Sports Schools in Finland

Report of a Study Visit, September 1999

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by

Dr Ian Thomson
Professor of Elite Sports Studies, University of Stirling

and

David Fairweather, Director of Curriculum,
Falkirk College of Further and Higher Education

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CONTENTS

Page

TABLES

FOREWORD

sportscotland welcomes this report by Ian Thomson and David Fairweather resulting from a study visit by a Scottish group to investigate sports schools in Finland. It reflects the outward-looking nature of Scottish sport, seeking to benefit where appropriate from successful initiatives elsewhere in the world.

The report and its recommendations are intended to inform debate on the potential to learn from the Finnish model in developing specialist schools for sport in Scotland.

Scotland has been introducing new systems for supporting youth sport at all levels, including talent identification and development where projects are currently being piloted and evaluated. This report should also inform the discussion on how this area might best be progressed.

The recommendations and views expressed in this report are entirely the authors' own.

sportscotland
April 2000

PREFACE

Giftedness in sport provided a starting point for this project. There is a growing body of knowledge about educating gifted children, and it has been recognised that prodigies are a special needs group (Radford, 1990). In term of organisation, there is no agreed policy about integration or separation. Gifted children who are separated into small groups for a major part of their school years may find difficulty in relating socially to more normal peers. Acceleration has also created problems (Freeman, 1991, 214). Children who associate daily with others who are years older in order to accommodate their abnormal speed of development can be isolated.

In sport, what may appear to be early exceptional ability may not flower into outstanding adult performance. Various intervening factors affect outcomes such as physical and emotional maturation and, perhaps most importantly, opportunity. Talent identification is still a very imprecise skill, particularly when dealing with young children (Rowley, 1995). European approaches to giftedness in sport vary considerably. There have been disturbing examples of what amounts to child abuse (Ryan, 1996) in gymnastics and ice skating. The French approach to identifying and developing young tennis players relies heavily on overload in the number of matches played annually (Thomson, 1992b). Swimming is another sport which tends to reject talented children who are not breaking records by the age of 13. These are fairly crude systems of selection by 'picking winners'.

The Swedish approach is to encourage experimentation up to the age of about 16 and, only then, to select those who may have some potential in a particular sport. This means that Swedish sports schools tend to concentrate on 16 to 19 year olds (Thomson, 1992a). Finland is very heavily influenced by Sweden and there are parallels between developments in the two countries. Both nations have developed appropriate strategies for gifted young athletes which are broadly similar to Freeman's organisational methods, namely acceleration, part-time withdrawal for specialist tuition, and enrichment which means the opportunity to work intensively at their own pace (Freeman, 1991, 214-215).

In England the nurturing of talented young athletes is harnessed to a system of specialist sports colleges (Dept of Education and Employment, 1998). In June 1999 there were 34 sports colleges, nearly all of them in comprehensive schools. More recently, the strategy for English sport introduced by the Prime Minister has committed the Government to 110 by 2003 and establishes them as central to a range of initiatives on school sport (Dept for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000). Priority is given to schools that have very good facilities for physical education and a record of excellence in physical education and community sport. The Government recognises that excellence in sport springs from an excellent foundation of physical education and school sport.

Specialist schools receive two sorts of additional funding from central government. They receive matched funding of £100,000 for a capital project to enhance the facilities in the subjects related to the school's specialism. In every case schools have

had to seek private sponsorship to raise their capital contribution. There is no European equivalent of this concept of private/public support for a sports school. The second sort of support consists of revenue funding of £100 per pupil per annum up to £100,000 per annum for three years to implement their development plans.

The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, announced in January 2000 that he intends that a quarter of Britain's comprehensive schools will cater for arts, music, sport or sciences by the year 2003 (*Independent*, 7 January 2000, p7). This would mean increasing the number of these schools from 480 at present to 800. It is food for thought that the government has allocated up to £3.4 million to improve facilities and a similar sum for annual running costs for sports schools in England. There has been no corresponding investment in sports schools in Scotland. Perhaps it is time for the Scottish Executive to invest proportionately in talented young people in this country. It may therefore be instructive to discover how another country with exactly the same population as Scotland (5.1 million) is dealing with specialist provision.

Ian Thomson and David Fairweather
April 2000

INTRODUCTION

The visit to Finland grew out of previous studies of sport in Sweden (Thomson, 1992a) and Denmark (Thomson, 1998). Some of the group who had been present at these earlier visits agreed to investigate sports schools in Finland. Contacts had been established by Falkirk College with an upper secondary school in Sotkamo which is in central Finland. Fortunately Sotkamo is one of the twelve designated sports schools in the country. It has established a close working relationship with the Vuokatti Sports Institute, some five kilometres distant from the school.

Vuokatti is one of the four Olympic Training Centres in Finland. It comprises a quite remarkable range of winter sports facilities including the only indoor ski tunnel in the world. The 1.2 kilometre long snow-filled facility enables cross-country and biathlon competitors to train all year round in a controlled environment. There is another building which to a layman's eye is the epitome of applied sports science. By controlling the atmospheric content it is possible to create high altitude environmental conditions. Winter sports athletes can simulate a mountainous environment in a building which is situated at sea level. The Institute facilities also include an ice-rink with seating for 400 spectators, a swimming pool and a sports hall 40 metres in length which can be used for indoor practice of Finnish baseball.

The group was based at Sotkamo but the focus of discussions with teachers, head teachers, civil servants, coaches and national sports administrators was consistently targeted on the viability of sports schools. The central issue was whether these schools could produce world class sporting performance alongside of normal upper secondary education. It was recognised that there are cultural and educational differences between Scotland and the Nordic countries. However, they are fairly similar in terms of population, and the Central belt in Scotland is not unlike the concentration of urban residents in and around Helsinki.

The purpose of the visit was to consider whether a network of sports schools could be an effective foundation for elite sport in Scotland. More specifically, whether the flexible negotiated curriculum in Scottish further education colleges would be the ideal setting for a Scottish equivalent of the Nordic system.

Finland, Norway and Sweden all share a common characteristic. They occupy huge land masses but they have very low population densities, on average about 17 persons per square kilometre compared with Scotland's 65 persons. The three Nordic countries have something else in common. A large part of each country lies above the Arctic Circle. However, in one significant respect Finland differs from its Scandinavian neighbours. Its eastern border is shared with Russia. These two countries have engaged in 40 wars over the past two centuries and Finland was only granted independence in 1917. It is still a young country living in the shadow of a large militaristic neighbour.

Two-thirds of the population of 5.1 million live in the south of Finland. The capital city Helsinki (population 546,000) and its environs account for over one million

inhabitants but there are no other cities of comparable size. The interior of the populated area of Finland is a vast network of islands and lakes. There are 188,000 lakes (10% of the area) and 180,000 islands in the country. It seems that the majority of the population live within a short distance from a lake. An amazing 67% of the land is covered in forests. Most of the country is flat, and the relatively small number of hills are in the northern region which experiences winters lasting up to six months.

For three-quarters of this century Finland was fairly isolated compared to other tourist resorts. It suffered from a shortage of direct flights from other European and world airlines into the country and poor internal transport networks.

The country experienced a catastrophic economic recession between 1990 and 1992. This resulted in a dramatic rise in unemployment peaking at 16.6% in 1994 compared to an EU average then of 11.5%. It was one of the most highly taxed countries in Europe (and remains so - in 1999 Finland had the highest marginal tax rates on earned income in Europe), and tourism suffered badly. However, in 1994 57% of the people voted to enter the European Community and from 1995 onwards there has been substantial support for modernisation. Finland is a democratic republic with a Parliament of 200 members and it is making huge strides forward as a country which welcomes inward investment, tourism and links with other nations. In 1998 its per capita Gross Domestic Product was almost identical to that of the UK. (EVA, 1999)

During the past 20 years, 120 winter sports resorts have developed, supported by the requisite infrastructure – roads and rail, good quality hotels, shops and restaurants, ski schools and comprehensive facilities for all manner of winter sports.

