

Written evidence submitted by Gracie Barra Jiu Jitsu UK

Gracie Barra is a global Brazilian Jiu Jitsu organisation with over 800 schools worldwide and close to 80 schools in the UK. Gracie Barra has had a presence in the UK for almost 20 years.

Gracie Barra is a team that sits under a voluntary governing body called the UKBJJA (UK Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Association). The UKBJJA submitted an application in March 2018 to become a nationally recognised body. At the present time this application is still to be approved.

Even though Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) is one of the fastest growing sports in the world, we are still yet to be recognised as a sport in the UK. In contrast, BJJ is the national sport in the UAE and taught in all schools. This lack of recognition means that we have been self funded and developed our own programmes to support elite athletes and up and coming talent.

BJJ schools are commercial businesses that operate through having a membership base, schools range in size from small part time academies to large full time schools with a team of staff and student numbers in the hundreds.

Competing at the highest level in Jiu Jitsu is an expensive business at great personal financial cost to athletes and coaches, with only a small number of competitions providing cash prizes. As a coach myself, I spend most weekends travelling around the UK, Europe, and the US with the elite athletes under my guidance.

There are stories close to me of athletes having to sell their car or take part in medical experiments in order to be able to afford competing in the World Championships.

Within Gracie Barra we have set up our own programme called the Ambassadors Programme. We are now able to sponsor a selection of adult and child athletes with small sums of money to help cover competition costs and related expenses. We also provide equipment and free access to training events. In 2020 we had 12 athletes in the programme but had received over 100 applications from across the UK. It is our hope to keep growing the programme and potentially gain some level of corporate sponsorship.

Everyone involved at the higher levels within the programme are volunteers, making sure that all money goes to the athletes. We run regular seminars and training events to raise money for the programme. Our clothing brand and internal competition network also contributes from the sale of clothing and competition registrations.

Our sport would 100% benefit from firstly being recognised as a sport by the UK and secondly by receiving a level of funding to support our top athletes from across all the teams in the UK. It is a sad state of affairs when a talented Black Belt has to sell their car to afford to win 3rd place at the World Championships.