canada administers three funding programs: the National Sport Organizations Support Program (NSO Support Program), the Athlete Assistance Program and the Hosting Program. With funds of \$42.6 million, the NSO Support Program is the largest Sport Canada program, accounting for just over half of Sport Canada's total program funding of \$83 million.

The NSO Support Program's three main objectives are: (1) to enhance high-performance of Canadian athletes and coaches through fair and ethical means, (2) to enhance the programming, coordinating and integration of development activities aimed at advancing the Canadian sport system, through working with key partners, and (3) to increase access and equity in sport for targeted under-represented groups. The program targets four sport organizations, as follows: the National Single Sport Federations (NSFs), Sport Organizations for Athletes with Disabilities



(SOADs), Multi-Sport/Service Organizations (MSOs), and National Sport Centres (NSCs or Centres).

The NSO Support Program has five components, reflecting the type of organization being funded. The program components are the following: National Sport Federation Support initiative, New Funding for Sport initiative, Domestic Sport initiative, Multi-Sport/Service Organizations Support initiative, and the National Sport Centres initiative (NSC initiative). It is the latter that is the object of the current evaluation. With \$3.4 million in funding for 2000-2001, the NSC initiative represents a fairly small proportion of all NSO Support Program funds.

There are currently eight National Sport Centres across Canada: Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Atlantic Canada (Halifax), Saskatchewan, and Quebec City. The latter two were established in 2000-2001. There is also the Sport Centre in Victoria, a legacy of the 1994 Commonwealth Games. The latter centre as well as the Saskatchewan and Quebec City centres, which have only recently been created, will not be included in the current evaluation. The intention is to extend the Centre network by encouraging outreach programming from existing Centres and by ensuring legacies from the hosting of Major Games and Canada Games.

The network was formed in the mid 1990s after the success of a two-year pilot project at the National Sport Centre-Calgary, established in 1994. Sport Canada had earlier supported a High-performance Single Sport Centre program which provided financial support to National Sport Federations which designated national training sites for their athletes. The concept of multi-sport training centres was endorsed at the planning conference, "For Excellence: A Symposium on Canadian High-performance Sport," hosted by Sport Canada in 1989. The benefits of multi-sport centres were independently expressed in a paper presented to the Minister's Task Force in 1991, which also recommended to pilot this concept. In 1992, an ad hoc committee was set up between representatives of the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), Sport Canada and the National Sport Federations (NSFs). The committee selected Calgary for the location to pilot the Centre concept owing to the existence of the facility legacy of the 1988 Olympic Games hosted in that city.

An important defining attribute of NSCs is partnership. First, the network of NSCs as it currently operates is based on a funding partnership arrangement between three national organizations: Sport Canada, the Canadian Olympic Association (COA), and the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC). Furthermore, depending on the Centre, other parties that can be involved in funding include the provincial government, educational institutions, multi-sport organizations and the private sector. The partners view this coordinated network, which spans both national and provincial jurisdictions, as the most effective means of attaining their commitment to the development of current and potential high-performance athletes, including those with disabilities.

The National Sport Centres' mission is to provide the athletes and coaches with a training environment that will optimize their performance to enable them to achieve podium results in international competitions through fair and ethical means, within a cost-effective and efficient system. The Centres focus on coordinating access and delivery of sport support services for athletes and coaches, which complement those provided by the NSFs. For athletes, the Centres contribute to a holistic, enriched training environment that accommodates the athletes' sport, personal, social and career development and limits their requirement to relocate in order to train. For coaches, the Centres promote stability, education and employment security. Together, the expectation is that this kind of environment will contribute to high-performance sports excellence for Canadian athletes as well as coaches.

These outputs are expected to lead to a number of other outcomes. First, the collaboration among partners at the national, provincial and local levels creates a more cost-effective and efficient sport system because its administrative jurisdiction spans across all levels, providing economies of scale. With this system, it is easier to ensure the same high quality and standards of service to athletes and coaches across Canada. Second, the network is beneficial to most athletes and coaches themselves because they are able to stay closer to their home region and to better integrate their personal, social and professional goals. Third, the NSC initiative is intended ultimately to contribute to the development of a seamless sport development system¹, coordinating

1. National Sport Centres are intended to stimulate sport development across the country and, as they expand their programming beyond the high-performance stream, to contribute to the development of a seamless sport development system. *National Sport Centres Position Paper*, January 1999, p.3.



national, provincial and local sport organizations and governments, and offering sport programming to Canadians of all ages and abilities. This allows the athletes to advance with greater ease from their earliest introduction to sport to the high-performance level. Other outcomes include greater identification of local talent, greater access by under-represented groups to Centre services, access to a greater pool of funds through leveraging including from the private sector, strengthening of local sports infrastructure, and higher profile for sports in general.

It is also important to note that the NSC network must balance its commitment to create a national system of Centres ensuring the same high quality in all the Centres, with its recognition of the uniqueness of each Centre in terms of its clientele and degree of local ownership/buy-in. All Centres typically offer a number of features, in partnership with NSFs, including: an optimum training environment; qualified coaches; services in the areas of counselling, career development, coach employment and education, sport science and medicine, and improved access to facilities; and local decision making. At the same time, and owing to the latter attribute, Centres differ in terms of infrastructure environments, sources of funding (local and provincial), and athlete and coach clientele.

Sensitivity to local needs is ensured through the establishment of local Boards of Directors. The Board of Directors consists of representatives of partners, typically including the CAC, COA, Sport Canada, provincial government, a host agency or municipality (where applicable), athlete and coach representatives, and additional founding and funding partners. The National Sport Centre President acts as an officio non-voting member. The Boards encourage local participation, and the staffing of the Centres with their own Director (or President, General Manager, etc.) and support services personnel.

The need for the development of a national system of Centres is met with the participation of national partners on the Board of Directors for each centre, the development of a Memorandum of Understanding among the national partners which specifies the minimum expectations for their respective funding of National Sport Centres, and the establishment of a National Coordinating Committee for Centres. The National Coordinating Committee is responsible for coordinating the design, development and implementation of the system of National Sport Centres. The Committee

also ensures coordination of activity among Centres, communication with the national sport community, and accountability to the three national funding partners.

1.2 Evaluation Objectives and Issues

The overall purpose of this evaluation, required by Treasury Board, was to determine if there is a continued need for the National Sport Centres initiative, if the Centres have been successful in meeting their objectives, and if they are doing so in a cost-effective manner. Towards this overall objective, the evaluation addressed a number of individual issues, discussed below along with the methodologies/lines of evidence used to examine these issues (i.e., review of literature, documentation and data, key informant interviews with national-level respondents as well as local/regional respondents in case studies of NSCs, and surveys of athletes and coaches).

There are two sets of evaluation issues, one set of six issues common to the National Sport Organizations Support Program, of which the NSC initiative represents one component, and one set of three issues specific to the NSC initiative. In the discussion below, we organize these nine issues into the traditional evaluation issue categories of rationale/relevance, design/implementation, impacts/outcomes, and alternatives/cost-effectiveness..

(a) *Rationale and Relevance*

The rationale issue is: “*Does the rationale of the NSO Support Program — NSC initiative continue to be consistent with overall federal government objectives?*” The rationale for the National Sport Centres is outlined in the Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework for the NSO Support Program:

- ❑ To compete at the highest international levels, Canadian athletes require a comprehensive array of high-performance services, but not all National Sport Federations are able to provide these services to the same extent to their athletes living in cities across Canada.
- ❑ By offering an array of enhanced and enriched services to high-performance athletes from a number of National Sport Federations at a National Sport Centre, a greater number of athletes from different sports can be supported. This also



increases the likelihood that athletes will be able to remain in their home province to train rather than having to re-locate.

- National Sport Centres also allow a sport's high-performance coaches to work more closely with their athletes, as well as provide development opportunities for aspiring high-performance coaches. In addition, the Centres allow coaches to interact with and learn from high-performance coaches in other sports.

In this evaluation, these rationales were assessed against overall government objectives in the area of sport, which include supporting high-performance athletes and coaches, developing the national sport system, raising the profile of sport, and increasing access and equity in sports. Evidence on the rationale and continuing relevance of NSCs was gathered in case studies, key informant interviews with representatives of Sport Canada, other national partners and National Sport Federations, as well as a survey of athletes and coaches. In addition, program and other information and documentation were examined to address this issue.

(b) Design and Implementation

For this set of questions, the overall issue is the extent to which the design and implementation of the NSC initiative enhance the chances of program success.

The first of the design/implementation issues relates to the information systems set up to monitor program progress. Specifically, the question is: *“What additional data collection and reporting mechanisms are required to fully implement the NSO Support Program-NSC initiative performance framework?”* In particular, the concern is the extent to which the current administrative data systems in use by program officers are adequate for gathering information on the performance measures suggested in the NSO Support Program Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework (May 7, 2001). The evaluation assessed this issue in key informant interviews with Sport Canada and NSC officials, partner organization representatives, as well as in a review of available documentation on current performance monitoring.

The second design/implementation issue addressed in this evaluation concerns the extent to which there is coordination among the various partner organizations. Specifically, the question is: *“Is there effective coordination of high-performance services among NSCs, the National Sport*



Federations (NSFs) and service providers?” A lot of the intended outcomes are directly dependent on whether or not there is effective collaboration of parties, including a seamless sport development system, efficiencies and synergy in service delivery, cost-effectiveness and economies of scale in service delivery, and leveraging of funds. Therefore, it was important to determine how effective the partnerships and collaborative approach have been.

According to the NSC Position Paper on the Sport Canada website, the Centres are to provide, in collaboration with NSFs, an optimum training environment for athletes and to work in partnership with local clubs, provincial and municipal sports organizations, universities and NSFs to enhance the level of services provided to high-performance athletes and coaches. Therefore, to address this evaluation issue, we consulted the CAC, COA and National Sport Organizations (particularly the NSFs and SOADs). In addition, in the survey athletes and coaches were asked for their views on the degree of coordination among partners providing sport services and the extent to which this has enhanced or hampered effective service delivery.

The final design/implementation evaluation issue concerns the regional delivery model under which the NSCs operate. The specific evaluation question is: *“To what extent is the expanded regional approach to NSC location impacting on the ability of NSCs to optimize their contribution to high-performance results?”* The main reasons for developing the regional delivery model were to bring funding decisions down to the local level and to allow high-performance athletes to train closer to home. Also, as a result of having a regional presence, the expectation is that provincial and regional sport centres that might be formed would be linked to the network, and that the private sector would contribute funds to the Centre. For the evaluation, then, Centre partners were queried in interviews regarding their views on how the regional delivery approach is working.

(c) Impacts/Outcomes

The first and, arguably, most important impact issue/question addressed in the evaluation was: *“To what extent has the NSO Support Program-NSC initiative achieved its intended outcomes?”* The NSC Position Paper and the NSO Support Program Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework list a host of expected outcomes. These include: enhanced access



to training facilities and an enriched training environment for athletes; enhanced training and lifestyle services provided to athletes in a holistic fashion (e.g., counselling, career development, coaching support, sport medicine); and enhanced coaching employment (i.e., stability and salary) and training and development for coaches. The survey of athletes and coaches was the primary source of evidence on these impacts, though information was also obtained in key informant interviews, case studies and in NSC documentation.

In addition, we gathered information on outcomes of a broader, less tangible nature. These include the following: enhanced sports infrastructure capacity, measured in terms of human resources; increased financial resources for athlete services through leveraging with public education and private sectors; increased efficiencies and synergy through partnership and coordination of services among sports organizations and funders; and stronger linkages with local sports community. Another expected outcome arising out of locating Centres in cities across the country is better decision-making due to local governance of Centres and the input of athletes and coaches. Note that many of these outcomes may result directly from the partnerships formed with the NSC, which is an issue that was discussed above (i.e., the coordination of services among NSCs, NSFs and service providers).

The second outcome evaluation issue is: *“Have there been any other outcomes or factors which have impacted on the NSO Support Program’s-NSC initiative’s success?”* To address this issue, we solicited the qualitative views of NSC staff, partners and the key sport stakeholders.

Third, there are outcomes of a long-term nature that were difficult to measure within the time horizon of the present evaluation. Specifically, the issue is: *“To what extent has the NSO Support Program-NSC initiative contributed to the ultimate impacts (Sport Canada’s goals)?”* Sport Canada goals comprise developing high-performance athletes and coaches, building an enhanced Canadian sport system by involving partners and forming a coordinated network of Centres in major Canadian cities, strategically positioning sport in the eyes of the public and the government, and increasing access and equity in sport for targeted under-represented groups.

Reflecting the above goals, in the evaluation we gathered evidence on such ultimate impacts as high-performance sports excellence (revealed in better performances at international levels); a stronger, integrated, seamless sport development system across the country; a greater profile for sport in Canada; and a programming legacy from the staging of Major Games, complementing the facility legacy. To address these issues, we relied on key informant interviews, case studies as well as the survey of athletes and coaches.

(d) Cost-Effectiveness and Alternatives

The two evaluation issues in this final category relate to the question of whether or not there may be better ways of developing high-performance athletes and the national sport system.

The first evaluation issue in this group relates to the extent to which there may be better approaches to meeting the objectives set for the NSC initiative: *“Are there any best practices/lessons learned from countries similar to Canada that should be considered?”* To address this issue, we reviewed government websites of the United Kingdom and Australia to learn about these countries’ approach to developing high-performance athletes. The objective was to determine if there are better practices that Canada could consider and whether there are lessons to be learned from the experiences in other countries. We also obtained opinions on this issue by talking to officials of Sport Canada, the other national partners, NSF representatives and NSC staff/service providers since these individuals may have visited other countries and observed the respective funding systems.

The final evaluation issue is cost-effectiveness: *“Is NSC service delivery cost-effective relative to NSF delivery of the same services?”* NSFs also deliver sport services directly. The question is whether or not the approach of funding National Sport Centres, which in turn make decisions about funding services according to the needs of the local/regional sports community, is more cost-effective than the NSFs alone. We relied primarily on the views of the various sport stakeholders for an informal assessment of cost-effectiveness.

1.3 Purpose of this Document

The methodology, findings and conclusions of the evaluation of the National Sport Organizations Support Program: National Sport Centre Component are presented in the remainder of this document. The methodology for the evaluation is described in detail in Chapter Two. The evaluation findings, organized by the major evaluation issues, are presented in Chapters Three to Six and the evaluation conclusions and recommendations in Chapter Seven. Finally, an introductory letter that was sent to NSC Presidents/CEOs and NSF representatives and the research instruments (i.e., interview and case study guides, survey questionnaires) are appended.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Review/Analysis of Program Documentation and Data

A review of existing program-based sources of evidence was conducted in order to provide a context within which to assess the various aspects of the NSC initiative. In particular, the objectives of the documentation/data review were to provide insights into the operational and strategic management of each NSC and to supply information on the nature and extent of the services provided to athletes and coaches. In addition, sources of NSC documentation (e.g., semi-annual monitoring reports) were useful for addressing several evaluation issues (e.g., issues related to outcomes).

Higher level program information was reviewed as part of this component. Key sources included:

- NSO Support Program Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework;
- Sport Funding and Accountability Frameworks for National Sport Federations;
- Terms and Conditions of the NSO Support Program;
- Financial commitments to NSCs for 2000-01 and 2001-02;
- National Sport Centres Position Paper; and
- Terms of Reference for the National Coordinating Committee for NSCs and minutes of NSC meetings of national partners and Centre Directors.

Centre-specific information was also examined as part of the NSC case studies (described in Section 2.5). This documentation included business and strategic plans for the Centre, budgets and financial statements, summary reports of Board meetings, reports on service areas (e.g., athlete services, coaching development), progress reports, annual and monitoring reports.

Findings from the documentation/data review were triangulated with the findings from the surveys of athletes and coaches and the key informant interviews conducted during the case studies.

2.2 Review of International Literature

The best practices for funding sports excellence and enriching the training environment were examined, in part, through a review of the international literature. The nature and extent to which other countries have experienced similar geographical challenges in supporting the training needs of their athletes and coaches were explored through a review of the literature available from the United Kingdom and Australia. The nature of the challenges these countries have faced, the various means by which they have attempted to address these barriers, and the extent to which these methods were seen as useful were examined.

2.3 Key Informant Interviews

We conducted a total of 10 key informant interviews. Interview questions were open-ended, which allowed the interviewees to explain their responses in depth and detail. Interviews were an average of 45 to 60 minutes in duration, and were conducted by telephone. All interviews were carried out in English or French, according to the preference of the respondent.

Interview respondents, who were identified in consultation with Corporate Review Branch and Sport Canada, included:

- senior officials of Sport Canada. (two interviews);
- one senior representative of each of the two other national partner organizations: the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) and the Canadian Olympic Association (COA) (two interviews); and
- representatives of six National Sport Federations (six interviews).



An introductory letter was sent to all key informants as well as a contact (the President or CEO) at each of the six NSCs included in this evaluation by Sport Canada (see Appendix A). It indicated that EKOS had been commissioned to carry out these interviews as part of the evaluation of the NSC initiative and that the participation of the respondent was important for learning about and improving the NSCs. The letter also assured respondents of confidentiality.

An interview guide for the key informant interviews is presented in Appendix B. The interview guide was translated into French. All interviewees were sent the guide by facsimile or electronic means in advance of their appointment to permit preparation for the interview.

Analysis of interview data was qualitative. Summaries of interviews were prepared for use internally to guide integrated analysis and final reporting.

2.4 Telephone Survey of Athletes and Coaches

(a) Approach

We conducted a 15-minute telephone survey (i.e., approximately 60 questions) of a random sample of 200 nationally carded and non-carded registered athletes and 31 full-time coaches in July 2001. The survey questionnaires are presented in Appendix C. These instruments were translated into French.

The margin of error for these survey samples is as follows:

- Athletes (n=200 out of a population of 1,231): +/- 6.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20; and
- Coaches (n=31 out of a population of 122): +/- 15.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The samples for the surveys of athletes and coaches were drawn from the databases maintained by the NSCs. The survey samples were selected to be approximately proportionate to the total numbers of athletes and coaches (in sports supported by Sport Canada) with each NSC,



to the extent possible given the availability of athletes and coaches during the survey period. Coaches were particularly difficult to reach during the timeframe of the survey (July 2001), which partially accounts for the small sample of 31 respondents and the fact that no coaches affiliated with the NSC in Montreal were surveyed. In conducting the survey, we monitored the types of respondents to ensure adequate representation of sub-groups (e.g., summer/winter sport, male/female athlete), to the extent that this was feasible. The distribution of athletes and coaches by the six Centres is presented in Table 2.1.

Prior to the full implementation of the survey, pretesting of the survey instruments was undertaken with a small number of athletes and coaches to simulate the conditions to be encountered during the actual survey as nearly as possible. The objectives of the pretest were to test the instrument in terms of sequencing and clarity of the questions, the length of time required to complete the interviews, and the response rate. Using EKOS' Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing System (CATI), study team members monitored the pretests for a fuller understanding of the survey items and questionnaire flow. Once the pretest was completed, survey interviewers were debriefed and a few very minor revisions were made to clarify the wording of some questions.