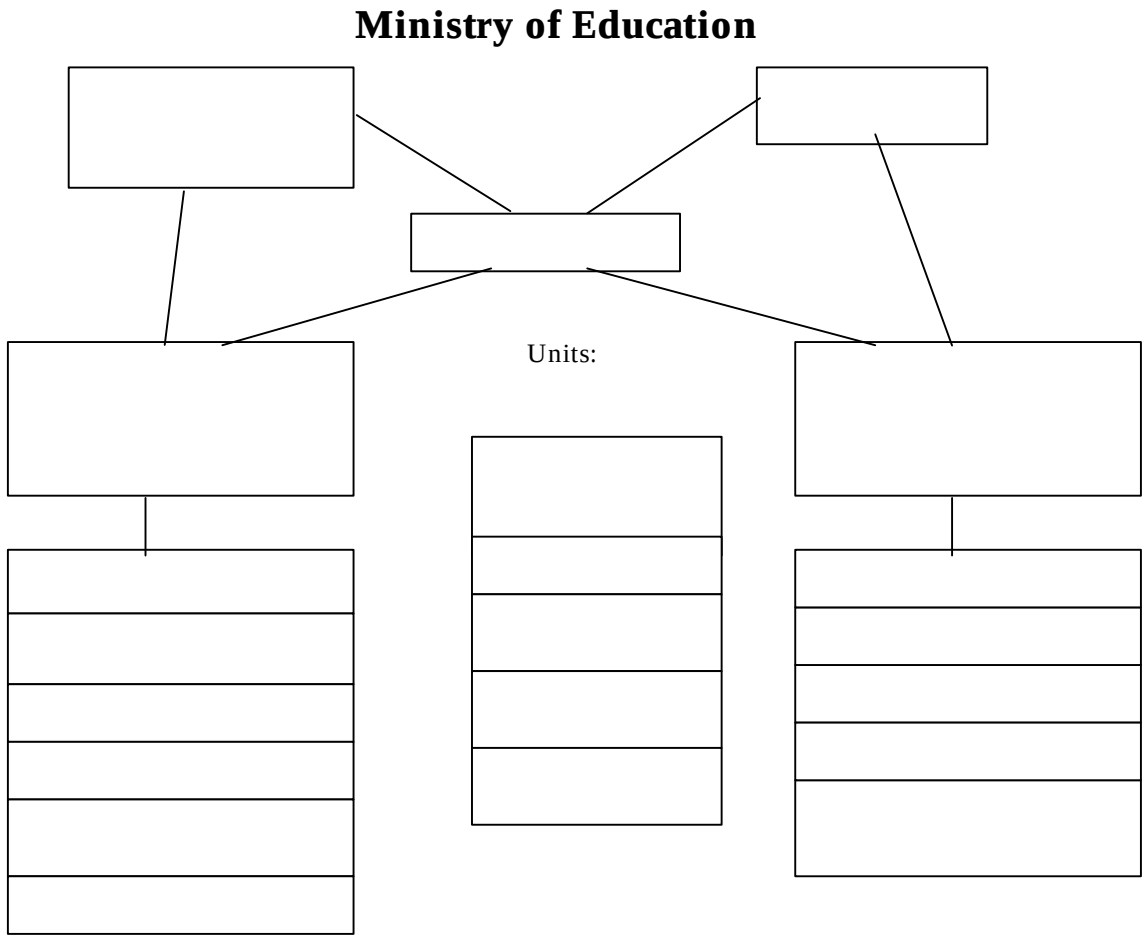
Finland lives in the shadow of Sweden. What Sweden does today in sport is likely to be mirrored in Finland within five years. Starting in the mid-1970s, Finland began to recognise that Swedish experiments with sports schools were widening the gap in performance between the two countries. By 1980 Sweden was emerging as one of the top European nations in golf, tennis, football and swimming. Denmark and Norway were producing world class footballers and Finland was operating in a narrow channel of winter sports. In 1987 the Finnish government grasped the nettle and embarked on a five-year pilot project of funded sports schools along Swedish lines. This was paralleled by radical changes in the secondary school curriculum. By 1992 the country was poised to embark on a planned, state-funded system of elite sports schools which was intended to challenge the growing dominance of Swedish youth sport at international level.

This study sets out to evaluate the sports school system in Finland and to consider the implications for educational and sporting policy in Scotland.

CHAPTER 1: SPORT AND EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Sport and education are administered from two separate arms of a giant Ministry of Education. It is the third largest ministry after the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Finance. Education accounts for 14 per cent of the state budget. The Ministry is divided into a Ministry of Education and Science and a Ministry of Culture (Fig 1). Physical education is within Education and Science and sport comes under Culture, although additional funding for sports schools derives from the Culture budget.

Figure 1: The Ministry of Education



Sport in Finland

In organisational terms each of the Divisions, whether in the Ministry of Education and Science or the Ministry of Culture, is headed by a Director who reports to a Director General and thence to a Minister. The Sports Division is broadly equivalent to the Sports Policy Unit in Scotland which advises our Deputy Minister. The Division consists of only four senior staff who deal with policy, legislation, liaison

with the voluntary sector, and a research agenda. They are an enabling group who help other organisations to develop sport in Finland in line with government policies and existing legislation.

There is another strand in the sports policy process. It consists of a 13-member cross party National Sports Council which is appointed by the Government for the full parliamentary term. The members are all elected Members of Parliament. The Council has three standing sub-committees for sports policy, sports research and physical education, and adapted physical activity. The Minister for Culture, Suvi Lindén who took office after the March 1999 elections, is a member of the Council and vice-chair of the sub-committee for sports policy. Her predecessor Suvi-Anne Simmes summed up the liberal consensus about the role of the state in sport:

> It is not our job to give sport its content. We simply provide directions and help to create the operating prerequisites. (*Motion*, 1998, no. 2, p23)

The Finnish Sports Federation is the third strand of the structure of sport. It is a confederation of the Workers Sports Federation, the Finnish National Sports Federation, the Finnish Olympic Association and the Finnish Football Association. Five years ago the government appointed a working group to identify criteria for the funding of sport. There was a concern that four separate bodies each with its own administration was too costly. The National Sports Council chairman at that time was a former Prime Minister and he helped to broker an agreement to form a confederation which would be funded by government. The original federations can still run their own affairs but there is one central administration and one voice for the voluntary sector when it comes to dealing with important issues. Mirja Vitala, one of the four senior staff in the Sports Division commented:

> We don't have to do it ourselves. We have an agreement with the federations. The federations have their own ways. Of course to get money some federations do what they think the government wants. Some say the result is that the Federation becomes an arm of the state.
> (Presentation to study group)

This tripartite structure of a Ministry sports division, a National Sports Council and a Finnish Sports Confederation has evolved over the past five years. It may not be perfect but it is democratic. There is no equivalent of the independent British sports councils appointed by government under royal charter to foster the knowledge and practice of sport. The nearest in the Finnish system is the National Sports Council but it consists of members of parliament and can hardly be described as independent of government.

Funding of sport is, as in Scotland, a combination of local and central government investment. Local authorities commit about £265 million per annum to sports facilities and services, which is fairly close to Scottish figures. The Department of Cultural Policy received about £225 million from the pools and lottery in 1999 and distributed it as follows (Ministry of Education Finland, 1999):

	%	£m
Arts	51	115
Sport	23	52
Research	20	45
Youth work	6	13

Comparisons between Finland and Scotland in this respect are complicated by the different sources of funding for sport. In 1998/99 **sport**scotland received about £10 million from tax income over which it had complete control. The £27 million it received from the National Lottery is governed by separate legislation which reduces **sport**scotland's discretion. Central government policies have also led to ring-fencing of budgets for particular projects. However, it does seem that Finnish sports federations receive substantially greater financial support than their counterparts in Scotland.

In Finland, central government funding for sport derives from Pools and a Lottery. Apart from the sports schools there is no contribution from taxation. Within the £52 million for sport, one-third is allocated to national sports federations. The amount awarded to each federation is based on a formula agreed between government and the Finnish Sports Confederation. This takes account of the number of participants and the quality of training offered. Currently federations are expected to devote 50 per cent to sport for young people, 25 per cent to sport for all and 25 per cent to elite sport. Local authorities receive about £11 million from the same sources for schemes that focus on target groups. A further £10 million of Pools and Lottery income is allocated to support for capital building projects. The Department for Education and Science Policy also commits about £135 million per annum for sports science, physical education and high performance sport from taxation. Just under £1 million is allocated for 1,600 students in twelve designated sports schools. There are another 19 sports schools and one military sports school which are not offered additional funding from the Ministry of Education budget.

Bellahouston Academy in Glasgow was the first Scottish school to be designated as a sports school. The Glasgow School of Sport started with an intake of seven 12-year old pupils in 1999. It was a rapid response to a central government initiative to support and extend specialist provision in schools (Scottish Office Education and Industry Dept, 1998). The school of sport received official status as a centre of excellence in March 2000 with £965,000 funding over three years (Scottish Executive, 2000). It is too early to judge if it will produce results. At face value it seems that Finland invests substantially more in sport and physical education than Scotland does.

