

Title : Dr

Forename : Paul

Surname : Abrahams

Occupation and position held (if applicable): : Chief Communications Officer, RELX

MEMBER NOMINATIONS

Ziemek Wojciekowski, Tomek Walicki, Nick Fihosy, Greerson McMullen, Kate O'Connell, Michael Medhurst, Nick Mort, Jeff Kiy, Paul Winter, John Troiano, Richard Sage, Kenny Jones, Brian Brittain, Gerry Gajadharsingh, Anthony Bartlett

Please describe your Fencing Experience & BF Service :

Paul Abrahams has lived and fenced in France, Switzerland, the US and UK over four decades. He has won medals in all three weapons at the Commonwealth Fencing Veteran Championships. These include three golds, three silvers and three bronzes. He has also represented Great Britain in both sabre and foil at the Veteran World Championships. He is currently ranked 12th in Europe in his veteran age group and number one in the UK.

Paul was chair of British Fencing's Foil Committee, and the foil co-ordinator on the International Youth Committee, which organised the cadet and junior squads. He was a member of the British Fencing Board for eight years, and was chair of the AGRC, which oversees British Fencing's finances.

Most recently, he has worked with Brian Brittain, a British Fencing board member, to set up and promote the British Fencing rating system aimed at encouraging more members to compete more often in more appropriate competitions. The scheme has led to additional competitions and greater participation for the broader fencing community. <https://www.ukratings.co.uk/>

He continues to referee domestically, and in the past officiated at many European Fencing Confederation cadet competitions including finals. He was a member of the British Fencing refereeing body that made international refereeing allocations.

Please describe your Governance/Company Director/Board level Experience: (This can be in private or public sector, sport or non-sporting capacity.) :

Paul served for eight years on the board of British Fencing. During that time he helped reposition the events programme so that it was no longer loss-making. He was a member of the nominations committee and also served as chair of the AGRC, which is responsible for overseeing the organisation's finances.

Paul is a member of the senior leadership team at RELX, a data and analytics company that is the seventh largest company on the FTSE 100. He has been Chief Communications Officer at that company for 13 years, responsible for marketing, external communications, internal communications, social media, the corporate website and the annual report. The team he manages has won many awards for its innovative communications strategies.

He has also attended the Financial Times Non-Executive Director Course.

How would you support the strategic objectives of British Fencing (Grow Participation, Create a Sustainable Future, Deliver GBR Success, Support Women and Girls, Deliver Positive Social Impact) if elected to the Board: :

A critical part of British Fencing's strategy has been to grow its membership. To sustain a thriving community - clubs, coaches and competitions - and ensure British Fencing's long-term financial viability - it is key that British Fencing prioritises growing the sport. From this many of the other strategic objectives follow - a sustainable future, international success, support for women and girls and a positive social impact.

In 2014, British Fencing membership was about 9,500 and the organisation announced a ten-year strategic goal for 2024 that looked to grow that number to 30,000. However, at last count (2023-24), there were 11,200 members.

About 70% of members are under 20. Membership peaks at the cadet cohort for women, and at the junior level for men. I believe that more efforts must be made to retain members in the sport as well as attract new adult fencers.

One lever to retain and grow membership is the competition circuit. At the moment, fewer than half of British Fencing members compete in a competition in any given year, and of those about half fence in just one competition. While elite fencers have many events in which they can compete, I would argue there aren't enough events for those outside the top of the sport.

There has been some progress with the development of the British Fencing ratings system with a few competitions in all six weapons for those with ratings of D and below - open to about 97% of members. British Fencing has run successful D/E/U events at the Nationals, but I believe more can be done to encourage clubs, regions and national governing bodies to run similar events which will provide a positive experience for members, coaches, clubs and competition organisers.

Please indicate and describe your current qualifications and practice experience in relation to those sought by the Board.

Delivery/Oversight of World Class Performance Programmes in Paralympic Sport : N/A

Private sector fundraising/commercial activities to support British Fencing strategic priorities :

Paul is part of the leadership team of RELX, which owns RX. This is the second largest events company in the world, and runs shows such as the London Book Fair and MCM ComicCon at the Excel Centre. During the year he attends many fencing events in UK both as a referee and a competitor, as well as competitions in Europe and the US as a fencer.

Paul believes there are considerable opportunities to increase participation at competitions in the UK and improve the delivery of those events, offering real value to members while generating a surplus that can be reinvested in clubs and British Fencing activities.

As part of his role at RELX, Paul is responsible for the corporate website. The current British Fencing website is cumbersome, complicated and difficult to navigate, and he could bring his expertise to help simplify the site and significantly improve the user interface, so that members can interact with the organisation with much less friction.

Sport/activity procurement in the education sector (primary/secondary) : N/A

HR :

Paul was a member of British Fencing's Nomination Committee for many years.

During a 25-year career as a manager, he has run teams as large as 60 people and dealt with a range of Human Resource Issues. This includes at a group level helping to manage employee litigation issues.

Please indicate whether you fall into the following under-represented categories

Disabled people : No

Ethnic minorities : No

Females : No

Please describe any additional skills and attributes that you believe you would bring to the Board if elected. Please study the job description for a Board Director on the British Fencing website. :

Paul is an experienced non-executive director and has a sound understanding of corporate governance and the duties of a director. First, the board partners with the Chief Executive to help set the strategy and objectives. Second, the board holds the Chief Executive accountable for the execution of the strategy. Finally, the board must make sure that the execution of the strategy is done in a way that meets the values of the organisation - most notably respecting staff and members. Since the organisation is not large, a non-executive at British Fencing may also help in areas of expertise, but ideally should not be involved in execution.

In terms of experience, I have knowledge and skills in finance, operations, risk management, HR, commercial and business development and marketing and communications. In addition, I have experience of grass roots fencing and club development, as well as elite fencing: a member of my family has competed at junior and senior world cups.