EKOS trained interviewers from our pool of fluently bilingual survey interviewers. Study objectives, as well as the meaning and intent of specific items in the interviews, were thoroughly covered. Interviewers were supervised at all times. EKOS' dual audio and visual monitoring system was also in place to verify ten per cent of the data collected throughout the survey.

At least five call-backs (or a total of six calls) were made for each case. Appointments were taken at the convenience of the respondent and to avoid response bias. Respondents were interviewed in their preferred official language. Daily records were kept of calls attempted, successful contacts, appointments established and interviews completed.

TABLE 2.1
Survey Sample

NSC	Athletes					Coaches				
	Population	Proportion of Total Population	Survey Sample	Proportion of Total Sample	Sample Proportion of Population	Population	Proportion of Total Population	Survey Sample	Proportion of Total Sample	Sample Proportion of Population
Vancouver	218	17.7%	21	10.5%	9.6%	26	21.3%	6	19.3%	23.1%
Calgary	334	27.1%	55	27.5%	16.5%	54	44.3%	16	51.6%	29.6%
Winnipeg	54	4.4%	12	6.0%	22.2%	8	6.6%	5	16.1%	62.5%
Toronto	285	22.9%	52	26.0%	18.2%	12	9.8%	2	6.5%	16.7%
Montreal	285	23.2%	43	21.5%	15.1%	17	13.9%	0	0.0%	0.0%
Atlantic	58	4.7%	17	8.5%	29.3%	5	4.1%	2	6.5%	40.0%
Total	1231	100%	200	100%	16.2%	122	100%	31	100%	25.4%



A complete set of descriptive univariate statistics was computed for all survey items (i.e., mean/average response, frequency distribution, standard deviation). For this analysis, data from the survey of athletes were weighted to be proportionate to the population of athletes associated with each of the six NSCs (see Table 2.1). Given that the survey of coaches yielded a small sample (n=31), results are presented in a qualitative fashion only (in Chapters Three to Six) because the quantitative results would be misleading with the large margin of error.

(b) Profile of Survey Respondents

A descriptive profile of the respondents in the survey of athletes and coaches is presented in Table 2.2. Approximately half of the athletes were male and half female, and two-thirds participated in summer sports and one-third in winter sports. The majority of athletes (87 per cent) were nationally carded during the period from April 1, 2000 to March 31, 2001 and most (68 per cent) had been using the services at the Centre for more than 15 months. Prior to using the Centre, most of the athletes trained at a club (52 per cent), a single-sport training centre (14 per cent), a private gym/recreation centre (13 per cent), or a university (13 per cent) (not indicated in the table). The sample includes some athletes with a disability (16 per cent), visible minorities (10 per cent) and Aboriginal persons (one per cent).

Turning to the coaches, the majority (87 per cent) were male and just over half coached a summer sport and just under half a winter sport. Most of the coaches (65 per cent) had been working with athletes at the Centre for more than 15 months. In addition (not indicated in Table 2.2), the majority were a coach of a training group at the Centre (90 per cent) and primarily coached able-bodied athletes (94 per cent).

TABLE 2.2
Profile of Survey Respondents²

	Athletes (n=200)	Coaches (n=31)
Gender:		
Male	107 (54%)	27 (87%)
Female	93 (46%)	4 (13%)
Sport:		
Summer	135 (67%)	17 (55%)
Winter	65 (33%)	14 (45%)
Association with NSC:		
Less than 4 months	—	—
4 to 15 months	63 (32%)	11 (35%)
More than 15 months	137 (68%)	20 (65%)
National Card Status:		
Nationally carded	175 (87%)	—
Non-carded national team member	24 (12%)	—
Designated training group member ³	1 (1%)	—
Equity Group Status:		
Athletes with a disability	31 (16%)	—
Aboriginal persons	2 (1%)	—
Visible minority	21 (10%)	—
None of the above	146 (73%)	—

2.5 Case Studies of National Sport Centres

2. Unweighted data, NSC Survey of Athletes and Coaches, 2001.
3. A total of 103 athletes (52 per cent of the sample) were members of a designated training group at the NSC. The one athlete noted here was neither nationally carded nor a national team member.

We conducted a total of six small-scale case studies of National Sport Centres as part of the evaluation. Case studies were conducted in each of six Centres: in Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary and Halifax. These provided an “on the ground” perspective on the service delivery and effectiveness of the Centres, as well as information on the rationale, design and implementation, and impacts and outcomes of the NSC initiative.

The review of each Centre consisted of three parts: a review of Centre documentation/data; five interviews with site staff/partners; and a review of the findings from the survey of athletes associated with each Centre. As noted in Section 2.1, for the documentation review, the information for each Centre included business and strategic plans, budgets, summaries of Board meetings, progress and annual reports, semi-annual monitoring reports, etc. Documentation from each Centre was assembled at Sport Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage and forwarded to EKOS.

We conducted the interviews with a range of stakeholders involved with each NSC. The list of persons to be interviewed was selected in consultation with Corporate Review Branch and Sport Canada. For each Centre, we typically conducted five interviews:

- President or CEO of the Centre (one interview);
- representative of a National Sport Federation (one interview);
- service providers from athlete services, sport medicine, sport science and/or weight training (two interviews); and
- a key local/regional partner on the Centre’s Board of Directors (one interview).

A guide for the case study interviews is provided in Appendix D. The guide was translated into French and all respondents were interviewed in their preferred official language.

3. RATIONALE AND RELEVANCE

3.1 Continuing Need for NSC Initiative

(a) *Interview Findings*

All national partners consulted in key informant interviews agree that the NSCs (i.e., the six core Centres) continue to be needed and relevant because no other organization can provide the level and mix of programs, services and expertise for athletes close to their home (e.g., NSOs do not have the resources to provide this level of service). Moreover, there are economies of scale associated with the fact that several sports receive multiple common services at one Centre. The Centres offer something that did not exist previously for athletes to meet their high-performance needs.

Similarly, all representatives of National Sport Federations (NSFs) who were interviewed feel that the NSCs are needed and relevant. Respondents most often point to the fact that the NSCs are providing services that their athletes would not otherwise be able to access due to financial constraints as well as a lack of information concerning the appropriate experts to consult and services to access. For one respondent, financial support for coaches is perceived to be a primary reason why some coaches continue coaching. The way in which the initiative is delivered is also perceived to contribute to its relevance. Given the expense and difficulty of relocating athletes to access training and services, any initiatives that reduce the need to travel are seen as highly relevant for the athletes (e.g., establishing NSCs in different regions, providing athletes with free access to fitness facilities in different locations). Some respondents also note that the NSCs are flexible enough to accommodate the way in which their organization currently structures its activities, thus complementing the services they are already offering. It is felt that this complementarity of NSC services is due in part to the fact that NSCs consult with NSFs concerning the services they require or would like to have and that they are able to approach the NSC for advice and/or support when they identify a need or gap in services.



(b) Case Study Findings

Consistent with the key informant interview findings, case study results suggest unanimous support for the relevance and continued need for the Centres. Most of the respondents indicate that there is a need in Canada to support our high-performance athletes in order to obtain better international results. The majority of respondents say that NSCs also contribute to the development of athletes at the national, as well as the provincial and developmental levels.

All respondents stress the need for the NSCs and provide numerous examples of how the athletes have benefited from Centres. Numerous respondents give examples of how athletes have achieved better sport-related performances due in part to the services provided to them at the NSCs. For instance, as a result of sport medicine services provided at one NSC, an athlete recovered from an injury more quickly than expected and soon went on to achieve podium results. This athlete subsequently acknowledged the NSC in media interviews. Respondents also indicate that based on the data they collect from the athletes themselves (e.g., athlete surveys, athlete reactions and comments), they seem to be benefiting significantly from these services. One respondent notes that “...to demonstrate the need for something you have to see what the clients think and all the evidence shows that athletes are using the services and are quite satisfied with the quality of services offered from the experts at the NSCs.”

Relevance is also thought to be a product of highly skilled NSC staff, the centralization of services for athletes to provide one-stop shopping, the complementarity of services with those offered by NSFs and others, providing athletes and coaches better access to services, better knowledge of what services are available to athletes and coaches, access to previously unavailable services, and more cost-efficiencies realised from flat fees for services.

(c) Survey Findings

Most of the athletes surveyed support the rationale and continuing need for the NSC initiative. A majority of respondents (78 per cent) rate the opportunity to train at a Centre close to their home as extremely important (i.e., a rating of 4 or 5 on the five-point scale). In addition, most athletes feel that the opportunity to meet and discuss training experiences/ techniques with athletes from other sports is important — 32 per cent rate this feature of the Centres as extremely important (4 or 5 on the scale) and 45 per cent as somewhat important (3 on the scale). Moreover, the finding

that most athletes in the survey (84 per cent), as well as a large majority of surveyed coaches, express overall satisfaction with the Centre's services and programming in their city suggests that the NSCs are meeting a need.

3.2 Compatibility with Sport Canada Objectives

(a) *Interview Findings*

Key informants' views on the degree to which the mandate and activities of NSCs are compatible with the four key objectives of Sport Canada are presented in this section.

To support high-performance athletes and coaches: All national partners and NSF representatives feel the initiative has done a great deal to support high-performance athletes and coaches. One NSF representative, however, feels that more could be done to support coaches. This respondent points out that coaches are valuable to a sport because they typically stay in the sport longer than athletes, and that there is a need for more education for coaches and to address the problem of coaches leaving sport because of a lack of job security. In addition, in the view of a national partner, the pursuit of this Sport Canada objective is compromised by the fact that the delivery of athlete services, sport medicine and sport science services is inconsistent across the six Centres because some of them are in effect "virtual Centres" without their own training facilities and also because each Centre is accountable to its own Board rather than to one central authority.

To develop the national sport system: Key informants provide mixed views on the degree to which NSCs are helping to develop the national sport system. While some national partners and NSF respondents see evidence of this support through training groups and training centres (which allow elite athletes to train together), through the attempt to standardize NSC service delivery nationally, as well as through information sharing with all athletes regardless of their level, others feel more could be done to develop the sport system. One NSF respondent points out that the NSCs are so busy funding the services they already offer that they have only limited funds to assist some sports to access facilities. Another suggests that there is a need for more "grass roots" support for the development of sport and points out that although Provincial Sport Organizations (PSO) concentrate on the development of sport, provincial athletes are not eligible for NSC services.



To strategically position and raise the profile of sport: In the view of all national partners and NSF representatives, NSCs have helped to position and raise the profile of sport, for example, by promoting sport through the media and by forming federal/provincial/municipal and cross-departmental partnerships. One NSF respondent reports that prior to the establishment of an NSC in their region, no organization was representing national level athletes and the NSC has become the media's source when they are looking for athletes to make appearances, etc. Others note that the performance of high-performance athletes in competition has or is expected to improve and that this ultimately leads to media exposure and raises the profile of the sport. The primary difficulty in raising the profile of a sport, in one respondent's view, is catching the media's attention. While the NSC has made an effort to promote sport, they have not seen much coverage of amateur sport and high-performance athletes in the media.

To improve access and equity in sport: Key informants generally feel that the NSCs help to improve access and equity in sport. For example, one NSF respondent points out that Paralympic athletes and coaches are treated with equal billing and that the NSC has gone out of its way to ensure events are wheelchair accessible and that athletes and coaches are included. Others note that communication between NSCs ensures that their athletes have full access to NSCs in other regions and that the NSC in one region has worked hard to provide access in all parts of the province to help athletes get services close to home. A national partner observes that there have been programs for women in coaching and, although there is no formal affirmative action program, the NSCs focus on an athlete's *talent*, not his/her gender or race. In the view of one NSF respondent, however, there is a potential conflict between the access/equity objective and the objective to support high-performance athletes and coaches. That is, improving *access and equity* in sport is not necessarily compatible with promoting *excellence* and the achievement of podium results in high-performance sport.

(b) Case Study Findings

All case study respondents feel that the NSCs are consistent with Sport Canada's objectives. In general, respondents note that the vast majority of NSC services are targeted to high-performance athletes and coaches and are, therefore, compatible with the objective of supporting high-performance athletes and coaches. The development of the national sport system is also a prime objective of Sport Canada. Respondents agree that NSCs are contributing to the development of the national sport system by developing strong partnerships with the National Sport Federations, the local community, the corporate community and the media, although many respondents believe the Centres should allocate additional resources to coaches and to the development of sport at more junior levels. Evidence to support the view that NSCs are consistent with the Sport Canada objective to strategically position and raise the profile of sport is found among the various NSC activities and products, such as publications, websites, partnerships, and participation in media events, as well as in the common belief that the performance of Canadian athletes in international competition will improve as a result of NSC support. Finally, the improvement of access and equity in sport is commonly considered to be a central tenet of the Centres whereby all athletes, regardless of race, gender or physical disability, are treated equitably. NSCs have also been proactive in this regard by developing a number of programs to encourage gender equity in coaching, sport for disabled athletes, etc. The degree to which the NSCs are supporting these objectives is discussed in greater detail in Section 5.9, which deals with the impacts of the initiative in contributing to Sport Canada objectives.

4. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Coordination of High-Performance Services

(a) *Interview Findings*

In terms of coordinating service delivery among National Sport Centres, National Sport Federations and service providers, many NSF respondents feel the Centres have been making significant strides. One respondent notes that the NSCs are the first agencies to attempt to provide this level of coordination and that their efforts to coordinate, provide better access and share information have made a big difference. Another NSF respondent explains that a member of the NSC staff in their region coordinates everything for one of their teams and works closely with athlete services, while a sport science coordinator is the primary link between their coaching staff and the NSC. Furthermore, monthly meetings are held between NSC staff, the governing body for their sport, and coaching staff. In this respondent's view, a key factor that contributes to their ability to coordinate these services is that the key players are physically situated close to one another, thus allowing them to maintain almost daily interaction.

Another NSF respondent indicates that the two NSCs with which they deal most often communicate to each other with great frequency and have been able to agree to provide the same services in both regions, including on-site visits from sport medicine specialists and physiotherapists. In this and another respondent's view, if the NSF or coaches are able to identify what services are needed and convey this information to the NSCs, the Centres will do all they can to assist.

NSF respondents also provide a number of suggestions for how the coordination among NSCs, NSFs and service providers could be improved. One way would be to develop a mechanism to assist NSFs with information sharing and training for service providers and athletes in different regions when new procedures and approaches are developed, or to simply maintain a strong link. Another respondent suggests that the needed improvements are simply a matter of expanding the network of service providers and continuing the sharing of information, and feels that more human resources are necessary to achieve this type of expansion. Similarly, an NSF representative stresses that stronger linkages between Centres and NSFs are needed so that the technical experts (i.e.,

specialized coaches, sport scientists and sport medicine physicians) athletes are accustomed to at Centres can also travel to major competitions to be with the athletes.

National partners also indicate a need to improve coordination between NSCs and NSF's. From their point of view, the NSF's should be more involved in service delivery but cannot be due to limited resources. The use of Centres by NSF's varies (e.g., swimming uses the NSCs a great deal whereas other sports do not). Some NSF's have national team service providers which may or may not also be at the NSC; other NSF's simply cannot afford to pay a service provider so, for example, some need to rely on temporary volunteers. The NSF service providers (e.g., a trainer who goes down south with the national team to train in the winter) cannot provide the same level of service that is available to athletes at or through the NSCs.

With respect to the coordination among the different types of service — athlete services, sport medicine services and sport science services — most key informants believe coordination is quite strong. For instance, one NSF respondent feels the NSC in their region does all it can to coordinate these services, by providing: (1) access to in-house resources (e.g., e-mail, videos); (2) an orientation session on all services available to athletes through the Centre; and (3) follow-up with athletes so they can see how their training is progressing. Another NSF respondent is satisfied with the coordination of services by the NSC because it is done directly with the coaches who are better able to provide direction concerning athlete services. A national partner observes that the Calgary Centre represents the ideal in service coordination: multi-disciplinary Performance Enhancement Teams (PETs) are formed for a particular sport to review the progress of individual athletes. This type of coordination is not currently possible at most other Centres, however, because they lack the facilities and concentration of expertise that the Calgary Centre has.

Many respondents point to areas where coordination among the different types of services and service providers could be improved. For instance, in one region, the NSC is unable to provide access to all service providers required by one NSF because the Centre employs a multi-sport approach to training. The NSF must, therefore, hire its own service providers who work with the NSC. As well, in some regions there is only one athlete services coordinator hired to serve hundreds of athletes, so one key informant feels that the NSC needs to hire more staff to properly assess athletes' needs. In particular, this respondent feels that more support is needed in the area of athlete self-marketing and sponsorship. In the view of another NSF respondent, athletes and

coaches are offered two different sets of duplicate services, even though many of the same services are needed by both groups. Although this respondent acknowledges the need to keep some athlete rights issues separate from those of coaches (e.g., team selection, athlete issues regarding how to be coached, demands made by coaches), when it comes to shared services (e.g., Gym Works, meal passes, self-marketing) both groups should have access to the same services.

Some key informants also indicate a need to improve the coordination of services across the network of Centres. For example, an NSF representative argues that a common, national template/paradigm for service in each different sport is needed in order to avoid the problem of athletes coming from different parts of the country to join the national team, but with different skill sets and having been trained with different approaches/paradigms. In addition, a national partner feels that athlete services need to be more consistent among the Centres. One national partner has been attempting to facilitate improved consistency by convening meetings of Centre coordinators of athlete services.

(b) Case Study Findings

Case study findings generally suggest that the delivery of high-performance services is effectively coordinated among NSCs, NSFs and service providers. Respondents note that: access to many top service providers has also meant access to their budgets/infrastructure to deliver athlete services; there is a very cooperative relationship among NSCs nationally (e.g., common template for services and programs with allowance for regional differences, Centre Presidents meet twice a year, information sharing); most sports have a partnership with an NSC; and NSC staff members effectively communicate with service providers and oversee the process of referring athletes. The relationship and coordination of services among NSCs and service providers are thought to be particularly strong.

Nonetheless, a number of areas for improvement are noted. In several regions it is felt that there is a need for greater central coordination of NSCs. For instance, it is felt that the national network of NSCs could benefit from a single entity to conduct certain tasks, such as developing marketing and research, and to better coordinate some administrative aspects of joint ventures among NSCs. An example of such a joint venture is the recent re-negotiation of training group



partnerships⁴, when all Centres negotiated new training partnerships as a collective rather than conducting these negotiations individually. Within NSC regions, this type of centralised coordination could be helpful to reduce overlap in service providers, and increase awareness of what services are available. Respondents from many regions also report the need for some central coordination of NSCs in order to improve the ability of partner sports and others to coordinate and communicate among coaches, athletes, service providers and the NSCs themselves. It is also felt that there is a need for more information or updated registries containing the names of those athletes who are eligible to access services, although NSC websites and staff are very helpful in this regard and some regions have developed province-wide directories of services.

In some regions, it is felt that communication between NSCs and NSFs could be improved and that some overlap exists in terms of the services offered and even the service providers they use. In one Centre, it is thought that there is little contact between the National Sport Federations and service providers and, although the NSC operates as the conduit for this line of communication, there is room for improvement. Some respondents from another Centre perceive there to be competition between the NSC and NSFs in terms of being recognised as the technical expert in a given sport. The competition between these agencies in this and other regions is also thought to exist because of higher resources allocated to the NSC relative to the NSFs, as well as resistance by NSFs to share their service providers since they regard themselves as the technical experts with the appropriate background to work more effectively with the service providers.