Another noteworthy difference between the two countries is that Finland passed a quite comprehensive sport Act of Parliament effective on 1 January 1999 that includes both a clear statement of underlying values and unambiguous objectives. Objectives include improving the nation's health and well-being; support for young people's growth and development; gender equality; multi-culturism; and sustainable

exploitation of the environment. Asked whether these values and objectives will influence the allocation of resources, the Minister for Culture, Suvi Lindén replied:

> The statute's foundation values are an excellent thing and we have to get on with its implementation. (*Motion*, 1999, no. 2, p19)

In Scotland such values tend to be set out in strategic planning documents such as *Sport 21* or in reports of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Schools. Admirable as they are, they do not have the force of law.

Education in Finland

As in Scotland, education in Finland is a national system administered locally. There are 4,300 schools, 232 vocational education establishments, 29 polytechnics and 20 universities. This indicates substantial differences from Scottish education, although both countries have a population of around five million. For example there are fewer than 3,000 schools in Scotland, only 12 universities and 43 further education colleges. In Finland children do not start primary education until the age of seven. Finland is moving towards providing one year of free pre-school nursery education. At the other end, over 50 per cent of school leavers move either into upper secondary schools or vocational institutions. The former provide a traditional route into universities and the field of vocational training is geared to polytechnics.

The integrated, centralised system is different from Scotland, partly because new structures were designed strategically in Finland. Polytechnics are regional institutions which cater for students who live at home. They were created gradually throughout the 1990s, culminating in a Polytechnics Act 1995 whereby the government was empowered to accredit selected institutions and designate them in perpetuity as polytechnics on the basis of geographic spread and proven excellence in experimental and development work. The national polytechnic network will be complete by 1 August 2000 when all polytechnics within the network will be guaranteed permanent status. They are jointly funded by government (from a performance-related budget) and local authorities. Universities developed along similar lines to Scotland. There was only one university in Finland until the early 1900s.

As in other European countries, Finland responded to the expansion of demand between the 1960s and 1980s by providing a variety of institutions. There are now 20 universities, ten of which are traditionally broad based and very similar to British universities. There are three universities of technology, another three are schools of economics and business administration and there are four art academies. The network covers the whole country but is not systematically distributed to the same extent as the planned geographical system of polytechnics. The state provides 70 per cent of the funding of universities. Students do not pay tuition fees as they do in Britain.

Primary education is reminiscent of Scotland prior to implementation of the 5-14 programme. The school year is divided into autumn and spring terms totalling 190

days. All primary children embark on learning two languages besides their mother tongue and English is the most popular foreign language. Physical education is a compulsory subject but only a tiny minority of schools are serviced by qualified physical education staff. Class teachers are responsible for grades 1 to 6, ie for 7 to 13 year olds. Specialist teachers take over for grades 7 to 9, as in Scotland.

After compulsory schooling at age 16, Finnish youngsters can choose between upper secondary schools and vocational education in various institutions. Upper secondary schools can specialise in a particular subject, and there are currently 50 specialised schools. A specialised school must be accredited by the Ministry and it then qualifies for additional help. In the case of sports schools, it means that the school receives 22,000 marks per sports pupil instead of the normal 17,000 marks per pupil. That additional sum amounts to £55,000 for 100 talented sports students per annum which can be allocated to payments for coaching, sports science and hiring of facilities.

The curriculum in upper secondary schools combines compulsory and optional units of study. The content of each subject is determined centrally in a national curriculum, but pupils can exercise considerable discretion about selection of electives and the duration of their courses. The government decides which subjects are compulsory and the number of hours allocated to each subject. The standard curriculum consists of 30 hours per week. Minimum times for 'core' subjects are set for Grades 7, 8 and 9. In the last two years of compulsory education the balance is 21 hours for compulsory subjects plus up to nine hours for electives, including sport. To complete pre-university education, pupils must have taken 75 units of study of which 45-49 are compulsory. Each pupil can select the 26-30 optional units and organise his or her pattern of study over a period ranging from two to four years. In 1994 it was decided to dispense with age grouping as the normal structure. Instead each individual can decide his or her own curriculum. Mixed age classes have become the norm. At the end of their studies, pupils undertake matriculation examinations, similar to Scottish Higher Grade examinations. These consist of tests in the mother tongue, the second national language (Swedish), a foreign language, mathematics and general studies. The resultant certificate gives access to higher education.

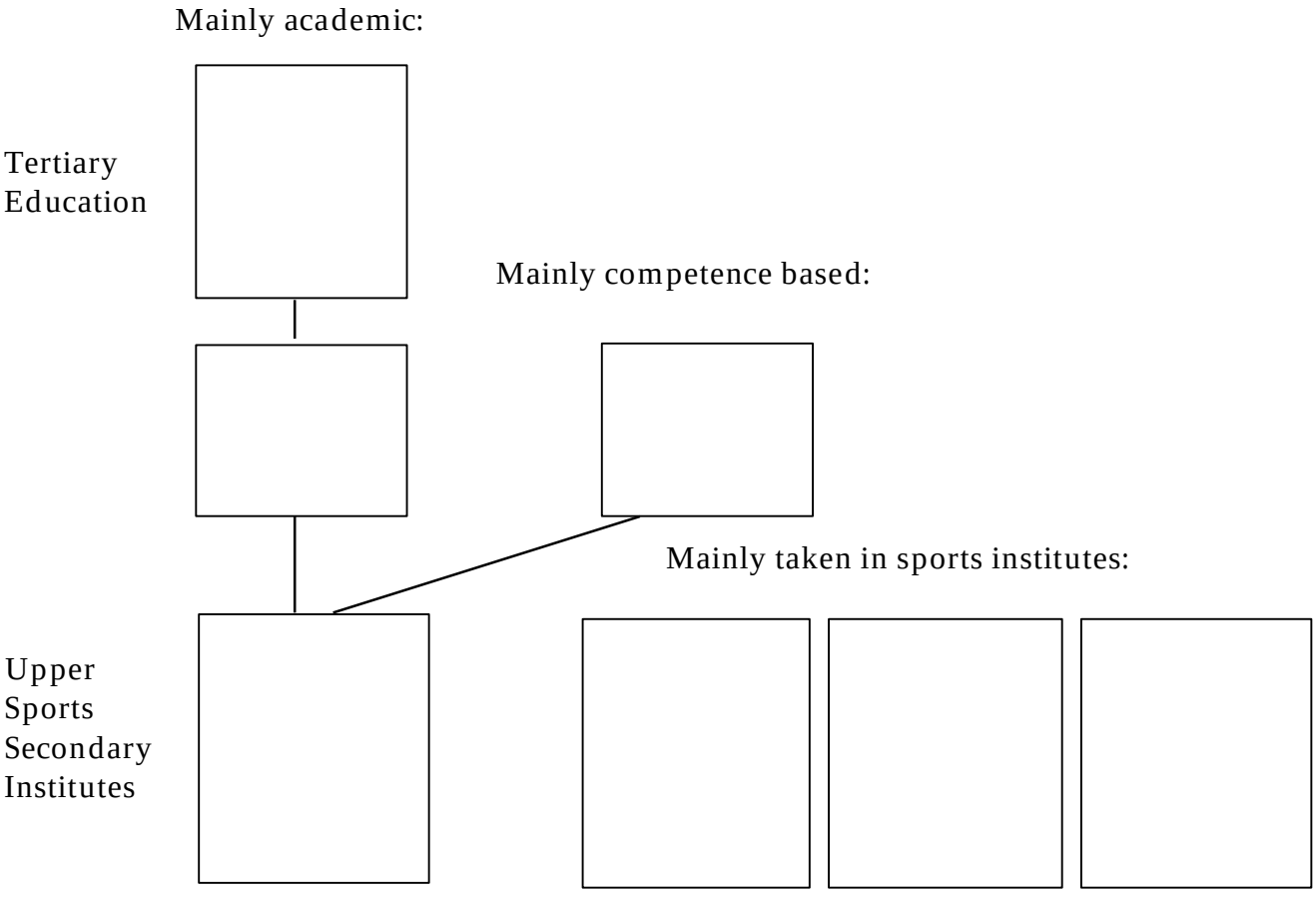
Within schools which specialise in sport up to 16 units can be undertaken which are essentially training and preparation for competition. 'Training' is accepted as a school subject and it takes place within school hours, although not necessarily on school premises. The sports schools are relaxed about the idea of coaches working with school pupils in place of teachers. Sports coaches or 'trainers' as they are known in Finland allocate marks for training units on the same basis as other curriculum units. **This is perhaps the most significant difference between Finnish and Scottish attitudes and practices concerning the inclusion of elite sport training**. In Finland it is an integral and respected part of the curriculum, pursued within school hours. In Scotland it is undertaken after school hours as a voluntary leisure activity, although there are those who regard it as an extension of the Scottish school curriculum. This is not to undervalue the other major difference. In Finland, talented young people are positively encouraged to move to specialist sports schools

in the knowledge that central government has provided a substantial per capita subsidy to augment school resources. The sports schools maintain high academic entry standards. Students must excel both in sport and academic work.

