

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Sport Governance, HC 320

Tuesday 31 October 2017

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Damian Collins (Chair); Julie Elliott; Simon Hart; Julian Knight; Ian C. Lucas; Christian Matheson; Brendan O'Hara; Rebecca Pow; Jo Stevens; and Giles Watling.

Questions 324 - 483

Witnesses

I: Baroness Grey-Thompson

II: Michael Breen, father of Olivia Breen, Paralympian

III: Tim Hollingsworth OBE, Chief Executive, British Paralympic Association

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Baroness Grey-Thompson](#)
- [British Paralympic Association](#)

Examination of Witness

Witness: Baroness Grey-Thompson

Q324 **Chair:** Good morning and welcome to this further evidence session of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee on our inquiry into governance in sport. I am grateful to all the witnesses giving their time to appear in front of us today and also to the people who submitted a large amount of written evidence to the Committee ahead of the hearings today.

I also want to explain at the beginning a slight change to the running order. Unfortunately, the technology that was going to enable Peter Eriksson to give evidence to us from Ottawa, where he is at the moment, is not working and we are unable to find an alternative solution to that. Regrettably, Peter will not be able to answer the Committee's questions orally today. He has supplied written evidence to the Committee that we will be publishing. The running order will change slightly in that we will only have one witness for the final session and we had advertised there would be a break while the technology was set up to enable Peter to give evidence. Obviously, that will no longer be the case and we will go straight from the second set of witnesses on to the final.

If I could start, Baroness Grey-Thompson, thank you once again for giving evidence to the Committee. I wanted to start, in some ways, where you said you started on this process formally, with your duty of care report that was published in April at the Government's request. You said in your written evidence to the Committee, which we are publishing this morning as well, that in the process of preparing that report you received numerous concerns raised to you by athletes and people involved in para-sport about flaws in the classification system and inappropriate procedures in terms of safeguarding the protection of whistleblowers. I wondered if you could tell the Committee a little bit about the evidence you received and your impression of it.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Thank you very much. Thank you to the Committee for looking at this issue because it is a very important one. It shows where the Paralympic movement has come, that the Committee is interested in this. I was asked by the Minister in 2015 to look at duty of care. The remit was huge. It was traumatic injury, concussion, education, gambling, doping and classification. A significant number of athletes, coaches, medics and people who work in the system approached me.

Around this particular area, classification, they raised issues of intentional misrepresentation, misclassification, insufficient information or medical information being provided, the lack of an appeals process or to know who to speak to to raise an appeal, and a fear of repercussions if they did raise an issue in this area. I think that was shown by the number of people who wished to remain anonymous. In all cases but two, everybody asked that their name and information was kept anonymous.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The final theme was lack of understanding about disability issues or disabled people, which they felt affected how the system ran.

Q325 **Chair:** Were you surprised by the evidence you received?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: It is a significant number of people across a whole range of sports. Some of it has been talked about a little bit in the last couple of years. I probably was slightly surprised by the number of people who came forward in one go but that was true across the whole area of duty of care. A huge number of people came forward to offer information.

The challenge with how duty of care was set up was that it was not set up to accept confidential information. If we needed to do anything with it, I could not offer anybody whistleblowing status. It was me and a part-time member of staff and I had no power to call anybody to account or to join up information. The themes that I mentioned, those were the areas where people came to me.

Q326 **Chair:** Yes. Did the nature of the allegations or concerns raised to you come as a surprise or did it merely confirm concerns that you had yourself, based on your own personal experience in the sport? Even if you may have been surprised by the number of people who came forward, were you surprised by the fact that these issues were raised?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I was not surprised that they were raised because there is nowhere else to go, or it does not feel like it. The fact that people came to me, they felt they were able to talk to me, they felt they could trust me, I think was just part of the issue we have within the system that there does not appear to be a formal process.

The difficulty with classification—and for the vast majority of athletes it should not be a difficult process to go through—is that every sport is different. They have evolved at different times. Not only do you have different classifications within a sport, not all those categories may appear on a Paralympic or a world championship programme. There are some challenges around that side of it.

Q327 **Chair:** Yes. As you say, people came to you because you were running this process and therefore you were someone they could go to. I suppose one of the things I am interested in is: did you feel that the nature of the allegations, the sorts of allegations or concerns being raised, were typical of problems you had heard athletes discussing in the past or that you may have had experience of yourself?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: They are typical of where the system is at the moment. The Paralympic Games have developed exponentially. My last Games was 2004; I could only dream then that we would have full stadiums that we had in London and the amount of public interest that is in this. London was an incredible moment and the UK should be very proud of that but with the development of the Paralympic Games comes more sponsorship, more media coverage and more personal sponsorship.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Paralympic Games have grown and developed much more quickly than the Olympics have in terms of the pace of development. One thing I think is important is that the governance and the processes develop at the same rate because what we are talking about in classification is the duty of care to everyone in the system. It is important that athletes feel that the system is appropriate, it can be trusted, and those who work in the system have duty of care applied to them as well.

Q328 Chair: You feel as well that there are no proper whistleblowing processes in place that support people coming forward with evidence or concerns that they have.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I do not think there are at the moment. There should be.

Q329 Chair: Yes. You said in your duty of care report as well that you thought there should be a Sports Ombudsman who oversees sports bodies. Inherently, someone is making a complaint about an athlete competing in their sport and they are taking that complaint to the national governing body of that sport, which in classification was responsible for classifying that athlete in the first place. They are challenging not just that athlete but the national governing body. Do you feel that in cases like that, these sorts of serious allegations have to be dealt with by an independent panel and not by the governing body itself?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: One of the things I asked for in my review was an independent investigation into where we are at the moment to understand what the landscape looks like. The recommendation on the Ombudsman was not initially written with this in mind but it can apply to it.

If I look at the whole range of areas that I looked at, it was very difficult for athletes to raise any concern within the system. We have seen that with some of the sports that have come out more publicly. Part of the idea of having the Ombudsman as well was to ensure that the national governing bodies looked at their internal policies and procedures for things like selection, deselection and a whole range of events and tightened those up. UK Sport and Sport England have done a lot of work on sports governance. Part of it was to ensure that each governing body looked at themselves but then also that there was a route through for people to raise an issue.

I did not define how big the Ombudsman would be. I did not see it as a large organisation. I saw it maybe as a couple of people who could pull in expertise when required. With some of the cases that we have heard in the last 18 months, I just think independence is a good thing to have. We are talking about public money. I do not think being accountable for public money is a bad thing. There has to be a mechanism. Obviously you do not want malicious complaints, but there should be a way of finding a resolution rather than issues just being allowed to keep going.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q330 **Chair:** I suppose implicit within it is the idea that there needs to be some sort of independent body that is separate from the national governing body, separate from UK Sport, which has the right to go in and look at issues as they occur to make sure things are being done properly.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I did not define it as “the Ombudsman could go in and look at issues”. I saw it more as a body that issues could be taken to. That recommendation was left deliberately with scope. We know there is no more money so the money for an Ombudsman would have to be found potentially within the current system or within the current people who work in the system.

Q331 **Chair:** But it is quite an important issue because implicit in what you are saying is that people do not have confidence in the sports bodies at the moment to investigate themselves, which effectively is what they are being asked to do.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: What we have seen in the media in the last year is issues around what has been called “a culture of fear” and raised in lots of other ways, how difficult it is not just for an athlete but for a member of staff. We tend to talk about athletes a lot but the duty of care applies to all. An athlete does not know necessarily how long they are going to be on a squad. With the cycle of funding, a coach does not know how long they are going to have a job. There needs to be a duty of care and protection to them as well.

Q332 **Chair:** The Committee has received anonymous evidence that it is not admissible for us to publish but is certainly important in thinking about these issues. I am sure that is similar and may be the same as some of the evidence you received. A lot of it is pretty heart-rending stuff from people who feel that they have been left in a desperate situation with no one they can turn to for help.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: That is my experience across the whole piece of work. It is the hardest piece of work I have had to do. I was listening to just horrific examples of how people were deselected in an Olympic/Paralympic year. It happens but it was the way it happened: bullying, intimidation, sexual harassment and worse. It felt that there was a huge amount of pressure and personally I found it incredibly difficult in terms of the challenge that I faced in getting the piece of work done. That is why I think people need somewhere to go.

Sport is amazing, it is incredible and we should be hugely proud of what the teams have achieved. Nobody wants to go back to 1996, where there was a single gold medal for the British team. Actually the Paralympic team did really well, but there was not much media coverage then and people do not remember that so much. Now is a really important time, with what we have seen that is in the public domain—and there are other sports that have gone through a process much more privately and done some really good work—to stop and take check. UK Sport is talking about doing a health check. They are talking about another review. There are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

some recommendations going forward. It would be useful to look at the system.

Q333 **Chair:** Yes. Can I just ask why you did not say more about this in your duty of care report? There is not that much on Olympic athletes and Paralympic athletes, para-sportsmen and women. You raise that athletes should understand more about where they could go to make a complaint and who is there to advise them but you do not really go into these serious issues. It is quite a stark comparison to the evidence you have given today and what you have put in your written statement to the Committee.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: When I was asked to do the piece of work, I felt my role was to look for gaps in the system and to make recommendations. I was not asked to look at governing bodies individually. I did not have the capacity to do that. I was not able to do a deep-dive into the whole system. It was to look at gaps.

In terms of the remit I had, it was grassroots in England right the way up to where lottery funding came in, professional sport, and I have mentioned the whole range of subjects. Writing the narrative for that was incredibly difficult because where one recommendation exists, it could apply to five or six different subsets and it was then trying to join it up. I tried to write a narrative but felt in the end a more positive way forward was to just put an induction process and education as a step going forward.

Also, there was a lot of challenge over what I was writing. It did not feel for a very long time that I had a lot of traction. For the first months that I was doing this, I was told there was nothing to see, "Go away". I had lots of stakeholder meetings that did not feel like they were going anywhere. I had a governing body wanting to know specific examples of what people were saying to me, and the information was anonymous. That is how people came to me.

The whole process was very difficult and it did not feel productive to the system to write a whole narrative behind why I made those recommendations. I said at the time if you knew sport you would understand why those recommendations were being made. Some governing bodies were doing some things; some were doing less. It would have been very complicated to write.

Q334 **Chair:** That challenge was coming from the sports bodies in this country against you writing too much narrative detail into your report?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: There was challenge coming around the information across all areas, not just this. There was a challenge around what athletes and staff were saying to me.

Q335 **Chair:** People challenging whether it was admissible for your report, whether it should be included?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Whether it should be included or not and what I was going to write. I said right from the beginning it would only be a forward-looking report because if I was being asked to do a whole deep-dive into the culture it would have been a whole team of people and a two or three-year project. It was meant to be a year. It extended slightly. It would have been a much bigger piece of work.

Q336 **Chair:** That is quite a shocking thing, in a way, to suggest that people came forward raising serious concerns and the challenge back you had from governing bodies of sports in this country was, "That is not admissible. It should not be included". It almost suggests they are trying to turn their gaze away from the problem that is within their sight.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I was not told what to write in the report and I tried at every opportunity to say that it was forward-looking. I think there was nervousness around what a narrative might look like and for me, in terms of what I was asked to do, a forward-looking approach was the right way to go.

Chair: Thank you.

Q337 **Julian Knight:** To follow up on that point about the report, I listened to the BBC "File on 4" report regarding the processes and it made reference to pressure that you had been put under effectively not to follow through over, or tone down, misclassification. I wondered what format any sort of pressure took and whether or not it was directed at misclassification.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: As I have already said, there were bodies that wanted to know the anonymous information that I was given. I did not feel under any pressure to not include that in my report in terms of asking for an independent investigation.

At one point in one of the drafts, I also had a recommendation for an independent body for classification which would move it from the national governing bodies but it was all a collaborative approach. On discussion with various people, I felt that I would be predetermining the outcome of an independent investigation because I also have to realise the people who came to speak to me chose to speak to me. We need a much wider investigation across sports. It did not make sense ultimately to have an independent body without having the investigation.

Q338 **Julian Knight:** It specifically went against the idea of an independent body, though. It was obviously in your draft and then it did not make it to the final version. Who were the main voices that said that this should not happen?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I do not think for that recommendation it occurred in that way, that people were saying no. Removing the independent body was my decision because, in trying to track how the system currently works, it is my view on how I think the system should work. It just did not make sense to have both those recommendations in there. All the recommendations I had I wanted to be very practical and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

able to be implemented, and the independent body felt like another step. I know there has been some discussion on what that might look like and whether that would be different from what exists at IPC level. In the UK we are able to influence what we are able to influence and we need to feed that mechanism up to the IPC. There is a view that we do not want anything too different from what happens at international level, but I did not feel that having an independent body was the most sensible step forward.