With respect to the coordination of athlete, sport medicine and sport science services, a particular strength in a number of regions, including Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver⁵ and Ontario⁶, is felt to be their use of the Performance Enhancement Teams (PETs). Using PETs, teams of service providers are developed, under the direction of the coach, to meet the service needs of a particular sport on a long-term basis. To improve the coordination of these various services, however, respondents provide a number of suggestions, including developing a protocol of tests

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4. Training group partnerships involve the sharing of costs and expertise/services among NSCs, NSFs, Provincial Sport Organizations and local clubs. For example, many NSFs share the cost of coaches' salaries with NSCs. These partnerships are intended to enhance the training environment for a training group in order to help it achieve its performance goals.
 5. Vancouver is using a system similar to Performance Enhancement Teams (PETs).
 6. Ontario is still in the process of fully implementing the PET system.

for athletes in different sports, having a single individual to coordinate services provided to an athlete, information sharing and workshops among the various service providers to assist them to manage cases and raise their awareness of other available services and service providers, and a central coordinator for all NSCs to develop consistency in these services across the country. In addition, some respondents feel certain gaps in services exist for some NSFs. For instance, one NSC representative feels that more funding is needed for sport science services since most NSFs do not use what small funding they have for these services due to competing concerns. Additional funding is also felt to be necessary to support innovation and research in sport.

4.2 Expanded Approach to Centre Location

(a) *Interview Findings*

Many key informants agree that the policy to increase the number of NSCs across Canada has enabled the Centres to optimize their contribution to high-performance results. Among the advantages of this approach, respondents note that more NSCs mean athletes have a better chance of accessing NSC services, and that they have to travel less and have better access to services from remote locations. Moreover, if athletes at the provincial level are given access to NSC services (e.g., through a partnership with a PSO), then this expanded regional approach is even more beneficial. In addition, local athletes can serve as role models for youth and raise the profile of sport in the local market. All of these factors are thought to contribute to improved performance and to help develop the national sport system. Respondents also suggest that several locations may promote information sharing and improvement for both developmental and high-performance athletes, although centralization of services and athletes may lead to improvements more quickly. For some respondents, however, the expanded approach has little effect on their athletes' performance since it is necessary that the athletes have access to specialized training facilities, coaches or terrain available only in certain locations.

Some drawbacks to the expanded approach to NSCs were also noted. Some respondents feel that the expanded approach means that resources devoted to a single sport are divided among nine locations, thus leading to lower levels of service, duplicate administrative costs and therefore less funding filtering down to the athletes. Although some respondents concede that it is positive for athletes to be able to access services close to home, the added incentive for NSF staff to want



to develop affiliations with NSCs in regions where the sport does not have training facilities may, in one NSF respondent's view, make it more difficult to manage the team. This respondent also notes that the level of service afforded by NSCs in different regions varies. Finally, for one NSF, the expanded approach has led to competition among NSCs to have athletes from different provinces relocate to train with the local NSC which could lead to a fragmented approach to training. This respondent feels that for their sport, some decentralization (i.e., two Centres) is beneficial to accommodate athletes' needs but that it is important for the NSF to focus on a limited number of Centres in order to direct resources to attracting the appropriate expertise, raising the profile of their sport and developing good sport-specific programming.

A national partner cautions that there is currently a transition period of uncertainty due to the unplanned and uncontrolled development of NSCs (e.g., in Quebec and Saskatchewan) and new regional centres of excellence (e.g., the one planned for Edmonton) stemming from decisions that are more political than strategic. These centres do not follow the same partnership model as the six core NSCs and are not necessarily in the best locations with a high concentration of carded athletes. This type of expansion creates the possibility that scarce resources may not be used to best advantage and may be spread too thin.

(b) Case Study Findings

There are mixed opinions concerning an expanded approach to Centre location. Those case study respondents who support the expanded number of NSCs feel this is beneficial because certain sports are historically situated in certain regions, and thus should have an NSC in those regions where community support for the sport can traditionally be found. Further, it is felt that the expanded approach enhances access and equity for all athletes by providing more points of access and sharing the burden of coordinating services and providing support for many different sports. In certain Centres, allowing athletes to train closer to home is felt to be particularly important in order to accommodate athletes' language and cultural needs, including the shock of physical displacement to a new environment. Some respondents also feel the expanded approach provides athletes and coaches with more choice: they can move to those Centres or facilities that have developed expertise in their sport, or use the training centre that is closest to home and come to the expert facility for short-term training sessions throughout the year.

Conversely, some respondents feel delivery through regional centres associated with the NSCs is a more appropriate approach (e.g., more accessible, hands-on services), and that having more National Sport Centres would redirect financial and human resources from the existing NSCs and add administrative costs to the overall operating budget of the initiative. Instead, a number of these respondents suggest that additional resources should be allocated to existing NSCs in order to maximize their impact and effectiveness. One respondent in particular suggests that a thorough analysis be done before any further expansion of the number and locations of NSCs to determine whether the needs of athletes in the region are better served by an NSC or a regional sports centre affiliated with the NSC. As several respondents believe that some decisions to set up additional NSCs have been politically motivated, this type of independent analysis may be useful from a public relations standpoint.

Other respondents argue that one NSC per province, with the exception of some smaller provinces, is sufficient to support regional service delivery and that consolidating operations in provinces where more than one NSC currently exists (i.e., BC and Quebec) would be more efficient. Several respondents also point out that it would be much easier to coordinate athletes and services if there were fewer Centres. One other suggestion involves reducing the number of NSCs to a single centre which can provide the optimum services and facilities because not all Centres are able to provide the same level of services. All other sport centres would then be funded by the provincial governments.

4.3 Adequacy of Performance Monitoring

(a) Interview Findings

Key informants note that current performance monitoring activities involve the collection of data on measurable performance indicators (e.g., administrative/financial data on the operations of the Centres, number of athletes and coaches served, number of volunteers, funds expended per athlete, attendance, programming changes, physiological testing, medical reports, athlete performance results and improvements), as well as some subjective data gathered through questionnaires and coach evaluations.

Respondents have mixed opinions about the adequacy of current performance monitoring. A minority of the NSF representatives is satisfied that the operations of the NSCs have realistic,



measurable performance outcomes and that there is a real effort to monitor these outcomes and to improve the validity and reliability of the performance measures. Also, a national partner observes that the performance monitoring done by the NSCs is more than adequate, but the three national partners are not doing enough in terms of analysing and drawing conclusions from the available data. For most key informants, however, the current performance monitoring needs improvement. In the view of one respondent, for example, there is a need for more funding to develop computerized systems to allow coaches to get information quickly for such things as NSC-designed conditioning programs when they are travelling for competition. As well, another respondent notes that there may be some reticence to share information with the NSCs, because sport science experts or coaches may not see the value of uploading their data into the NSC system, and athletes may have concerns over the privacy of information they provide (e.g., if two athletes are competing for the same spot on a team, they could use performance and testing data to unfair advantage).

NSF respondents suggest a number of different types of information they would like to see collected through the current performance monitoring mechanism. One respondent notes that despite the collection of much useful data, it is still difficult to evaluate the impacts of different initiatives on athlete performance. This respondent would like to see data collected which would track the relationship between fatigue and performance, but notes that this would require NSCs to micro-manage the partner sports, something the NSCs do not want to do. Another NSF representative feels that it would be very valuable to have access to data on general conditioning from other sports because this would provide a basis of comparison. For this respondent, the issue is more one of providing access to the data, as this information is already being collected.

National partners also offer suggestions for additional or improved performance monitoring. In the view of one respondent, there is inadequate performance monitoring of (1) the need for funding for Centres and (2) the impact of funding on high-performance results and the degree to which athletes receive support that otherwise would have been unavailable. This gap in performance information is a problem mostly for the “virtual Centres” that are only offices and do not have training facilities. In this respondent’s opinion, while performance is tracked very well for the Calgary Centre (which is a true high-performance *training environment*), it is not adequately monitored for the “virtual Centres” (which are only *service environments* providing access to service). A suitable measurement tool and different standards/expectations are needed for



the “virtual Centres”. In other words, this partner needs evaluation information on the value of investment in “virtual Centres”.

Another national partner suggests that a unique monitoring and evaluation cycle is required for summer versus winter sports. For summer sports, an interim evaluation should be conducted in the spring to assess the preparation and training process (e.g., the degree to which training objectives were met), while a final evaluation should be done in the fall, after the competition season is over, to assess the results in competitions. Similarly, for winter sports, an interim evaluation of the training process should be conducted in the fall and a final evaluation in the spring after the competition season has ended.

(b) Case Study Findings

Documentation reviewed for the case studies contains very few details on performance monitoring systems or data bases at each Centre, though evidence of the types of information and data available can be found in NSC monitoring reports, progress/status reports, financial statements, annual reports, business plans, etc. Of particular interest for purposes of evaluation are the semi-annual and annual monitoring reports that each Centre prepares using a common format. These reports present information and data under the following headings: competition results; fair and ethical harassment-free environment; holistic athlete development; coach employment; coach development; partnership, coordination and sport development; financial resources; financial efficiencies; promotion and advocacy; and key issues and recommendations. These topics appear to cover elements of all of the eight NSC initiative performance outcomes specified in the Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF) for the NSO Support Program. Related sources of useful data are the annual NSC applications to Sport Canada and the data base of information from the Sport Assessment Questionnaire that NSFs complete for the Sport Funding and Accountability Framework (assuming that NSF data for each sport can be broken down by NSC).

In addition, some Centres are endeavouring to set their own performance targets and indicators, and measure progress toward these targets. For example, in the Strategic Plan and Accountability Framework for the NSC-Calgary, “core strategies” and associated “critical success factors” are measured with various indicators. Also, in the Operational Plan for the NSC-Ontario in Toronto, “areas of strategic emphasis”, “major activities” and related “expected outcomes” are

monitored. This type of performance monitoring is targeted at the particular objectives of each of these Centres, however, and not at the eight performance objectives of the overall NSC initiative (though the former objectives have some relationship to the latter).

Although few case study respondents could comment on performance monitoring systems, most of those who did felt that the current systems are adequate. Current data collection systems monitor such things as the number of athletes served, the number of service providers involved, what sports are served, the number of referrals and initiatives undertaken, and athletes' competition results, and can provide detailed reports by service provider, athlete and sport to show where resources are being spent. In terms of reporting, some strengths are thought to include the sharing of information among NSCs and the fact that all partners and groups sit on the committees and Boards for the NSC, thus ensuring good accountability to all stakeholders.

Despite the fact that NSCs monitor what activities take place and how resources are spent, a number of respondents feel that it is much more difficult to establish a clear causal link between services provided through NSCs and the performance of high-performance athletes. Nonetheless, some respondents indicate that they are currently collecting information in order to define those data sources which can be used as positive performance indicators for different training groups.

A number of suggestions were received concerning different types of performance measurement data that could be collected. One respondent suggests creating more qualitative performance monitoring tools and procedures which measure athlete satisfaction with training systems (although some Centres already conduct athlete surveys), improved familiarity with and use of the services offered and improved lifestyle, not just the "less meaningful" quantitative measures of ultimate outcomes, such as the number of medals won or improved racing times for athletes. Others suggest the need for a comparative database of what other countries are doing to help the NSCs improve and/or identify areas for improvement and service gaps. A third suggestion is to provide time-series data on athlete development through the system, from junior to senior levels, to track such indicators as resources spent, services received and performance improvements.

Concerns are also raised about the way in which performance measurement systems are implemented and managed. For instance, some respondents feel there is too much data collected

already and that too many resources are invested in this activity. Still others are concerned that performance monitoring of the Centre could result in the duplication of administrative work. To avoid this, they suggest creating a central data base, which would standardize the reporting mechanisms, enhance the analysis of the findings, and improve access to the results. The system could be designed in such a way that confidential data would be limited, while the athletes, coaches and the public could access the less sensitive data. In terms of reporting, another suggestion is to hire an external consultant to develop reporting requirements, as few NSC staff have sufficient training in business management and performance monitoring and reporting. Finally, it is important to ensure that performance monitoring information is captured consistently and diligently, as one respondent notes that he no longer has to complete any paperwork when consulting with athletes and feels this may reflect a lack of the necessary performance monitoring activity at the Centre.



5. IMPACTS/OUTCOMES

5.1 Enhanced Human Resources Infrastructure Capacity

(a) *Interview Findings*

All national partners and NSF representatives feel the Centres have done much to enhance the human resources infrastructure capacity available to high-performance sport. The NSCs have attracted many dedicated and qualified experts and have provided stable employment for them. The creation of training groups and partner sports has provided access to more coaches and allowed coaches to continue coaching. In the view of one NSF respondent, however, there are still not enough dedicated high-performance coaches due to insufficient resources. The service provider network has provided greater support to athletes, and has led to a synergy among partners leading to greater access to services and expertise through a broader web of professionals. With the additional support, one respondent notes that there is the possibility of prolonging athletes' careers, which could in turn allow them to reach their full potential.

(b) *Case Study Findings*

Respondents in the case studies also agree that the NSCs have helped enhance the human resources capacity available to support athletes and coaches. The establishment of the NSCs alone means there are more permanent full-time and part-time staff engaged in providing support to athletes and coaches. A number of respondents also stress that much of the credit for the success of the NSCs can be traced to the high quality of their staff.

Additionally, the presence of the Centres has had a profound effect on the resources and expertise available to athletes and coaches through the development of service provider networks, the Performance Enhancement Teams, salary support to coaches through training group partnerships which has enabled them to continue coaching, and the provision of partial financial support to assist NSFs to hire experts that they would not have been able to afford otherwise.



5.2 Enhanced Training and Lifestyle Services for Athletes

(a) *Interview Findings*

A range of training and lifestyle services are available for athletes at NSCs. Although there is some variability from Centre to Centre, these athlete services, sport medicine services and sport science services typically encompass the following:

- ❑ ***Athlete services:*** These lifestyle-related services include personal development seminars, personal and educational counselling, public speaking seminars, media relations assistance, assistance with careers, self-marketing and job placement, and transition workshops.
- ❑ ***Sport medicine services:*** Services in sport medicine include access to physicians, massage therapy and physiotherapy.
- ❑ ***Sport science services:*** Several services related to sport science are provided, including nutritional consultation, vitamin supplements, meal passes, strength training, biomechanics, sport psychology, physiological testing and monitoring, and consultation/assessment of test results.

Most key informants agree that the NSCs have led to enhanced training services for athletes through access to more facilities and a greater level of expertise at the facilities. Although some respondents note that lifestyle services have also improved somewhat due to initiatives such as the meal passes and provision of free access to different private fitness facilities (which allows athletes to train closer to home) as well as greater access to counselling and employment services, several feel that more services are needed in self-marketing, sponsorship and assistance with accommodation for athletes who relocate to be closer to an NSC or training centre.

(b) *Case Study Findings*

Respondents in the case studies are very pleased with the training and athlete services the NSCs are offering. They indicate that lifestyle services became available across Canada for national athletes only with the inception of the National Sport Centre network. Case study respondents indicate that National Sport Federations do not have the human resources and funding to provide these services. Part of the National Sport Centre's mandate is to provide a holistic environment for athletes and coaches by incorporating services to help athletes and coaches with training, personal and practical issues. Respondents are especially pleased with the sport psychology services for teams, and some say they are aware of many athletes making use of the



individual counselling to sort out personal issues. Athletes and coaches seem very pleased with the quality of workshops on a variety of athlete-related issues including nutrition, income tax, media relations, athlete transition period, post-employment, and retirement.

There does appear to be variation in the type of services and the extent to which these services are offered from Centre to Centre. Some Centres note that they have fewer available training and lifestyle services than others, especially when comparing the newer, smaller Centres to the larger, more established ones. Respondents observe that athletes and coaches in the more established Centres appreciate the customized athlete training support that is being provided (or is in process of being implemented), using such models as Performance Enhancement Teams (PETs). In general, athletes and coaches are very pleased with these services and hope that they will continue to develop.

NSC documentation also indicates that Centres are forming agreements with specialists to provide specialized resources/workshops for service providers in dealing with athletes and their problems. However, respondents in the case studies say there still is not enough done to help service providers. Service providers would like to see more support for their own training and more workshops with other service providers, with the aim of providing a more holistic approach to training high-performance athletes.

Respondents from the smaller regions are particularly pleased with training and lifestyle services since many high-performance athletes did not have access to some of these services (e.g., massage therapy, specialized conditioning) in their region prior to the NSC network. Some respondents note that further improvement is needed to increase athletes' access to accommodation and transportation. Respondents representing National Sport Federations and respondents from the more populated regions say they are pleased simply because they no longer have to coordinate these services themselves.

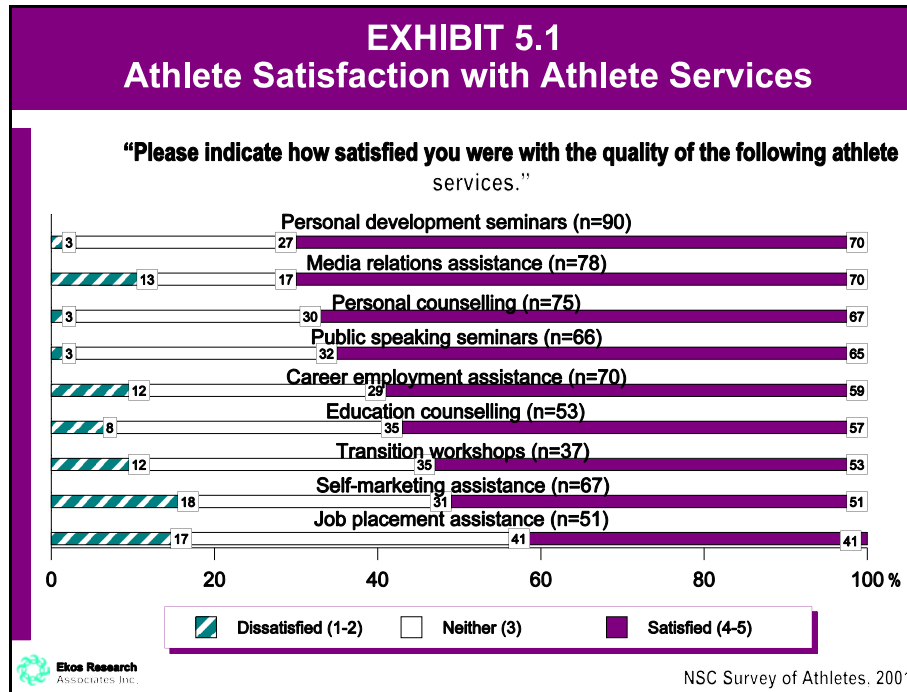
(c) Survey Findings

Consistent with the interview and case study results, findings from the survey of athletes indicate that levels of satisfaction are quite high for most of the athlete, sport medicine and sport science services provided at or through the National Sport Centres. These results are described in

this section, supported by a graphical presentation of key findings. Note that these findings include only those athletes who have used the service and who could provide a rating (i.e., those who indicated “don’t know” are excluded from this analysis).

