

The Case for Regulation of White Collar Boxing

Introduction

In England, official regulatory supervision over boxing is provided by established national governing bodies (NGBs): England Boxing, Boxing Scotland, Welsh Boxing for amateur competition, and the British Boxing Board of Control for the professional game. These organisations administer competitions, regulate training practices and oversee the medical records of athletes that compete, as well as provide directives about the presence of medical specialists at the scene and protocol compliance.

'Unlicensed' boxing events, on the other hand, are not subject to the regulations of the regulatory organisation. The UK has seen a rise in the popularity of "white collar" amateur boxing shows, which serves as an example of this trend. The lack of a formal governing organisation within UK Sport's broader regulatory framework leads to a lack of clear regulations regarding the provision of medical care in these events. In this particular context, it is noteworthy that Safe MMA has taken on an advisory function in Mixed Martial Arts. While it offers suggestions however, it does not have the right to force event organisers to follow this advice.

This research aims to examine common activities in white-collar boxing, specifically focusing on unlicensed events. It suggests that the lack of oversight fosters an atmosphere that may encourage unethical behaviour, putting the safety and welfare of boxers at risk and generating legal liabilities and reputational issues which may harm the long-term future of the sport if not addressed. These include: the legality of unlicensed boxing, personal and corporate liability of promoters, opponents and third parties; insurance; the responsibilities of coaches, cornermen and officials; safe conduct of events, including the observation of medical protocols, and; training and matchmaking practices.

Methodology and Data Collection

At the outset, the original research design for this study proposed to review statistics relating to injury from boxing (both amateur and professional) to establish the context in which an objective measure of boxer welfare might be identified. It was clear from an early stage however, that current practice precludes against the collection of comprehensive injury statistics, and the approach was abandoned in favour of a mixed methods approach, involving three-phases:

- A review of available academic and 'grey' literature (published reports by professional bodies and other interested parties);
- An online survey of over 500 active boxing coaches distributed via the governing bodies, and;
- A series of online focus groups with c. 20 coaches to explore issues in more detail.

It is clear that the issues which prompted the governing bodies to commission the research have emerged as recurring themes in each stage of the data collection. This triangulation of data is important because it reinforces the messages emerging from the research and underlines their consistency. This gives added impetus to the work, confirms its validity and should help to ensure buy in from key stakeholders as the policy responses are developed and refined.

Results

Literature Review

Injuries in Amateur Boxing

Regulation in amateur boxing has developed over time in response to scientific advances in medicine, more specifically research related to head injuries in response to high-profile incidents of serious (and occasionally fatal) injury. Over time, this has included such measures as the introduction of the standing count rule in 1964, mandatory head guards from 1984 onwards, and various modifications to the round formula (Bianco et al, 2013). The overall effect was to reduce 'challenging' health outcomes, though Bianco et al. noted concern that the eventual reversal of the headguard rule would require careful monitoring.

Alevras et al. (2019) observed through a systematic review of the literature that boxers incurred an injury every 2.5 hours of competition and 772 hours of training. They also identified a need to monitor the ways in which injuries occur and the risk factors which can be modified to prevent them. This is pertinent to the current study, for the reasons outlined in the discussion of methodology and data collection, foremost among them being the absence of a comprehensive injury database to support ongoing scrutiny of the safety of the sport.

White Collar Boxing

When white collar boxing first appeared as a business in the late 1980s, it involved people who had never boxed before preparing to compete in organised contests. Typically involving participants from white collar occupations, rather than the working class participants more usually associated with boxing, events were first staged in New York by Gleason's Gym, before flourishing among city workers in London. The concept was given additional credibility through its use as a means of fundraising for charity by involving celebrities (such as Ricky Gervais and Les Dennis).

Founded in 2001 and 2007, respectively, the International White Collar Boxing Association (IWCBA) and the World White Collar Boxing Association (WWCBA) have grown to be well-known regulatory organisations with a primary focus on participant safety. Aligning its weight divisions with those of professional boxing, the IWCBA requires a qualified medical staff to be present at ringside. In order to facilitate national, regional, and international rankings and championship title competitions, the WWCBA, which operates in the Asia-Pacific region, sets uniform rules and procedures. Working together with organisations like the amateur AIBA, these associations are crucial to the regulation of white collar boxing around the world.

Despite these efforts to assert control over the delivery of white collar boxing, several high-profile incidents of serious injury and occasional fatalities in the UK have generated a series of unsettling headlines in recent years:

["Man dies after suffering 'serious injuries' in white-collar charity boxing match | The Independent"](#) – man from Liverpool died in hospital the day after a bout in Nottingham (2014).

["White collar boxing nearly killed me': Amateur fighter had brain bleed and two cardiac arrests after charity bout - Mirror Online"](#)—a 20-year-old participant said she had two cardiac arrests and a brain bleed that left him in a coma for ten days after a charity boxing event. He took part in an 8-week training programme prior to the competition (2018).

["Dad, 34, nearly killed after suffering two strokes following his first ever white-collar boxing match - Mirror Online"](#) — the participant, 34, experienced severe

health issues after his first boxing match after just eight weeks of training. Following a 999 call, doctors discovered a ruptured artery in his neck (2018).