Q339 Julian Knight: Yes. I am sorry to labour the point here, Baroness, but you decided effectively that this should not occur, that we should not have the independent body, between version 1 and version 2. You did not just do that in isolation. There must have been pushback from somewhere within the stakeholders in this report, presuming they saw the early vision. Why is it that you went from saying, "Yes, there should be one" to, "No, there should not be one"?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I think I had 27 drafts of the report, actually. I stopped numbering them when I got to about 24. I originally had recommendations that went much wider, much further, and covered all sorts of other areas as well. Originally there were ideas to have recommendations on gambling but in that area not much evidence came forward. I did not feel I had any pushback on the independent body. For me the investigation was important and then we would be able to see about what further steps needed to be taken.

Q340 Julian Knight: From the evidence today, it seems to me as if you went a certain distance looking at misclassification and thought, "Okay, that is something for another day", effectively. What prompted you to take that course of action? What is it within the environment of Paralympic sport, effectively, that makes it such a can of worms that you did not want to drill down into that area?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Into the independent body?

Q341 Julian Knight: No, sorry, into misclassification.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Sorry, I do not think I understand your question.

Q342 Julian Knight: You said before, effectively, that you had looked into misclassification but you felt as if you had not gone into it in a great deal of detail. In fact, according to the "File on 4" report, you also stated to a parent, I believe, that you felt there was pressure on you to stop you from going forward.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Right. No, that email refers to pressure I felt about the whole duty of care report, not specifically about including the independent body. It was just the huge pressure I felt at the time with the weight of people coming to talk to me. It was me and I had a part-time member of DCMS staff, but a lot of those one-to-ones were just with me so it felt that people's expectation of me was that if they came to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

speak to me I could change the whole system; I could just wave the magic wand and it would be okay.

The email you are referring to was written in the lead-up to Rio, when there was the declassification, but there was lots and lots of other stuff going on. To be honest, I felt quite isolated and I was not quite sure where to turn. Doors had started to open by that point but earlier on it felt that lots of doors were being closed across the whole review. Again, it was, "There is no problem in the system". It brings me no joy that the sports that have come out publicly have, and talked about the way athletes and staff are treated. It is very sad in terms of the culture that exists in some sports but I tried to look at it as a positive, that we were able to move forward and do something different.

Q343 **Julian Knight:** You are refuting that there was any overt pressure or below-the-line pressure to make you draw back from misclassification?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: The pressure that I felt was around bodies in the system wanting to know the anonymous information that I was given and wanting to know specifics about what people were coming and telling me about their area of the system. That is where I felt pressure.

Q344 **Julian Knight:** Yes, exactly. Therefore, you felt as if it was effectively militating against what your report was about, the ethos of your report, and therefore you felt that pressure. This is probably quite a deliberate strategy, do you not think?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Apologies; I do not think I have explained myself very well. I had on one side lots of people coming to tell me all sorts of things and on the other side people asking what the first group were telling. That pressure was huge.

Q345 **Julian Knight:** But do you not think that potentially the bodies that were saying to you, "Actually this needs not to be anonymous and so on if you want us to act on this" were using it as a means to divert you away from this or corral your report?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: No, I did not feel that. I felt I had ultimate freedom to write what I wanted in the report. The pressure I felt was not at that level.

Julian Knight: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

Q346 **Giles Watling:** Briefly on that before we go on to classification, you mentioned you had a freedom but you also tell a tale of a great deal of resistance that you met along the way from the established bodies of the sport. It is interesting that there always seems to be a resistance to change in any situation like this. Was there anybody, or any part of the established bodies of sport, who was cheering you on, saying, "Go on, get on with it, it is good news that you are doing this"? Did you have a positive response from them?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Grey-Thompson: There were a few governing bodies that were very open and very helpful. The English Institute of Sport, the Sport and Recreation Alliance and the British Athletes Commission were very supportive. I think people felt that this was the right time to do this piece of work and look at where we can improve the system going forward.

Q347 **Giles Watling:** It was not universal resistance that you felt along the way?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: No. There was some very positive support, absolutely.

Q348 **Giles Watling:** That is good to hear. I will move on to classification, then. In an interview in the newspapers recently, you said that it is absolutely vital that classification is taken seriously and that it is at the heart of the integrity of the sport. That said, do you believe that the current system of classification is fit for purpose? If not, why not?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Classification is the route into sport. There is a national and an international system. On the International Paralympic Committee we have a new President, Mr Parsons. He has said that he wants to increase the professionalisation of it, which is important because a lot of classifiers are part-time or almost voluntary. The British Paralympic Association has talked about education. They have a new code coming out and are talking about an appeal process.

From the amount of information that has been given to me, as a sporting community we need to absolutely ask the questions: whether it is fair; whether it is transparent; whether athletes have the ability to make an appeal; and, whether they can do that in an open and tolerant forum. Based on what I have heard from a variety of sources, I do not believe we can confidently answer that right now.

Q349 **Giles Watling:** Right. Talking about the classifiers, you mentioned independence and you set that to one side. What safeguards are in place to ensure that during the process of national classification the person who conducts the classification has no conflict of interest?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I do not think I am the right person to answer the whole of that question. A number of people have spoken to me saying that they found the process quite difficult to go through. This goes beyond the scope of my review, but one of the issues is who goes into the classification process with the athlete. Is it a coach? Is it a member of staff? Is it a parent? That is something that should be looked at in future.

Every sport is different. There are some sports where a national classifier can also be an international classifier. I could probably spend the next two hours giving you a wider explanation of that. At the moment, and for very good reasons originally, the classification is done through the national governing bodies because it is people who know the sport and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

know the athletes. Where we are now with the Paralympic movement, that independence needs to be greater.

Q350 Giles Watling: Do you not think that during that admittedly very tricky process—the assessment, I suppose is what it is—there should be totally independent oversight at a very local level of that assessment?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I would be all in favour of that. I am in favour of independence. A different recommendation I have is that any independent review of a governing body should not be done by someone who is paid or maintained by the sport. That was not written with this in mind but it fits across very well.

Q351 Giles Watling: Right. Just one last thing. Currently, as I understand it, classifiers only consider medical and technical performance evidence during the process. How would the inclusion of a social examination around the athlete improve the classification process?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: It is about looking at adaptation because even in the UK, depending on your impairment, where you are born, your parents and your education, your adaptation to your impairment might be quite different. There could be something quite interesting.

I was classified 31 years ago and I have been retired for 11 years but when I was classified, I was classified by currently competing athletes. That system is not ideal at all—it was a transfer process, a stopgap into the system that we have now—but the athletes saw you training, competing and in a social environment. They saw you in the bar. That was a very interesting way to be able to look at somebody.

If you look at the wider context of disabled people in terms of their life as a disabled person away from being an athlete, within the benefit system if they are applying for a Personal Independence Payment or a Blue Badge they have to show themselves on their worst day, at their worst point. In sports classification you have to show yourself at your best, at the maximum ability that you have.

I had a recommendation in the report that was about trying to join some of that up. Actually it was about trying to get disabled people to be fitter and healthier and more active because that would give us the best talent pool. We do not have a huge number of disabled people in this country as a talent pool, if I am being quite harsh, thinking of it from an elite sports background, so we need to feed that talent pool as much as we can.

Giles Watling: Thank you.

Q352 Brendan O'Hara: In your evidence to the Committee you wrote about athletes cheating the classification system or being coerced into cheating the classification system. Could you expand a bit more on that? How widespread would you say this problem is?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: From the information I was given, probably about 10% of the people who spoke to me raised issues on intentional



HOUSE OF COMMONS

misrepresentation and then there were wider issues as well. Within what is possible to look at, if we take it back to what has been in the public domain about "culture of fear" and about the system, medals are really important. I think as an Olympic and Paralympic team we should win as many as we possibly can. It is now time for a wider debate on how we want to win those medals.

UK Sport and Sport England have said it is massively important that we look at the welfare of the athlete and we look at duty of care as they are going through the system, but within a bullying environment it is very easy to shut down athletes having an opinion or free choice. You can institutionalise them, they can lose self-belief about what is right and wrong, and they want to compete. They want to be part of the GB team because it is a massive privilege to be there wearing the tracksuit. It is possible to influence athletes or for athletes to make a decision that that is the route that they want to go down.

Q353 **Brendan O'Hara:** How widespread is it? Is it endemic within the system?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: That is why we need an independent review.

Q354 **Brendan O'Hara:** How difficult would it be to prove intentional misrepresentation?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Proving IM is incredibly difficult. As defined by the IPC, it is someone who misrepresents their skills and abilities, but the burden of proof is really high. As well as the process, the IPC has, in a system where athletes are not allowed to talk about classification full stop, or they feel it is very difficult to, trying to raise IM is something that is even harder to do.

There needs to be some clarity about how athletes are able to do that. Medical evidence is required to put in an appeal. You cannot just randomly put in an appeal about somebody. How do you get that medical evidence? We probably need to have another debate about what medical evidence of athletes is published.

It is not the same as drugs in sport, but that is the only comparison I can think of. The nearest equivalent is TUEs. How far do we want to go with TUEs? How far do we want to go with classification? I believe Great Britain should be the absolute gold standard of integrity, of independence, and we should have an open discussion about IM and about misclassification.

Q355 **Brendan O'Hara:** Do you think that currently Great Britain is that gold standard of integrity and independence that you talked about?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Not yet but I think it can be in a short space of time. It could be the gold standard.

Q356 **Brendan O'Hara:** Why is it not currently?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Because you have governing bodies classifying. There is a whole series of things that with a little bit of change could be a lot better.

Brendan O'Hara: Thank you.

Q357 **Rebecca Pow:** Along that line, just to have you say it—and welcome and thank you for coming—can you just put into words why an athlete would want to be persuaded to cheat the system? Why would an athlete want to be classified below their ability?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: There will always be athletes who are one side of the line or another and a call has to be taken, and that can be quite difficult and quite challenging. Within the system there is a review process and you go back and look at athletes again. But where we are now in the Paralympic movement, it is medals, it is money, it is sponsorship, it is media coverage. If this was talking about doping in Olympic sport, it would be the same reason.

Q358 **Rebecca Pow:** You think it is the equivalent, effectively?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Not quite, but there are similarities in terms of what it can give you. It is lots of things.

Q359 **Rebecca Pow:** Would you be prepared to give any examples of the kind of thing an athlete might do to get themselves classified below their level?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: The information that was given to me was anonymous. If it is possible, I could go back and look at my notes and provide something through written evidence.

Q360 **Rebecca Pow:** You do not want to give an anonymous example? Swimming is the area that has been highlighted to us. Do you want to go down that road now, Chairman?

Chair: Which way are you going?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: At the ultimate, it is somebody pretending they can do less than they can. That is it, really. Then it is about the rigorousness of the testing procedure. When I was classified, I had pins stuck in me and I am not sure you can do that anymore. It is basically people pretending they can do less than they can but that influence can come from a whole range of places.

Q361 **Rebecca Pow:** Yes. Do you think it is mainly outside influences, the team influencing the individual rather than the individual?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I could not pick one out more than the other. It is just a whole range of influences.

Q362 **Rebecca Pow:** Out of interest, it strikes me that this has all started happening since the 2012 Olympics and it has escalated. Would you say that is the case, that it is getting worse?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Leading into 2012 I think there was an escalation, but that is a personal view and there are lots of reasons for that.

Q363 **Rebecca Pow:** Just to sum that up, do you think that the sport is betraying the values of the Paralympics, going down a road that is not where we started and taking the Paralympics somewhere it should not be going, unless we sort it out?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: We have to sort it out. That is why I am grateful the Committee is looking at it, because this is an amazing opportunity, as I said before, for us to be the gold standard, to be world leading. Then, as a country, we are able to challenge other things that we see in the rest of the world.

Transparency in governance is something that is important to us as a country. The Paralympic values are something people live and breathe. So many years on, I am still stopped in the street by people reminding me how amazing 2012 was. We should not forget that. We just need to look a bit differently at where we are.

Q364 **Ian C. Lucas:** I wanted to talk to you about money and the change in the sport. You mentioned you retired in 2004.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Sorry, that was my last Paralympics.