As illustrated in Exhibit 5.1, levels of satisfaction with athlete services are highest for personal development seminars and media relations assistance (70 per cent of athletes are satisfied in both cases), but lowest for job placement assistance (41 per cent satisfied). There is strong support for the continuation of these types of services: fully 80 per cent of athletes in the survey agree “to a great extent” that the Centre should continue to offer holistic services that help athletes develop socially and intellectually as well as physically. Additionally, athlete services as a whole are perceived by a majority of coaches to have become more effective relative to similar services that were available prior to the establishment of the NSCs.

There is a trend for athletes who are members of a designated training group to be *less* satisfied with athlete services than other registered athletes. In particular, training group members are less satisfied than other registered athletes with career/employment assistance (49 per cent *versus* 71 per cent satisfied), education counselling (50 per cent *versus* 70 per cent) and job placement assistance (32 per cent *versus* 55 per cent). It is unclear why this difference exists. It may be partially due to the degree of availability of these athlete services at the particular NSC at which these respondents train (e.g., almost two-thirds of the training group members in the survey train at the Calgary and Montreal NSCs). It may also be that many of the respondents belonging to training groups happen to be in a sport for which access to these services is relatively poor, though it is difficult to confirm this given the small survey sample.

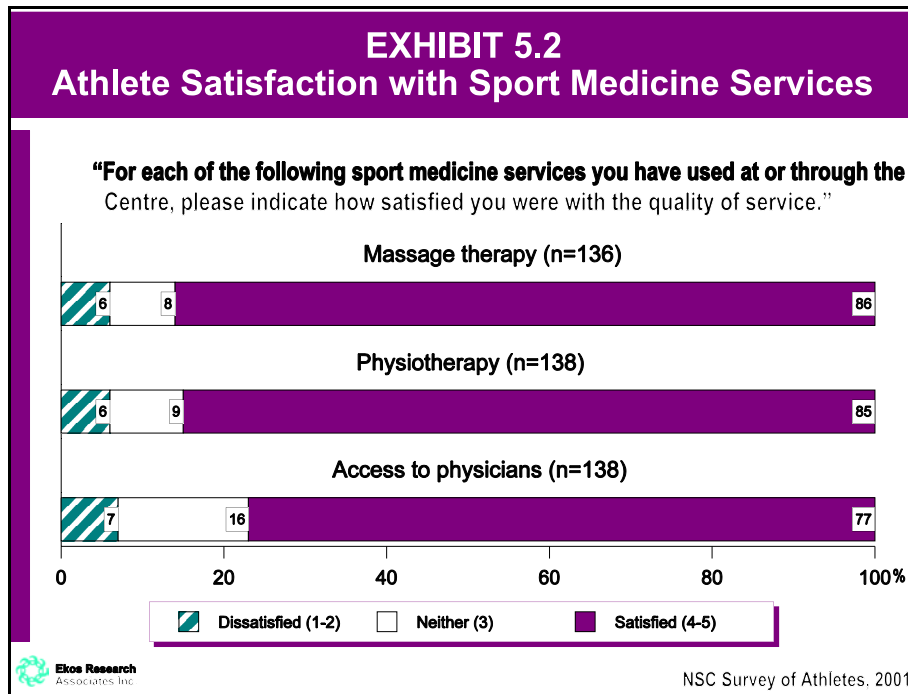


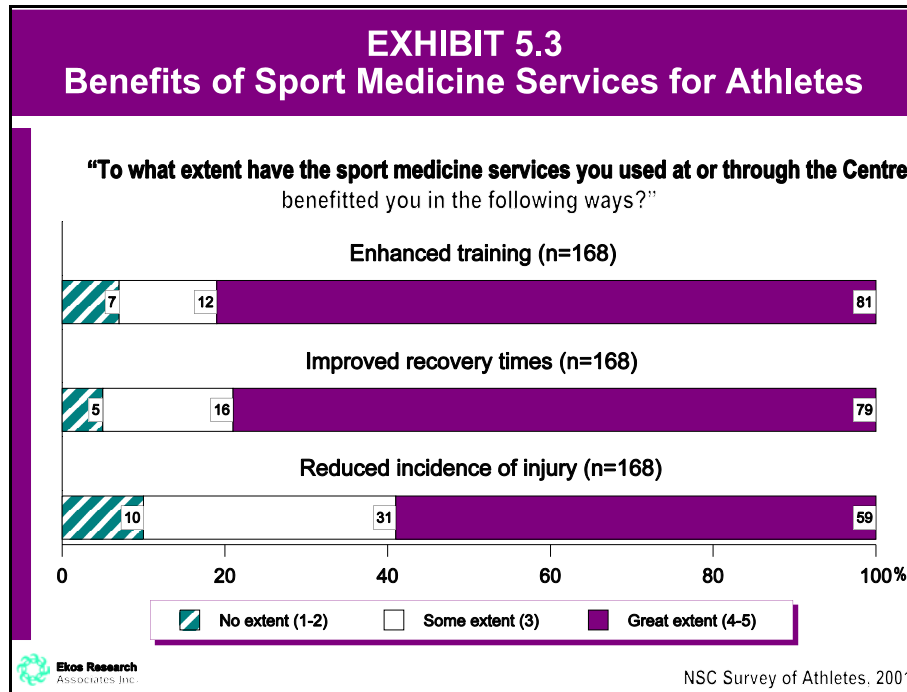
Most coaches also report that athletes’ use of athlete services is a very effective means of enhancing their social and intellectual development. The vast majority in turn strongly believes that social and intellectual development enhances athletes’ training and athletic performance and that their NSC should continue to offer holistic services designed to help athletes socially and intellectually.

While satisfaction ratings are fairly strong for the athlete services, they are even higher for sport medicine services (see Exhibit 5.2). More than three-quarters of the athletes surveyed are satisfied with massage therapy, physiotherapy and access to physicians. As indicated in Exhibit 5.3, the majority of respondents also believe that the sport medicine services available at or through the Centre have improved their training and their recovery times to a great extent (81 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively). In addition, most athletes perceive that these services have helped to reduce the incidence of their injuries (59 per cent to a great extent and 31 per cent to some extent).

Among coaches whose athletes have used sport medicine services through the NSCs, the level of satisfaction with these services is also quite high. Coaches tend to be most satisfied with

physiotherapy services, followed by massage therapy and access to physicians. Coaches also feel that the use of these services has generally had a strong positive impact on their athletes. This is perceived to have occurred primarily with respect to improved recovery times and enhanced training, but also, to a slightly lesser extent, in terms of a reduced incidence of injury.





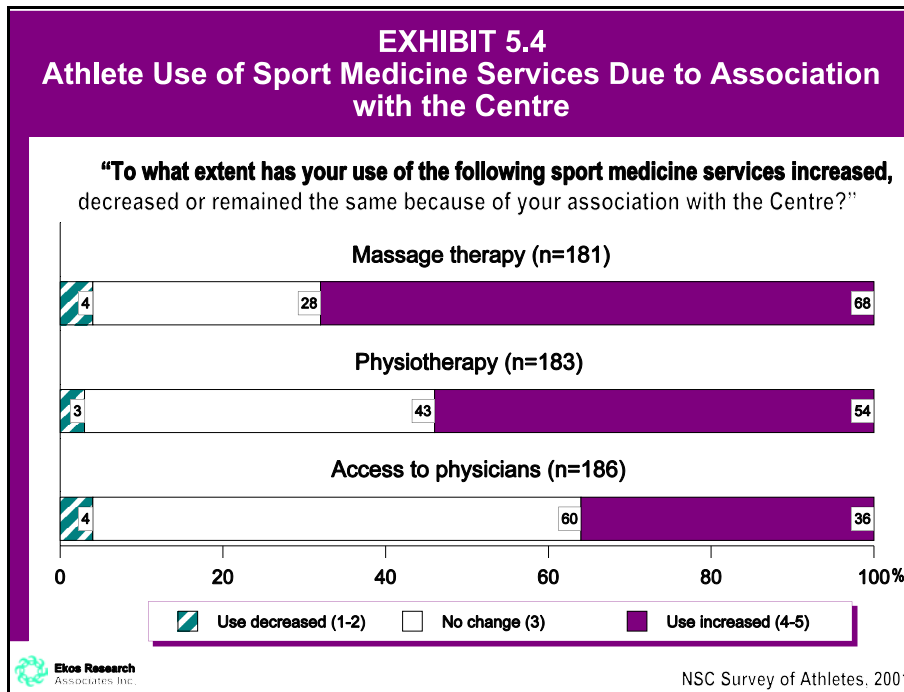
Athletes were asked if the extent of their use of sport medicine services has changed because of their association with a Centre (see Exhibit 5.4). For a majority of athletes, use of massage therapy and physiotherapy has increased at the Centre (68 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively). Access to physicians has remained the same for most respondents (60 per cent), however. Only 36 per cent of the athletes indicate that physician access has increased due to their association with the Centre, though access has increased more for general registered athletes (42 per cent) than for those who are members of designated training groups (31 per cent).

Over half of athletes (57 per cent) have received sport medicine services from service providers other than those at/through the Centre. For these 110 athletes, the primary services they received from other sources were physiotherapy (53 per cent of responses), massage therapy (53 per cent), physician consultation (47 per cent) and chiropractic therapy (24 per cent). Their key reasons for seeking sport medicine services elsewhere were as follows:

- Centre’s service provider was not conveniently located to where I live and/or train (44 per cent of responses);
- service could be obtained more quickly from another provider (38 per cent);



- ❑ the required service (in particular, chiropractic therapy and physician consultation) was unavailable to me at/through Centre (32 per cent) – this is an issue for survey respondents from the Montreal and Calgary NSCs and, to a lesser extent, the Centres in Vancouver and Toronto;
- ❑ service was not offered at a convenient time (23 per cent); and
- ❑ dissatisfied with quality of service provided at/through Centre (20 per cent).

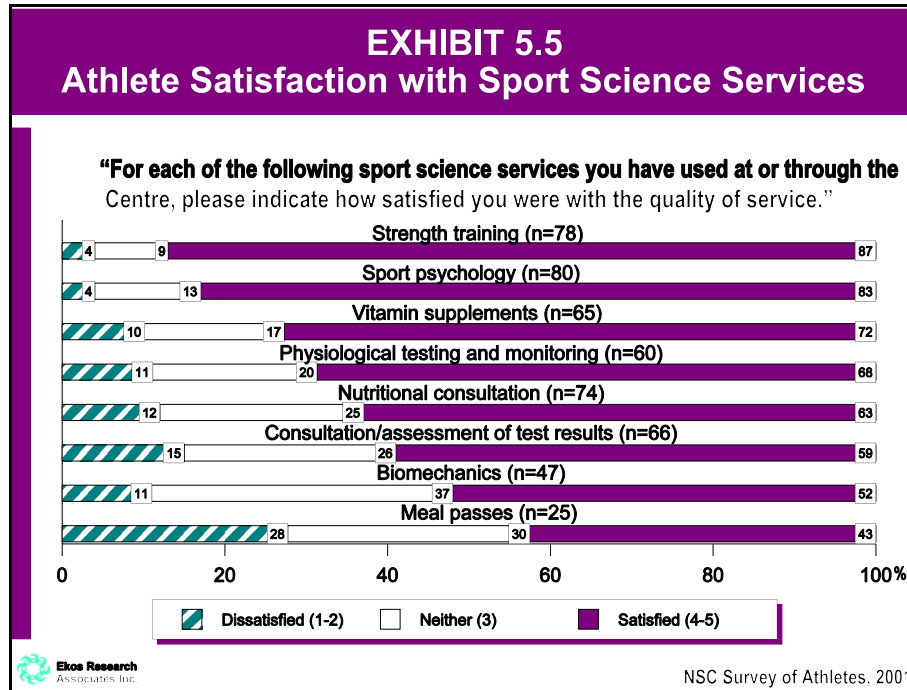


The satisfaction ratings for sport science services are presented in Exhibit 5.5. Athletes’ level of satisfaction varies widely from one type of service to another. They are most satisfied with strength training and sport psychology (87 per cent and 83 per cent satisfied, respectively), but much less satisfied with meal passes (43 per cent satisfied, though only 25 respondents have used these). Athletes who are members of a designated training group are *less* satisfied than other registered athletes with meal passes (30 per cent *versus* 70 per cent) but *more* satisfied with biomechanics (60 per cent *versus* 37 per cent).

Among surveyed coaches, high levels of satisfaction are observed for strength training, consultation (e.g., assessment of test results), and physiological testing and monitoring. Coaches



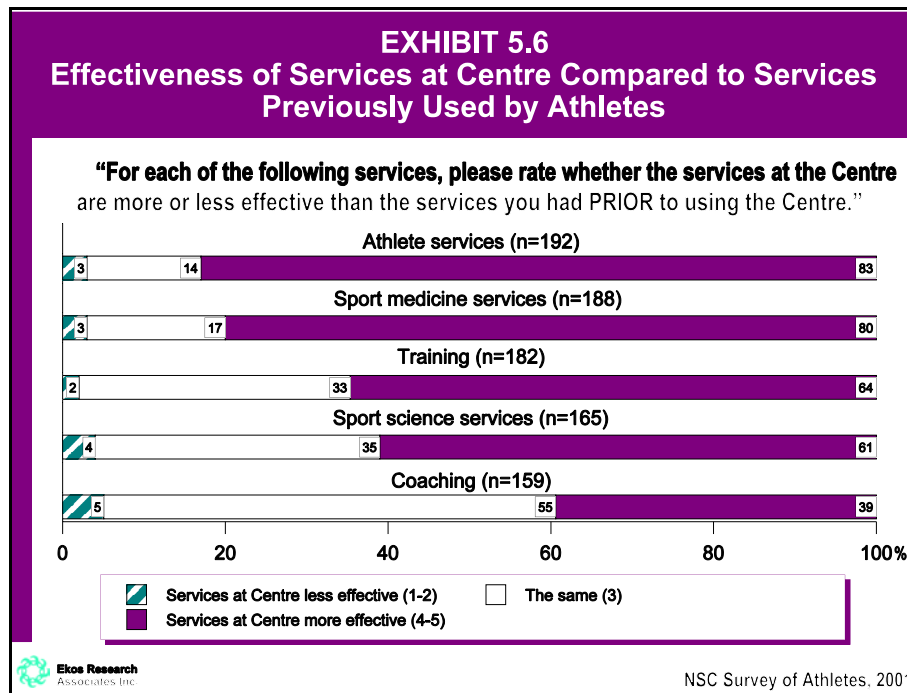
express more moderate levels of satisfaction for sport psychology and nutritional consultation and low satisfaction for vitamin supplements, biomechanics and meal passes.



Despite low levels of satisfaction for some sport science services, most coaches feel that overall, the sport sciences services they have received during their association with the NSCs are more effective than the services available to them prior to the NSCs. A large majority of coaches feel the sport sciences services they and their athletes use are very effective at enhancing their athletes’ training and athletic performance and that dialogue between sport science service providers and coaches is useful. Moreover, surveyed coaches feel the availability of these services has improved to a great extent since their Centre’s start-up and most are very satisfied with the quantity and range of sport science services available to their sport in their city.

For most of the various training and lifestyle services, athletes also tend to feel that the services available at or through the National Sport Centre are more effective than the services that used to be available to them, before they started using the Centre. As illustrated in Exhibit 5.6, athletes rate athlete services and sport medicine services most highly in this respect (at least 80 per

cent of respondents feel that services at/through the Centre are more effective), though coaching fares poorly (only 39 per cent). For over half of the respondents (55 per cent), the quality of coaching at/through the Centre is about the same as the coaching they used to receive. Note, however, that athletes who are members of a designated training group are more likely to observe improvement in the effectiveness of coaching available at/through the NSCs (51 per cent) than other registered athletes (26 per cent).



5.3 Enriched Training Environment for Athletes

(a) Interview Findings

All respondents agree that the NSCs have led to an enriched training environment for athletes. Most notably, respondents report that there has been improved access to training specialists (strength training, conditioning, etc.) and “luxury” services (e.g., massage therapy) which improve athlete performances. For some, the opportunity for athletes to train as training groups has enabled the NSF’s to set aside time for elite athletes to be challenged by practising with higher level athletes. Athletes have the opportunity to interact with athletes from other sports while training at NSC-affiliated facilities, thus leading to information sharing among athletes and coaches from various sports. Nonetheless, some key informants feel that there is a need to expand the NSC

network to improve access, as some NSC service providers are not conveniently located. Also, a national partner observes that the training environment for athletes has been improved mostly at the Calgary Centre, but less so at others.

(b) Case Study Findings

Respondents in the case studies most often point to the fact that NSCs allow athletes to train closer to home as evidence of the contribution of Centres to enhancing the training environment for athletes. Respondents also note that the Centres provide support to coaches, thus allowing them to focus their attention on the training. Specialized service providers, such as physical fitness coaches, feel that coaches should be further encouraged to use specialized services like fitness or strength and conditioning coaches. They note that these specialists have university degrees, often at the master's or doctoral levels, while typical coaches may only have limited exposure to these subjects through workshops. They note that many coaches may feel defensive or threatened when first working with these specialists, but most often they eventually realize how the athlete is better served with this additional expertise.

Case studies reveal a preference for having National Sport Centres physically attached to a large multi-sport training facility. Many respondents describe the positive attributes of this situation and highlight the potential benefits, such as physiotherapy available at the training site, greater contact with national athletes, and greater contact between high-performance athletes from different sports. It may also encourage coaches and athletes to make more use of the Centre's services. The "virtual Centres" maintain that being located within a sport facility would help with coordination and communication issues. However, in terms of enhancing the athletes' training environment, the "virtual Centres" may provide more service alternatives to meet the athletes' unique needs. For example, one Centre arranges to have massage therapists come on site when the athletes of one of their partner sports complete their work-out.

Facilities that partner with NSCs, such as universities and municipal or provincial facilities, often provide special privileges to carded athletes to encourage these athletes to train in their centres. For example, one partner sport complex is in the planning stages of creating a weight room to be used exclusively for carded athletes. This complex already donates the space for the NSC and additional rooms for the exclusive use of high-performance athletes.



(c) Survey Findings

Survey results indicate that the NSC initiative has had some success in providing an enriched training environment for athletes:

- most athletes agree that the Centre has responded adequately to the needs of athletes by introducing new services and programs quickly (77 per cent agree and only four per cent disagree), and the same pattern of findings is observed for coaches;
- the majority of athletes feel that their training environment has improved significantly as a result of their association with the Centre (62 per cent agree and only 12 per cent disagree), and results of the coaches survey echo this general view; and
- responses from coaches suggest some moderate improvement in the amount of support for sport-specific equipment since the Centres were established.

5.4 Enhanced Coaching Environment

(a) Interview Findings

Key informants identify a number of steps the NSCs have taken to enhance the coaching environment, including better access to coaching information and services, planning software that coaches can use, seminars delivered by sports experts, decision-making workshops for coaches, educational opportunities through the National Coaching Institute and sport science consulting. One respondent also notes that the NSC will “trouble shoot” for coaches (e.g., lobbying for support on behalf of one female coach to allow her to keep her infant off-site at the Sydney Olympics).