[“Tributes to man who died in 'white collar boxing' match - BBC News”](#) – participant died after fighting in the Ultra White Collar Boxing event held at Tramps nightclub, Worcester (2022).

[“Student who died after being seriously injured in charity white collar boxing match is named | Daily Mail Online”](#) – 25-year-old student required emergency medical attention in the early stages of his fight and died later in hospital (2023).

These stories share a common thread: that the minimal amount of time preparing for a white collar bout is insufficient to understand the sport and become "fighting fit", The sport's governing bodies have repeatedly raised concerns regarding safety standards and have labelled them as "effectively unlicensed.

There are significant concerns remain that white collar boxing operates outside of any regulatory framework, exploiting a number of grey areas of the law relating to licensing, health and safety, and informed consent ([Call for medicals legacy for dead 'white collar' boxer - BBC News](#)). Channon et al. (2020) found through 200 hours of observations that medical practices and standards vary considerably between events, citing examples of missing medical equipment, unqualified practitioners, and medical personnel being overruled by promoters. In their view, the lack of standardised rules for care presents a serious risk to participants, and regulation is urgently required.

Further, the charitable purpose of white collar boxing, which features so heavily in promotional literature, has been questioned by some observers. Wright (2020) suggests that while the perception of white collar boxing is that it is a free and charitable activity, the reality is not straightforward. Elsewhere, negative media coverage has focussed on the short period of training undertaken by participants, leaving them unprepared for entry into the ring (Yorkshire Post, 2020). Additionally, promoters have been accused of failing to protect participants by mismatching opponents and allowing bouts to continue inappropriately (White Collar Boxing Undercover – ITV Exposure, 2020), though promoters have defended their practices vigorously (<https://ultrawhitecollarboxing.co.uk/itv-exposure-white-collar-boxing/>).

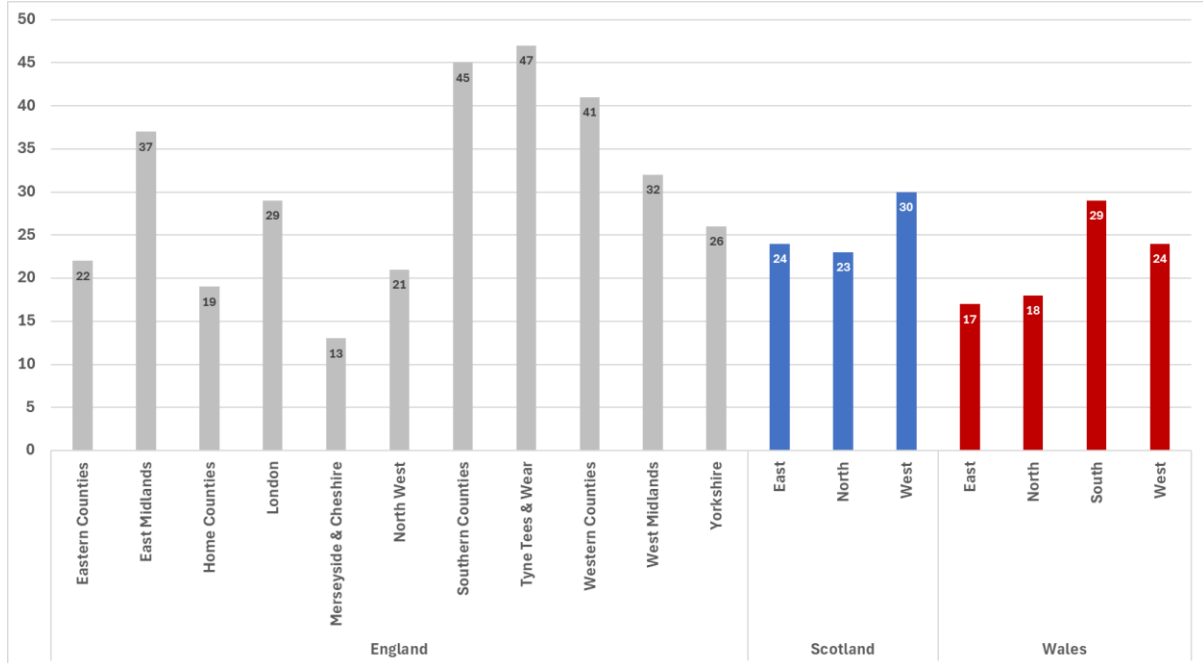
It is in this context that England Boxing has launched the 'One Night Only' concept, in an effort to promote involvement by new participants in the sport. This project aims to establish a safe space where people with little prior boxing experience and little training can compete in a single, competitive match while following England Boxing Rules, with certain exceptions made for participants in the events. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there is little, if any, independent evidence to support the claims of those on either side of the white collar boxing debate. It is therefore both pertinent and timely to review the current situation with regard to white collar boxing, and to explore ways in which the boxing authorities might support promoters and participants alike in providing a safer operational environment, underpinned by clarity with regard to responsibilities for safeguarding and welfare.