Q365 **Ian C. Lucas:** Your last Paralympics was in 2004. Clearly we have had 2012 and also Rio subsequently. It seems to me there has been a step change in the scale of the Paralympics as a sport. You mentioned the full stadiums. A lot more money has come into the sport. Can you give us an idea of how much money there is in the sport? How much could an individual athlete receive in sponsorship if they were at the top of the game nowadays? Would it be hundreds of pounds, thousands of pounds, tens of thousands of pounds?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I would say Paralympic sport is still not on the same level as Olympic sport but you could be talking tens of thousands to a very, very small—I would say tiny— numbers who earn a life-changing amount of money. It could be a comfortable standard of living. I am sorry, I do not have specifics.

Q366 **Ian C. Lucas:** Sure, I understand that but you have just given me a ballpark figure that is useful. Do you think that plays a role in the decisions that an individual athlete might be making about this classification issue?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I think money is a part of it. I do not think that is all of it. It is potentially medals; it is lots of things that come with that.

Q367 **Ian C. Lucas:** But money could play a part in motivation for going for a wrong classification.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Grey-Thompson: It could do. My aspiration for a Paralympic athlete is that we are on \$1 million a year shoe contracts. We are not there yet but soon that will happen.

Q368 **Ian C. Lucas:** The gist of what you seem to be saying is that we need to have structures in place to properly deal with the temptations that might be there to abuse the system.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Yes, in the way that we have an education system for young athletes joining a talent pathway around doping, anti-doping and those policies and procedures. I know the BPA have suggested having an education process. That sort of ethical education I think is important, as well as understanding the system, how it applies and how it works.

Q369 **Ian C. Lucas:** A starting point would be to make an assessment of where we are now.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Yes.

Q370 **Ian C. Lucas:** Do you think that part of the money that has come into the sport should be used to establish a proper assessment of where we are now and what needs to be done to make the system better?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: In terms of lottery money or just—

Q371 **Ian C. Lucas:** Any of the money that comes in. Obviously we have seen full stadia of people watching this, which is a great thing, but we need to use this money positively.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Absolutely. One of the things that has been raised with me is the cost of an independent investigation. I do not think integrity has too high a cost. Where that money comes from is a discussion and a negotiation. It is maybe coming back to DCMS. I know DCMS have consistently said there is no more money. We may even need to review how the money is spent. That is above any recommendation I could possibly have.

Q372 **Ian C. Lucas:** One of the chilling aspects of being a member of this Committee is that it sometimes calls into question your view of the integrity of sporting bodies. That makes you much less keen on sport sometimes. Do you agree with me that the integrity of the Paralympic movement is at stake if we do not deal with this?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: If we do not deal with it, yes, because Paralympics and Olympics inspire people to participate, go into it and go into all sorts of other things. They have an amazing ability to encourage people to be active. It is massively important.

Ian C. Lucas: Thank you.

Q373 **Chair:** If I may, we have had a series of questions about what may motivate an athlete to seek classification in a more favourable category but in your experience is this an athlete's decision or are athletes being



HOUSE OF COMMONS

encouraged by coaches and other members of their support team to seek classification in categories and are directed to do it rather than it being initiated by the athlete themselves?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: It can come from a range of places.

Q374 **Chair:** But you certainly feel that if there are problems, it is undue influence of coaches over athletes as well as what might motivate the individual athlete to do it?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Yes. It is important that it is not just athletes. It could come from a range of different influences. It could come from a personal coach, it could come from a team manager, it could come from family, it could come from a range of different places, and I guess to the uninitiated, that is what makes classification quite hard to understand, the complexities of how it all fits together. There are just lots and lots of layers that add to the complexity of classification on participation.

Q375 **Chair:** You say in your written evidence to the Committee that until we have addressed those concerns “openly and transparently”, which are the words you used, “my fear is that sports in the UK will not be trusted”.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Yes.

Q376 **Chair:** How do you think it can be more transparent?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Apologies for coming back to my independent review, but there needs to be stock taken across all sports to be able to gather more evidence than I was able to, and also to have a process where that evidence is able to be joined together and looked at in more detail. Then, once we know what that looks like, it is potentially a separation of classification. It could be an independent body, an oversight body or different training for classifiers. There could be lots of options that come out of that. Again, based on the number of people who have spoken to me, trust is something that they have all raised.

Chair: Thank you.

Q377 **Christian Matheson:** Just a brief question, if I may, about the classification process. Mr Watling used a very interesting phrase that stood out, it being a “tricky process” in the sense that there have to be a lot of sensitivities involved when making a judgment about somebody’s disability and how that affects them. How much scope is there in the process for interpretation as opposed to cold, hard medical examination? Does it depend on which category we are talking about? Are some categories a bit more judgmental rather than—

Baroness Grey-Thompson: There are some categories that are obviously really easy to look at. An arm amputee is straightforward. Because each system is different depending on the individual, the impairment, their adaptation to it and the sport and the categories that are available, they will be looking at medical evidence that is provided—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and it is important that medical evidence, good medical evidence, is provided—and then it is down to the assessment process. It is difficult to give you a definitive answer.

Q378 Christian Matheson: Are there some categories where there might be more scope for deliberate misclassification?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: It may be that someone who has multiple conditions—I would say the vast majority of athletes should be relatively quick and relatively easy to classify. The classification process is just what you have to go through, the same way as if you sign up to be a GB athlete you have to be on the active competition register.

If somebody knocks on your door and asks you to provide a sample, you have to provide a urine sample in front of them. As a young athlete, being stripped from your bra to your knees is not pleasant as they watch you give the sample, but that is what you have to do. That is the deal with being part of the programme. Classification is just an accepted part of the process.

Christian Matheson: Okay. Thank you.

Q379 Simon Hart: Earlier you mentioned repercussions, and in your written evidence as well. I wondered if you could expand on what those repercussions are, where an athlete may feel that they are at risk. Also, is the implication that the governing bodies are responsible for applying undue pressure in these circumstances?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: The repercussions reported to me were things like deselection from the squad or the team, lack of access to funding, lack of media coverage—

Q380 Simon Hart: This is for speaking out on classification issues?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: This was across a whole range of issues but this also came up within the classification. In some cases, people were told not to talk about classification.

Q381 Simon Hart: By their governing bodies?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: By their governing bodies and a variety of people in the system.

Q382 Simon Hart: Can you be more precise or is that being unfair? I am just trying to explore a bit of the credibility of the evidence—

Baroness Grey-Thompson: No, I absolutely understand. I do not want to be vague on it. It could be coaches, other team members, medics—it could be a whole range of people who would say, “Look, just do not speak out about it”.

Q383 Simon Hart: Again, a slightly legal question. Forgive me. Does that constitute a form of bullying, in your view?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Control, I would say, but it depends on the rest of the context, what is around that athlete and that system, as well. It is somewhere between control and bullying.

Q384 **Simon Hart:** Yes, depending on the athlete.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: It could be because there might be a lot of other things going on around it at the time, or not going on around at the time.

Q385 **Simon Hart:** How effective has that bullying or control been in silencing people who may wish to express a more public view about classification?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: It has not stopped it because the conversations still happen. Just in terms of the anonymous information—I think this is probably unfair—I do not know if I expected more people to go on the record than did but the fact that every request was anonymous and that in some cases people did not want to come into Parliament to meet me, I had to meet in a coffee shop somewhere, was—

Q386 **Simon Hart:** Again, I am conscious of trying to put words in your mouth, but do you think as a result of that concern, the problem is a larger one than we are all conscious of? Is there an iceberg effect? Is there a much bigger problem under the surface, just people who do not want to come forward?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I am coming back, sorry, to an independent investigation again, one that is properly constituted, that allows people to give evidence under whistleblowing status, allows them to have that freedom to speak out, and is also able to look at the evidence and say, "That is useful". It is about finding a resolution to it. Some of it may potentially be not quite the right area. They might be raising an issue that is not strictly down to classification, it might be influenced by other things, but what we do not have at the moment is a resolution to the number of people who are talking about this.

The challenge across the whole system, which pretty much everybody who spoke to me came back to, is that it is hard to talk about anything. It is hard to raise any issues. The system is just slightly inward looking at the moment. That makes it a challenge for everybody.

Simon Hart: Thank you.

Q387 **Jo Stevens:** I just have a couple of questions on intentional misrepresentation, which you have talked about a bit. To prove a case at the moment it is like the criminal burden of proof. It has to be beyond reasonable doubt, as opposed to the civil burden of proof which would just be more likely than not, 51% or more. Do you think, bearing in mind what we have heard this morning and what you found in your review, that that burden of proof, that standard for proving intentional misrepresentation, should be reviewed and looked at again?



Baroness Grey-Thompson: IM is really useful to have because when the IPC defined it they had not previously done. It is useful to have that definition. It is how that process is used, how it is measured and what the entry is. If you look at the IPC website it says the penalty for IM is so many months, so many years or potentially a life ban on the second offence. That is a useful step. For the IPC code or the BPA code that will be coming out, it is how you measure it and what you do with it. The code and that process is the first step of it, the first part of that, but it is what you do with it that is incredibly important.

Q388 **Jo Stevens:** You mentioned the sanctions that currently apply. As I understand it, you can have a 48-month ban for a first-time offence, up to a lifetime ban for a second offence. Do you think those sanctions are appropriate, at the right level, or would you like to see those reviewed as well?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I have been part of a lot of debates on life bans in sport for drugs. I am not sure I could give you an answer. We could spend a lot of time debating. They might be okay but the part I am interested in is how you are able to raise IM, what you are able to do with it, the effect that that has and what evidence you need.

Do you have to submit medical evidence? Can it be video evidence of somebody training versus how they compete? There needs to be more explanation and for people to understand how that process can be entered into, because at the moment not only is the burden of proof high, it is quite a hard process to enter into. That makes the misclassification beneath it also quite difficult to raise and challenge because if people are not able to step forward—"Who do you complain to? Where do you go?"—it just means that it is incredibly difficult and potentially nothing happens.

Jo Stevens: Thank you.

Q389 **Chair:** In conclusion, I think it is fair to say that you believe that the system of classification is open to abuse and is being abused at the moment.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Yes.

Q390 **Chair:** Yes, and that you have had the chance to discuss this with the governing bodies because they challenged you over the nature of the evidence you received?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: No. I have not gone back to any of the individual governing bodies because of the anonymous nature of the information. Governing bodies are different sizes and the people who spoke to me felt they could be identified.

Q391 **Chair:** Sure. Okay, that is clear. You said that you believe that the system is being abused and therefore you must believe that the governing bodies do not have the systems in place to stop that abuse happening.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Grey-Thompson: No, but I have spoken to many of the stakeholders in the system about this. Through last year, I had several conversations with stakeholders about where I felt classification was and what I thought should be done with it.

Q392 **Chair:** Clearly, UK Athletics would say, "We believe we are doing everything we can and we believe the system is fair". The IPC would say, "We think we are doing everything we can". Your position, based on what you know and what you have experienced, is that you believe that more needs to be done because the current system is not working.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: We should be the gold standard. We should have integrity at the heart of everything we do. There should be independence and I think we can achieve that.

Q393 **Chair:** Yes, but you said yes, you believe the system is being abused at the moment. You believe that is happening now.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Yes.

Q394 **Chair:** I just want to ask as well, going back, we have focused a lot on the build-up to London 2012 and you said you felt that, based on the evidence you had received, it was building up at that point. Obviously these issues are not new, and on classification we have spoken a lot about athletes possibly trying to get a more favourable classification.

I think it is fair as well to look at the cases of athletes like Anne Wafula Strike, who in her own words lost five years of her career because she was reclassified at the 2006 World Cup mid-competition. That decision was subsequently overturned five years later. Do you feel that she was treated badly in the way that her case was looked at at the time?

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Duty of care, as it should be applied to all athletes in the system, was not applied by the system. That is a real challenge. If athletes get moved, and it has happened, their welfare needs to be protected. If somebody is in the wrong category that has an impact on lots of other people in terms of team selection and in terms of how the team is run but I was not part of the classification panel that happened at that time and the duty of care of an athlete is absolutely paramount.

That, for me, is one of the reasons why it was important to do this piece of work, because through lots of experiences I have seen duty of care not being applied to people who are in the system.

Q395 **Chair:** Yes. The reason why I want to raise it is that obviously it works both ways. It works for and against people. Reading an article published a few years ago looking back on that case, an athlete who is paralysed from the chest down being asked to do sit-ups and stand-up exercises to try to prove that she had greater mobility than she had on the eve of a final at a World Cup does seem like a peculiarly brutal process, particularly as that subsequent decision to reclassify was then overturned



five years later.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: The classification process in terms of what you are asked to do and not do is relatively set. The timing of that can be difficult. In recent years, the IPC has stopped classification at major games. From London, although there were some checks and balances, it has been stopped but classification is the entry into the system and unfortunately or fortunately, that is how our movement works.

