The election of the Labour Government in 1997 brought an increased focus on the organisation, administration and management of sport organisations. In part this was due to instances of poor management and failures in organisational governance. It was also a reflection of the increased level of public funding for sport, particularly following the introduction of the National Lottery in 1994, which has resulted in the need for sports administrative structures to move from amateurism to professionalism (Henry and Lee, 2004). Moreover, it reflected the increasing focus on sport as a means to deliver Government policy, with sport seen as a way to target issues such as social exclusion, obesity and health, anti-social behaviour, and youth crime. This has led to sport policy being taken more seriously by politicians, and like many other areas of public services, increasingly the organisational structure of sport has been subject to modernisation reforms (McDonald, 2005) as part of an ongoing process to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

Since 2000, both Sport England and UK Sport have undergone numerous structural changes in the drive toward modernisation. Underpinning the modernisation agenda has been the desire for Government to devolve responsibility to Sport England and UK Sport. Such reforms have been perceived as necessary to increase the accountability and autonomy of Sport England and UK Sport although it has led to the increasing ability of Government to influence the strategic direction of these two organisations through the introduction of targets, measurable outcomes, Key Performance Indicators, and the need to demonstrate compliance with certain standards (Houlihan and Green, 2009).

While both Sport England and UK Sport have had to demonstrate that they are “fit for purpose”, national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) have also come under increasing scrutiny to modernise. NGBs have a varied role. They have been described as custodians of their sport (UK Sport, 2003) and their responsibilities are widespread, and include, but are not limited to strategic planning, promoting the sport, overseeing the rules and regulations, increasing participation, and developing talent. Modernisation, in the context of NGBs, has been defined as “the process of continuing development of a Governing Body towards greater effectiveness, efficiency and independence” (UK Sport, 2003: 1). This was first reflected in A Sporting Future for All, a policy document released by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) in 2000, within which there were some key recommendations relating to the governance of NGBs. The Government stated that NGBs would receive increased control over the allocation of public funding on the proviso that NGBs become more accountable by modernising administration structures and practices, and implementing robust management, planning and monitoring of all activities (DCMS, 2000). NGB modernisation was further advocated in Game Plan (DCMS, 2002), where it was clearly reiterated that Government investment should be used to drive modernisation and that NGBs should have clear performance indicators that can be used as the basis on which to determine funding.
Editor's comments - [ This report presents the findings from a research project focusing on the
governance of national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) in the UK. Governance has become
an increasingly important issue that NGBs in the UK have had to address over the last decade
due to examples of poor management, financial failure, and increased public funding for sport
that have resulted in the need for more professional sports administrative structures.
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