In the view of one NSF respondent, support to coaches could be improved if the national coaching certification program was more flexible to allow all part-time coaches to hold full-time jobs and pursue coaching at the same time. It is also felt that some centralization of services, such as through dedicated facilities, would improve the coaching environment by allowing coaches to control as many variables as possible when training athletes. In addition, an NSF representative argues that there is still a need to allow coaches to spend more of their time coaching as well as a need for more mentorship from head coaches. Finally, one respondent feels there should be some system in place to facilitate the transition for coaches who have to relocate their families to be close to training facilities.

(b) Case Study Findings

In the view of many NSC case study respondents, one of the most notable contributions to an enhanced coaching environment is the involvement of all NSCs in coach training programs, such as those through the National Coaching Institute (NCI) which provide Level 4 and 5 coaching education. Respondents note that with additional support programs, such as salary support, many more coaches are completing the training.

Training group partnerships help establish full-time stable coaching positions through coach salary support. Centres contribute to coaches' salaries as long as they meet certain conditions: they must be in partnership with other organizations; the positions supported must be full-time positions; and the athletes who will benefit from this service must be high-performance athletes. Partnerships are also established with other coaching organizations to improve training resources. For example, one Centre has formed links with other international coaching organizations to combine funds for the development of a shared virtual resource centre.

Results of the case studies also indicate that the issue of equity in coaching is being addressed within the Centres. For instance, Centres have initiatives in place to encourage more women into coaching (and coaching at higher levels) by providing support and incentives such as the Salary Supplement Program, as well as professional development programs and scholarship support to female coaches who have been admitted into the NCI. The Centres have also organized lectures and workshops on policy on gender equity in sport.

On the question of the overall quality of Canadian coaching, results of the case studies are mixed. Some respondents indicate that the current level of support to coaches may still not be adequate since it is felt that many sports are losing their top coaches to other countries. Other respondents complain that the quality of coaching in Canada is low in comparison to other countries due to the poor coaching education in Canada. These respondents believe the creation of a coaching undergraduate degree would provide coaches with more specialized training that would equal the education received by strength and conditioning coaches and physiotherapists, who often need a master's or a doctorate degree to work with high-performance athletes. Several respondents also note that Canada often hires "other countries' reject coaches" and that Canada has

difficulty attracting and retaining good coaches. Many respondents blame low salaries as the cause of the Canadian coaching problems.

(c) Survey Findings

In the survey of athletes, only a minority of respondents agree that the Centre has provided them with the opportunity to train with a set of coaches of a much higher quality than they would otherwise have had (29 per cent agree while 42 per cent disagree). Note that improvement in the quality of coaches is perceived to be greater for training group members (38 per cent agree) than for other registered athletes (20 per cent). Therefore, from the perspective of the athletes surveyed, the NSC initiative has had only limited success in achieving an enhanced coaching environment, though members of designated training groups perceive somewhat more success in this respect. In addition, most coaches surveyed report that their salaries have remained the same since the establishment of the NSC in their area, suggesting more could be done to provide salary support to coaches.

5.5 Increased Opportunities for Coach/Athlete Learning

(a) Interview Findings

Most key informants agree that the NSCs have provided some increased opportunities for coach/athlete learning and training breakthroughs. Some respondents feel that there is a greater willingness to share information now and note that with more Centres, there is less competition between Centres than there was three to four years ago. Specific events, such as athlete or coaching seminars, are felt to promote information sharing among coaches and athletes at their level. Other respondents note that the capacity for learning opportunities is not yet fully developed and organized but they expect better information sharing practices to evolve with the Centres. Moreover, more resources, more full-time coaches and the development of Sport Canada policy in this area could help to improve the Centre synergy. More information concerning the coaching and training activities of other countries is also thought by one respondent to be an area where the NSCs could further enhance coach/athlete learning.

(b) Case Study Findings



National Sport Centres inform and provide venues for communication and coordination among athletes, coaches and service providers through their communication tools, i.e., their web sites, newsletter, workshops, social and professional events, and other publications.

All of the NSCs have developed web pages that provide information on their services and programs, and which also highlight the accomplishments of their athletes and coaches. In addition, respondents are pleased with the expected and unexpected results of their publications, such as the *Podium* or weekly *Multisport* in Montreal. These publications have proven to be excellent communication and promotional devices for the athletes, coaches and the Centres themselves.

Case study findings also suggest that NSC-sponsored events contribute to enhanced learning opportunities. Respondents provide numerous examples of how events hosted by the Centres provide opportunities for coaches from different sports to share training problems and learn from one another. For instance, one respondent reports how a Cirque du Soleil coach helped a gymnastics coach with choreography after a coaches meeting held by the Centre. As well, many respondents feel interaction among national athletes and coaches from different sports tends to spark a renewed enthusiasm and excitement among all participants.

(c) Survey Findings

In the survey, most coaches also agree that it is important for them to have the opportunity to meet and discuss training experiences and techniques (e.g., through meetings and luncheons) with coaches from other sports on an ongoing basis, and for many, their local NSC provides a good deal of opportunity for them to do so. Of those who have attended at least one of these information sessions (virtually all of the coaches surveyed), most feel these opportunities to exchange information have been very beneficial to their coaching. Nonetheless, a large proportion of coaches feel the NSC could provide additional support in this area.

In terms of more structured training activities, a large majority of coaches feel the National Coaching Institute does a great deal to effectively train and prepare Level 4 coaches to work with high-performance athletes.

5.6 Increased Collaboration Among Service Providers and Technical Leaders

(a) *Interview Findings*

In the view of a number of key informants, collaboration among service providers and technical leaders has improved under the NSCs. For many, the difference has simply involved an increased access to service providers that coaches did not have before. One respondent reports that the NSC has linked them with a good physiotherapist and freed up more of their time to speak with the people working with the athletes, to monitor athletes' progress and ensure they are on track. For another, the NSC has meant that their coaches have someone who knows who and what they can have access to. The NSC, coaches and service providers are located close to one another and are thus working together to ensure the services are well coordinated and to share information among service providers and athletes.

(b) *Case Study Findings*

Most case study respondents feel that collaboration among service providers and technical leaders is enhanced in situations where the NSCs are in close proximity to or housed within large multi-sport training facilities. Collaboration among service providers and technical leaders is also increased because of the good technical research done in their region's university. One such example of beneficial research to sport is the research conducted at the Kinesiology Department at the University of Calgary. Other Centres note that the kinesiology departments of their region's universities are weak in terms of their sport science needs. Several Centres mention the need to improve sport science research for their partner sports, and most of these Centres refer to Calgary as exemplary in this field. Respondents from NSCs in these regions feel that an important approach to fostering partnerships among service providers and coaches has been the development of Performance Enhancement Teams. Other respondents complain of the problems stemming from having scattered facilities in the cities, because athletes and coaches do not like travelling long distances from one facility to another for training and services like physiotherapy and massage therapy. They suggest that it would be much more reasonable for the athletes and coaches to have all of their training and services centralized, ideally in one facility. Some of these "virtual Centres" are also in the process of adopting the PET approach and would further benefit from having as many members of the same teams as possible training in a single facility.



(c) Survey Findings

Results of the coaches survey suggest that some assistance is required to improve or promote interaction between coaches and sport medicine providers to ensure optimal preparation of their athletes. Fewer than half of the coaches surveyed feel there is a great deal of interaction in this regard, whereas the remaining coaches feel this type of interaction is occurring to only a moderate or small extent.

5.7 Increased Resources for Athlete Services

(a) Interview Findings

National partners and NSF respondents agree that the NSCs have increased resources for athlete services. Examples include increased funding support, tool-kit seminars (e.g., in sport science and medicine) that NSFs are unable to host, greater access to service providers that guide athletes to new techniques/contacts, and more funds for coaching. One NSF respondent maintains, however, that resources for athlete services could be more efficiently used if the Centres focussed more on achieving high-performance results which, in some instances, requires focussing the sport in only one or two Centres.

(b) Case Study Findings

Respondents in the case studies also agree that resources have increased for athlete services since the inception of the National Sport Centres. In addition to core funding from the Canadian Olympic Association, Coaching Association of Canada and Sport Canada, Centres receive financial and promotional support from provinces, municipalities and the private sector in the form of bursaries, office space, and agreements with service providers. Respondents also note that there is more regional support for the national athletes and coaches who train in a given region because the public becomes more familiar with the sport, there is more coverage in the local media, and a fan base forms. As well, local businesses often help promote these athletes. For example, one athlete was accepted in the Career Opportunity Program with UPS and was featured on UPS express envelopes. Respondents also note how different partners (e.g, provinces, municipalities,

private sector) organize fund-raising events to help support the athletes. For example, one NSC city raised funds to help member athletes go to the Sydney Olympics.

(c) Survey Findings

Results of the survey of coaches suggest that resources for athlete services are perceived to have increased since the NSCs were first established. In particular, most coaches feel that support in the areas of sport science and sport medicine have increased over this period.

5.8 Stronger Linkages with the Local Sport Community

(a) Interview Findings

Although national partners and a number of NSF representatives believe that stronger linkages between the NSCs and local sport communities have been forged, these linkages do not appear to be occurring in all regions or for all sports.

A few respondents report that the NSCs are not only helping the high-performance athletes, but the up-and-coming athletes as well. One NSF respondent notes that services provided to national team athletes were extended to junior national team athletes because they were involved in the training pool, so sport specialists were able to provide services to all of the athletes and similar attention was paid to the coaches in terms of training. In some regions, NSCs have been proactive in getting involved at the local level and have hired someone to coordinate leadership services and organization on behalf of local sport organizations and have been actively involved in the area of coaching education.

In other regions, however, a number of respondents feel that little has been done to develop relationships with local sport communities. One key informant points out that the NSCs may pose a threat to existing sport bodies, especially those that are not partner sports. The NSC staff in this region have been working hard to try to get people on board to work together for a stronger sport community. Another NSF respondent observes that the NSCs do not really focus on the local sport community and any local impacts the Centres do have are indirect (e.g., information sharing). Finally, in the view of one NSF respondent, the biggest challenge lies in building relationships with Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs). PSOs should partner with the local NSCs to support local



sport development so that over the long term, the Centres could develop sport-specific programs that would work in collaboration with PSOs rather than competing with them for athletes.

(b) Case Study Findings

In general, case study respondents believe that there is some increase in the linkages with the local sport community. Respondents note that the National Sport Centres are forming more partnerships with regional training facilities, universities and with the private sector for human resources and facility access for high-performance athletes. For example, one respondent explains that “... because athletes have passes to work out in a lot of different training facilities, the general public actually sees the athletes work out and this gets kids and even grown-ups all excited to see Olympic athletes in their neighbourhood.”

As well, respondents feel that: (1) NSC publications reach the local community and inform them of events and results of teams and athletes; (2) strong relationships are being formed with the local media; (3) athletes, coaches and service providers are collaborating in conducting high-performance demonstrations, workshops and speeches; (4) partnerships are developing with local stakeholders and local key individuals for sponsorship; (5) NSCs are often present at local coaching conferences and symposia; and (6) partnerships are being made with regional sport centres, universities, training facilities, and local businesses.

Still, many of these respondents stress the need to provide more services to the developmental athletes who currently fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial government or in the grey area between jurisdictions. Although some provincial governments have increased funding to the NSC in their region in order to provide developing athletes with services similar to those provided to high-performance athletes, this is not occurring uniformly across all NSC regions. Respondents largely feel that the federal government should take the initiative in providing more support to the developmental athletes, especially in those regions where the province is unable to contribute in this area. These respondents believe that this is the best way of improving the quality of the future high-performance athletes.

(c) Survey Findings

Results of the survey of coaches suggest that technical programming among club, provincial and national levels is currently fairly well coordinated, although there is still room for improvement. Similarly, a large number of coaches feel the NSC in their region has played a significant role in this regard, although similar numbers of coaches feel the NSCs have played only a small or moderate role in the development of coordinated programming among these various levels.

5.9 Contribution to Sport Canada Objectives

(a) Interview Findings

As discussed earlier in Section 3.2, key informants believe that the objectives and activities of the National Sport Centres are generally compatible with the four key objectives of Sport Canada. Similarly, key informants observe that the NSCs have in fact had an impact and contributed to the achievement of Sport Canada's objectives.

Regarding the Sport Canada objective to support high-performance athletes and coaches, all national partners and NSF representatives feel that the Centres have done a great deal, for instance, through training camps, the provision of athlete services, and support for coaches' salaries. One NSF respondent points out, however, that there is a need to provide more education for coaches and to address the problem of coaches leaving sport because of a lack of job security.

Many key informants feel that the NSCs have helped to develop the national sport system, for example, through partner sports, funding for training camps, training groups, coaches, the provision of services to athletes at both the national and provincial levels, attempts to standardize the services across the network of Centres, and the sharing of information with athletes at all levels. Other respondents feel that the development work has been largely limited to sport at the elite levels, however. Moreover, one NSF representative argues that Sport Canada needs to define more clearly exactly what a national sport system is supposed to be in Canada and to take concrete action toward developing such a system.

In terms of strategically positioning and raising the profile of sport, key informants note that the NSCs have contributed by doing media announcements and press stories, by keeping the

media informed about national team programs and individual athletes, and by forming partnerships across levels of government and departments. An advantage of the NSCs is that they are able to leverage their membership to draw media attention. As one respondent notes, when the NSCs hold a press conference many athletes will show, which in turn attracts more media and more coverage. Most respondents nevertheless feel the NSCs' gains have been only moderate in this area. On a related point, one NSF representative suggests that Canadian Heritage/Sport Canada should do more to increase public awareness of the NSCs and to promote the benefits of the Centres during Olympic competitions.

All key informants agree that the NSCs have helped improve access and equity in sport. They perceive that able-bodied and Paralympic athletes and coaches are treated equally, events are wheelchair accessible, and the Centres focus on athletes' talent and performance, not their gender or race. As one NSF respondent notes, rather than decreeing an access/equity mandate, the NSC has worked to gather input from the athletes and uses this effectively. Thus, in this respondent's view, the NSCs have done a better job than federal agencies in treating Paralympic athletes equally. Another NSF respondent points out that their coaches have been able to access coaching grants and that mentoring programs for female coaches have helped.

(b) Case Study Findings

Overall, case study respondents believe that the NSCs support Sport Canada's objectives, however, it is perceived that some Centres promote some objectives better than other Centres. For example, some NSCs have many regional sport centres while some Centres have very few. Respondents at NSCs with many regional partners feel they are contributing more significantly to Sport Canada's objective to improve access in sport by providing services and resources close to where the athletes are located.

All respondents believe that the NSCs are providing support to high-performance athletes and coaches, although a few respondents note that the original mandate of the NSCs is not as broad as Sport Canada's wide-reaching objectives. In their view, the Centres were originally set up primarily to support high-performance athletes to achieve international results. Many state that in order for the NSCs to meet Sport Canada's objectives, the Centres would have to better position themselves in terms of human and financial resources. Many respondents suggest that clarifying

the national mandate would make all of the individual Centre mandates clearer and more compatible with one another.

All respondents believe that the NSCs are contributing to developing the national sport system and that they have helped to strategically position and raise the profile of sport. Most respondents indicate that they have strong relationships with local community sport organizations and with the media, thus contributing to these objectives.

Based on the results of the case studies, all Centres are felt to be supporting the objective of improving access and equity in sport, although (as noted) some Centres seem to promote this objective better than others. Most NSCs make no distinction between different types athletes and sports in terms of access to services, except in the case of addressing their specific needs, and most athletes have complete access to all services offered. Although most respondents agree that all athletes have the same level of access to services provided by the NSCs, some respondents perceive that not all services are equally accessible to all athletes and that some sports are favoured over others.

(c) Survey Findings

Results from the survey of athletes suggest that the NSC initiative has contributed to Sport Canada's objective to support high-performance sport. Almost half of survey respondents (47 per cent) agree that their athletic performance has improved significantly since they became associated with the Centre, while 19 per cent disagree. This finding is consistent with the results of the coaches survey. Moreover, 57 per cent of athlete respondents, and a similar proportion of coaches, agree that the services offered by the Centre have played a major role in their improved performance, and only six per cent of athletes disagree on this point.



5.10 Factors Influencing Success

(a) *Interview Findings*

National partners and NSF representatives identify a number of factors which have facilitated the success of the National Sport Centres:

- ❑ ***Quality of NSC human resources:*** In the view of most respondents, a key factor in the success of the overall initiative is the quality of human resources associated with the Centres. The NSC Presidents are highly knowledgeable and skilled professionals with credibility in the sport community. NSC staff members are dedicated experts and leaders in their sport who are proactive in creating training groups, understanding and helpful. The NSC Boards include representatives from all key national and local stakeholders (including athletes) and this helps to create some commonality across all Centres.
- ❑ ***Partnerships:*** Several key informants also note that the partnerships developed in support of the NSCs have been a strength, including the partnership among Sport Canada, the Canadian Olympic Association, the Coaching Association of Canada as well as partnerships with provincial governments. The national partners have a good, collaborative relationship and have provided funding and direction for the initiative. Partnerships among NSCs have also contributed to their success. As one respondent points out, cooperation and communication between two Centres has been beneficial by creating greater access to services in different regions and providing opportunities and flexibility to help the NSFs accomplish their goals.
- ❑ ***Clear NSC mandate:*** In the view of some key informants, the fact that the Centres have a clear mandate that focuses on high-performance sport is a facilitating factor. Moreover, the Centres' mandate incorporates multiple sports and a strong focus on athletes and their needs. Related to this, the extensive stakeholder consultations that were done as part of the development of the Centres have ultimately facilitated the success of the initiative.
- ❑ ***Flexibility:*** A primary strength is that the NSCs are flexible enough to work within an NSF's existing structure to provide the support the sport requires. In addition, some key informants perceive that Sport Canada is flexible with respect to the NSCs, allowing them the autonomy to operate in the way that works best for their particular region.
- ❑ ***Local community support/pride:*** Support from the local community and pride in the NSC is cultivated if the Centres are run properly. Community support facilitates the success of Centre activities.