Q396 **Chair:** Do you feel there need to be standards that are rigorously enforced everywhere around the world, particularly at the world championships? We have received evidence saying that depending on where you seek your classification, you can get a different result.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Yes, but if we are the gold standard we can then challenge what we see around the world or what is seen around the world. I was not asked to do an international comparison. I do not think I could give you a definitive answer on other countries in terms of what they do.

Q397 **Chair:** Just to be clear what you said, I think you said yes, you believe that it is true that standards are applied differently in different places around the world and therefore—

Baroness Grey-Thompson: They could be.

Q398 **Chair:**—you could get a different classification result depending on where you seek to be classified.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: You could be, yes.

Q399 **Chair:** That is obviously massively concerning because people will know how to game the system and know how to get the result they want.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: We can control what we do. There is a discussion to be had on what you think of classification. Is it the rules of the sport? Is it the spirit of the sport? Do some people treat it as a game? Do you try to nudge the rules as far as you can to gain advantage? While there are lots of conversations about that I cannot say whether any of the sports through more formal structures, they have had that discussion. I think it is important to know, as a country, where we stand within the rules of classification. I would hope that it is not gamesmanship; that we are not trying to push it, but—

Q400 **Chair:** There could be certain basic standards, like saying if a reclassification is taking place mid-competition, as it was with Anne Wafula Strike, that the athlete's full medical record has to be available to the assessors in order to make a decision. There are certain key standards that should be met. If a complaint has been made or a concern has been raised, it has to be looked at seriously, but then there are consistent standards that are applied then as to how that complaint or issue is then investigated.



Baroness Grey-Thompson: Yes. In terms of timing, when the athlete is pulled in, how they are told, how that classification is carried out, what the outcome of it is, what impact that has on their ability to compete at that event, or future events, that should be standardised. I do not know if it is or if it is not, but my view is that that standard should be there.

Q401 **Chair:** From what you have said, your concern is that, at the moment, it is not.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: There is potential that it is not. I cannot, from the information that was provided to you, say it is not, but it would be great if that information was public and people were able to feel that, wherever they go in the world, whoever classifies them, then an appropriate job will be done.

Chair: Yes. Thank you very much.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Thank you.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Michael Breen.

Chair: Mr Breen, thank you for agreeing to give evidence to the Committee this morning. Today is part of the session looking at parasport. We wanted to hear from Baroness Grey-Thompson for the work she has done for the Government looking at this, and speaking as a distinguished athlete in her own right. We were keen to have the opportunity to speak to individual athletes or family members of athletes, who have raised concerns within the system, and do not feel that they have had redress, as well as having the chance to talk to the bodies themselves.

We are pleased that in the final session the BPA will be giving evidence. We did invite the IPC to give oral evidence to us today; unfortunately, they were not able to supply someone to be here for the hearing today, which is a disappointment. They have, nevertheless, given the Committee a written statement-that we are publishing, along with written evidence we have received today-so that is on the record. We may have further questions for them.

Before we proceed to questions, Mr Breen, I am grateful for the large amount of written evidence you have supplied to the Committee, both written statements from you and your wife, but also the very large appendix of detailed information that goes with it. The Committee has discussed this this morning and we feel that we need more time, as a Committee, to go through that in detail before it can be published. That does not mean to say we are not going to publish it, it just means that there is a large amount of information and we have to go through it.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It names a series of individuals as well, and we feel that the Committee probably needs to reflect on that, and also consider whether we would seek, ourselves, further written or oral evidence from the people named in your written evidence as part of the process of publication. We are not a court of law—

Michael Breen: I understand.

Chair:—and the purpose of our hearing is also not to investigate individual allegations, but rather to look at the process by which governing bodies of sports deal with serious allegations that have been raised. We need time to go through that in detail. We will certainly notify you of the next step we will take on that.

Michael Breen: Yes.

Chair: However, it meant that we did not feel that we were able to publish your evidence this morning. We also felt that, because your individual written statement is very well put together, and draws on the appendices expertly as well, it really needs to be published a single piece of work. We did not feel that we could publish just the written statement without the appendices, and we needed more time to go through those in detail.

I would like to say as well, before we proceed to oral questions, you are free to answer the questions we ask you in the way you deem most appropriate.

Michael Breen: Thank you.

Chair: Our principal interest is the way in which the authorities that you have taken your complaints to have dealt with those inquiries rather than, necessarily, seeking to investigate a claim made against any one individual.

Michael Breen: An individual. Yes.

Q402 **Chair:** If I could start off by asking you: you have had detailed experience of seeking to raise the sorts of allegations or concerns that we were discussing with Tanni Grey-Thompson earlier on about abuse within the classification system, and the way that has been policed.

Michael Breen: Yes.

Chair: We have heard a lot of complaints as well that there are no due processes for whistleblowers, and there is a culture of fear that exists within the sport. It would be very interesting for the Committee if you could describe in your own words what you think the process is like; of being someone trying to take forward your concerns and finding someone to deal with them, and how you yourself have been treated in going about that process.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Michael Breen: Thank you for inviting me along today; I am really pleased to have been given the opportunity to come and speak to the Committee.

In answer to the question, the process has been truly torturous. It has taken from mid-2013 until this point in time. I have, at every point in time, tried to engage with the relevant individuals that work within the relevant bodies to try to raise my concerns.

The way that this started, and the way that I find myself here today, came about in an almost innocuous way. The UK Athletics head coach, Paula Dunn, just mentioned in a casual way an athlete who had been classified nationally, and she said that she had turned up for classification without relevant supporting medical documentation. She referred to the athlete's parents: one was a consultant surgeon and the other was a nurse. She said in a mocking way, "Who on earth would go to classification without their medical evidence?" and she then talked about the actual process at classification. It all seemed pretty loose.

Within the conversation, she told us that the athlete in question, Ms Hahn, did not have cerebral palsy but she had learning difficulties, but she had ended up with a cerebral palsy classification.

Q403 **Chair:** I think I am quite correct to say there is not a cerebral palsy classification as such, there is a T38 classification that will have to do, but it is not exclusively for—

Michael Breen: Correct. Yes. I am using the phrase that she used. If we talk about T38, it was traditionally cerebral palsy, but it is hypertonia, ataxia, athetosis, brain trauma. The phrase that she used was, "She ended up with a cerebral palsy classification, but she had learning difficulties". We went, "Well, that is odd".

Then we were told by two of the classifiers who were on Ms Hahn's national classification, who conducted a physical examination of her, that they found nothing to merit a T38 classification, and there had been some debate and dispute as to whether or not to give it. They had to go and get another classifier. Anyway, it ended up they gave it to her. Then the athlete was coming up for international classification and, at that point, we were then saying to the head coach, Paula Dunn, "What is going on?" By that point in time, it had become abundantly clear that particular athlete was going to be a new world record-holder, because she was so fast.

Q404 **Chair:** Mr Breen, I am slightly concerned that the athlete you have named is not here to defend herself.

Michael Breen: Sure.

Chair: I think it needs to be stated for the record as well that these issues have been investigated with the IPC, and they stand by their view that the classification was fairly and rightly made. What may be helpful



HOUSE OF COMMONS

for the Committee is, rather than walking us too far into the case itself, that you give your view of the way in which you brought these allegations to their attention and the way in which they handled it; that is the thing we are most interested in looking at.

Michael Breen: Yes. We queried it. She got an international classification. She came out of classification and immediately broke the world record the next day. She was on a review classification, which indicates that they are not altogether sure about whether it is absolutely the right class. I raised concerns with the head coach. The head coach initially said, "It is done. There is nothing you can do about it". I then sent a more detailed email, and the head coach then emailed back telling me that she was resigning; a resignation that she subsequently retracted.

I then engaged with the next in line at UK Athletics, Neil Black. He said he was going to look into the matter. In fact, they then had another employee of UK Athletics conduct what they determined was a thorough investigation. I asked if it was going to be an independent person. They said no. The next thing I received was an 18-page letter from Farah and Co. They did not interview me, any member of my family. They did not ask for any evidence. They did not engage with us in any way, shape or form. There was no attempt to find the truth; they just came back with a defence.

Q405 **Chair:** With regard to Farah, his work, he is no stranger to the Committee.

Michael Breen: Indeed, yes.

Chair: You have made allegations about a classification process. Presumably, they interviewed people who were involved in the classification process.

Michael Breen: They interviewed some of them.

Chair: But not all?

Michael Breen: Not all, which I find rather strange and concerning.

Q406 **Ian C. Lucas:** I am a lawyer by background; you normally have a complaints procedure or process. Does such a process exist, to your knowledge?

Michael Breen: No. I asked for a grievance procedure and I asked for a whistleblowing policy. Mr Black initially wrote and said, "There is no whistleblowing policy and there is no grievance procedure". He then wrote a week later and said, "Oh, here is the whistleblowing policy". I opened the whistleblowing policy and it was for employees. UK Athletics went to great lengths in all of the contracts to say to athletes, "You are not an employee" because they do not want anyone to get employment rights, so there is no procedure, which I find rather strange. Given that it is a large entity with many athletes and a well-known law firm, you might think that, at some point, either the chairman or the CEO might engage



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and say, "What governance documents ought we to have in place in 2017, or 2016, that ensure that we are doing it all right?" but, no.

As I felt that there was no process, there was no genuine attempt to get to the truth, I then decided to contact the IPC. Appended to my evidence are some of the letters that I wrote. Most of them were initially ignored. Eventually, I got hold of the head of Legal, and I wrote an email asking a number of questions with regard to what the IPC considered to be the correct process at a national classification, which is the one I was concerned about.

He wrote back and said he was refusing to answer all of my eight questions because they were of the variety of, "When did you start beating your wife?" I took some umbrage at that and said, "From one professional to another, I think it is appropriate that, if I have asked you some searching questions in relation to the IPC's processes on how the rules relate to the conduct of a classification, it is important that you answer them". He wrote back a more conciliatory email, and eventually we agreed to meet. We met at Claridge's. He was absolutely convinced that there was no issue with regard to classification.

By that point in time, I felt that I had spent a long time speaking to other parents and coaches, and other athletes, and it got to the point where I am the spokesperson, and I represent a number of other athletes and their parents and their families. I put to him that we had serious reservations with regard to how classification is conducted, both nationally and internationally. I gave him an example—because you quote experience that you have; I said that my daughter had been classified internationally by a GB classifier. I said that did not feel right, given that one could argue that classifier was conflicted by virtue of the fact that she is classifying a GB athlete. He took this all on board.

He called Ryan Montgomery, who is the head of Paralympic Summer Sports, and put him on loudspeaker. He said to him, "I have got someone who I am talking to". I do not think Mr Montgomery appreciated he was on loudspeaker. He said that there was an issue in regard to classification, "But it is quite an important point, because this chap is saying that he feels that Team GB, or certain people within Team GB, are ensuring that some of their athletes get classified in classes where perhaps they ought not to be". Ryan Montgomery retorted that, "That story has been around, everybody knows that story; it has been around since Peter Eriksson", who became Paralympic head coach of Team GB in about 2009.

Mike Townley very quickly ended the call. He was very embarrassed. Then we had a meaningful dialogue. I believe that Mike Townley was very genuine and he was trying to resolve it. He asked me to identify some athletes, which I did, and I met him again at Claridge's on 25 May 2016, and he shared some information with me with regard to those athletes.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

For example, one athlete, who has relapsing-remitting MS, there are two boxes—

Chair: Yes. I just want to point out here that I do not think it would be appropriate for you to name the athlete. I just wanted to be clear on that. Thank you.

Michael Breen: I was not going to. Two boxes to tick: one box says, "Stable" and the other box says, "Progressive". Neither box was ticked, so the medical diagnostics form completed by the GP, and the GP had drawn a third box and ticked that box and written, "Relapsing-remitting MS". He said to me, "That is really very concerning. This athlete does not comply with our rules and they ought not to have been classified, albeit it again on a review basis, and they ought not to be going to Rio".

So I thought, "Okay". So, notwithstanding the fact that I do not have whistleblowing status because, by the way, the IPC do not have a grievance procedure, nor do they have a whistleblowing policy—and this is an interesting point particularly with regard to the evidence that has just been given—and there was no ability for either an athlete or a nation to protest an athlete. The only person who can protest an athlete is, in fact, the chief classifier, and that happens very rarely.

Q407 **Chair:** From what you have said, you have confirmed what Tanni Grey-Thompson said in that there are no grievance procedures—

Michael Breen: Nothing, no.

Chair:—or whistleblower policies; that, effectively, the bodies are investigating themselves, and in your view not adequately, and that they are aware of allegations around individual athletes but, nevertheless, are allowing them to compete. Would that be fair?