Online Survey

The governing bodies which commissioned this research were keen to understand the appeal of white collar boxing by canvassing the views of their affiliated coaches. Not only do they represent a significant constituency of individuals with a vested interest in how the sport is regulated, but as advocates for boxers they are well-placed to speak on behalf of those who might be tempted to engage with white collar boxing. It is also pertinent to note however, that the concept of white collar boxing appears to circumvent the traditional route into the ring, by offering a shorter training period before a first bout

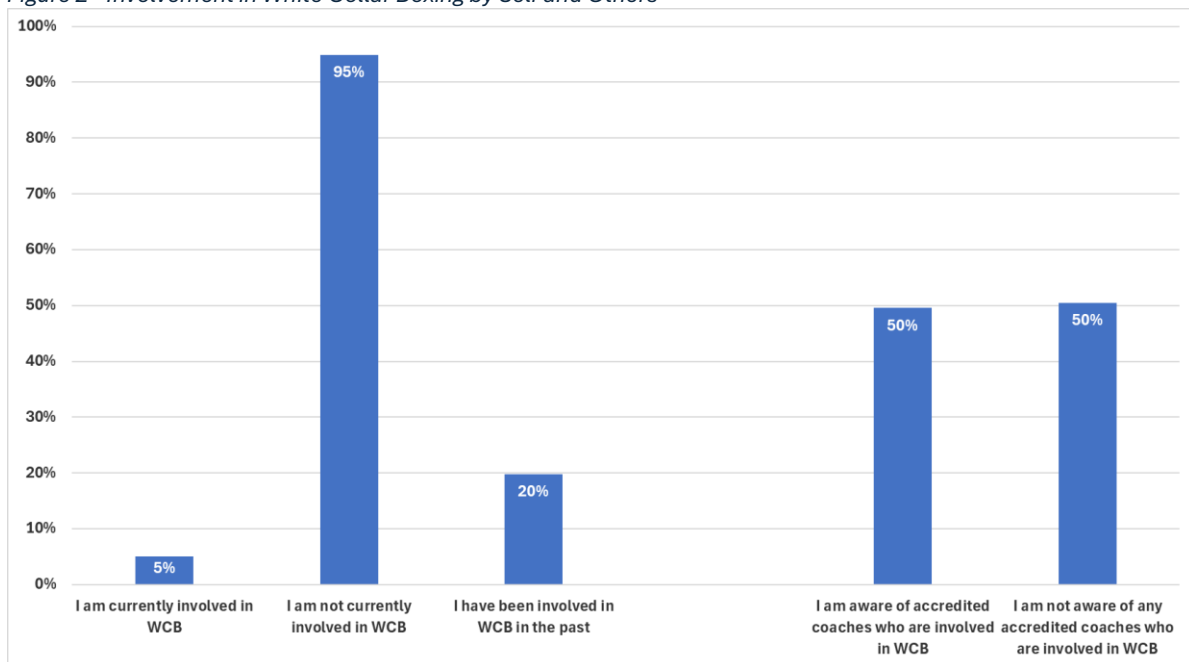
An online survey was distributed via the governing bodies' own communication channels, and over 500 attempts were made to complete the questionnaire. Figure 1 shows how the response attempts were distributed between the governing bodies' administrative regions, showing that the majority of surveys were completed by coaches based in England, though there were also a notable number of forms submitted by coaches based in Scotland and Wales.

Figure 1 - Distribution of Survey Responses, by NGB Region



One of the key questions to be determined by the research was the extent to which coaches accredited by the NGBs are engaged with White Collar Boxing. As Figure 2 makes clear, only 5% of coaches would admit to their own current involvement, though one in five have been involved at some point in the past. Nevertheless, half of all those surveyed claimed to be aware of other accredited coaches who are currently involved in WCB.

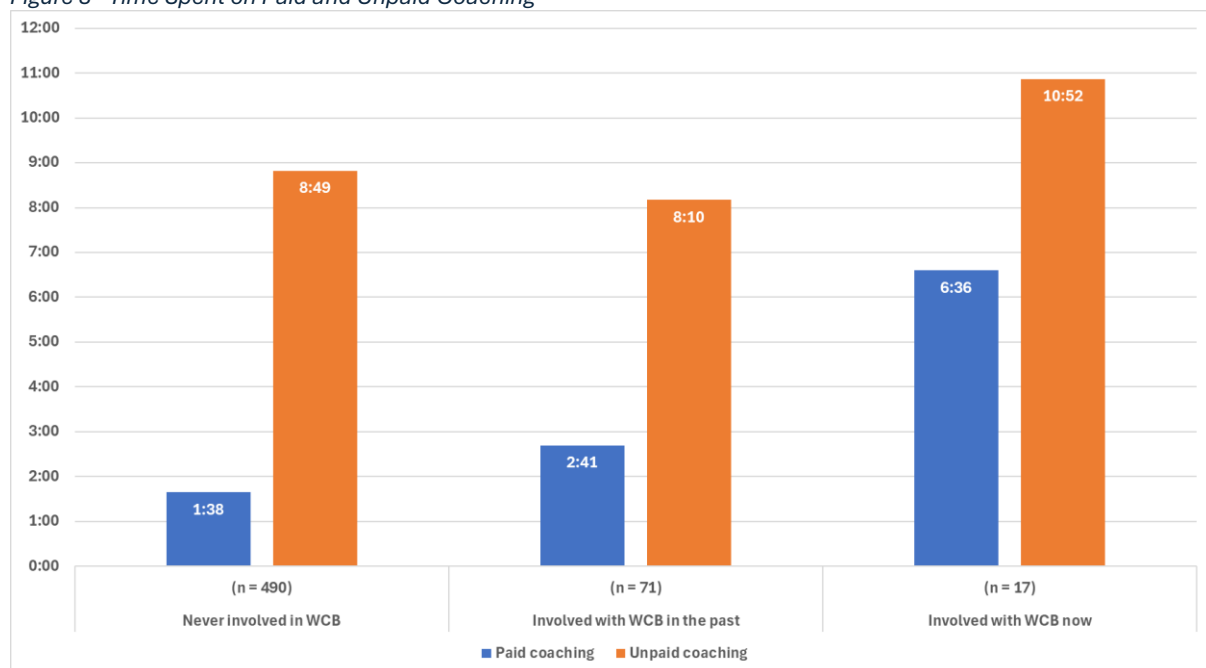
Figure 2 - Involvement in White Collar Boxing by Self and Others