There are two separate routes for gaining academic qualifications in sport (Fig 2). Young people who successfully complete upper secondary education can take a three-year university course leading to a Bachelor of Science degree or a four-year Master of Science degree course in Sports Sciences. There are opportunities to proceed to PhD level study. There is another route which is also aimed predominantly at youngsters. It prepares people for competency-based examinations in sports leadership and sports coaching. Typically it caters for those who have not gone on to an upper secondary at age 16. It can lead to a polytechnic degree in sport.

The other state-sponsored approach to vocational training is usually developed within sports institutes which are funded by central government. There are 11 national and three regional sports institutes in Finland. They collaborate with sports governing bodies to provide training for coaches. This form of vocational education is concerned with part-time volunteer coaches. The training is comparable to the modular courses offered in Britain by the National Coaching Foundation.

Figure 2: The Structure of Vocational and Higher Education in Sport



CHAPTER 2: SPORT AND RECREATION IN FINLAND

Sport and physical activity play a very important role in the culture of Finland. Statistically it is an exceedingly active nation. A survey conducted by the Finnish Sports Federation (1998) in 1997/98 produced the following facts:

- There are more than 6,700 sports and exercise clubs with a membership of over 1.1 million members.
- 200 of the clubs cater for professional athletes.
- Over 500,000 Finns do voluntary work in sports and exercise clubs and other associations that organise physical activity. This work is valued at £500 million per annum.
- A total of 13,400 people work for clubs without pay as office-bearers. On average they each perform the equivalent of two working months of voluntary work each year.
- The clubs employ 1,500 full-time and 6,800 part-time workers.
- One million Finns use constructed sports facilities at least one hour every day.
- A total of 2,100,000 Finns take part in basic exercise: walking (1 million) skiing (724,000), cycling (720,000) and swimming (573,000).
- Five out of six Finns aged 3 to 18 (84%) state that they participate in sports and exercise. Two out of five engage in sport at least four times a week.
- More than one-third of the 3 to 18 year olds who take part in sport do so in clubs.

This level of activity is reflected in the extensive provision of facilities. The local authorities are the main providers of sports facilities but central government also makes a substantial commitment. In the mid 1990s as Finland was emerging from a major economic crisis, the state was investing about £9 million a year in capital facilities. At that time the equivalent sum in Scotland was £1 million. The advent of the National Lottery in the UK has improved this situation dramatically in Britain but there is still a wide gap between Scotland and Finland in community sports provision. The town of Jyväskylä is a good example of the range and quality of what can be achieved.

Jyväskylä is a town of only 65,000 inhabitants which means it is not in the top ten centres of population. However, the extent of its community facilities is well beyond those of any Scottish community of similar size. The local authorities established a Foundation representing the state, local government and the University of Jyväskylä to ensure a coordinated approach (Reynolds, 1995).

An indoor athletics arena has been built in the town centre with a fully equipped 200-metre banked track and associated facilities. Modern research equipment has been installed for testing and measuring athletic performance. The whole arena can be dismantled within an hour and a half, cleared and replaced by a sheet of synthetic grass measuring 100 metres by 56 metres which is floated out on underfloor air ducts to create a full-size indoor football pitch.

Below the main area there are two full-size ice hockey pitches. In a separate building alongside of the arena there is an ice hockey stadium with seating for 4,000 spectators. Within this same complex there is an eight-lane 50-metre swimming pool designed by Alvaar Alto, Finland's most celebrated architect. Contained in the sports park there is an outdoor ice rink, an outdoor athletics stadium and an arena for Finnish baseball.

In the outskirts of the town there are 300 kilometres of artificial cross-country ski tracks arranged in 10k circuits, some of which are floodlit. There are ten log cabins providing basic accommodation for overnight residence for skiers. Finally there is the first ever synthetic ski jump facility. Sports medicine resources are available in a rehabilitation centre a few kilometres from Jyväskylä.

From a Scottish perspective this range of facilities in one place is exceptional. However it is typical of a culture that values sport highly. Central government funding linked to local initiatives is a normal feature of Finnish sports development.

There is no tradition of extra-curricular school sport in Finland. Young people who want to take part in recreational or competitive sport join the local sports club. However there is growing concern about their lack of fitness which is seen as connected to the parlous state of physical education in schools. Starting in 1993 there has been a much greater emphasis on variety and choice in physical education. The chairman of the Federation of PE Teachers in Finland was asked to comment in 1997:

> He sees the increased freedom of choice as the big villain of the piece. The problem is that those who need exercise most do not choose the courses. (*Motion*, 1997, no. 2, p6)

The government elected in March 1999 is considering new legislation to increase choice and this could remove PE from the list of compulsory subjects in secondary and vocational schools. The Minister for Culture, Suvi Lindén does not appear to favour this approach.

> In scholastic sports, our big mission is to revive club activity. It's also important that health science and physical education be subjects in their own right. Sport is a good way of preventing social exclusion. (*Motion*, 1999, no. 2, p19)

Young Finland is a state-funded body that deals with the sporting needs of young people. It runs after-school projects that enable pupils to stay on after normal school hours. The nearest Scottish equivalent is Team Sport Scotland. There is a major programme 'Finland - Land of Children on the Move' that Young Finland is running from 1998 to 2000. It aims to get 100,000 children to begin exercising regularly. Another project is called 'The Exercising, Healthy School'. It involves the National

Board of Education and the Federation of Physical Education Teachers. This has led to a supplementary training programme for PE teachers at the University of Jyväskylä. About 400 teachers have undertaken the programme.

These various projects are aimed at changing the whole culture of activity in schools and giving much more emphasis to the benefits of exercise. The nation's commitment to physical activity is mirrored in the interests of members of parliament. According to *Motion* magazine (1998, no. 2, p6) more than a quarter of the 200 MPs also serve as voluntary sports administrators. This is a tradition reaching back over the past sixty years.

Urho Kekkonen who was president of Finland from 1956 to 1982 was a life-long competitor and after leaving office he became head of the Finnish Olympic Committee. Esko Aho who became prime minister in 1991 has recently taken over as president of the Finnish Ski Association. It is not uncommon for Olympic athletes and medallists to enter the Finnish or European parliament. Marjo Malikainen won an Olympic gold medal in 1988 at Calgary. She is now a member of the European Parliament. One of the committees on which she serves is the Committee for Culture. She is pressing for a Sport Directive to be included in the European Union's body of legislation. She believes that this would ensure that every new bill would have to be considered in terms of any possible impact on sport. There are many more instances of politicians who are engaged in the policies and administration of sport. It is a striking difference between Scotland and Finland. Scottish members of parliament are rarely former world class athletes and they are hardly ever involved in sports administration.

Historically, the main Finnish sports have reflected the climate and terrain – running and swimming, boating, equestrianism and winter sports. Competitive skiing originated in Norway, starting with the Holmenkollen events in 1892 (Killanin and Rodda, 1976). These cross-country and ski jumping events were accepted as the most important in the skiing world until the first Winter Olympics took place in 1924. Downhill skiing was invented by Henry Lunn who established a Public Schools Alpine Sports Club Challenge Cup in 1903. By then he was the owner of a hugely successful travel company which operated winter sports holidays in resorts that are now the core of Alpine skiing. The Challenge Cup was awarded for the combined results in skiing on a flat course, skating and tobogganing. Lunn went on to establish the first downhill race in 1911, and finally in 1922 he invented and organised the first race down a slalom course.

The first Winter Olympics were held at Chamonix in 1924 and Finland was one of the 16 countries which took part. There were 14 events (Alpine and Nordic) and a Finn, Thunberg, won three gold medals in speed skating. The Nordic and Alpine countries dominated the Games between 1924 and 1956 when Russia began to send competitors. Between 1924 and 1972 four countries (Norway, Russia, Sweden and Finland) won 60 per cent of the gold medals at the Winter Olympics. Finland's successes since 1972 have been mainly in biathlon, cross-country, speed skating and ski-jumping. Nevertheless, Finland has won a total of 427 medals in the summer and winter Olympics over the past 103 years.