Michael Breen: That would be a very fair assessment but not only are they aware of it; they have been aware of it since 2009, from what Ryan Montgomery said. I think they just think that if they keep ignoring it and telling people that it is not happening, people will be convinced it is not happening. I also find it really deeply perplexing that there is no right of protest. That seems bizarre.

Q408 **Chair:** We discussed in a previous session whether there needs to be, in the UK, an independent body that oversees, or a body that can investigate independently of the governing body. Based on your experience, do you think that is necessary?

Michael Breen: I think it is vital. For any viewer of sport you need to believe that what you are watching is real, it is honest and it has integrity. If, every time you open your newspaper you are reading stories about the sport in question not having any integrity, it is not believable, and people will switch off, and that will affect athletes also. It is vital.

Chair: Thank you. Jo Stevens.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q409 Jo Stevens: We, as a Committee, have received a lot of written evidence in relation to this inquiry, from people who have asked to remain anonymous, for fear of reprisal. We heard from Tanni Grey-Thompson earlier that she also received a lot of evidence, and people did not want to be identified. Why do you think people are afraid of openly discussing their experience in parasport?

Michael Breen: I think they are really frightened. They have been intimidated and bullied over many years. Part of that intimidation relates directly to classification; my daughter has heard it, other athletes have corroborated it, that, when you go into UK Athletics team meetings, you are told that you are not allowed to discuss classification. In some instances, you are told that you are not allowed to discuss the classification of a specific athlete, who is then named.

In addition to that, you have a scenario whereby you are told that if you step out of line then they will set their lawyers on you, which is exactly what happened with me, so they are making good on their promise. Thirdly, and most importantly, there is the spectre of de-selection. My daughter was originally told that she would definitely be in the relay team for Rio and then, at the last moment, she was told that she was not going to be in the relay, and another athlete replaced her. That other athlete had not been in a holding camp, because she was doing other things, and she had not been doing relay training.

They make sure the athletes know that this is what happens to you. In fact, we have been used as an example—"This is why you do not do it". I can give you another example, that the head coach censors people's social media. If you post something that she is not happy with, you get a phone call.

Q410 Jo Stevens: You talked about the threat of de-selection; are there any other repercussions, you think, that athletes or others are concerned about in coming forward and talking about their experiences?

Michael Breen: If you are an athlete, the single most important thing is that you get selected and that you compete, so de-selection is number 10 out of 10. Allied to that, you have to remember that, if you are going to be a funded athlete, the two things go hand in hand: you cannot be funded if you have been de-selected. Suddenly you can go from not being selected, not being in a team, not being funded; that is a disaster. That is what needs to be-

Jo Stevens: You have a gross inequality of arms between the two people, essentially.

Michael Breen: Yes.

Jo Stevens: One is very powerful and one is dependent on them, and is therefore vulnerable.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Michael Breen: In particular, I am sure it is not lost on the Committee that we are not just talking about athletes here, we are talking about disabled athletes so they are, in a way, more vulnerable and therefore require more safeguarding, I would suggest.

Q411 **Jo Stevens:** What role do you think the Paralympic governing bodies can play in trying to remove that culture of fear that you have described?

Michael Breen: That is a very good question. Assuming that they have the will to do that—

Q412 **Jo Stevens:** Let us assume that, for the record. What would you suggest?

Michael Breen: Regrettably, I think it is intrinsically linked to classification, because a lot of the intimidation and bullying revolves around classification. Because they are trying to create this story that there is nothing wrong with classification—and everyone knows that there is, and that is why all the athletes talk about classification—they find themselves having to crack the whip to make sure that people do not talk about it. They need to get their house in order and fix classification. It is unforgivable in 2017 that there is no governance in place in any of these sporting bodies; it is unacceptable. They need good governance for safeguarding.

Jo Stevens: Thank you.

Q413 **Rebecca Pow:** Following up on the issue that Jo raised, for the body that does do the classifying, why do you think a situation has arisen where life is being made very difficult to question the classification system? Is it because of the drive to make money and get medals and get results? Why do you think it is so difficult?

Michael Breen: I do not think it is directly related to the drive to get money and medals. I believe that the classification system is not fit for purpose in its current format, and that there are a number of fundamental issues with it. If you go back in time, there used to be medical doctors involved, who are experts in their field, and it was compulsory for there to be medical doctors sat on every classification panel. They have, largely, been removed, and they need to be brought back to give integrity to classification. At the moment, the classification panel consists of two classifiers. One would normally be a coach, and he is called the technical classifier, and the other would normally be a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist.

It is all too easy for governing bodies to commission a medical report that convinces the two classifiers that they ought to give a classification, and there is no rigour with regard to properly ensuring that the person who presents for classification ought to be classified into that class. There needs to be root and branch review of the classification process, doctors need to be brought back in, and it ought to be compulsory that all medical evidence is produced in classification.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It is important, in certain circumstances, that you can see historic medical evidence. Somebody might have more knowledge in relation to an athlete who is going to go into the T30 classes, so you are talking about hypertonia, ataxia and athetosis; often this will be diagnosed between 12 and 24, maybe 36 months. If you are not seeing that historic medical evidence then you need to understand why it is not there and you need to ask more questions.

Q414 Rebecca Pow: Because of this, do you think far too many people are slipping through the net and getting into categories they should not be in, and they are below the bar that you should have for those categories? Is that what your main debate is?

Michael Breen: I do not want this to get out of context. I know that there are some classes that it is much easier to do that in; there are other classes where it is perfectly safe. I would not want to say that it is absolutely widespread but, as far as I am concerned, if it is one, it is one too many. There is a significant issue at the moment that needs to be addressed and it is not difficult to address it, I am just not convinced that the people in charge at the IPC have any interest in addressing it.

Rebecca Pow: I listened to the Radio 4 "File on 4" documentary, and I believe you said, or should I put the word "allegedly" in front of it, just in case—

Michael Breen: Yes.

Rebecca Pow:—that, "The IPC are eradicating cerebral palsy athletes through their classification system"?

Michael Breen: Yes.

Q415 Rebecca Pow: Can you expand on that?

Michael Breen: Of course. The problem is that, the way the class has been broadened, it now includes athletes who have suffered a brain trauma or have another similar or like condition. It is what one's definition of what, "A similar or like" condition is.

The best example I can give you is back to the relapsing-remitting MS. That condition, by definition—the clue is in the name—can either go into relapse, or it can go completely into remission. It can also be controlled by medication. At any point in time, you could be competing, lining up on the start line, with another athlete, who at the time has relapsing-remitting MS, but, in fact, on that given day, they do not have it because it is in complete remission. They have no chance of competing, because cerebral palsy is something that is stable and permanent and is not treatable, and certainly does not go into remission.

Those athletes are leaving the sport because they are no longer prepared to line up and be humiliated—which is what is happening—because in some of the races that you watch, say in a 400 metres, you will have one



HOUSE OF COMMONS

athlete, who does not have cerebral palsy, who is 50 or 60 metres ahead of the field. It is degrading.

Q416 **Rebecca Pow:** Would a coach be prompted to push an athlete with the MS condition into trying to get into the cerebral palsy category?

Michael Breen: Sorry, they are entitled to be in a cerebral palsy category—

Rebecca Pow: Right.

Michael Breen:—but my gripe is with the IPC in the way that they have gone about mixing athletes who should not be mixed together.

Q417 **Rebecca Pow:** Can I just ask, as a complete amateur's observation—

Michael Breen: Sure.

Rebecca Pow:—say you have split them all up, then—which I think would probably be very difficult because everyone has a different stage and a different condition—would that take the competitiveness away? Because you might end up with only one or two in every class and then you would have hundreds, looking at it from that angle, of classes with only one or two people.

Michael Breen: No, but that is an excellent question, because when I went to 2012, where my daughter competed for the first time, there were heats for her class, which is T38; what I call the traditional cerebral palsy class. London 2017, there were no heats, it was a straight final, and that tells me that the cerebral palsy athletes are leaving the class; they are not prepared to compete.

Q418 **Rebecca Pow:** What do you think that is saying to disabled people with cerebral palsy about the whole system of the Paralympics for people with disability?

Michael Breen: I think it goes against the ethos of Paralympic sport because it is supposedly fair and equal competition, and that is not what it represents. You are effectively being pushed out of the sport in which that you want to perform. It is truly awful.

Q419 **Chair:** As part of the written evidence we have published this morning is evidence from para-athlete Ian Jones, and there he talks about being reclassified in Indianapolis in the run-up to the London 2012 Games. He was a T44 athlete and he said, "For some reason I was reclassified as a T38 athlete, which is the cerebral palsy class. I was never diagnosed with cerebral palsy, I have no medical evidence saying I had cerebral palsy and I clearly told the classifiers on the panel that I did not have cerebral palsy. The whole thing was a mess". He then duly won the 400 metres race in Indianapolis by 150 metres clear.

Michael Breen: Yes, and he felt acutely embarrassed, that athlete. He did not want to be there, he told them not to classify him into that class, and they did it anyway. This is not something new, regrettably. Yet, when



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you try to engage the IPC in the conversation, they are in complete denial.

Q420 Rebecca Pow: What I cannot get to the bottom of is, is it their ignorance and lack of wanting to understand that you need more medical evidence, or is it that there is a conspiracy because they want to get people in to win more medals and more money? We are trying to understand, is there a conspiracy, or is it just that they do not really get it?

Michael Breen: It is a mixture of the two. You have to go back to what Baroness Grey-Thompson said earlier: it used to be that there were not very many people involved and went along and attended but, suddenly, and in particular after 2012, the sport has been catapulted into popularity and success, and, with that, brings money, sponsorship, television revenue. They are now acutely aware that they have a brand. It is the third biggest event after the World Cup and the Olympics, and they want to protect the brand.

They do not want, because they think their sponsors will not want, to have stories being written about their mistakes in classification, which, I suspect, is why there is no right of protest. That is on the one hand. On the other, the head, Peter Van de Vliet, who is the Medical and Scientific Director of the IPC, is a physiotherapist, and the Chief Classifier of the IPC is an occupational therapist. They do not seem to want medics around; that is just the only way I can put it.

Chair: Thank you. A few quick questions, Ian Lucas, and then Giles.

Q421 Ian C. Lucas: Is the fundamental problem here that the regulatory authority has a conflict of interest with itself as also the individual body responsible for getting as many medals as possible?

Michael Breen: The number of conflicts of interest I have almost lost count of. I can take an example: in 2009, Peter Eriksson, who was going to speak earlier, was coaching an athlete, he was her personal coach, and when he that year became the Paralympic head coach, the first thing he did was—well, not the first thing—that year he got his athlete reclassified from a T54 down to T34 into an unassailable position. I think that athlete has won 800 races since and a lot of gold medals. That is one example.

You then have Ed Warner who, until very recently, was the Chair of UK Athletics, in 2011 is appointed Chair of the IPC Scientific and Technical Committee, which is in charge of classification for athletics. In large part, that is why I believe my complaint to the IPC did not go anywhere, because I am aware, and it is in evidence, that Mr Warner contacted Mr Townley and told him to drop it, and Mr Townley then confirmed in writing that he was being removed from the case.

Q422 Chair: I just want to say that Mr Warner said he was not in that position in that Committee; he was not involved in cases related to the UK, where they would—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Michael Breen: He did say that, but he also rang Mr Townley and specifically discussed that case with him, and he has confirmed that in writing and Mr Townley has also confirmed that in writing.

Chair: Thank you. Giles Watling.

Q423 **Giles Watling:** Thank you. We have touched on it just now with Rebecca, but, clearly, classification is never going to be a precise science. You have touched on, of course, any class you will have, there will be somebody near the top and there will be somebody near the bottom.

Michael Breen: Correct.

Giles Watling: You will always have—

Michael Breen: A range. Yes.

Q424 **Giles Watling:** A range. Are you proposing that perhaps we narrow those ranges and, thereby, as Rebecca Pow said, create more classifications, or—

Michael Breen: No.

Giles Watling:—you mentioned earlier that there should be medical oversight and independent oversight.

Michael Breen: Yes.

Giles Watling: All these things would answer your questions: is that the—

Michael Breen: Medical oversight; I would be surprised if anyone felt that was a backward step. Independent oversight, I would be equally surprised if anyone thought that was a backward step. You need to establish a professional body of independent classifiers, and that those classifiers classify everyone, so that you are classifying in context. You are not having someone classifying in Sydney, Australia, and then another classifier classifying in, let us say, Scotland, and they have a differing view as to what moderate, or whatever, is. That is really important.