This activity, apparently taking place under the radar of the sport’s NGBs, hints at a level of stigma or taboo associated with unlicensed boxing and suggests that the true extent of coaches’ involvement may be under-reported. This is not to imply any dishonesty on the part of those coaches who responded to the survey however. The questionnaire was distributed via the NGBs to accredited practitioners, rather than directly targeting those supporting white collar boxing. The results are therefore likely to reflect the use of these ‘official’ channels of communication.

In the survey sample as a whole, 90% of respondents were members of an affiliated club, and 81% of coaches held a current accreditation from their NGB. Membership was lower among those who have been involved in white collar boxing in the past (83%), and only 65% of those who are currently engaged with white collar boxing are members of affiliated clubs. Similarly, coaching accreditations were marginally lower among those who have been involved in white collar boxing in the past (78%), and those who are currently involved (76%). Respondents to the survey have been actively involved in the sport for an average of just under 15 years, though this figure is notably lower for those who deliver white collar boxing, at 11.5 years.

Figure 3 - Time Spent on Paid and Unpaid Coaching

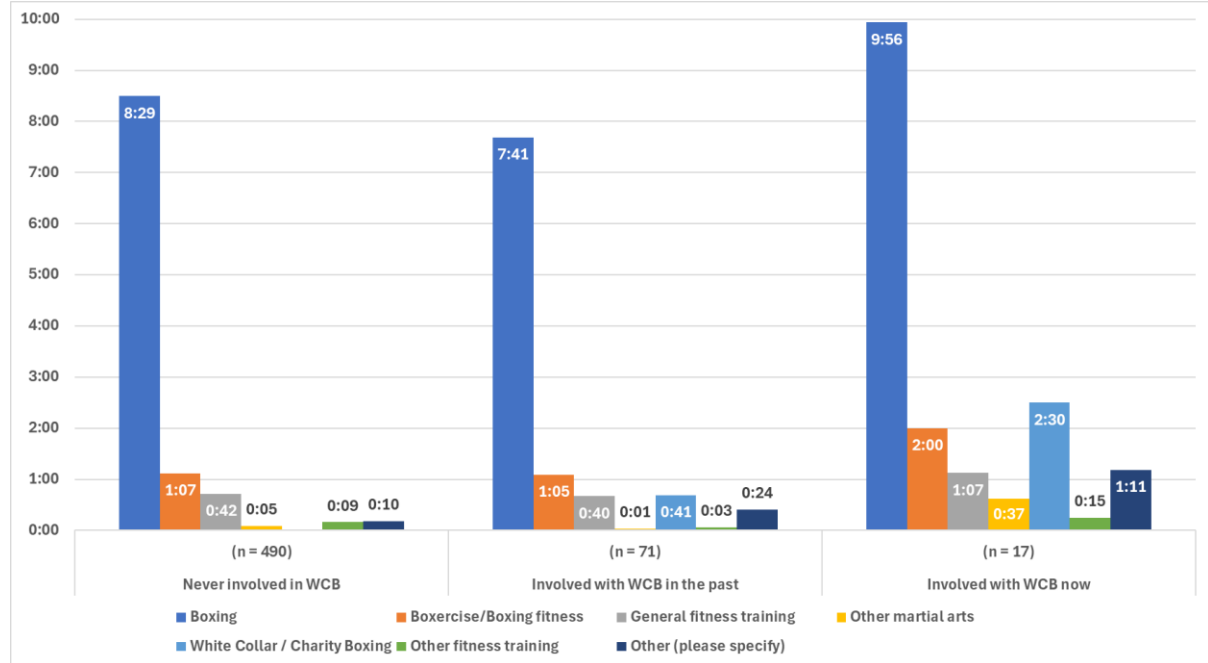


On average, coaches deliver just under 2 hours per week of paid coaching and nearly nine hours as volunteers, though in practice, the proportion of coaches who provide both is relatively low at 18%. It is interesting to note (from Figure 3) that those coaches who are currently involved in white collar boxing deliver a much higher amount of paid coaching per week (more than 6.5 hours), as well as more unpaid coaching (almost 11 hours). This suggests both a significant degree of commitment, and a higher likelihood of there being a financial incentive for their engagement. In contrast, coaches who have never been involved in white collar boxing deliver fewer hours per week in total but spend a more significant proportion of their time (84%) delivering as volunteers. Coaches who were involved in white collar boxing in the past fall somewhere between the two extremes, delivering a higher proportion of paid coaching than those who were never involved (25%), but less than those who are currently engaged.