Finland's other world class sporting achievements have occurred in athletics. Paavo Nurmi won nine Olympic gold and three silver medals and set twenty-two world records in distances from 1,500 to 10,000 metres. Lassi Viren won the 5,000 and 10,000 metres both in the 1972 and 1976 Olympic Games. Finland's other strength in athletics is javelin in which the country has been consistently successful throughout the century. The first world athletics championships were held in 1983. They were staged in Helsinki. However, the entry to world sport of the Soviet countries and East Germany, followed by the African nations, has nullified the efforts of a small country like Finland. It became obvious about fifteen years ago that if Finland wanted to compete on the world stage, new sports policies and structures would be required.

Finland has followed the lead given by other countries striving to establish a world class sporting identity:

- They have begun to bid for major world events – a hosting policy that has been very successful for Canada.
- They have developed sports schools along similar lines to their neighbours, Sweden.
- They have established a public/private business partnership in funding world class facilities in order that local authorities do not inherit massive debts as in the UK.
- The Ministry of Education has created machinery to manage, develop and coordinate sports policy, in line with parliamentary legislation for sport that also works in Denmark.
- Most of the funding for sports research is channelled to research institutes at one institution, namely the University of Jyväskylä.

Hosting Games

Helsinki made a valiant but eventually unsuccessful bid for the 2006 Winter Olympic Games. In a unique, innovative presentation, Finland proposed a three-centre approach: Helsinki, Lahti (both in Finland) and Lillehammer in Norway. Helsinki staged the 1952 Summer Olympic Games. Helsinki has built the Hartwall Arena, a magnificent ice skating/ice hockey facility, as a private commercial concern that would have been available for the 2006 Olympics. Lillehammer hosted the Winter Olympics in 1994 and Lahti accommodated the World Nordic Ski Championships in 1989 and the World Biathlon Championships in 1991. Helsinki ran the World Ice Hockey Championships in 1997, the European Skating Championships in 1998 and the Figure Skating World Championships in 1999. Helsinki is only 60 miles away from Lahti. This amounts to a huge expertise in hosting events. Ninety per cent of the Olympics competition sites are already in place. Although the bid was unsuccessful it demonstrated Finland's commitment to international events and its outstanding record of hosting championships.

In the summer of 2000 Helsinki will host the European swimming championships. In anticipation an international standard aqua complex has opened at Makelanrinne. It includes a ten-lane 50-metre pool and a world standard diving tower and pool. There is seating for 4,000 spectators. Finland is holding the European under-18 football championships in 2001 and has made a bid for the World under-18 event in 2003. The four Nordic countries are making a joint bid to stage the European football championships in 2008. They also have their eye on world events for girls and women footballers. Finland is not normally regarded as a major football nation but in 1998 HJK from Helsinki became the first Finnish team to qualify for the Champions League. In Sotkamo they are hosting the 'European Youth Olympics – Winter Days 2001'.

Funding Facilities

The Finnish government has wrestled with the problem of investing public funds in development projects that are privately owned and geared to profit-making. The dilemma is that the State is not prepared to fund national facilities fully; municipalities cannot and perhaps should not fund them; and the same problems of public/private investment arise at municipal and national level. If the country is to bid successfully for world level events it needs private sector investment but the State must also protect the interests of the general public: nurturing young people, improving facilities for voluntary sports clubs and providing opportunities for special-needs groups to engage in physical activity. The Finnish Sports Federation, representing 120 organisations of which 70 are sport-specific governing bodies, is concerned that commercial involvement will lead to increased charges for voluntary sports clubs.

Research

The University of Jyväskylä has become the focal point for sport-related research. It houses LIKES, the Foundation for Sport and Health Sciences that has regularly monitored scientific research in sport and physical activity since 1993. It is involved in a long-term project 'Social Justification for Physical Activity and Sport' that resulted in an initial report (LIKES, 1993), an extensive scientific review of Finnish physical culture (LIKES, 1994) and a comprehensive overview of the current situation (Mertaniemi and Miettinen, 1999).

Jyväskylä also houses a Research Institute for Olympic Sports, and a Research Centre for Sports Pedagogy set up in 1998. The latter examines physical education and sport within the school system. All of the Institutes operate under the umbrella of the University Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences. There is an international network encompassing ten universities and research institutes and universities in Europe and the United States. Jyväskylä research is supported by the Ministry of Education and extends to large-scale projects involving several European countries. The most important issue currently is the health, exercise and well-being of young people.

Olympism

Three years ago the Finnish Olympic Committee identified the following problem

> Regardless of the sport, only 20 per cent of the Finnish junior medallists will as adults make points – winning placements in world championships or the Olympics.
>
> (*Motion,* 1997, no. 2, p18)

There was ample evidence that 18-20 year olds performed well in World and European junior championships. The high drop-out rate appeared to stem from conflicting pressures on young people and the financial costs of high level sport. The Committee decided to set up a Junior Olympics sports project, starting in 1997. Jari Piirainen was appointed as Youth Sport Director. He analysed the dilemma for young people as follows:

> The young people are forced to deal with very difficult situations. They want to go to the top in sports, but they realise at the same time that sports alone are not going to make their lives secure. They want to study as their peers do, and at the same pace. We have lacked – and continue to lack – career planning for world class athletes. (*Motion,* 1997, no. 2, p9)

There are two aspects to the Junior Olympic project. Firstly, 99 scholarships have been awarded, 67 for summer sports and 32 for winter sports. Each scholarship is worth £1,250. Secondly, the project is linking Finland's four Olympic training centres to polytechnics. Piirainen's aim is to work out for each athlete a personally tailored educational programme so that he or she can live, practise and study at the training centre. It is intended that funding will be provided to enable the athletes' personal coaches to live at the centres. A more radical aspect of his thinking is that head coaches for national teams should also be based at the centres.

This project deals with the age group beyond upper secondary schools. If the two systems are to be linked it is necessary for the Finnish Olympic Committee to identify the outstanding sports school athletes and recruit them to the training centre / polytechnic scholarship scheme.

CHAPTER 3: SPORTS SCHOOLS

Sports schools in Finland are modelled on the Swedish system. That is a quite normal pattern of development in the Nordic countries. Sweden invaded Finland in the twelfth century, commencing an unbroken rule of seven hundred years that ended at the beginning of the 19th century. It is not surprising that there are close cultural similarities between the two countries. Swedish is the second national language in Finland. They compete with each other but in sport they are happy to learn from each other. Swedish golf is one of the major success stories of the past 25 years. Finland took the best elements of the Swedish system, adapted it and have now emerged as European team champions.

The idea of making special provision for talented young athletes has been around from the middle of the 19th century. British public schools were leaders in this field but in the more recent past East European countries developed talent identification and development schemes on an unprecedented scale. Sweden moved into this area in 1967 when several national sports federations began to experiment with schemes to attract the best 16-19 year old athletes into selected gymnasiums (upper secondary schools) (Thomson, 1992a).

The Swedish Board of Education convened a conference in 1975 to discuss ways of combining high performance sport with a fairly rigid secondary curriculum. The outcome was the 'five-hours dispensation' allowing sports students to drop two subjects and to allocate five hours to sport within the normal school day. It was at that point that interest in sports schools began to develop in Finland. National sports federations approached local authorities and identified schools that could follow the Swedish system. From 1977 to 1987 it was fairly haphazard, lacking in central support and direction. The Ministry of Education gave no encouragement and the voluntary sport sector was fragmented. However, in 1987 the Ministry made specific reference to the success of the Swedish sports schools when it invited a small group of schools to experiment with a different curriculum for talented athletes. Each school concentrated on a specific sport, such as athletics, volleyball or skiing. The pilot project lasted from 1987 to 1992.

In 1992 Sweden could boast 73 sports schools in 49 local authorities covering approximately 1,500 pupils in different sports (Soderberg, 1991). A small number were residential units within day schools but the majority catered for students who lived at home. The performances of Swedish teams and individuals in junior competitions up to and including world level were sufficient to convince the national sports federations and the Finnish Olympic Committee that they must follow suit. In 1992 the government introduced measures to recognise and designate twelve upper secondary schools as specialist sports schools.