Going back to your original point, I am not advocating that you suddenly have more classes. Although, interestingly, only on Thursday the IPC have issued a document saying that they are going to have more classes and they are going to take the amputee athletes and put them in a new class of 61 to 64, because they were previously sitting in what was traditionally the “les autres” class, so the others. “Les autres” traditionally would be the athletes who did not quite fit into the other classes. Perhaps—and I do not know; we are waiting to see—the IPC is going to have a place for those athletes who do not quite fit.

The fundamental of where I am trying to get to is back to the ethos of the IPC and paralympic sport, and that is fair and equal competition. Outside of the misclassification issue, which no doubt we may discuss



HOUSE OF COMMONS

more, I feel that what we tend to see on some tracks is not fair and equal competition, and that is because certain athletes, as an example the T30 athletes, are having to compete against people for whom, on any given day, their condition may not exist.

Q425 Giles Watling: You mentioned earlier that the success of the Paralympics has brought many things; it has brought money in the millions.

Michael Breen: Indeed, yes.

Giles Watling: But it has also brought scrutiny, and that is what you welcome, and we are getting there.

Michael Breen: Yes, and fair play.

Giles Watling: Good. Thank you.

Jo Stevens: I just have one question, thank you, Chair. You mentioned about there being no right to protest a classification.

Michael Breen: Correct.

Q426 Jo Stevens: If there was a right to protest a classification, I am interested to know who you think should have the ability to do that. Is it a complete free-for-all; could anybody put in an objection? How would that work? You can see where I am going with this: if anybody felt they did not like it and could pile in—

Michael Breen: That would be unworkable, obviously.

Jo Stevens: Yes. So what are you suggesting would be an appropriate mechanism?

Michael Breen: First of all, if you had more transparency with regard to classification, people would be less inclined to think that there was some skulduggery. If, for example, you had a portal just for, say, coaches to access, that certain medical documentation is posted on that so people know that they have gone through the right processes and rigours.

Also, if you had a more rigorous fit-for-purpose classification system in place, people would be more inclined to believe in it—at the moment they really do not believe in it—and therefore you would have less people protesting. You would need to have a system—it could not possibly be a free for all—but you could have an independent body that would receive classification and if you wanted to make referral in relation to an objection you would have to have reasonably good evidence for doing so and that that body would review it and determine whether or not there is any merit in taking it forward.

Q427 Jo Stevens: You mentioned coaches; are you talking about individual coaches or are you talking about national coaches or—

Michael Breen: I think in the first instance, you are asking me—



Q428 **Jo Stevens:** There is an issue of confidentiality as well, isn't there?

Michael Breen: Yes, there is to a point but you might be a little bit surprised at how relaxed a lot of the athletes are about their medical documentation. Because of the issue of misclassification, I think there are a lot of athletes who would be much happier seeing all the medical evidence posted on a portal than people being able to hide behind the cloak of secrecy of saying, "My medical documentation is confidential". If you ask my daughter would she be happy, if it was going to benefit the sport, to have her medical documentation put up online for certain parties to be able to access, she would be absolutely fine with that. She would say, "Why would I have a problem?"

Q429 **Jo Stevens:** So can you answer my question about the level of coach?

Michael Breen: Sorry, I thought I had. It could not just be a personal coach, no; it would have to be a national coach.

Jo Stevens: National coach, thank you.

Q430 **Chair:** Mr Breen, a number of the issues you touched on there are similar to things we have looked at in other areas of sports. In particular, I think the idea of the coaches being charge of everything, with medical staff effectively reporting to the coaches rather than to a separate medical chain of command.

Michael Breen: Yes.

Q431 **Chair:** You would agree that that is part of the problem in para-sport.

Michael Breen: The coaches play a pivotal role, obviously, because they are coaching the athletes but at the moment perhaps there is an element of the tail wagging the dog in relation to that and there needs to be more balance given to it.

Q432 **Chair:** Certainly, what you touched on—and what we discussed with Baroness Grey-Thompson in the first session as well—is common standards on the way in which medical records are used and made accessible. Indeed, there was a debate in cycling around the same thing, for an athlete's medical data to be available so that there are restricted groups and people can see for themselves that there is no question of foul play.

Michael Breen: Yes, I think people would endorse that and be happy for that to happen. I don't see why they would object to it and certainly from the people I have spoken to, that is one of the things they are advocating.

Chair: Yes. Thank you for the answers you have given this morning and we will get back to you shortly with regards to the written evidence you have submitted to the Committee. As you know, we had hoped that Peter Eriksson would be able to give oral evidence himself to respond to our questions and respond to what has been said so far. The Committee will look to see if it is possible to have that session another time, but we



would certainly invite Mr Eriksson, or indeed anyone else who has been affected by what has been said so far today, to respond to the Committee, certainly in writing, for the Committee, and publish any right to reply they feel they are due.

Mr Breen, thank you very much.

Michael Breen: Thank you.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Tim Hollingsworth.

Q433 **Chair:** Tim Hollingsworth, thank you for joining us. I am sorry you are on your own for this session—that we do not have Mr Eriksson by screen with us as well. Thank you for being here to answer our questions and sitting through the evidence that has been presented to the Committee so far this morning.

I appreciate that a lot of what we have discussed has been around classification and the process of classification is not one that BPA is directly involved with, but nevertheless the Paralympic team is your team and you are responsible for the people that compete in it. What is your view on the issues that have been discussed so far this morning?

Tim Hollingsworth: Good morning, Mr Chairman, thank you very much indeed for the opportunity. Mr Eriksson will know it is a great pleasure to be able to speak this morning. I do commend the Committee in looking at the wider issues around governance in sport and focusing on an area of real fundamental importance to the Paralympic movement.

It is the absolute foundation stone of para-sport that there is classification. It is distinctive, in my view, from every other consideration in that it is the only way that we can establish that athletes can compete in a fair and equal manner based on their impairment. So we have to always be looking at it because it is too important and too fundamental to the sport for it to be considered to be a minor point.

My view is a little contrary certainly to that which you have just heard, although I also share many views with Baroness Grey-Thompson, but fundamentally I do not believe that where we are now is in a position where we are looking at something that can be considered not fit for purpose. I don't believe that. I think there are absolutely areas—and I am sure we will touch on them—where this process and the underpinning nature of classification can and must be improved.

That is not to say that the sport as a whole and the athletes as a whole are being failed by the process that we have in place currently. Indeed I think what is most interesting to me is that, as we have seen with para-



HOUSE OF COMMONS

sport generally—and it is a huge privilege to be part of it at this time, as it grows across every element—classification is one of those growing pains that needs to be addressed. Perhaps people’s understanding and awareness of where things are now and where the IPC’s code internationally has driven things now, needs to catch up with that.

I look forward to explaining that more but my view, in answer to your question, is that we are in a place where much of what is happening needs to be better understood and then we need to move to place where, to echo Baroness Grey-Thompson, we have a better, more robust, more transparent system in place.

In another walk of life, you have an Ofsted review, if you are a good school—you are aiming for outstanding but good does not mean you are failing, and I think the danger of the narrative that we are hearing in parts is that we believe that unless we are at that level of understanding, which we are all aspiring to, then we are in some way looking at something that is broken, and we are not.

Q434 Chair: The evidence that we have received suggests that it is more serious than that. If this was a school, it would be a school that has been put into supported measures and having new leadership thrust upon it. These are very important and very sensitive matters and the Committee does have to look at them with care. We would not have done so if we were just taking Mr Breen’s word for it or one other person’s word for it. It is across a range of different para-sports, different athletes, family members, people coming forward telling their story, some of which we could publish today. Some people have asked—as they did with Baroness Grey-Thompson’s review—for their identity to be protected.

As someone who knows the sport as well as you do, are you surprised by the number of people who are coming forward and expressing the same concern, which is that the classification system isn’t working and there are no grievance procedures through which you can take a complaint about it?

Tim Hollingsworth: To take those two points, in terms of the first stage, I think we are looking at a situation where we can improve and should look to improve the classification process. Part of that is just about better understanding and awareness. But it will also be, as Baroness Grey-Thompson mentioned earlier, as we look to professionalise the system internationally—and it must start internationally before we can look at that from a national level—then, yes, it is clear to me that there are areas that need to improve and people’s personal experiences within that are quite clearly demonstrating that there are areas that need to improve.

Q435 Chair: You do not agree with Baroness Grey-Thompson that we should have a gold standard policy in this country rather than wait for the IPC and everyone else in the world to move to what we think is an acceptable level, not just to impose our own standards ourselves.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tim Hollingsworth: No, I completely agree with that. What I meant by that is that ultimately classification, particularly at the level that we are concerned with, where it is competition at the highest level, is an international classification and, therefore, if we are out of step with that too much it will create too much difficulty for athletes looking to be certain about what their classification will be when they go an international level.

I completely do not want to give the impression that I do not think we should have the best possible national standard. I am just saying that we should do this in tandem with an improvement in the international situation.

Where I am absolutely in agreement, and I think some of the evidence that you have heard today and clearly received is demonstrating more clearly than perhaps we had realised, is the need for an established process to ensure that genuine grievances are heard.

I absolutely recognise that while there are improvements happening now around governance, not least the UK Sport led code, the governance code that UK Sport is introducing, there are improvements to governance that will see policies and procedures put in place but ultimately we do need to look at having an independent body that can make a decision and determination so that there can be more transparency and more solidity to the process.

Q436 **Chair:** You talked about national standards potentially creating difficulties for athletes if we move too far away from the international norm. Presumably that would only apply if we were applying a more rigorous standard ourselves. The difficulty would then be it is just harder to compete because we are making sure our athletes are in the right categories.

Tim Hollingsworth: No, what I am basically saying is that ultimately the classification that is in place for any international competition is the athlete's classification by their international federation. My point about professionalisation was that I would absolutely wish to see it happening in the United Kingdom and absolutely wish to see a better and more robust process than is currently in place. Baroness Grey-Thompson mentioned many of the classifiers are in a volunteer capacity. It is not necessarily as clearly robust as it could be.

But the point I was making was that I think we have a bigger issue in ensuring that international classification, where most of the athletes are competing in the environment that we see them, at the Paralympic Games, at World and European Championships, that that is keeping pace. I have no problem at all with a gold standard in the UK, but I think we have a collective interest in ensuring the international classification is at that point too.

Q437 **Chair:** You mentioned quite a lot about understanding, about the level of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

understanding in these issues, but the impression I get is there is quite widespread understanding of what these problems are. The issues we have touched on this morning go back over 11 years and have been brought up by multiple athletes. What is that people are not understanding about the scale of the problem?

Tim Hollingsworth: My point about education and understanding, and where we are very keen in—

Q438 **Chair:** I am talking about people in leadership roles within the sports bodies that oversee para-sport, what is it they do not understand, because from what we can see there seems to be quite a widespread concern?

Tim Hollingsworth: I think there is a growing understanding, at both national and international level, of the system in place that has been introduced primarily since 2015. It was a big watershed moment when the International Paralympic Committee produced and published its athlete classification code.

That has put into place a far more rigorous set of standards and practices than was previously the case and I think there is a good example there of understanding the mix of medical diagnosis, of physical and functional testing and reviewing competition that now takes up both the national and international classification process.

As people were more understanding of that, and also understanding of the types of impairment that are covered by different classes, the way in which functionally those impairments are classified on a different basis, on a sport by sport basis, then you can perhaps have more understanding about how people might not necessarily have realised why one athlete is freely and fairly competing against another.

Q439 **Chair:** From what you said, though, it sounds like the common standards are not there as they should be. Many people would expect that there would be common standards that countries that compete in a Para Games would follow all around the world.

Tim Hollingsworth: They are there, absolutely. I would agree and accept that one of the jobs that we collectively have to do—and I think the IPC have a responsibility here at international level—and the international federations do, and it is complicated by the fact that in the sport of athletics and several others the IPC also works as the international federation, but the international federations ultimately have to ensure that the standards and procedures for their sport are clearly set out internationally and that every nation can then apply those, as we look to do, indeed to a gold standard in the UK.

Q440 **Chair:** What are your obligations, the British Paralympic Association? You are responsible for a team that gets sent to a Para Games, and if someone comes to you and says, “Well, I have got concerns that there are athletes in the team who are not in the right category and I think



HOUSE OF COMMONS

there has been foul play”, what are your obligations in terms of how you would respond to a concern raised like that?

Tim Hollingsworth: I think it is a very good question for how the British system operates and how we need to improve some elements of governance. At the moment it is fair to say that we do not have formal authorities around processes like classification.