Further to the breakdown between pain and unpaid, Figure 4 shows how coaches’ time is split between what might be described as ‘pure’ boxing coaching, and other boxing-related and fitness activities. Curiously, coaches in all three categories deliver more than 7.5 hours of ‘boxing’ per week, with current white collar coaches supporting almost 10 hours of boxing activity. As the graph makes clear however, while other coaches provide around an hour of

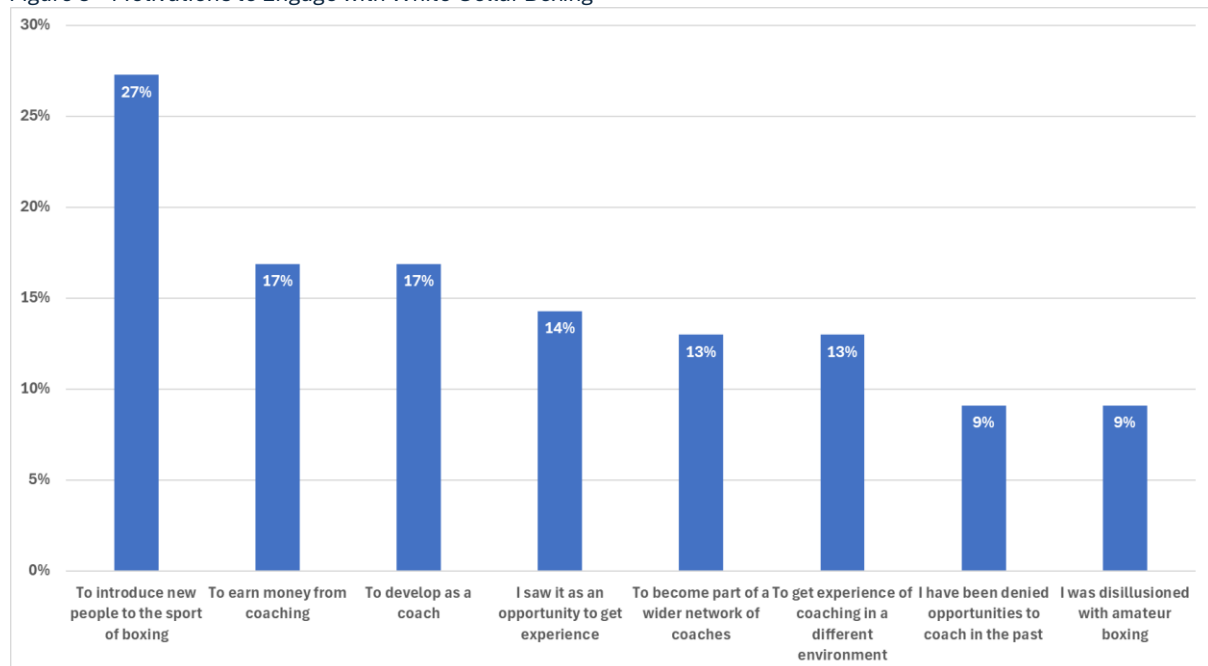
boxing fitness and about 40 minutes of general fitness training per week on average, those who are currently involved with white collar boxing are more active across a wider range of activity. Not only are they providing more boxing fitness and general fitness training than other coaches, but deliver an average of 2.5 hours per week of white collar activity, as well as over 30 minutes of other martial arts and more than an hour of 'other' activity.

Figure 4 - Time Spent on Coaching Boxing and Boxing-Related Activities



It appears that the majority of 'pure' boxing activity is delivered as unpaid coaching, while other activities account for paid delivery. The most significant difference between the groups is that those who are currently involved in white collar boxing spend around 44% of their time supporting activities other than boxing in the purest sense, and 14% delivering white collar boxing. In these circumstances, the financial incentive might be expected to be the primary motivation behind coaches' involvement in white collar boxing, but as Figure 5 shows, this is not strictly true.