The system introduced in 1992 has survived intact. The designated sports schools receive additional funds from the Ministry. In return they must only demonstrate that they have invested in the quality of training and that sports students are

performing satisfactorily in academic work and sport. Sports schools have complete discretion over the following areas:

- Selection of sports
- Number of sports
- Selection of students
- Appointment of coaches

This gives rise to a number of related issues. There is no upper limit on the number of sports students or the number of sports that can be offered. There is no central strategic planning. The Ministry gave the following response to questions about prioritisation of sports:

> There is no priority listing of supported sports given by the Government. The schools themselves can decide the sports and they are usually based on a tradition, but sports organisations, coaching, training facilities and economical resources affect it.
>
> (Letter from Ministry of Education, 15 October 1999)

The Finnish government consistently remains at arms length from policy and practice in the development of elite sport. In response to a further question about the purpose of sports schools the Ministry replied as follows:

> The starting point of education authorities is that both studies and top-sport can be combined together at sport schools. It is of course every student's personal choice how that is combined and which one will get bigger efforts in each phase in their lives. (ibid)

Although it is a decentralised system the Finnish sports school movement has benefited enormously from changes in the curriculum of upper secondary schools. Each student can plan an individualised programme of units that fits with elite sport. He or she can choose to complete the required 75 units in the normal three years or extend it to four or even five years.

For those who are residents in a local authority that includes a sports school there is no additional cost. However, talented youngsters may leave home and move to a sports school outwith their area (see map in Appendix A). They have to pay for residence and meals. In the case of Sotkamo Sports School these youngsters board in the Vuokatti Sports Institute a few kilometres from the school. The rent for a room in a dormitory is about £120 a month. Breakfast and dinner costs around £50 a week. The head-teacher at Sotkamo stated that it had not been a problem to recruit very talented youngsters. Nevertheless the decision to extend to four or five years does mean an additional financial burden for parents.

In theory, each student is responsible for planning his or her course. In practice, sports students have to fit in with training times set by the coaches. In Makelanrinne, the only sports school in Helsinki, the football students face a 30-minute journey each way to the indoor and outdoor pitches, three times each week. Most of them leave at 8am and return at 10.30am but others depart at 9am. The transport, hire of pitches

and availability of coaching staff means that students must arrange their academic timetables around their sporting regime. One coach has overall responsibility for the 53 football students.

The Ministry of Education provided a table showing the distribution of sport and students at the twelve designated sports schools (Appendix B).

The schools vary in so many ways that it is difficult to describe it as a unitary system:

- In 1998/99, there were 1,595 students in 50 different sports.
- The smallest number of sports students in a school was 44, the largest 438.
- The smallest number of sports offered in a school was three, the largest 42.
- Three sports - track and field, ice hockey and football - accounted for 45 per cent of the sports students.
- Three of the twelve schools accounted for 49 per cent of the students.
- At £555 per head the government's contribution amounts to nearly £900,000 per annum.

Whether by accident or design, more than half of the twelve schools cater for five out of the six most popular sports. At the other end of the scale there are 35 sports out of 50 which are only offered in one or two of the schools. In 21 cases the sport is only offered at Makelanrinne. An alternative interpretation is that the system caters mainly for 15 sports of which six account for over 1,000 students (Table 1). Eight of the schools responded to a questionnaire. The first section sought factual information about staff and students (Table 2).

Table 1: Numbers of Schools and Their Pupils Taking the Most Popular Sports

Sport	No. of Schools Offering the Sport	No. of Pupils Taking the Sport
Track and field	11	279
Ice hockey	10	226
Football	9	222
Skiing	9	140
Swimming	8	81
Basketball	6	121

Table 2: Number of Pupils, Staff and Coaches at Sports Schools						
Name of School	**No. of Pupils**	**No. of Staff**	**Funded Sports Pupils**	**Local Resident Pupils**	**Coaches**	
					Full time	**Part time**
Aurajoki	294	25	203	120	2	7
Kastelli	396	22	80	55	1	6
Kuninkaanhaka	358	38	125	*	0	8
Kuortane	207	23	74	9	0	8
Makelanrinne	635	45	438	*	1	17
Ounasvaara	305	25	76	21	0	4
Salpausselka	387	47	93	*	0	8
Sotkamo	368	24	116	26	1	14
*Information not supplied.						

These are generous pupil-teacher ratios but if pupils in S4, S5 and S6 were used for comparison, it is likely that there would not be a great difference between Finland and Scotland. In two of the schools, Aurajoki and Makelanrinne, 70 per cent of the pupils were funded sports scholars. The others varied between 20 and 35 per cent. Perhaps the most surprising statistic from this table is the tiny number of full-time coaches – five compared to 72 part-time coaches. In the four schools that employ full-time coaches they refer to them as coaching coordinators. The Principal at Makelanrinne commented:

> There is a constant need for more full-time coaches. (Questionnaire return)

Six of the schools have not developed facilities specifically for sports pupils. It seems that local community facilities are readily accessible and are fairly close to the schools. The travel times ranged from a few minutes walking distance (200 metres) to 30 minutes by minibus for most of the schools. Kastelli is ten minutes away from its main sports facility. Kuninkaanhaka and Sotkamo are within five minutes of all the sports facilities they need. Kuortane is situated only 200 metres away from a sports institute. Ounasvaara is also within walking distance of excellent facilities. Even Makelanrinne with its great range of sports has a maximum travel time of 30 minutes to any of the facilities that are needed for sports pupils.

Table 3 is not fully comprehensive because the range of sports is so extensive. However, it gives an indication of the kind of facilities that sports schools utilise on a regular, virtually daily basis.

Table 3: Type of Community Facilities Hired by Sports Schools

Sports School	Ice Rink	Swim Pool	Sports Hall	Ski Track	Ski Jump	Indoor Football Hall	Indoor Track and Field	Outdoor Games Field	Outdoor Track and Field	Finnish Baseball	Racket Sports
Aurajoki	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Kastelli	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓
Kuninkaanhaka	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Kuortane	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Makelanrinne	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Ounasvaara	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-
Salpausselka	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓	-	-
Sotkamo	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	✓	-

Four of the schools – Kuortane, Ounasvaara, Salpausselka and Sotkamo - concentrate most of their activity at sports institutes close to the school. They are able to hire coaches employed by the institutes on a part-time basis.

The schools were asked whether the main function is to develop top class athletes who receive education or if education is the main focus with sport as a secondary bonus. They could choose to indicate that each is equally important. Seven out of eight opted for the 'equally important' answer. The Principal at Kastelli provided supplementary information including the following:

> The sports-orientated syllabus enables those talented in sports to combine their training and upper secondary school, which prepares the student-athletes for future studies at university or professional education level. It offers the best possible growth place for promising athletes of school age and a curriculum tailored for their needs and to **get examination results on or above the national average** [our emphasis]. The admission requirements are very high at Kastelli. The primary criterion is that the students should possess a burning desire to become elite athletes of international level. (Questionnaire return)

The schools were asked about medals won by their students since 1992. The level of achievement at all eight schools was very impressive. They all felt that winning Finnish junior championships was so commonplace as hardly requiring detailed description. Kastelli summarised this level in athletics, ice hockey, soccer and swimming as:

> Dozens of medals won at junior (national) level in each of these sports.

The following brief comments cover international results:

Aurajoki Olympic silver medal in ice hockey 1994. World championships in ice hockey several times, many students.

Kastelli World Championship medals in skiing and ice hockey (junior and senior). Medal in world schools championship in football.

Kuninkaanhaka Medals at international standard (not defined) in athletics.

Kuortane Medals in wrestling, shooting and track and field.

Ounasvaara Six gold medals between 1994 and 1999 at Junior World Championships in various skiing disciplines and triathlon. Gold in individual and silver in the team event at the Senior World Championships in Nordic combined skiing 1996-99. Silver and Bronze at the Olympic Games in free-style skiing in 1998.

Salpausselka Medals in canoeing, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing at world junior championships.

Sotkamo 35 medals in world junior cross-country championships, four in triathlon and six in Nordic combined and ski-jumping.

Makelanrinne The school has maintained a Hall of Fame record of achievements since 1992 (Appendix C). It is summarised in the following two tables.

Table 4: Medals Tally at Makelanrinne School, 1992-99 Inclusive

Games	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Total
Olympics	2		1				2		5
Paralympics	1								1
World Championships	1		1	1	1	6	3	2	15
European Championships					1	1	3		5
Junior World Championships	1		8	2	3	1	2	1	18
Junior European Championships	4	3	1	3	2	3	4		20
Schools World Championships			1	1		1		3	6
TOTAL	9	3	12	7	7	12	14	6	70

Table 5: Number and Type of Medals Won by Makelanrinne School, 1992-99 Inclusive								
Medals	**OG**	**Par**	**WC**	**EC**	**JWC**	**JEC**	**SWC**	**Total**
Gold			5	2	7	6	4	24
Silver	1		7	2	6	7	1	24
Bronze	4	1	3	1	5	7	1	22
TOTAL	5	1	15	5	18	20	6	70
See Table 4 for explanation of headings								

These are truly extraordinary achievements. Three of the schools have won Olympic medals and others have competed with distinction at world level. The largest school has won 21 Olympic and World Championship medals in eight years. The smaller schools have concentrated on a few sports, mainly Nordic winter sports, whereas Makelanrinne has spread its successes over 18 different sports.