Where we have an obligation, to use that word, is to the IPC, as a member body of the IPC, to ensure that the classification code is properly disseminated and understood by our national federations, that they are supported in their upskilling of the classifiers that they have at a national level in a national federation, and that we are ultimately ensuring that the systems and processes in place are better delivered in the UK as a result of the international federation’s information.

Q441 **Chair:** With respect, what you have done is described the process but what we are saying is when someone comes to you and says the process does not work in this case, what do you do about it? It sounds, from what you said, that you do not do anything about it at all, that it is entirely a matter for the IPC and if they are happy then you don’t do anything about it.

Tim Hollingsworth: That is a good point around the ability of the BPA to have authority rather than to seek to influence. I am very clear that if we start to intervene in national federation processes and systems, then we will be going into territory that is clearly defined as being their responsibility; similarly, in an international federation. So we would look absolutely to ensure that the system is developing better processes than it currently has so that there is a route for that.

Q442 **Chair:** Thinking about the Rio Games, IPC as a body decided to ban Russian athletes from competing, so that was direct interference with other international governing bodies of separate sports to say, “We are not going to have any Russian athletes. This is the decision of the IPC, they are our games and they are not going to compete”.

What you are saying is if someone came to you with an allegation about a member of the British Para team going to Olympics and said, “I have evidence that says that that person is wrongly classified and people cheated the system” your response would be, “I am very sorry, there is nothing I can do about that”?

Tim Hollingsworth: No, no, I would absolutely look—if that evidence was material, to support that going back into the national federation.

Q443 **Chair:** But what you are saying is you have no power to do so. You said it would be wrong if you could cut across the authority of other bodies. Other than just seeking to educate people as to how the system would work, if you were given evidence of how that system had failed, there is nothing you could do about it in terms of the selection for your team.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tim Hollingsworth: We could absolutely take that ultimately to the International Paralympic Committee.

Q444 **Chair:** Yes, you could take to the IPC, but if the IPC said, "Sorry, that is our classification and we are sticking with it" then that is it, isn't it? There is nothing more you could do.

Tim Hollingsworth: I think the IPC is absolutely the right body to look at it because of their responsibilities on an international basis.

Q445 **Chair:** This is very important so I want to be absolutely clear on this. In terms of where the authority lies, you do not have the ability to act and remove an athlete from a team based on an allegation, or to initiate your own investigation, or to do your own checking. You are reliant on other bodies to do all that work for you.

Tim Hollingsworth: We do have two very clear authorities, ultimately. Yes, we have—

Chair: Yes?

Tim Hollingsworth: Yes, we do, in relation to the team at the Games, you mentioned Rio—

Chair: Some other people want to come in. Ian Lucas.

Q446 **Ian C. Lucas:** I want to be absolutely clear in my own mind about who makes the assessment for individual sports. We heard a lot about athletics. It is the athletics body within the UK that will make the assessment and if it is football or basketball or whatever, then it would be the football and basketball body. So they are the people who are making the individual assessments—

Tim Hollingsworth: Correct.

Ian C. Lucas: —in respect of each individual athlete? What you are saying is that when an assessment is made or if someone comes to you with a challenge to an assessment then you would refer them back to the individual sport body within the UK.

Tim Hollingsworth: I would in relation to ensuring that they had the right system and process in place to deliver it, yes. So the—

Q447 **Ian C. Lucas:** What happens if they don't?

Tim Hollingsworth: I think that I would absolutely advocate there being an independent opportunity for that athlete to—

Q448 **Ian C. Lucas:** So at the moment there isn't a system to challenge an individual sport that is a member of the British Paralympic team?

Tim Hollingsworth: Sorry?

Ian C. Lucas: There is not a process to challenge a decision in respect of an individual who then becomes a member of the British Paralympic



HOUSE OF COMMONS

team?

Tim Hollingsworth: There is a process that we have identified today that exists within the sports and ultimately through to the international federation.

Q449 **Ian C. Lucas:** No. If someone comes to you, what you are telling me is there is nothing that you, as a body, do; you refer it to the individual sport?

Tim Hollingsworth: In the first instance, yes.

Q450 **Ian C. Lucas:** What happens in the second instance?

Tim Hollingsworth: Currently we would—

Q451 **Ian C. Lucas:** Currently there is not a second instance, is there?

Tim Hollingsworth: No.

Q452 **Ian C. Lucas:** There should be, should there not?

Tim Hollingsworth: There should be, absolutely.

Q453 **Ian C. Lucas:** So why is there not one?

Tim Hollingsworth: I think that is a very good point about the whole issue that we are dealing with today in relation to ultimately having a fair assessment of a situation by an independent organisation, whether it is completely independent and newly set up or whether it is through existing bodies like Sports Resolutions, where it can be demonstrably independent and a third party.

Q454 **Ian C. Lucas:** I think we made some progress there, but I find it incredible that in a multi-million pound business, which is what this is nowadays, that process is not there at the minute because as we heard earlier, and I am sure you will agree, the integrity of this is absolutely the heart of the sport. So you agree with that?

Tim Hollingsworth: Yes, it would be astonishing for anyone who was involved in any sport not to feel that that was absolutely the fundamental point and the starting point for everything that we do. I believe that is paramount.

Q455 **Ian C. Lucas:** What is of real concern is that we have had a huge amount of evidence from individual athletes who do not have faith in the integrity of the system. We have not tried that hard. These people have come to us because they have not felt that they could come to you. Don't you find that depressing?

Tim Hollingsworth: I think that is an interesting assessment of an organisation, the BPA, that does seek to represent and address the athlete in every context but principally has an authority around the time of the Paralympic Games.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

My view is that what we should be looking for is a better, more robust, system than exists now and then an addition of an independent body to take further any complaints that are not considered to be properly addressed.

Q456 **Chair:** Mr Hollingsworth, you have been in your post for, what, six years now?

Tim Hollingsworth: Yes.

Q457 **Chair:** I think if you had been in the position for six months, the general acceptance you have of the issues, the questions of the Committee have put, all of the problems that have manifested themselves, the relative weakness of the BPA within this would be more understandable, but this is a problem that has developed and grown on your watch.

I find it very depressing to hear you state, as you have done, that the BPA does not have any power in this regard and even when people come to you with serious issues, that you and your colleagues at the BPA are well aware of all of the concerns that have been raised, that have certainly been raised with us—I do not believe this is news to anyone who is inside the sport—people have sat back and really just let it happen.

The people who have suffered have been the athletes and their families, people that have come forward to the Committee to share their stories with us. What do you have to say about that?

Tim Hollingsworth: I do not think there is any context around this that looks to anything having happened where there was a direct responsibility of the BPA in relation to these issues. Everything that we are talking about is in relation to, as we have heard this morning, individual athletes within their national federation.

So I will completely recognise the fact that the scope of our direct authority in that context is limited, but I think what you are right in saying is that we do feel that we should now be involved in—development of a national code is one example of it—a better approach to classification at a national level in terms of people's understanding of roles and responsibilities and ultimately the development of a suitable process for complaint procedures to be dealt with independently.

Where we have interaction with athletes, where we have interaction with coaches, where we have interaction with the sports, these issues were not made clear in the way that they are being made today, at that time and to us. We have had—

Q458 **Chair:** I am going stop you there. I do not believe that. I do not believe the people in this room believe that and I find it incredible that you say it.

Michael Breen: It is not true!

Chair: Mr Breen, please.



Tim Hollingsworth: What I mean by that is where we have a direct response from the athlete, which is at Games time, we are given feedback, we do a survey based on their experience of being part of the team. That was my clear point. I undoubtedly have heard from individuals and I have absolutely sought to understand the issues, the BPA has sought to understand the issues, have sought to get the evidence in front of us and have quite clearly recognised that the evidence has been taken as far as it can be and there is no need for it to be taken any further in this case.

Q459 **Chair:** Other members of the Committee wish to come in but do you feel, knowing what you know—and as you have admitted now you are aware of the breadth of these allegations that people have brought—that Para athletes that have been failed by the system in the way that they have are owed an apology by the Paralympic movement for the failures in the process so far?

Tim Hollingsworth: There has not been any proven case of intentional misrepresentation. There has not been any proven case of intentional misrepresentation. There has not, indeed, been any evidence that has been presented that has gone beyond the circumstantial and the anecdotal.

My answer is, if I were to say that, it would be to not defend the right of those athletes, who are otherwise being accused, of having been through correct and proper process, having been through, at both national and international level, procedures that have confirmed their classes and are deemed to be in the right class for their competition. By suggesting that there has been some fundamental failure, I think we are absolutely taking the issue that we face currently too far.

Q460 **Chair:** The question I asked was this. You have admitted that there are failings in the system. Baroness Grey-Thompson said that the system is being abused now, in her opinion. We have heard from Mr Breen, we have heard from other athletes and families of athletes who have given evidence to us about the failures. What I am saying to you is that in your position do you think the BPA owes an apology to Para athletes in this country, Paralympians, to say, “We are sorry for the failings in process of the past and we are determined to make sure that this stops”?

Tim Hollingsworth: I think we are absolutely determined to improve the system but I do not—

Q461 **Chair:** But do you think an apology is owed by the BPA to Paralympians in this country who have been failed by the system as it stands at the moment?

Tim Hollingsworth: If there is genuine evidence of an athlete being failed by the system, then yes.

Q462 **Chair:** But at the moment, you do not feel that an apology is owed.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tim Hollingsworth: I am saying if there was genuine evidence then yes.

Q463 **Chair:** It is a yes or no. Even Greg Clarke found this easier than you are finding it.

Tim Hollingsworth: I would absolutely say to the collective it would be a no.

Q464 **Rebecca Pow:** First of all, I find it extraordinary that just now you said we do need a more robust system and you will be looking at it. Yes or no? If it was not for this inquiry, would you be looking at a more robust system?

Tim Hollingsworth: Yes. We absolutely need to recognise what has happened before this inquiry but I do agree that this inquiry is looking at a very important issue. But the International Paralympic Committee has addressed the issues through a very important piece of work, the development of the international code that was published in 2015. We since then have been working much more forcibly to put in place an equivalent national code that will be very clear about understanding who does what and what needs to happen. So I do believe, absolutely, these issues would be looked at and looked at clearly.

But I would reflect, whether it is with this Committee or whether it is since Rio, one must acknowledge how issues in sports have come to the fore. It would be quite wrong to sit here and say that those issues are not serious and should not be taken seriously. Therefore, in relation to some of the wider practices, not just in classification but the whole issues around sport programmes, Para programmes, I do think that we are in a time—and this Committee is meeting at a time—when there is a much greater spotlight being focused on athlete programmes.

Q465 **Rebecca Pow:** We know that but what I would say is that you have been very slow off the mark and so many examples have been highlighted, and I will just give you one because I would like to know what you thought about it:

Bethany Woodward, who was a British Paralympian, recently handed back her medal because, she said, she lost faith in the way that the team was selected. Did that not ring massive alarm bells for you? That somebody who had won a medal, for whom it must have been wonderful to win a medal, thought that she did not deserve it because of the way that the classification system worked, allowing what she considered the wrong person to be allowed into the team. How did you react to that? Did you not think you should be really looking into that?

Tim Hollingsworth: I thought it was, first and foremost, extremely sad. I think it is extremely sad that any athlete has got to a position where they feel strongly enough about any issue that they feel that such a drastic action has to be taken.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

However, I have to say in the circumstance of that and the race particularly that she highlighted, I have not been aware of any evidence that would move beyond the circumstantial to suggest that there was any underlying cause for that to be in doubt.

Q466 Rebecca Pow: Did you put an investigation into progress? Did you follow any procedures to check that out?

Tim Hollingsworth: The reality is the medal that was in question was not one with any involvement of the British Paralympic Association. It was competing for UK Athletics at an IPC Athletics European Championship. Had it been in the Paralympic Games, where she would have been competing as a member of the Paralympics GB Team, then we would have had a very different perspective in relation to that. So the issue was more general rather than specific. What was the issue that she is so unhappy about? What is her belief in terms of why things have got to this stage?

As has been explained, I absolutely recognise the way that she as an athlete has presented why she feels like she does but I do not accept that in that particular case there is clear material evidence to suggest that something was wrong.

You mentioned earlier, Chair, the IPC banning Russia last year. I think we have evidence there of an organisation who, when they are presented with material evidence, are not afraid to make difficult decisions, tough decisions. You could not get a tougher decision than banning Russia as a country from the Paralympic Games last year. So I think we have to be clear that we need circumstantial evidence to be treated in one way and material evidence to be treated in another.