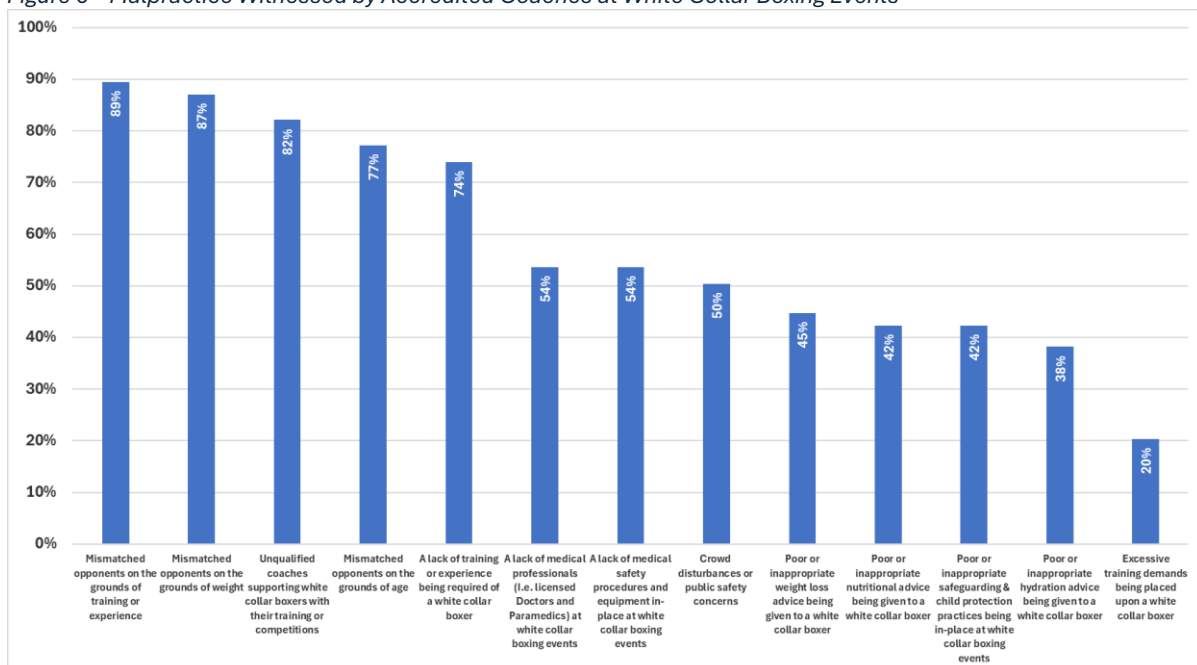
Figure 5 – Motivations to Engage with White Collar Boxing



Just over one in four coaches who said they have been involved in white collar boxing said that they were motivated by a desire to introduce new people to the sport, a higher proportion than those who said they wanted to earn money from coaching (17%). Other coaches see white collar boxing as an opportunity to develop and progress, though this does not by any means indicate that there are no opportunities to do so within the existing NGB frameworks. Nevertheless, a small proportion of coaches said that they were disillusioned with amateur boxing (9%) or had been denied opportunities to coach in the past.

Survey respondents highlighted a range of poor coaching practices prevalent in white collar boxing (Figure 6). While it is not possible to corroborate third party reporting without significant investigative effort, there are a number of things which should raise significant concerns. Foremost among these is the apparent mismatching of opponents, whether this be on the grounds of training and experience (89%), weight (87%) or age (77%). Furthermore, almost three quarters of coaches were aware of boxers being entered for bouts with insufficient training (74%), while 82% of coaches had witnessed unlicensed coaches supporting fighters in training or competition.

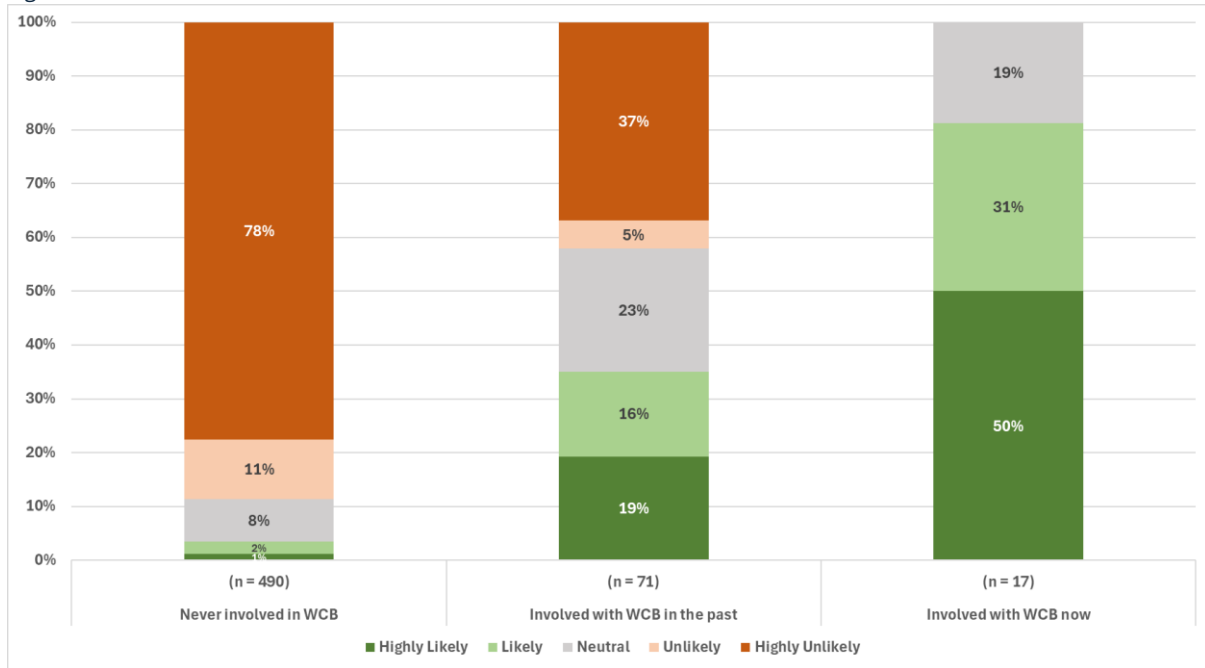
Figure 6 – Malpractice Witnessed by Accredited Coaches at White Collar Boxing Events