On the other hand, key informants also identify factors that have impeded or been barriers to the success of the NSCs:

- ❑ ***Lack of coordination and national standards/accountability:*** Some key informants feel that service delivery from the various NSCs across Canada is not sufficiently coordinated and consistent/standardized. This may be due to the fact that each Centre is responsible to its Board rather than to a centralized, national authority. Such an authority is needed to provide a national plan/direction and national accountability.
- ❑ ***Insufficient funding and resources:*** In the view of many key informants, the lack of funding limits the number of partner sports an NSC is able to accommodate and the amount of access to facilities and service providers it can offer athletes and coaches. In the view of a national partner, the NSCs have so much potential to tap but cannot do so due to a lack of resources. Another national partner estimates that the Centres would need four to five times their current level of funding in order to be comparable to the approaches of other countries. In some cases, it is simply difficult to find any qualified human resources (e.g., applied sport scientists) in Canada. On a related matter, an NSF representative notes that a lack of flexibility in how NSC funds can be used has been a barrier. For instance, it was difficult to get the NSC to assist their team in accessing the necessary training outside of Canada and they would like to reallocate funds to support services their team requires if their athletes are not using the base services provided by the Centre.
- ❑ ***Lack of training facilities:*** Some of the Centres (i.e., the “virtual Centres”) lack their own training facilities and as such are limited in what they can offer high-performance athletes. Related to this, there is a lack of prospective partners with high quality training facilities (e.g., universities).
- ❑ ***High coach turnover:*** In the view of some national partners and NSF representatives, the high turnover of coaches is a major problem because athletes need to keep adjusting to new coaches and the coaches themselves have a great deal to learn when they first begin their position. Coaches appear to leave their NSC position (typically every four years, following the Olympic cycle) because their salaries and job security are inadequate. Some leave for higher paying coaching jobs in other countries such as the United States while others leave coaching altogether.
- ❑ ***Inability/reluctance of some NSFs to use NSCs:*** Some NSFs have not taken advantage of the opportunity offered by the NSCs due to a lack of funding, human resources or a lack of vision. Increased collaboration between NSFs and Centres would be mutually beneficial.

(b) Case Study Findings

Similar to the interview findings, respondents in case studies note that the chief factor contributing to the success of NSCs is the quality of the National Sport Centre staff. Staff members

are thought to be passionate, dedicated, hard working and enthusiastic, and bring strong reputations and experiences within the sport community to their jobs. Their various backgrounds in sport (e.g., many NSC staff are former high-performance athletes) mean they have greater empathy and knowledge of the issues facing athletes and coaches and thus, are better able to address their needs. As well, the continuity of the staff (many have been on board since the Centres began) has also meant that relationships with partners have had a chance to grow and strengthen.

A number of additional qualities of the Centres are also thought to be facilitating factors, including:

- innovative models and programs, such as Performance Enhancement Teams and Teamwork leadership;
- the leadership, support and guidance of the founding partners without whom some respondents feel the concept of the NSCs would not have been realised and whose commitment and continuing support of the NSCs have allowed them to grow and flourish;
- the regional approach to service delivery, which is thought to allow different NSCs to develop agreements, partnerships and initiatives according to needs of the local sports community;
- the partners' ability to commit to a common vision;
- the NSCs' ability to find and maintain good sponsorships; and
- the strong leadership coming from the coaches.

A number of barriers to the NSCs' success were also identified. Among these, respondents note that given the nature of some Centres (i.e., "virtual Centres" that do not have a training facility) it is difficult, from a marketing perspective, to attract corporate sponsorship because potential sponsors do not see in what they would invest. Many also feel that NSC partners are competing for the same sponsors within the community (e.g., NSFs, Provincial Sport Organizations).

As well, respondents unanimously agree that the finite level of funding provided to the Centres poses limitations to their activities and initiatives, including the size of their service delivery networks, the number of training group partnerships they are able to support, and the quality of services provided. Most respondents feel that their Centre's human resources are fully committed and they cannot do more with the amount of funding they currently receive.



Respondents also note that the stress level that currently exists within the sport system is a barrier to the success of the NSCs. For example, numerous respondents perceive that there are conflicts and animosity felt between the NSCs and some NSFs, which perceive that the Centres have been gaining more government funding and a higher profile in the Canadian sport system at their (the National Sport Federations') expense.

Some respondents complain that politicians are using sport for political gains and make decisions that have little pay-back for sport. It is perceived that sport in Canada is too political and this issue is an important barrier to the NSCs' capacity to produce high-performance results.

Another perceived barrier to the NSCs' success is the resistance of some non-profit organizations to become involved with a Centre. In addition, some respondents perceive that there are mixed messages from Sport Canada — that is, a conflict between the results *versus* access objective or excellence *versus* equity objective. In other words, in the view of these respondents, the Sport Canada objective of access and equity in sport is not necessarily compatible with the achievement of excellence and podium results.

6. COST-EFFECTIVENESS AND ALTERNATIVES

6.1 Cost-Effectiveness of NSC Service Delivery

(a) *Interview Findings*

Key informants agree that the delivery of services by the National Sport Centres is more cost-effective than the delivery of the same services would be by National Sport Federations. Some respondents point out that the NSFs do not currently deliver the same services as the NSCs and would be unable to afford to do so, thus the NSCs are filling an important gap in services. Others point to the fact that the use of a single centre to deliver a range of services to multiple sports is more cost-effective than the single-sport focus of NSFs because there are economies of scale (e.g., there are discounted rates due to the large volume of athletes using the same services). This multi-sport approach of the Centres reduces duplication among NSFs, leverages the resources from many sports, and benefits from information sharing among several service providers and sports (e.g., approaches to optimize high-performance results). In addition, one respondent perceives that the operational focus of the NSCs means that more funds go directly to where they are needed (i.e., services for athletes and coaches) and not to administration.

In the view of some national partners, it is not possible to compare the cost-effectiveness of NSCs and NSFs in all cases. For example, there are occasions where an NSF needs to take a sport medicine doctor to a competition in another country with the national team. This is a very costly but necessary service and clearly not one that a National Sport Centre could provide on-site. One national partner also notes that the service provided by an NSF is essential in cases where there is only a “virtual” NSC (i.e., the Centre does not have its own training facility) and the NSF chooses not to use this Centre. In such a case, it would probably be more cost-effective for funds for the particular sport to go directly to the NSF rather than being channelled through the NSC.

(b) *Case Study Findings*

Most case study respondents feel the delivery of services through the NSCs is more cost-effective than the delivery of the same services by the NSFs. It was remarked, however, that the NSC services do not duplicate but rather complement those provided by the NSFs. It is generally

felt that the NSF's do not have the time or resources to support athletes and coaches through the development of networks and partnerships with sport agencies and service providers. As well, by representing athletes from many different sports, the NSCs are able to leverage funds and realise economies of scale that would not be possible even if the NSF's were in a position to provide these services on their own. Examples of this include the negotiation of agreements with service providers to provide services to NSC clients at reduced rates and in-kind contributions from municipal governments for office space. Finally, some respondents feel the dedication and talent of the NSC staff have led to value-added service, as staff will often go beyond the call of duty to address the needs of athletes and coaches (e.g., providing assistance on the weekends).

Although virtually all respondents see the NSCs as a cost-effective means of delivering services, some nevertheless argue that the initiative would be more cost-effective if there were fewer NSCs, thereby reducing duplication of services and dilution of funds.

6.2 Suggested Improvements to NSC Service Delivery

(a) Interview Findings

Despite strong support for the NSC initiative, key informants provide a number of suggestions for how the initiative might be improved. To begin, several respondents suggest additional services or improvements to existing services at the NSCs. These include: more marketing assistance for athletes; athlete advocacy to help the athlete resolve issues that may arise between them and their training centre (i.e., how processes work, assistance to cope with housing, selection criteria, career planning, etc.); a mechanism to assist athletes and coaches to make the transition from living at home to living near the NSC; more leading edge services for the preparation of athletes; more services which offer the latest high tech equipment; better athletic/training facilities for Centres that do not currently have their own facility; and access to affordable facilities when teams are travelling in Canada. In addition, some national partners stress that suitably qualified coaches and professionals should be hired (e.g., coaches who are qualified to travel with the national team to Olympic competitions). One respondent also states that with more funding, the NSCs would be able to provide more of the same services and be a better initiative as a result.

Other comments deal with service delivery more generally. One NSF respondent feels that if the NSC did a better job of coordinating athlete and coach services by not duplicating services for these two groups, the NSC could free up time and resources. In addition, some national partners suggest that services (in particular, sport science and sport medicine) and the sharing of learnings about high-performance service need to be better coordinated across Centres. Practitioners in these fields are extremely busy and need support to facilitate the sharing of information. Others feel there should be more flexibility in the way the NSCs provide support. One respondent warns that if there are too many stipulations on how funding is utilized, NSFs may put together a program they do *not* really need just so that they can acquire funding for services they do actually need. Another NSF representative points out that NSCs vary in terms of their flexibility concerning budget expenditures in different areas and that in some regions, they have been unable to shift the unused portion of the budget to other needed areas. Similarly, one NSF identified a required service that did not fit into any category of services offered by the NSC, thus the NSC had a hard time accommodating them. In this respondent's view, more flexibility is required to accommodate the particular needs of each sport. Finally, standardization in the services provided and eligibility for NSC services is believed to be an area where the NSCs could improve. In the view of one respondent, all NSCs should have a campus-style environment modelled after the Calgary NSC which helps athletes to better manage their time and program. Still, a national partner notes that standardization needs to be balanced with the flexibility to adapt the NSC service delivery model to the particular needs of each city/region and the athletes/sports using each Centre.

A third general area where key informants feel improvements could be made concerns the objectives and mandate of the NSC initiative. Some respondents feel that the NSCs should play a bigger role in working with the sport development system because this would have long-term benefits for sport. A national partner points out that this need is particularly great for team sports (given Canada's poor performance internationally) and that the NSCs should be sponsoring junior age group teams. In the view of another NSF respondent, however, their NSC-affiliated training centre goes too far in this respect and developing athletes should not have the same amount of access as national team athletes.



(b) Case Study Findings

Case study respondents provide some suggestions for improving NSC service delivery. One area in which improvements could be made involves the standardization and coordination of services nationally among different NSCs. For instance, a centralized management team would be helpful to coordinate NSC activities on a national scale in such areas as marketing and promotion. As well, a standardized system for categorizing athletes and determining their eligibility to access NSC services would reduce confusion for athletes and permit movement from Centre to Centre. Coordination of services is also felt to be necessary among service providers and between NSCs and NSFs in order to reduce duplication and improve the effectiveness of and access to services.

In addition, some NSCs are currently supporting a proposal to channel all of the resources currently applied to high-performance sport from various partners through a single organization (a role that could be played by the NSCs), thus allowing NSFs to approach only one organization for funding rather than approaching all traditional funding partners separately (i.e., Sport Canada, the Canadian Olympic Association, the Coaching Association of Canada, the provincial government and NSCs). It is felt that this approach would provide one set of criteria and objectives to be applied to the funding, thus reducing confusion and paperwork for the NSFs.

Other suggested improvements include:

- more funding to support coaches;
- expanding the focus of the Centres to include developing athletes;
- more commitment to sport science programs;
- increasing the number of facilities available to high-performance athletes; and
- fewer NSCs to reduce duplication.

(c) Survey Findings

In the survey of athletes, respondents were asked to specify other services that could be beneficial to them but which are not currently available at or through the National Sport Centre. In many cases, they simply restated the types of services already provided at/through the Centre, which may indicate that they would like improved access to the current services more than different types of services. These findings may also reflect the fact that not all athletes have access to the

same services. Responses in the coaches survey were similar. Athletes' suggestions for additional athlete services, sport medicine services and sport science services are as follows:

Athlete services:

- career/employment/job placement assistance (13 per cent);
- better facilities/equipment (11 per cent);
- sport medicine counselling (eight per cent);
- personal development seminars (six per cent);
- personal counselling (four per cent);
- educational counselling (two per cent); and
- don't know/no response (56 per cent).

Sport medicine services:

- chiropractic therapy (15 per cent);
- all necessary sport medicine services (15 per cent);
- acupuncture (seven per cent);
- physiotherapy (five per cent);
- massage therapy (four per cent); and
- don't know/no response (54 per cent).

Sport science services:

- physiological testing and monitoring (eight per cent);
- sport psychology (five per cent);
- nutritional counselling (five per cent);
- vitamin supplements (two per cent); and
- don't know/no response (79 per cent).

6.3 Best Practices and Lessons Learned from Other Countries

(a) *Interview Findings*

Most key informants suggest that components of the sport systems in two other countries should be considered for the NSCs. The first is the sport system in the United States, where more corporate sponsorship has enabled them to host international exhibition events, thus providing athletes with more exposure to real competition. When athletes must travel to events, rather than hosting them at home, there is rarely an opportunity to take the whole team so the developing athletes who will be representing Canada in the future do not gain exposure to international competition and do not perform as well when they compete on the international stage. Corporate sponsorship is also thought to provide better athlete support, including incentives and time off to train when athletes are employees of the sponsor companies.

A second model which is highly regarded by NSF representatives and national partners is the Australian model, where areas of excellence are established for different sports. Using this model, all the talent for a given sport is located in one geographic area. Moreover, the Australian Institute of Sport employs coaches directly (unlike in Canada where coaches' salaries are often shared among the NSCs and other organizations) and the sport system in Australia is driven by measurable performance targets (e.g., targeted number of medals to win in international competitions). Respondents feel that this model has several advantages: attracting experts; keeping athletes and sport experts together for training and other services; exposing high-performance athletes and coaches to one another (e.g., for knowledge transfer, networking, brainstorming, multi-mode training); and cost savings by creating one excellent facility rather than several less adequate ones. With this approach, each sport would sign a multi-year contract and be committed to a city and to Sport Canada, so that people who migrate to the centre (e.g., sport science specialists, coaches) have some job stability. As well, incentives would be given to athletes to be part of the NSCs, such as financial resources (i.e., so athletes do not need to have a part-time job),

accommodation, nutritional support, transportation, etc. With this level of support⁷, athletes would probably not question their involvement in sport.

(b) Case Study Findings

Very few case study respondents can provide examples of approaches used in other countries that could be applied in the Canadian context. In fact, a large number of respondents feel that the Canadian model, using the NSCs, is the best approach to developing sport and supporting high-performance athletes and coaches in Canada.

Some respondents nevertheless feel that, while the current NSC model is the most efficient means of service delivery, it would be useful to enhance this model by having centralized multi-sport complexes in major centres to provide an enhanced level of service and expertise. One respondent takes this suggestion a step further and feels the current model could be enhanced by creating centres of excellence, as is done in Australia. As noted, with the Australian model, one city or town is developed as a centre of excellence for a given sport (although more than one sport could be housed within a single city) and resources are dedicated to developing one exceptional sports facility in the centre of excellence, rather than many less adequate facilities scattered throughout the country. It is thought that the advantages of the Australian model are the cost savings realised from having to build fewer facilities, as well as the higher density and better access to top level experts and athletes within a given area.

(c) Findings from International Literature

The assessment of the nature and extent to which other countries have experienced similar geographical challenges in supporting the training needs of their athletes and coaches is brief because there are few countries that are large enough to face this particular challenge. The United Kingdom and Australia are two comparable cases because they have incorporated sporting systems

7. Under the Athlete Assistance Program (AAP), financial support is currently provided for identified Canadian amateur high-performance athletes in the form of monthly living and training allowances (i.e., \$1,100 for Senior card athletes and \$500 for Development card athletes). This interview finding presumably refers to additional support and incentives for an athlete to train at a centre.

that have similarities with the National Sport Centre network in Canada.⁸ All three countries were concerned about improving the performance of their high-performance athletes due to disappointing results at international competitions. Australia and the United Kingdom included new state-of-the-art facilities, and programs and services geared towards improving not only the performance of athletes and coaches as part of the restructuring of their high-performance sport system, but also the inclusion of services that contribute to the overall welfare of the coaches and athletes. All three countries offer services that promote a “balanced” or “holistic” lifestyle, such as workshops on personal financial planning, media training, education guidance, and career planning. It is now widely recognized that ignoring the bigger picture in the search for sporting success can undermine the mental strength needed to succeed. Research shows that athletes with a balanced lifestyle are more likely to achieve their sporting goals, cope better with stresses such as injury and retirement, and have more confidence in what the future will hold after sport.

All three countries make use of support services such as the Athlete Career and Education (ACE) Program. All three also provide expertise in sport science, sport medicine, coaching, athlete services, performance planning, personal development training and information technology.

Australia was the first of these three countries to complete its redesigned sport system to better meet the needs of high-performance athletes and coaches. Australia’s solution materialized with the formation of the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) soon after disappointing results from the Australian team at the 1976 Montreal Olympics. The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) was opened on January 26, 1981. It operates nationally from a 65-hectare site in Canberra. It is a pre-eminent elite sports training institution providing athletes with high-performance training facilities, coaching, equipment, sport medicine and sport science facilities as well as accommodation for 350 residents on site. Currently the AIS offers scholarships every year to almost 600 athletes in 34 programs in 25 sports, and employs approximately 75 coaches. Programs are located in Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, the Gold Coast and Mount Buller, as well as in Canberra. The AIS has also been offering scholarships to disabled athletes since 1989, which were expanded as a separate Athletes with Disabilities scholarship in 1993. The program has set a benchmark for the

8. The information for this section is retrieved from the web sites: for Canada: http://www.pch.gc.ca/Sportcanada/SC_E/nsce.htm for Australia: <http://www.ausport.gov.au/> for United Kingdom: http://www.uksport.gov.uk/generic_template.asp?id=11764

training of athletes with a disability. Australia also offers an indigenous athletes program that operates in conjunction with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

The United Kingdom's sport system is more similar to that of Canada, although it did oscillate between the choice of a centralized system and a more decentralized, network approach. Following repeated disappointing performances by English and British teams on the international stage, the Government announced proposals to set up a "British Academy of Sport", as a single academy for elite sports men and women. This was part of the Government's policy paper "Sport: Raising the Game" in 1995. In discussions athletes, coaches and sports National Governing Bodies welcomed the principle of setting up a high-performance Academy, but they felt that a network of facilities and services across the UK would be a better approach and would allow athletes and coaches to train closer to their homes and places of work.

The United Kingdom Sports Institute (UKSI) Central Services, located with UK Sport in London, is still in the process of being completed. Once completed, it will coordinate service delivery throughout the UK and the Central Services team and the network of centres will work together to serve the needs of athletes (including disabled), coaches and performance directors by enhancing the content and quality of their training programs. They will be supported in their quest to achieve their stated targets through the provision of services wherever they may train or compete in the world via the most modern, efficient and interactive methods of communications and information technology. The UK Sports Institute, via the network of centres, delivers a range of prime sport science and medicine services. These include the Athlete Career and Education Program (ACE UK), the World Class Coaching Program, sport physiology, biomechanics, sport nutrition, physiotherapy and podiatry.

Canada and the UK are using a network approach instead of a centralized approach like that of Australia believing that this approach is more beneficial to the athletes and coaches because it allows them to work and train closer to their homes and places of work, instead of having to relocate to a distant part of the country. The National Sport Centres' rationale on this point is that this network approach contributes to the holistic development of high-performance athletes, so that

their athletic performance goals are pursued in parallel with their personal, social and career development goals.⁹

The United Kingdom is still in the process of developing its system, so it is not ideal for comparison with Canada at this time. Australia's system appears to be very similar to that of Canada in its focus on constructing a state-of-the-art environment for the athletes and coaches in which they receive leading edge sport science, sport medicine and other sport services. The principal difference between Canada and Australia is that the latter has opted for a more centralized approach while the former has taken a de-centralized network approach. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to assess which system is more suitable for a country that experiences geographical challenges in supporting the training needs of high-performance athletes and coaches.

Another significant difference between Canada on the one hand and Australia and the United Kingdom on the other hand is funding. Australia and the United Kingdom inject substantially more funding into their sport program than does Canada. The Australian federal government takes greater initiative in funding not only its high-performance athletes, but also the developmental athletes. The United Kingdom funds its athletes with proceeds from lotteries. Canada devotes significantly less money to its high-performance athletes and developmental athletes (i.e., talented non-carded athletes with the potential to develop into high-performance athletes) and has significantly fewer scholarships for its athletes and coaches.