All of this has been achieved by performers within a fairly narrow age-band, mainly 16-19 years. All of the participants have been part-time athletes, combining sport with secondary education. This is not to undervalue the contribution of national sports federations and the Finnish Olympic Association who provide coaching for elite athletes, arrange training camps and bear the costs of attendance at championships. However, the daily grind of training for most of the year is organised and managed by the schools.

The government's contribution of £900,000 seems very modest in view of the results. Local authorities and sports institutes supply the facilities at reasonable charges and they are probably subsidising the sports schools. Nevertheless, most countries would probably meet such costs willingly if they could be assured of six Olympic medals and 15 world championship successes.

For the sports schools the most important issue is the level of support from central government. The government elected in March 1999 acted swiftly. They appointed an Athletes' Career Committee under the chairmanship of Harri Sylvasalmi, Director of the Sports Division in the Department for Cultural Policy. It was effectively a review of the sports school system. The remit of the committee was:

> to develop ways of helping athletes to combine flexibly, an active sports career and studies, and to explore ways of supporting athletes' education and training.
>
> (Ministry of Education, 27 August 1999)

The committee was appointed on 12 January and reported eleven weeks later on 27 August 1999. They unanimously endorsed the work of sports schools. They made 12 recommendations based on the assumption that there was room for expansion of the system (Appendix D). For example, the existing model of Olympic Training Centres should be expanded. One or two more sports schools should be designated in Helsinki to reduce the pressure on Makelanrinne and meet latent demand. A sports school should be established in eastern Finland. There were recommendations about

guidance for athletes in further and higher education, changes in legislation and funding of student athletes.

It appears that the government does not intend to implement the report. Jari Piirainen, Secretary General of the Finnish Sports Federation, made the following statement in a presentation to the study group of visitors from Scotland:

> The Minister of Culture does not accept that central government should pay for elite sport. There is to be no further expansion of specialised provision for sport. The current system will be maintained throughout the four-year term of the government but no guarantees can be given beyond that.

In the light of the response, it is highly unlikely that the government will amend legislation. This is a severe blow to the local authorities who have operated the system since 1992. It is very discouraging for the Finnish Sports Federation and frustrating for the Finnish Olympic Committee who have worked hard to develop athletes career and education initiatives.

Summary

- **Central versus Local Freedom.** The Finnish system is highly decentralised. Local authorities and schools are given maximum discretion. In a sport context this allows schools to decide on the sports they will offer, the number of sports students, and the coaches they will employ. Quality control is a local responsibility.

- **Size and Growth.** There is no upper limit to the number of sports students, either within a selected sport or in total. Nor is there a lower limit below which there would be a threat to the status of a sports school. It may be that growth is planned over periods of time but, if so, no evidence was available. The alternative is more likely: growth is reactive, incremental and unplanned.

- **Specialisation.** Some sports have concentrated their talented players at one sports school. Sotkamo has the best 40 young Finnish baseballers. Makelanrinne has a monopoly on the elite juniors in badminton, squash and tennis. However, in the major sports – track and field, ice hockey, football, skiing, swimming and basketball – the key concept is distribution across many schools.

- **Resident/Non-resident.** One of every three students attending sports schools is not normally resident in that area. They are, in that sense, national specialised schools. Financial costs of residence are met by parents but it is a means tested system.

- **Curriculum.** Sports students can spread the normal three-year upper secondary education over longer periods of time. Training is a curriculum subject assessed by coaches appointed by the school. Students follow a balance of compulsory/optional courses without regard to age groupings. Anecdotal

evidence from staff of the schools is that their prospects of progressing to further and higher education are not adversely affected.

- **Coaches.** The system consists almost entirely of part-time coaches. The proximity of a sports institute creates opportunities for joint funding of full-time posts. In these cases the full-time person is regarded as a coordinator of coaches and sports scientists.

- **Logistics.** Sports schools do not have exceptional sports facilities on site. They rely on local facilities. This creates huge logistical problems of moving students, sometimes hundreds of them, from school to sport facilities and back on a daily basis. Added to this, students must take part in training camps and competitions during the school year. Booking of transport, facilities and accommodation adds to the normal administration of the schools.

- **Performance.** The results in European and World Junior or Schools championships alone would justify the system. The additional rewards of World and Olympic medals are certainly attractive. The central problem is that only one in every five of Junior medallists will progress to similar performances at Senior level. Finland won only one medal in the 1999 World Athletics Championships.

- **Training Centres.** There are four Olympic Training Centres in Finland, funded by the Finnish Olympic Association. The FOA receives less than £2 million from the lottery, nothing from tax income and about £900,000 from sponsors. Without additional funding it cannot increase the number of training centres. There is an obvious need for central funding of centres and grant-aid for full-time athletes.

- **Research.** Finland has opted to concentrate research in health-related fitness, physical education and sport at the University of Jyväskylä. There is an accumulation of resources in that one place and a critical mass of researchers from the various social, biological and other scientific fields of inquiry.

- **Political Support.** One in every four members of Parliament is involved in some form of sports administration in addition to parliamentary duties. The National Sports Council consists entirely of politicians. There is a Sport Act of Parliament. Former cabinet ministers occupy senior positions in sports organisations. They combine political skills with life-long engagement in sport.

- **Funding.** There is a simple funding formula for sport. It is essentially a voluntary activity that is funded mainly by citizens through their involvement with clubs and by local authorities who provide facilities at very low charges to local clubs and associations. Central government employs a few civil servants to distribute a proportion of sports lottery funds but otherwise adopts a non-directive approach. The Finnish Sports Federation is the authorised governing agency for sport, and within it the Finnish Olympic Association takes responsibility for elite sport. There is no sports scholarship system in post-secondary education and no equivalent of the Scottish Talented Athlete Programme.

CHAPTER 4: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCOTLAND

The purpose of the visit was to consider whether a network of sports schools could be an effective foundation for elite sport in Scotland. In addition, whether the flexible, negotiated curriculum arrangements in Scottish further education colleges would be suited to a sports school or scholarship scheme. The evidence was overwhelmingly convincing.

The sports school system is highly regarded in Finland because it meets the needs of the country's elite young athletes without disrupting their education. It is efficient in the use of resources and it is well managed at school level. It is effective in delivering an output of high sporting performance. It is economic compared to systems in other countries in that the per capita subvention is only £550 per annum. It relies to a very great extent on the ability of head teachers to juggle available resources and manage the process of blending sport and education. These are all culturally-free characteristics of a system. They are transferable between societies.

Although 12 schools receive additional funding from the Ministry of Education, this has not discouraged another 19 schools from developing similar arrangements on their own account. Alongside of these institutions there are ten sports institutes and four Olympic training centres that also cater for high level athletes. This has all been achieved without making concessions in academic studies. It adds up to the idea that sport, and in this case elite sport, is a significant element of culture in Finland. This raises the question of readiness. Is Scotland ready to accept that sport is not simply a frivolous activity but a central part of our living culture?

There are two reasons for believing that Scotland is ready for sports schools and sports scholarships as integral parts of education and culture. Firstly, in December 1998 the Scottish Education Minister Helen Liddell announced that £14 million was being made available to support and extend specialist provision (Scottish Office Education and Industry Dept, 1998):

> This money will ensure that pupils with special talents have the best opportunity to develop their talents as part of their school education. Specialist provision is all about maximising the potential of children both academically and with regard to their particular specialism.

The government recognised the successful track record of the three existing specialist schools for music and dance and indicated a readiness to build in other areas, including sport.

Glasgow City Council responded quickly to the paper. The Glasgow School of Sport was opened at Bellahouston Academy in 1998 with an initial intake of seven pupils. A full-time post of Director was established and funding was shared equally by the Department of Education and the Department of Culture and Leisure Services. In session 1999/2000 the number of sports pupils rose to 26, with a maximum capacity of 120. Funding from the Excellence Fund of nearly £1m over three years was announced in March 2000. The Glasgow School of Sport was followed by government approval for an international languages school at Shawlands Academy.

This project will be supported by the Excellence Fund - £480,000 in capital funding and £480,000 for running costs over two years. The first music school outside of the central belt will also be funded from the Excellence Fund: Dyce Academy in Aberdeen will receive £2 million. (Scottish Executive, 2000)

Announcing the award to Dyce Academy, Peter Peacock, Deputy Minister for Children and Education, commented:

> Many of our young people show special aptitude in a variety of ways. They have special talents and we want to nurture these special talents... This [award] will spread the geographical impact of having specialist schools of this kind in Scotland and will widen the opportunity for a whole range of children. (*Herald*, 15 January 2000, p8).