More than half of the coaches who responded to the survey had witnessed insufficient medical personnel and procedures at white collar events, and half had witnessed crowd trouble. This is significant from an event management perspective, in the context of the Institute of Licensing’s survey of licensing authorities, which found that many local authorities were unaware of white collar boxing events taking place in their area (Institute of Licensing, 2021).

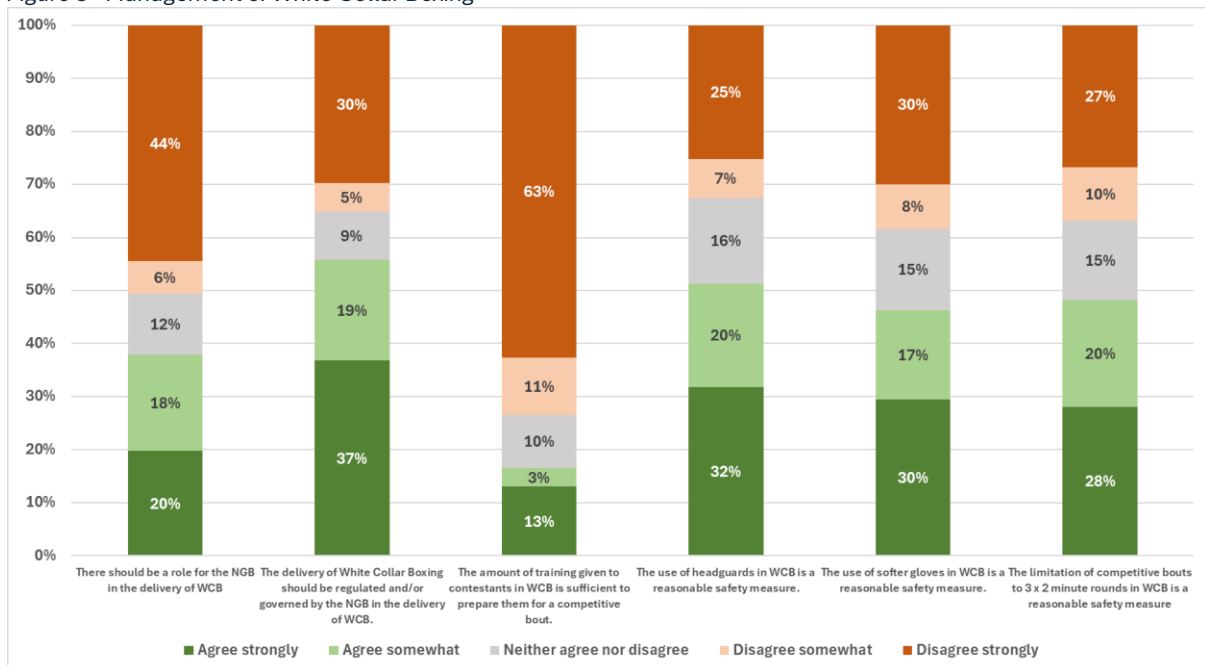
Interestingly, the likelihood of a coach continuing to engage with white collar boxing appears to depend on whether or not they have already had some prior involvement (Figure 7). Nearly ninety percent of coaches who had not engaged with white collar boxing in the past said that they were unlikely to become involved in future, with only 3% indicating a willingness to engage. By contrast, only 42% coaches who had prior involvement said that they would be unwilling to engage in future, with 35% prepared to be involved again. Nearly all of those coaches who stated that they were currently involved in white collar boxing appear to be willing to continue, though the size of this cohort was much smaller (n = 17), and the results should therefore be treated with some caution. In short, there appears to be a small minority of coaches who are prepared to support the provision of white-collar boxing, both now and in the future.

Figure 7 - Future involvement in WCB



Coaches were also asked how white collar boxing might be better managed in future, and the results are presented in Figure 8. Half of all coaches felt that boxing NGBs should not be involved in the delivery of white collar boxing, with 38% in favour of an active role for the governing bodies. However, more than half of all coaches (56%), felt that NGBs should be involved in regulating the delivery of white collar boxing, with 35% opposing the suggestion. This appears to suggest a tacit level of acceptance that white collar boxing will continue, and that NGBs should be able to control its delivery, but not as a promoter or organiser.