It should also be noted that Canada is unique with its National Sport Centres because this system is exclusively responsible for services for high-performance athletes and does not deal with training facilities directly. This separation is not so clear within the United Kingdom and the Australian high-performance programs.

9. *National Sport Centres Position Paper*, January 1999.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The key evaluation findings are summarized and conclusions are drawn in this final chapter. In addition, recommendations are made for improving the National Sport Centres initiative.

7.1 Rationale and Relevance

(a) *Continuing Need for NSC initiative*

The rationale for the NSC initiative is as follows: (1) in order to compete at the international level, Canadian athletes need an array of high-performance services but not all NSFs are able to provide this level of service to athletes in their sport across the country; (2) more athletes from more sports can be supported at a regional multi-service, multi-sport National Sport Centre and can probably receive these services close to their home; and (3) at such a Centre, high-performance coaches can work more closely with their athletes and can also provide development opportunities for aspiring coaches.

The evaluation evidence generally supports this rationale and clearly indicates that the National Sport Centres continue to be needed to support high-performance sport and to help improve Canada's performance in international sport competitions. In the opinion of virtually all respondents consulted in key informant interviews and case studies, the NSCs are offering essential services that high-performance athletes would not otherwise be receiving, certainly not close to their home. A key reason for this is that the National Sport Federations simply do not have the resources to offer the level and mix of sport medicine, sport science and athlete services that are available at or through the Centres. Moreover, the survey findings that the majority of athletes regard the opportunity to train close to their home and to discuss training experiences/techniques with athletes from other sports as important further support the need for the NSC initiative.

(b) *Compatibility with Federal Government Objectives*

The evaluation findings indicate that the rationale and activities of the National Sport Centres are generally compatible with and have contributed to Sport Canada's four key objectives:

to support high-performance athletes and coaches (e.g., through the provision of a range of high-performance services at or through the Centres); to develop the national sport system (e.g., through the development of partnerships with National Sport Federations, provincial governments and local communities, the formation of training groups of elite athletes, and the sharing of information nationally); to strategically position and raise the profile of sport (e.g., through the promotion of sport in the media, web sites and publications, and Centre athletes serving as role models to the local communities); and to improve access and equity in sport (e.g., through the expansion of Centres into different regions, the focus on athletes' talent as opposed to their gender or race, the equal billing given to Paralympic and able-bodied athletes and coaches, and the wheelchair accessibility of major events).

However, the federal objective to support high-performance sport and results is perceived to conflict to a degree with the access/equity objective, causing some confusion over the NSC initiative's rationale. In the *National Sport Centres Position Paper* (January 1999) prepared by the three national partners, it was noted that the term "high-performance athlete" is intended to include athletes with a disability. Despite this clarification, some confusion remains over the excellence versus access/equity objectives.

7.2 Design and Implementation

(a) *Coordination of High-Performance Services*

The delivery of high-performance services is quite well coordinated among the different partners, due largely to the fact that interaction/communication between the NSCs and service providers is facilitated because they are situated near each other. Service delivery is also well coordinated between NSCs and NSFs though there is room for improvement because some NSFs do not yet have any involvement with a Centre.

Coordination among the different types of service – athlete services, sport medicine and sport science — is perceived to be strong due to the efforts of NSC staff and coaches, particularly at the Centres utilizing Performance Enhancement Teams (PETs) or a similar teamwork approach. One perceived weakness, however, is the duplication between parallel services provided to athletes and coaches. In addition, despite the fact that a draft of Minimum Services at National Sport

Centres for Athletes and Training Groups was prepared in May 1998, many respondents in this evaluation observe that levels of service vary too much from Centre to Centre. Related to this, the training template/paradigm utilized in a given sport can vary for different Centres, which creates problems when members of the national team come together, having been trained somewhat differently. Due to this inconsistency in service, there is a perceived need to improve the degree of coordination across the national network of NSCs (i.e., beyond what the National Coordinating Committee is currently able to provide).

(b) Expanded Regional Approach to NSC Location

The expanded regional approach of the initiative — having the six core Centres located in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax — is generally perceived to facilitate the initiative's contribution to high-performance results. This is mostly because of the provision of a range of high-performance services that were not previously available to many athletes and the improved access to these services for athletes close to their home. In addition, some Centres are strategically located in regions where particular sports have traditionally been strong and have enjoyed community support (e.g., winter sports in Calgary).

On the other hand, many respondents in the evaluation identify potential adverse impacts of the expanded network of NSCs. Given the limited resources available to the initiative, the most common concerns are that the expanded network has resulted in a dilution of resources, expertise and services available to athletes using any one Centre as well as some duplication in administrative tasks and costs for the overall initiative. Views are mixed regarding the value of the additional NSCs in Quebec City and Saskatchewan and of regional centres of excellence, such as the one planned for Edmonton. While some respondents feel that the creation of regional centres affiliated with an NSC offers a suitable and cost-effective approach to increasing the reach of high-performance services, others express concern that recent expansion of the initiative has been unplanned or uncontrolled, arguing that recent decisions to establish new regional centres have been more political than strategic and have not been supported by a thorough needs analysis. They note that these centres do not follow the same partnership model as the six core NSCs and that they may not represent the best use of resources or be ideally located (e.g., in a community with a sufficiently high concentration of high-performance athletes).

(c) Adequacy of Performance Monitoring

There are wide ranging opinions on the adequacy of current data collection and performance monitoring by the NSCs, and a lack of detailed documentary evidence (e.g., listing of data elements in existing data bases at Centres) to confirm or refute stakeholders' varied perceptions. Some respondents in this evaluation believe that insufficient useful data are collected by the Centres, some that too much information is gathered, others that enough information is collected but that the data are not adequately analysed and utilized by the national partners, while still others simply do not know. Considering the majority view and the available documentation, however, it is reasonable to conclude that there is room to improve and standardize the current performance monitoring procedures for purposes of evaluation.

A great deal of descriptive information is collected by each Centre that provides at least partial evidence relating to the eight NSC performance outcomes specified in the Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF) for the NSO Support Program. This information includes: number, types and qualifications of Centre staff and coaches; amount of salary support for coaches from training group partnerships; number of volunteers; services provided and numbers of athletes and coaches receiving these services by sport; detailed financial statements for the Centre; records of athlete training and performance including competition results; subjective data from athlete questionnaires and coach evaluations (e.g., the NSC Annual Athlete Evaluation); and documentary evidence on Centre activities and performance that can be obtained in monitoring reports, progress/status reports, and reports to and minutes of meetings of the Centre Board of Directors. Some of this information and data are collected to meet the requirements for the annual application and review process for the NSCs and for the Sport Funding and Accountability Framework for NSFs. In addition there has been some effort to set performance goals and measure progress toward these goals for individual Centres (e.g., in the Strategic Plan and Accountability Framework for the NSC-Calgary).

The major perceived gaps or limitations with the current performance monitoring procedures are as follows:

- lack of dedicated expertise in performance monitoring and evaluation for the NSC initiative;



- ❑ lack of a centralized, computerized data base designed specifically for performance monitoring for the network of NSCs;
- ❑ lack of data and analysis to demonstrate convincingly the need for funding and the causal impact of funding and services provided on high-performance results;
- ❑ performance measurement tools and standards/expectations tailored for both the fully equipped Centres such as the NSC-Calgary and the “virtual Centres”;
- ❑ lack of standardized data collection, analysis and reporting procedures for each Centre to follow for purposes of performance monitoring and evaluation for the overall NSC initiative; and
- ❑ lack of formal procedures for the initiative’s national partners/National Coordinating Committee to review and utilize performance information.

7.3 Impacts/Outcomes

(a) *Achievement of Intended Outcomes*

It was beyond the scope of the current evaluation to quantify and draw firm conclusions about the incremental impacts of the NSC initiative on high-performance results in sport in Canada. This is because the required analysis was not part of the evaluation (e.g., comparison of competition results before and after the establishment of NSCs, analysis to rule out alternate explanations of any improvements in competition results). The evaluation findings do indicate, however, that the NSC initiative has made progress toward the achievement of each of the eight performance outcomes specified in the RMAF, as highlighted below:

- ❑ ***Enhanced human resources infrastructure capacity:*** With the establishment of the NSCs, new salaried positions have been created and NSC staff members are regarded as an important asset for high-performance sport. In addition, athletes now have access to a broader network of service providers.
- ❑ ***Enhanced training and lifestyle services for athletes:*** Athletes have access to enhanced services and express high levels of satisfaction with all sport medicine and many sport science and athlete services. Coaches’ views are similar. Athletes who are members of a designated training group are, however, less satisfied with some athlete services than other registered athletes. Most athletes feel the services at or through the NSCs — in particular, athlete services and sport medicine — are more effective than the services they used to receive, prior to using the Centre. Services that appear to need to be considered for addition or improvement include assistance with relocation to and accommodation in the community where the NSC is situated, meal passes, job placement, self-marketing and



sponsorships. Moreover, as noted earlier, it is widely perceived that the level of service is inconsistent from one Centre to another.

- ***Enriched training environment for athletes:*** There has been an improvement in athletes' access to enriched services (e.g., strength training and massage therapy) at or through the NSCs. In the survey, most athletes and coaches indicate that their training environment has improved and that the Centre introduces new programs and services quickly to respond to their needs. In addition, half of the athletes belonging to training groups believe that coaching at the NSCs is more effective than the coaching they used to receive, though only one-quarter of other registered athletes observe such an improvement in coaching. Services are also available to under-represented groups such as disabled, aboriginal and female athletes.
- ***Enhanced coaching environment:*** The NSC initiative has had some limited success at enhancing the coaching environment. Financial support in partnership with NSF's and other partners to help cover the salaries for more coaches has been provided through training group partnerships in a number of sports, but there is a perceived need for more highly certified full-time coaches, more funding to provide competitive salaries to attract and retain qualified coaches, and more job security for coaches to help reduce the high coach turnover. In the survey, most coaches do in fact report that their salary has remained the same since the NSC was established in their area. The involvement of NSCs in coach training programs, such as those offered by the National Coaching Institute, helps to enhance the coaching environment, though some stakeholders believe there is room to improve the quality of coaching education in Canada. Moreover, only a minority of athletes in the survey perceives that the NSC has provided them with the opportunity to train with higher quality coaches, though views on the quality of coaching at Centres is somewhat more favourable among training group members.
- ***Increased opportunities for coach/athlete learning:*** The NSCs have provided some opportunities for coach/athlete learning, for example, through athlete or coaching seminars/information sessions (e.g., at which coaches can share what they have learned about high-performance training), workshops with service providers, and web sites, newsletters or other publications. Moreover, having athletes and coaches from several sports at the same Centre provides more opportunities for information sharing.
- ***Increased collaboration among service providers and technical leaders:*** The NSCs have also provided opportunities for increased collaboration among service providers, coaches and technical leaders (e.g., experts with NSF's and universities), due largely to the fact they are situated near one another. In addition, service providers have received specialized training and attended workshops together, though there is a perceived need for more professional development to help promote a holistic training approach. Performance Enhancement Teams are a good illustration of increased collaboration among various service providers and specialists. The NSC-Calgary is singled out as an optimal example because it is affiliated with a multi-sport training facility and can draw on the expertise of sport scientists from the kinesiology department at the University of Calgary. At "virtual Centres" without the same access to training facilities, however, the opportunities for collaboration are thought to be more limited. Also, results from the survey of coaches suggest that more interaction between coaches and sport medicine specialists could be beneficial for athletes.



- ❑ ***Increased resources for athlete services:*** The NSC initiative has helped to increase the resources available for athlete services, for instance: the funding for the initiative from the three national partners; financial and promotional support from provincial and municipal governments as well as the private sector; and in-kind resources from partners, such as free access for athletes to use training facilities at universities and private gyms.
- ❑ ***Stronger linkages with the local sport community:*** Some linkages have been developed with local sport communities, but there is room for improvement and progress in this area appears to vary significantly from one Centre to another. Examples of productive local linkages include: extending services for national team athletes to junior national team athletes; coordination of technical programming among the local club, provincial and national levels; partnerships with local universities, businesses and training facilities; participation of NSC athletes, staff and service providers at local conferences or workshops; and promotion of NSC events, athletes and competition results through the local media.

(b) Contribution to Sport Canada Objectives

As was discussed in Section 7.1, the activities of the National Sport Centres have had an impact and have contributed to the achievement of Sport Canada's four key objectives – to support high-performance athletes and coaches, to develop the national sport system, to strategically position and raise the profile of sport, and to improve access and equity in sport. Respondents in the evaluation do identify some limitations of the NSC initiative in these regards, however. In particular, the initiative's capacity to contribute to the objective of supporting high-performance athletes and coaches is compromised by the lack of funding and job security available for coaches as well as the lack of dedicated training facilities at the "virtual Centres" in most regions. In addition, the degree to which the Centres can facilitate the development of a national sport system is limited by some confusion among stakeholders as to precisely what the national sport system is supposed to be, the lack of "grass roots" development of young athletes by the Centres, and the governance model of the NSCs whereby each Centre is accountable to its own Board rather than to a centralized, national authority, which is perceived to adversely affect the coordination of the national NSC network.

(c) Factors Influencing Success

Key factors thought to facilitate the success of the National Sport Centres include: the high quality of the Centre Presidents, Boards and staff as well as their continuity; partnerships at the national, provincial and local levels, including sponsorships; the Centres' clear mandate to support

high-performance sport and their focus on multiple services for multiple sports at/through each NSC; innovative approaches such as Performance Enhancement Teams; the regional approach to service delivery across the network of Centres; and strong leadership from coaches. On the other hand, factors that may be impediments to the success of the initiative are: a lack of coordination, national service standards and centralized accountability for the national network; insufficient funding for the NSCs to reach their full potential; lack of access to training facilities for “virtual Centres” which limits athletes’ training and makes it difficult to attract corporate sponsors; high coach turnover; and a lack of involvement of some NSFs with NSCs.

7.4 Cost-Effectiveness and Alternatives

(a) *Cost-Effectiveness of NSC Service Delivery*

The consensus is that the delivery of services by the NSCs is more cost-effective than delivery of the same services would be by single-sport National Sport Federations. This is primarily because the Centres can leverage resources from several sports and there are economies of scale associated with the provision of services to athletes from several sports (e.g., discounted rates for service due to the large volume of athletes). It would not be financially feasible for a single NSF to endeavour to offer services to athletes in one sport in different regions of the country. Furthermore, there are benefits to be derived from the multi-sport approach of the Centres, such as information sharing among coaches and athletes from different sports.

(b) *Best Practices and Lessons Learned from Other Countries*

Although most respondents in the evaluation generally believe that the network of NSCs represents the best approach for supporting high-performance sport in Canada, there are components or features of the sport systems in other countries that may be worth considering should the NSC initiative be adjusted or enhanced in future years. These best practices from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States are as follows:

- ***Creation of one centralized, national multi-sport training institution:*** The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in Canberra is an elite sport training institution with training facilities, coaching, equipment, sport medicine, sport science, athlete services and accommodation for 350 athletes on site. The Institute provides training and services for 25 sports and directly employs roughly 75 coaches.



- ❑ ***Creation of regional single-sport centres of excellence:*** Also in Australia are a number institutes/academies (without residences) in different states that focus on supporting individual sports that have existing programs in the area (e.g., local clubs and coaches). Each of these regional centres provides integrated athlete services, sport medicine and sport science, taking a holistic approach to the development of athletes and coaches.
- ❑ ***Setting of national performance targets:*** Driving the national sport system in Australia are measurable performance targets (e.g., winning a specified number of medals at Olympic competitions), which are agreed upon by key sport stakeholders and create a common goal for high-performance sport in the country.
- ❑ ***More funding for amateur sport:*** Many countries, including the United Kingdom and Australia, provide more funding for sport centres and for both developmental and high-performance athletes than does Canada. The United Kingdom uses proceeds from lotteries to fund athletes.
- ❑ ***Corporate sponsorships:*** In the United States, corporate sponsorships are used to support athletes and to assist the country in hosting major international exhibition events. These events provide developmental athletes with the opportunity to experience international-level competition, something which would not be feasible otherwise because it is too costly to take the entire national team to another country for an exhibition event.

7.5 Recommendations

Based on the evaluation evidence, the following recommendations are made for improving the National Sport Centres initiative:

1. ***Clarify rationale of NSC initiative in relation to Sport Canada objectives.*** There is some confusion over the rationale of NSCs, particularly in relation to Sport Canada's objectives. This confusion stems from a perceived conflict between the excellence versus access/equity objectives, the view that government decisions related to sport in Canada are quite political and do not necessarily facilitate the achievement of podium results, as well as a lack of clarity as to what the national sport system is supposed to be. Therefore, some communications efforts targeted at key sport stakeholders to clarify these points would be helpful. This could be as simple as ensuring that all stakeholders have the *National Sport Centres Position Paper*, the Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF) for the NSO Support Program, or perhaps some communications materials adapted from these documents. In addition, a portion of major meetings of partners/stakeholders and Board meetings at NSCs could be devoted to discussion and clarification of the national priorities of the NSC initiative. Setting national performance targets for high-performance sport, as is done in Australia, could also help to clarify the goals and priorities for the initiative.
2. ***Strengthen national coordination, service standards and accountability of NSC network.*** A number of issues raised in this evaluation could be addressed with improved centralized



coordination, national service standards and accountability for the network of NSCs. It is perceived that the level of service varies greatly from Centre to Centre, that there is a need for a more formalized information sharing mechanism among the Centres (particularly related to sport science and sport medicine since professionals in these fields are too busy to coordinate communications themselves), and that the governance model of the Centres – whereby NSCs are accountable to their own Board of Directors rather than to a central authority – compromises the national-level coordination and consistency of service delivery for the NSC network. Some efforts in these regards have already been made. A draft of Minimum Services at National Sport Centres for Athletes and Training Groups was prepared in May 1998 and there currently is a National Coordinating Committee for the NSC initiative that meets twice per year at annual meetings of the COA and CAC. On the basis of the evaluation findings, however, there may be a need to revisit, clarify and more closely monitor the existing service standards. In addition, there may be a need to give the National Coordinating Committee more centralized authority as well as more resources to coordinate the NSC network. For example, if feasible, appointing a full-time or half-time National Coordinator, possibly with a small support staff, would help the Committee to undertake its ambitious list of responsibilities as specified in the National Sport Centres Position Paper. Although some decentralization and local flexibility for the NSC network is clearly desirable, many respondents in this evaluation appear to think that the balance needs to be shifted somewhat in the direction of stronger centralized coordination and accountability.