Q467 Rebecca Pow: Did your organisation not think that you should be looking seriously into these suggestions: that, for example, some athletes are either making their conditions allegedly seem worse than they are to get into certain categories or—we have had loads of evidence submitted. Did it not ring alarm bells to you that you should be starting to look into these issues? My colleague is going to mention the swimming issues. The swimming issues in particular have been raised—they were on that “File on 4” documentary—and, frankly, I find it quite shocking to listen to some of the things that have gone on, allegedly. Are you not aware of any of those?

Tim Hollingsworth: I am aware of them, absolutely. I am also aware of the processes that are in place at both national and international level by other parties, third parties, to look into those allegations. It is not the case, in my view, that there is any—I think it is important that it is beyond reasonable doubt that there is this burden of proof in relation to understanding when someone’s personal view on an individual’s classification, or anecdotal evidence around what they believe has happened, then gets translated into deliberate cheating.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The issue that I find difficult in relation to this is the belief that someone's view on one individual athlete's classification is quickly conflated into cheating. That is the danger.

Q468 Rebecca Pow: Doesn't it come right back to the issue that my colleague mentioned: that you are going back to the individual sport themselves to ask them what they thought about assessing their own sport? Is that not the root of all of it?

Tim Hollingsworth: Sorry?

Q469 Rebecca Pow: For your classification system, doesn't it all come back to you just feed it all back to the sport itself? So say it was swimming, you could say that the swimming fraternity wants to get the best people in with the best medal chances to win the swimming races, so are they going to make it easier for certain people to get into the categories to do those races? Did you not think about all that, because it seems to have been highlighted, given it was on a Radio 4 documentary? Didn't you look into it?

Tim Hollingsworth: We have looked into that absolutely. I can say two things in relation to everything that you have mentioned there and, indeed, everything that we are talking about today in terms of the representation of an impairment and classification, and the process that underpins it.

On the one hand, it is absolutely the case that Great Britain, as many other nations do, will look at the classification classes and will look in their processes for athletes who will be competitive within those at the highest level. I do not see that that is anything unusual and certainly do not see that as being anything outside of the spirit of sport given that at the top level, at the Paralympic Games, a key element of that is competitiveness and winning. So on the one hand within a class it is absolutely reasonable for athletes to be sought who are going to be competitive within that class at the highest level.

That is not to say that sport is not still there for everyone with every impairment, everyone can look to have their own sporting experience but at the top level there is an element of competition within it that has to be recognised.

I simply cannot see how that has to always then be accompanied by a view that there is not integrity to the process. I would be deeply alarmed if we thought there was not integrity to the process. People who are looking at sport now and thinking that coaches or governing bodies are looking for ways to bend the rules and cheat the system, I do not see that as being something that is supportable but also I do not see it as something that is as widespread as perhaps people are considering.

Q470 Rebecca Pow: Okay, and just finally, do you think there is a suitable whistleblowing procedure if anyone did have concerns?



Tim Hollingsworth: No, that is something where we are recognising, in all of this debate and with this Committee and outside, and with respect to individuals, athletes, parents, whoever, who have felt frustrated that there has not been a suitable end point to the procedure. In domestic terms at least, from the area of national classification, ultimately having some independent body, whether it is an independent body newly set up, whether it is through an existing functional body like Sport Resolutions UK, but somewhere ultimately where these cases could be heard is a good thing.

Q471 **Jo Stevens:** Mr Hollingsworth, I have listened to what you said today and I think what you have said is you think that there should be an improved classification process, we need an established process for genuine grievances to be heard, there needs to be an independent body involved for more transparency, better and more robust processes and professionalism around it all. Have you reached that conclusion today?

Tim Hollingsworth: No.

Q472 **Jo Stevens:** So how long have you been of that view?

Tim Hollingsworth: It has been an emerging recognition within the wider context of the very important consideration we have in sport at the moment in duty of care, not just talking about classification. A really important staging post now for sport, particularly for para-sport, must be to recognise that one of the areas that is in need of improvement is the general robustness of systems and processes that have grown very fast and are necessary to underpin the sport and the competition. So I don't think it is a recently emerging view. I did and have recently—

Q473 **Jo Stevens:** How long have you been of that view?

Tim Hollingsworth: We have been in consultation for 18 months now around the national classification code, for example, that we will be looking to publish early next year. That is one example of where, since the Rio Games and indeed before the Rio Games, we have been looking at making sure that this next stage of the process is put in place.

Q474 **Jo Stevens:** But in order to have reached that point where you wanted that review to happen, you must have been thinking about this for some time previously. I am interested to know, is it two years, three years, four years that you have felt this way about the system. I am interested in how long it has taken for us to get to this point. That is why I am asking.

Tim Hollingsworth: A lot of the discussion today has highlighted how the focus of London 2012 was a catalyst for many elements within para-sport. I would say from my own experience—and so much of that is wholly positive in terms of people's understanding of it, people's enjoyment of it, and most importantly the impact that can have on wider society and perceptions of disability and what is possible—all those things are so demonstrably occurring as a result of London that simultaneously



we must and should be looking at the processes that underpin world class sport in this case but also para-sport more generally.

Q475 **Jo Stevens:** So is it fair for me to say that since 2012 you have been of that view that there should be these improvements—

Tim Hollingsworth: No, what I am saying is that in general terms—sorry, in general terms I believe that what we are seeing is a growth and development of a movement. In specific terms, I think it is unquestionable that since Rio and the Games that we had there, there have been a number of issues that have arisen across sport, not just in para-sport, that have sharpened the mind and given, people collectively more focus on what needs to be done.

I would say that it is more recently—and I will accept it is more recently—that we have been thinking as an organisation about what is the obvious next step, for example, in terms of whistleblowing and complaints procedures, in tandem with the work that UK Sport and others are doing through the governance code and the way in which they are looking collectively across the system at culture and wellbeing.

Q476 **Jo Stevens:** Will there be any additional steps that you will now put in place as a result of what you have heard today in order to achieve that?

Tim Hollingsworth: We can do two things. We should absolutely look forward to the finalisation and publication of the national classification code that is based on an understanding of and recognition of what was published in 2015 by the IPC at international level. That is what we will start in classification to describe and determine much better who does what and the processes that will underpin it.

So I think that is one really important stage of the process.

Jo Stevens: Anything else?

Tim Hollingsworth: The other most important thing is to ensure that across the system we are absolutely playing our part in making the governance of sport and the culture within sport more actively looked at through what UK Sport is doing with its measures, through what we can control around the team. We have a number of areas when it comes to the team at the Games where we can be clearer about the obligations and the requirements we have for everyone who competes for Great Britain at the Paralympic Games. We should certainly look to do that, as well as promoting the best practice across the movement.

We had Baroness Grey-Thompson come to a meeting of our membership to talk about duty of care. More recently we had Nicole Sapstead, the Chief Executive of UK Anti-Doping, come to speak about doping within para-sport from her perspective. There is a lot we can do.

Q477 **Jo Stevens:** If, for example—and I am not making this invitation because it is not within my gift—we were to ask you when you would be



HOUSE OF COMMONS

able to come back and tell us that you have done those things, that they had happened, how long do you think it is going to take?

Tim Hollingsworth: Well, the code I hope will be out in January. Today is quite a meaningful deadline in governance terms for a lot of governing bodies and organisations like ourselves to have complied with the Code for Sports Governance.

Ultimately, I would hope that we would start to have a good and serious debate now around what the best mechanism will be for ultimate independent review of issues, complaints procedures and ultimately having in place a stage, which currently you would accept is not there, to ensure that any genuine, material, recognisable complaints are dealt with more effectively.

Q478 Christian Matheson: Mr Hollingsworth, I note a contradiction in the evidence that you have given today and perhaps you can clarify it for me.

In response to Mr Lucas, for example, you talked about the fact that there is not a proper appeal procedure. Ms Stevens has just talked about, and you have confirmed, some of the changes that you are going to make in your processes and procedures. However, at the same time, in response to a question from the Chair, you refused to acknowledge the failures when complaints have been made to you in the past.

The Chair asked if you felt it was right to apologise and it was as though you were acknowledging that there had been no failings in the past in the cases that had been given to you. Yet, at the same time, you are making all of those changes. How do you know that there were no failings if you recognise that the procedures to identify the failings were not in place and you are having to replace them?

Tim Hollingsworth: It goes back to the recognition that we could be in a better place than we are now but does not reflect on a systematic failure. If there was an understanding of an individual athlete or any individual within the system, then clearly you would want to be—I guess it is the issue of what I am—what would I be apologising for, to the Chair's question?

Q479 Christian Matheson: Perhaps for the six years you have been in charge that you have not put structures in place. You have had people complain to you and bring evidence to you and you have not been able to address those complaints.

Tim Hollingsworth: No, but I think the acknowledgement there on all sides was that the British Paralympic Association did not have the authority then to make changes within the governing bodies so it was better that those cases were looked at and heard by the relevant bodies and parties themselves.

Q480 Christian Matheson: Except that we have heard that it is not better, which is why you are wanting to take on these changes yourself.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tim Hollingsworth: No, I would see the changes in stages. Certainly I think in the first instance, we need to take what we are doing now and make it more robust, perhaps look at better education and training around what is the current system so that people understand it better, and absolutely understand that if you do take the issue of classification and improve that through the professionalisation of that process then a lot of the misunderstandings will no longer occur.

Q481 **Christian Matheson:** So when a complaint was brought to you—and we heard from Mr Breen, for example, this morning—you accept that it will not possibly have been looked at properly because the structures were not in place.

Tim Hollingsworth: I do not accept that. I do think in the case of—

Q482 **Christian Matheson:** Mr Hollingsworth, I am sorry, I am finding a bit of a contradiction in the evidence you are giving. On the one hand you are accepting that the structures are not in place and on the other hand you are not accepting that they were not looked at.

Tim Hollingsworth: I think Mr Breen, to give an example, and I am conscious that he is behind me, is right that his enormous clear frustration was because he felt that there was not a final independent body with whom the issue could be looked at and a line drawn in the sand once and for all.

What I do not accept is that the issue was not looked at. What I do not accept is that there was not an investigation made by an organisation, ultimately the international federation, the IPC, that looked at the evidence that was presented and absolutely came to the conclusion that there was nothing there that they should act upon, a body that has quite clearly demonstrated when they do get presented with evidence they will act.

Just because somebody has a grievance, it does not necessarily mean that ultimately you are in a position where you should feel the urge to apologise, is my point.

Q483 **Chair:** Mr Hollingsworth, to answer your rhetorical question about what are you being asked to apologise for, I think it is the consequence of not having a proper whistleblowing procedure so that athletes have to give evidence anonymously to the duty of care report or to this Committee because they feel they have no way of getting their story out there.

We have received evidence of athletes who feel that they have been discriminated against within teams because they have raised concerns to coaches, to other people in the team and then they are discriminated against because of that. We have heard stories of people that have been failed by the system, and to have Baroness Grey-Thompson say that as far as she is concerned the classification system is broken and people are cheating it now, today, as a consequence of that—these things may not be all within your direct control but I think we would look at the BPA and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

say that you are a leading organisation for para-sport in this country. It would be appropriate for you to recognise the failings, to be a champion of putting right and to acknowledge and apologise to the victims of those failures.

Tim Hollingsworth: I am genuinely sorry that there are athletes who feel that they have grievances but I do not feel that those grievances necessarily are ones that are substantiated. That was, I guess, my confusion. My apologies.

I do absolutely recognise that people are feeling we can look in a different context at other failures within the sporting landscape and recognition by a governing body about a cultural failing that is quite clearly identified and quite rightly apologised for. Similarly, you can look at where genuine evidence is presented that you can say that that is a failing that should be recognised and apologise for that.

I do feel very sorry indeed that we are in a position where there are athletes who feel they can't get to a point where they are listened to satisfactorily, but I am not saying I am apologising for failure or a belief that the system is not working as effectively as it is. I do believe that the issue is that we should therefore look for an ultimate independent body to be able to take genuine claims a stage further.

Chair: The frustration that I think the Committee feel, and I sense other people in the room feel as well, is that once again, like so many other issues in sports governance that we have looked at, we are having this discussion and looking at no whistleblowing process, no grievance procedures, cases that have not been properly investigated, athletes have suffered as a result of trying to speak out within their sport.

The reason why we end up investigating these issues is that people approach the Committee, people approach investigative journalists, people are seeking alternative means to try to get the truth out there because there is no system within their sport to do so, nowhere they can go and be taken seriously. It is tragic and none more so than the case of para-sport and the issues we looked at today.

I appreciate your being here. I am sorry that you were the only person representing a governing body that was on the panel today because it is probably slightly unfair that you have had to carry the burden for everyone else. I do appreciate your evidence today and thank the other witnesses as well for their testimony. Thank you.

Tim Hollingsworth: Thank you.