Secondly, the Minister for Education and Culture Sam Galbraith and his Deputy Minister Rhona Brankin have actively supported the establishment and progress of the Scottish Institute of Sport. The **sport**scotland Lottery Fund has allocated £20 million over a four-year period to the Institute. **sport**scotland (formerly the Scottish Sports Council) has established and given every assistance to the Institute since November 1998. The advent of the Institute has generally been welcomed by national governing bodies of sport. Local authorities have been heavily involved in the establishment of the Institute's local network of area institutes of sport. The creation of a public body specifically charged with responsibility for elite sport has been greeted favourably by the media.

This amounts to more than a groundswell of support. It is a recognition by all and sundry that Scotland has fallen well behind other nations in world level sport. There is a spirit of optimism that this can change, but only if fresh ideas can permeate the sport system. Sports schools could be a part of this new thinking.

There has been no indication that the English system of specialist sports colleges will be adopted in Scotland, although the strategy for English sport introduced by the Prime Minister committed the Government to having 110 in place by 2003 and established them as central to a range of initiatives on school sport (Dept for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000). The system has many strengths, not least of which is an enhancement of physical education in the specialist schools. They are required to build significantly on the basic physical education content of the National Curriculum. The objectives include linking with higher education institutions offering sports scholarships; providing a supportive environment for talented young sports people; acting as centres of excellence and talent identification; and acting as essential building blocks in talent development strategies of some sports. The English system is probably more comprehensive than in most countries but it does contain many hurdles for schools to overcome. It appears to be very bureaucratic.

The central thrust of the European sports school movement is that dedicated resources must be made available to **selected** schools and associated clubs. No other country spreads resources thinly over a large number of institutions. No other European nation has improved its success rate substantially by investing solely in individual athletes. The fabric which binds successful elite sport development is institutional. Schools, colleges, universities and sports centres are indispensable

elements in the mosaic of elite sport. Investment must be channelled through these institutions if Scotland is to follow the European model.

This fits well with the culture of Scottish sport. The notion of sacrificing a child's education in pursuit of glory in sport is anathema to most parents. There is little enthusiasm for tennis or gymnastics academies that are highly popular in America. There are well-documented accounts of excessive regimes that amount to child abuse (Ryan, 1996). Even well-regulated and respected boarding schools such as Millfield or the Lawn Tennis Association residential centre of excellence at Bisham Abbey have not proved popular with Scottish families. The culture in Scotland favours local provision up to the age of about 18 when half that age group embarks on higher education. If the concept of sports schools is to be accepted it is likely that at least initially they will be non-residential. They will be integral parts of Scottish secondary, further and higher education.

Glasgow City Council's enterprise in launching the Glasgow School of Sport at Bellahouston Academy is entirely praiseworthy but one school cannot provide for all the talented youngsters of Scotland in a wide variety of sports. There is a need to link the concept of sports schools to the broader national interest that led to the creation of the Scottish Institute of Sport. This sort of thinking would probably support the notion of a network of sports schools spread geographically across the country. It would seem appropriate for the Institute to allocate some of its funds and also apply to the Excellence Fund and education budget - that would need to provide the lion's share of the funding - for a rolling programme of development of sports schools. The Institute could invite the area institutes of sport to bid for funding that might cover a substantial proportion of the costs, the balance being raised locally. It is probably unrealistic to expect full funding from central sources initially.

There are obvious advantages in operating through area institutes of sport. They would be responsible for making the necessary contact with education officers, college principals, head teachers of secondary schools and committed teachers and coaches. The Institute could prescribe guidelines and criteria for the development process. These might include the following.

Institutions:

- should have a track record of elite sport development;
- must be committed to flexible programming of studies and sport;
- should have well-established links with local sports clubs; and
- should be able to nominate teachers, coaches, accredited sports scientists and sports medicine staff.

The programme:

- should be approved by relevant governing bodies of sport; and

- should cater mainly for the 16-19 age group.

Area institutes of sport could be advised to concentrate on institutions with a history of success in particular sports. Any additional funds would therefore be focused on existing good practice. For example, if a particular individual had been the driving force, he or she could be released for part of the working day or week to concentrate on the development process. The programme funds could be used for a part-time replacement. Alternatively a coach could be employed to work alongside the motivator. The Scottish Institute of Sport might initially offer a guaranteed minimum sum to each sports school for setting-up costs. In the longer term this could switch to per capita funding as the number of students grew to an approved target number.

The Institute might advise area institutes of sport to explore alternative timetabling of study and sport. This might entail starting the school or college day earlier or later to accommodate training at the right place and time and with the right people. The Swedish system is based on a reduction of five hours in the school week, that is allocated for training. The Finnish approach goes a step further by accrediting 'training' as curriculum hours. In sports that require access to off-site facilities, half day or full day release might be appropriate. Canoeing and golf would come into this category.

Essentially the timetable should be designed around training requirements and the curriculum for sports students should be negotiated thereafter. This is a radical departure from existing practice but with skilful management it should be possible. Experience of sports scholarships in universities shows that different patterns of study can be devised and sports students can achieve satisfactory academic results if their courses are spread over an extra year.

Area institutes of sport might invite selected schools and a further education college to collaborate in these arrangements. Colleges can provide academic and vocational education. The most significant link between schools and colleges could be in provision of study under the new Higher Still banner. A mixed economy of school and college provision might be preferable for some sports students. College courses are available throughout the day and evening. Sports students might combine a reduced workload during the day at school with some evening college courses. In the longer term sports schools may choose to follow the Finnish model of dispensing with age groups as the basic unit. Talented youngsters across the 16-19 age range could train together for sport and join appropriate classes from an education menu available at secondary schools and further education colleges.

Another option would be to designate selected further education colleges as sports schools. Most of their students are in the 16-19 age bracket. They already operate flexible programmes of study and some of them are already operating elite sport schemes. As an example, Falkirk College is collaborating with Stenhousemuir Football Club in the education and training of young apprentice professional players. There are two groups, one consisting of twelve males and the other, six females. They train at the football ground and College in the mornings and attend the College

in the afternoon. A local secondary school, Larbert High School, has a long and distinguished record in schools football. If the College were to develop a sports school programme, the links with Larbert could be strengthened. Falkirk College and Stirling University have established a close working relationship. Elite level College students can access university facilities and coaching, and vice versa. The College is represented on the University scholarships committee. All levels of educational needs of talented youngsters could be provided at one or another of these institutions.

The Boards of the six area institutes of sport include senior officers and/or elected councillors who shape educational policy and provision at local level. They are in regular contact with the Scottish Executive Education Department. They also communicate with Ministers and Members of Scottish Parliament. They are part of the forums that are now charged with responsibility for elite sport at area level. Their support may well determine whether sports schools are introduced in Scotland. If they agree that the area institutes of sport are the appropriate agencies to initiate development, the following sort of organisation might ensue.

The Board would control areas that are entirely sporting matters:

- the budget for the programme;
- selection of sports;
- number of sports;
- selection of students; and
- number of students.

Head teachers of designated sports schools or principals of colleges would control what are essentially education matters:

- their budget allocation and its disbursement;
- employment of on-site sport school coordinators;
- employment of registered teachers connected with the programme;
- hire of facilities and transport;
- purchase of services of sports coaches, sports medicine and sports science staff; and
- the curriculum provided by the school or college for sports students; while
- the manager of the area institute of sport would provide administrative support.

Conclusions

Scotland needs a firm foundation for elite sport. The evidence from Finland shows clearly that sports schools can provide that foundation. They are efficient, effective and economical. The establishment of the Scottish Institute of Sport and its six area institutes offers an opportunity to proceed strategically in the pursuit of sporting excellence combined with education. This report is suggesting that a country with the same population as Scotland has shown the way ahead. It is not a revolutionary approach. It is a matter of building an existing good practice and good will. Glasgow City Council has demonstrated that if there is a will to make specialist provision for sport, it can be achieved. It is to be hoped that the same passion and commitment would emerge across the country in response to a national initiative led by the Scottish Institute of Sport.

APPENDIX A: MAP OF SPORTS SCHOOLS IN FINLAND

APPENDIX B: SPORTS SCHOOLS PUPILS – 1998/99

APPENDIX C: MAKELANRINNE SENIOR HIGH HALL OF FAME 1991-99

APPENDIX D: REPORT OF ATHLETES' CAREER COMMITTEE

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