3. ***Improve coordination of service delivery between NSCs and NSFs.*** Due to the fact that some NSFs have no involvement with NSCs and to the perceived lack of cooperation and/or resources for the sharing of service providers between some NSFs and NSCs (e.g. when the technical expert for a national team cannot travel with the team for training or competitions), there is a need for further efforts and possibly more resources to coordinate service delivery between NSCs and NSFs.
4. ***Carefully assess rationale and need for any expansion of the NSC network.*** It would be advisable to conduct an independent needs analysis before any further expansion of the NSC network is considered because of the perception that some recent decisions in this respect have been more political than strategic and also to ensure that the best decision is made (e.g., whether to open a new NSC or just a regional centre of excellence affiliated with an existing NSC and in what location) and that limited resources are put to best use.
5. ***Refine and standardize performance monitoring procedures to meet RMAF requirements.*** Using the performance framework for the NSC initiative in the RMAF as a guide, refine and standardize the current data collection and reporting procedures to ensure that the eight performance outcomes are adequately and consistently monitored for each NSC. Although some useful descriptive information and data are currently available to address these performance outcomes, there is a need to refine the measurement procedures so that they are more closely aligned with the indicators in the RMAF and to consolidate data from different sources into one standard instrument and one centralized data base specifically designed for performance monitoring and evaluation. Key existing sources of data are the annual NSC monitoring reports and applications to Sport Canada and the data base containing information from the Sport Assessment Questionnaire for the



Sport Funding and Accountability Framework (provided that NSF data can be broken down by NSC). A detailed analysis of the data elements in existing data bases was beyond the scope of the present evaluation, but such an analysis needs to be done as part of the development of a performance monitoring system tailored to the requirements of the NSC initiative. If resources are available, it would also be useful to incorporate a brief annual survey of athletes and coaches into a performance monitoring system. For example, an abbreviated form of the survey instruments used in this evaluation could be used to monitor satisfaction with and perceived impacts of services, with the current results serving as a baseline. In addition, standardized reporting requirements compatible with the RMAF (e.g., an adapted version of the current semi-annual and annual monitoring reports) as well as formal procedures for the National Coordinating Committee to review and make decisions based on monitoring reports need to be established. The NSC initiative would probably need the assistance of a performance monitoring/evaluation expert (e.g., from the Department of Canadian Heritage, Sport Canada or an external source) to refine its current data collection and reporting procedures.

6. ***Improve services with which athletes and coaches are dissatisfied.*** In order to address some concerns about inadequate or needed services as well as the low satisfaction ratings given to some services by athletes and coaches in the survey, consider adding or improving the following services: assistance to help athletes with relocation and accommodation in the community in which the NSC is situated; meal passes; “leading edge” services and more hi tech equipment; a broader range of services to meet specialized needs, such as acupuncture and chiropractic therapy; job placement; and self-marketing and sponsorships. If feasible, also provide more funding to enhance existing services and provide professional development for service providers. In addition, endeavour to reduce unnecessary duplication in the delivery of parallel services offered to athletes and coaches. More generally, some respondents in the evaluation also identify a need to improve the expertise in sport science in Canada (e.g., by having university programs that focus on training applied sport scientists and by creating a Canadian research centre in high-performance sport science).
7. ***Devote more effort to developmental athletes.*** In order to facilitate the development of a seamless sport development system, look for opportunities to establish more linkages with local sport communities, for example, by sponsoring junior age group teams and working with local clubs. This support for developmental athletes would help to ensure that there is a pool of talented young people with the potential to become high-performance athletes.

Assess the feasibility of increasing funding for coaches’ salaries and development. To address the problem of high coach turnover and the perceived need to provide competitive salaries to attract and retain more qualified full-time coaches as well as provide more development opportunities for aspiring coaches, NSFs and NSCs together need to assess the feasibility of injecting more funding into coaching.

8. ***Assess the feasibility of building dedicated training facilities for “virtual NSCs”.*** Given the widely held view that the potential benefits of the NSC initiative are limited by the fact that most of the NSCs (with the exception of the NSC-Calgary) are in effect “virtual Centres” without significant access to multi-sport training facilities, assess the feasibility



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of either building training facilities for some of the NSCs in major centres with a high concentration of high-performance athletes such as Vancouver and Toronto or, at the very least, working with the owners of existing facilities to improve access. The costs and benefits of such a major undertaking would need to be carefully assessed within the broader context of the sport system in Canada as well as competing priorities for government funds.



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APPENDIX A

Introductory Letter



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June 2001

Dear Sir/Madam:

The Corporate Review Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage, in cooperation with Sport Canada, is currently undertaking an evaluation of the National Sport Centres as part of a broader evaluation of the National Sport Organizations Support Program. The Branch has commissioned EKOS Research Associates Inc., an Ottawa-based firm that specializes in applied social research and program evaluation, to conduct the evaluation of the National Sport Centres during the months of June and July 2001. The evaluation will examine the Centres' continuing relevance, design, service delivery, outcomes, possible improvements and related issues.

An important component of the evaluation is a round of interviews with national partners of the Centres (i.e., Sport Canada, Coaching Association of Canada, Canadian Olympic Association), National Sport Federations, and staff, service providers and partners of six National Sport Centres across the country – in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax. An EKOS consultant will be visiting each of the six Centres to conduct in-person interviews.

A representative of EKOS Research will be contacting you within the next week or so to request an interview appointment. On average, interviews will be 45 to 60 minutes long. In order to ensure that the evaluation is comprehensive and incorporates the opinions of all key stakeholders, your participation in the interview is extremely important. Any comments you provide in the interview will be kept strictly confidential. Interview findings will be reported in summary form only.

If you have any questions or concerns about the evaluation, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Jerry Ciasnocha with the Corporate Review Branch of Canadian Heritage at (819) 953-4866 or Mr. Michael Callahan with EKOS Research Associates at (613) 235-7215.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Sincerely,



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APPENDIX B

Interview Guide



**Evaluation of the
National Sport Organizations Support Program:
National Sport Centre Component**

**National Partners and National Sport Federations
Interview Guide**

The Corporate Review Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage, in cooperation with Sport Canada, is currently undertaking an evaluation of the National Sport Centres as part of a broader evaluation of the National Sport Organizations (NSO) Support Program. The NSO Support Program provides funding to support National Sport Federations, Sport Organizations for Athletes with Disabilities, Multi-Sport/Service Organizations, and National Sport Centres. The Branch has commissioned EKOS Research Associates Inc. to conduct the evaluation of the National Sport Centres. The purpose of this interview is to obtain your opinions and observations regarding the Centres' continuing relevance, design, service delivery, outcomes, possible improvements and related issues. The interview will take about 45 minutes. Your comments will be kept strictly confidential. Interview findings will be reported in summary form only.

Background

1. Please describe your role and area of responsibility in your organization. What are your responsibilities with respect to the National Sport Centres?
2. For roughly how long have you been doing work related to the National Sport Centres?

Rationale/Relevance

3. Do the National Sport Centres continue to be needed and relevant? Please explain.
4. To what degree do you feel that the National Sport Centres are consistent with Sport Canada's objectives to:
 - support high-performance athletes and coaches;
 - develop the national sport system;
 - strategically position and raise the profile of sport; and
 - improve access and equity in sport?

Design/Implementation

5. To what extent is the delivery of high-performance services (e.g., athlete services, sport medicine services, sport science services) effectively co-ordinated among National Sport Centres, National Sport Federations and service providers?
 - Are there any problems with the co-ordination of service delivery from these different sources? If yes, please specify.



- Is there a need to improve the co-ordination of athlete services, sport medicine services and sport science services? Please explain.
6. To what extent has the expanded approach to National Sport Centre location (i.e., nine Centres across the country) facilitated the capacity of the Centres to optimize their contribution to high-performance results? Please explain.
- Are there any adverse effects to having this many Centres? Please explain.
7. Please outline the current data collection and performance reporting mechanisms of the Centres. *(Note: Please skip this question if you are not familiar with performance monitoring at the Centres.)*
- To what degree are the current data collection and reporting mechanisms adequate for performance monitoring?
 - Is additional data collection needed to effectively monitor the performance of Centres? If yes, what additional data need to be collected? How and by whom could this information be collected?

Impacts/Outcomes

8. To what extent have the National Sport Centres achieved their intended outcomes?
- Enhanced human resources infrastructure capacity (i.e., staff)?
 - Enhanced training and lifestyle services for athletes?
 - Enriched training environment for athletes?
 - Enhanced coaching environment?
 - Increased opportunities for coach/athlete learning and training breakthroughs resulting from the Centre synergy?
 - Increased collaboration amongst service providers and technical leaders?
 - Increased resources for athlete services?
 - Stronger linkages with the local sport community?
9. To what extent have the National Sport Centres contributed to the achievement of Sport Canada's objectives:
- to support high-performance athletes and coaches;
 - to develop the national sport system;
 - to strategically position and raise the profile of sport; and
 - to improve access and equity in sport?
10. Are there any particular factors that have facilitated the success of the National Sport Centres? Please specify.
11. Are there factors that have impeded or acted as barriers to the success of the Centres? Please specify.



Alternatives/Cost-Effectiveness

12. Is the delivery of services by the National Sport Centres cost-effective in comparison to the delivery of the same services by National Sport Federations? Please explain.
13. Can you suggest any changes or improvements that are needed to enhance the quality and cost-effectiveness of service delivery by the National Sport Centres?
 - Are you aware of any approaches used in other countries that should be considered for the National Sport Centres in Canada?
14. Do you have any final comments to make about the National Sport Centres?

Thank you for your co-operation



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APPENDIX C
Survey Questionnaires

APPENDIX D
Case Study Guide



**Evaluation of the
National Sport Organizations Support Program:
National Sport Centre Component**

**Case Studies of National Sport Centres
Interview Guide**

The Corporate Review Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage, in cooperation with Sport Canada, is currently undertaking an evaluation of the National Sport Centres as part of a broader evaluation of the National Sport Organizations (NSO) Support Program. The NSO Support Program provides funding to support National Sport Federations, Sport Organizations for Athletes with Disabilities, Multi-Sport/Service Organizations, and National Sport Centres. The Branch has commissioned EKOS Research Associates Inc. to conduct the evaluation of the National Sport Centres. As part of the evaluation, interviews are being conducted with the President/CEO, service providers and partners at six Centres across the country: in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax. The purpose of this interview is to obtain your opinions and observations regarding this Centre's continuing relevance, design, service delivery, outcomes, possible improvements and related issues. The interview will take 45 to 60 minutes. Your comments will be kept strictly confidential. Interview findings will be reported in summary form only.

Background

1. Please describe your role and area of responsibility or your relationship to this National Sport Centre.
 - For roughly how long have you been associated/involved with this Centre?
2. Could you please provide a brief overview of the services offered at this National Sport Centre?

Rationale/Relevance

3. Does this National Sport Centre continue to be needed and relevant? Please explain.
4. To what degree do you feel that the services provided at this National Sport Centre are consistent with Sport Canada's objectives to:
 - support high-performance athletes and coaches;
 - develop the national sport system;
 - strategically position and raise the profile of sport; and
 - improve access and equity in sport?



Design/Implementation

5. To what extent is the delivery of high-performance services (e.g., athlete services, sport medicine services, sport science services) effectively co-ordinated among this National Sport Centre, National Sport Federations and service providers?
 - Are there any problems with the co-ordination of service delivery from these different sources? If yes, please specify.
 - Is there a need to improve the co-ordination of athlete services, sport medicine services and sport science services? Please explain.
6. To what extent has the expanded approach to National Sport Centre location (i.e., nine Centres across the country) facilitated the capacity of the Centres to optimize their contribution to high-performance results? Please explain.
 - Are there any adverse effects to having this many Centres? Please explain.
7. Please outline the current data collection and performance reporting mechanisms of this Centre. *(Note: Please skip this question if you are not familiar with performance monitoring at this Centre.)*
 - To what degree are the current data collection and reporting mechanisms adequate for performance monitoring?
 - Is additional data collection needed to effectively monitor the performance of this Centre? If yes, what additional data need to be collected? How and by whom could this information be collected?

Impacts/Outcomes

8. To what extent has this National Sport Centre achieved its intended outcomes?
 - Enhanced human resources infrastructure capacity (i.e., staff)?
 - Enhanced training and lifestyle services for athletes?
 - Enriched training environment for athletes?
 - Enhanced coaching environment?
 - Increased opportunities for coach/athlete learning and training breakthroughs resulting from the Centre synergy?
 - Increased collaboration amongst service providers and technical leaders?
 - Increased resources for athlete services?
 - Stronger linkages with the local sport community?



9. To what extent has this National Sport Centre contributed to the achievement of Sport Canada's objectives:
- to support high-performance athletes and coaches;
 - to develop the national sport system;
 - to strategically position and raise the profile of sport; and
 - to improve access and equity in sport?
10. Are there any particular factors that have facilitated the success of this National Sport Centre? Please specify.
11. Are there factors that have impeded or acted as barriers to the success of this Centre? Please specify.

Alternatives/Cost-Effectiveness

12. Is the delivery of services by this National Sport Centre cost-effective in comparison to the delivery of the same services by National Sport Federations? Please explain.
13. Can you suggest any changes or improvements that are needed to enhance the quality and cost-effectiveness of service delivery by this National Sport Centre?
- Are you aware of any approaches used in other countries that should be considered for the National Sport Centres in Canada?
14. Do you have any final comments to make about the National Sport Centres?

Thank you for your co-operation



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Annex A

Sport Canada Management Response
to the
Findings and Recommendations
of the
Evaluation of the
National Sport Organization Support Program:
NATIONAL SPORT CENTRES COMPONENT



Introduction

The National Sport Centre (NSC) component evaluation is the first of three component evaluations of the National Sport Organization (NSO) Support Program. The other two component evaluations are underway (Multi-Sport/Service Organizations and National Sport Federations/Sport Organizations for Athletes with a Disability), the results of which will be reported to the February 2002 meeting of the Audit and Review Committee.

This Management Response is directed towards the nine recommendations of the National Sport Centre component evaluation, however it is anticipated that there will be overlap between recommendations from the three component evaluation particularly in the areas of clarification and communication of program objectives, and refining and standardizing performance monitoring procedures applicable to the Results-based Management and Accountability Framework. Accordingly, the management response to such recommendations in this document may be modified based on the recommendations from the remaining two component evaluations.

Sport Canada Conclusions

Sport Canada Management finds the overall conclusions of the evaluation to be positive and supportive of the direction that has been taken with the introduction of the National Sport Centres network after the successful two-year pilot project in Calgary in 1994-96.

Sport Canada is one of three national partners (Coaching Association of Canada and the Canadian Olympic Association) that work with numerous provincial/local partners to provide funding and direction to the network of NSCs. The network of NSCs is coordinated by the National Coordinating Committee for National Sport Centres, and is comprised of each of the NSC Presidents, representatives of each the three national funding partners, National Sport Federation representatives, as well as athlete and coach representation.

Sport Canada's response to each of the nine recommendations follows. As noted below most will require discussion with the National Coordinating Committee before implementation. The next meeting of the National Coordinating Committee is scheduled for April, 2002.

Recommendations

- 1. Clarify rationale of NSC initiative in relation to Sport Canada objectives.*



Recommendation accepted in principle.

The issues noted in this recommendation, including the confusion over the expectations of NSCs with reference to Sport Canada objectives, will be raised by the Sport Canada representatives and resolved at the next meeting of the National Coordinating Committee. The draft Canadian Sport Policy mentions the notion of developing “stretch targets” which is compatible with this recommendation.

2. Strengthen national coordination, service standards and accountability of NSC network.

Recommendation accepted in principle.

Major improvements have already been made. What still remains to be done, however, is for the National Coordinating Committee to improve and standardize its reporting functions in a format that is congruent with Sport Canada’s expectations.

This will be raised by the Sport Canada representatives with the National Coordinating Committee in April 2002 and a plan of action determined to resolve this matter.

3. Improve coordination of service delivery between NSCs and NSF’s (and lack of involvement of some NSF’s).

Recommendation accepted in principle.

The discussion at a workshop on NSCs at the October, 2001 *Sport Leadership Conference* confirmed that there is now a much better understanding and acceptance of what NSCs are able to do for National Sport Federations. The problem, however, is that the service capability of most of the NSCs has reached its maximum and without additional new resources further growth and expansion in service capability will not be possible.

No further action is recommended until additional sources of funds are identified.

4. Carefully assess rationale and need for any expansion of the NSC network.

Recommendation accepted in principle.



Extensive needs assessments were conducted prior to the establishment of the six Centres covered in this evaluation. Every effort will be made to continue the process of needs assessments prior to the creation of any new Centres.

5. Refine and standardize performance monitoring procedures to meet RMAF requirements.

Recommendation accepted in principle.

The NSO Support Program RMAF will need to be revisited and modified in preparation for the next program evaluation. The revisions will be based on learnings from the current evaluation of the NSO Support Program (three components) and the department's guidelines for preparing RMAFs. Such a revised RMAF should be available by March 2003, with the NSO Support Program to be evaluated again in 2005-06. To adjust the standards to facilitate performance monitoring, it is vital that the NSCs have a better understanding of the expectations that government has for them.

The National Coordinating Committee should explore the concept of a centralized database, standardized reporting processes using athlete surveys carried out by independent bodies or by simply using their own standardized tools.

These items will be discussed with the National Coordinating Committee in April 2002.

6. Improve services with which athletes and coaches are dissatisfied.

Recommendation accepted in principle.

It is felt that services are generally quite good but there is some misperception of whether NSCs or NSFs are responsible for delivery of certain services (e.g., the costs for athletes to relocate from their homes to a particular NSC), while on the other hand, some services are a shared responsibility. These roles and responsibilities need to be clarified.

In some cases, services (e.g., job placement) have been available for some time, but are not broadly accessed by athletes. In such cases we need to ensure that needed services are well promoted to facilitate greater access by athletes and coaches when they are offered. This will require action by each NSC.



The concept of *Performance Enhancement Teams (PETs)* such as those at the Calgary NSC are acknowledged as the preferred “approach” but they are sport-specific and therefore require direct and considerable involvement of the respective NSF, as well as the NSC.

The above will be discussed with the National Coordinating Committee in April 2002.

7. *Devote more effort to developmental athletes.*

Recommendation accepted in principle.

Without additional resources there is little ability to influence this situation other than by providing more services to fewer sports. If this route is chosen, important questions will need to be addressed, such as which sports should be supported and how far support should be extended into the high performance athlete development system. The recommendation makes particular sense for those NSCs (e.g., the Atlantic Centre) which currently do not service a large number of international level high performance athletes and could therefore provide more athletes with services.

The above will be discussed with the National Coordinating Committee in April 2002.

8. *Assess the feasibility of increasing funding for coaches’ salaries and development.*

Recommendation accepted in principle, but issue is beyond the scope of the NSC initiative.

Although there is no question of the need for more stable and clear sources of funding for coaches’ salaries, this recommendation is outside the scope of this evaluation, as well as Centres generally. The recommendation, therefore, should be considered in the context of the Secretary of State (Amateur Sport) response to the Report of the Coaching Working Group and the Federal Action Plan for the Canadian Sport Policy.

9. *Assess the feasibility of building dedicated training facilities for “virtual NSCs”.*

Recommendation accepted in principle, but issue is beyond the scope of the NSC initiative.



This objective is currently outside the mandate of this program. Instead the recommendation should be linked with the Hosting Policy development and hosting opportunities as they arise. Athletes should be encouraged to relocate to NSCs that have the facilities that they need for their personal athletic development.