Figure 8 - Management of White Collar Boxing



The majority of coaches (74%) agreed that the amount of training given to participants in white collar boxing is insufficient to prepare them for competitive bouts, with only 16% suggesting that white boxers were adequately prepared. There was some support for a range of mitigation measures however, with 52% in favour of the use of headguards, 47% supporting the use of softer

gloves, and 48% agreeing that bouts should be limited to 3 x 2-minute rounds. Nevertheless, between 30 and 40% of coaches were opposed to any mitigation measures, suggesting that they are vehemently opposed to the format under any circumstances.

Focus Groups

Three focus groups took place in late January featuring a total of 15 participants from across England, Scotland and Wales. Of these, only one coach had direct experience of coaching in support of a white collar event, but almost all had attended at least one show in the last and know other boxers and coaches who are currently involved.

One of the motivations for becoming involved in white collar boxing is that it offers what is perceived to be a shortcut to competitive bouts, with less onerous training regimes and what are perceived to be less bureaucracy. While there is evidently some frustration with the administrative requirements, coaches understand why they exist, and are broadly supportive, as this quote from a coach indicates:

“don’t get me wrong there are some decent coaches in some white-collar boxing, as there are boxers. Overall, as the whole thing goes there are some egotistic coaches. There is so much red tape to overcome in England Boxing. DBS checks, first aid, child protection courses, weight limits, endless rules and regulations and it costs a fortune. But I understand the ‘ball ache’, I understand the safety precautions and that is why we are with England Boxing. The downside, I think White Collar Boxing coaches, Tom, Dick and Harry, they are just essentially out to make money, they call themselves a boxing coach, charging what they want, putting on these shows, no regulation, mismatching is unbelievable. I have spoken to some coaches and asked why they aren’t with England Boxing, and they say it is too much hassle and regulation. They want to do what they want, when they want and how they want. This is really frustrating from our point of view. We’re struggling to get these people in our gyms, we’re losing all these people to white collar clubs.”

The air of frustration with the uncontrolled nature of white collar boxing was evident throughout all three focus groups, and there is a clear perception that organisers and promoters are motivated only by money. The safety and welfare of boxers is frequently overlooked as a result, and for this reason alone, most coaches would like to see white collar boxing either closed down altogether or brought under control through regulation. There is particular concern that university students, who are being encouraged to take part in events staged at student unions, are simultaneously being diverted away from university boxing clubs, which have a long and storied tradition in the sport.

At a more general level, the fear is that potential participants will be enticed away from community clubs by the prospect of progressing to a competitive bout within a few months, when most coaches agree that the traditional route takes at least 18 months to two years. Coaches stressed the need to develop the fitness levels required to compete successfully, as well as learning the ‘craft’ (with particular reference to defence) which a boxer needs to protect themselves in the ring. There was also a sense running through the conversations that boxers taking part in white collar shows are less likely to be mentally prepared to fight, especially in front of the large crowds in attendance.

“There is a certain level of boxing within England Boxing, before any coach puts anyone out to box, they will know they are at a good level or standard. With white collar boxing you could have only been boxing for 3 months. Some boxers are just not good enough to be at that next level and so they get enticed by these white-collar events, The money entices. They are then boxing people that maybe only

have had 2 bouts. In the England boxing scene, they might not be great but all of a sudden in the white-collar scene they are performing well. It's a complicated scene."

Relatedly, several coaches also cited the stress induced by the need for participants in white collar shows to sell tickets for their event, under threat of not being allowed to box. The shows themselves are promoted along the lines of professional events, with high quality flyers and websites. For some white collar boxers, one consequence of agreeing to participate is that they are required to engage in live interviews on social media sites. In at least one example cited by a focus group participant, this had resulted in serious and sustained threats and abuse by friends of an opponent in advance of their bout, which had added to the mental strain.

One participant who was trained through England Boxing but has coached on the unlicensed circuit cited significant safety concerns in relation to medical provision. Many shows are supported by paramedics rather than qualified doctors, and these are frequently St John's Ambulance volunteers. The problem of mismatching (by weight, age, experience and coaching quality) is also a significant problem:

"The level of coaching they get in a really short period of time is not enough to prepare them for a competitive or uncompetitive bout."

"The shows are often ex-professionals who have come back and are a lot older and have had a lot of experience in the past or they are first timers. It's a bit like the wild west some of the shows."

"With the matchmaking from our perspective, when we match our students, they have an England Boxing record book and that book contains information about skill bouts / no win / win / loser / number of bouts / unanimous / stopped / knocked out etc. etc. All that information is in the book. White collar boxing doesn't have any of this."

It is clear that many boxers participating in white collar shows are believed to be underprepared to fight, both physically and mentally, which is exacerbated by the high rate of mismatching. Consequently, many bouts end inside the distance with injury (often serious) to one of the competitors. Other bouts which should be stopped are allowed to continue because officials lack the experience to know when and how to intervene to prevent injury:

"The main thing I have seen on the White-Collar boxing circuit, the coaching eye is probably not as good, they let things go and that is where the safety slips."

"As a coach I usually feel quite comfortable but not in those sort of shows, it feels like the atmosphere is wrong and the safety precautions are not there."

In other cases cited by focus group participants, the desire of the audience to get the full value of their admission fee takes precedence over the safety of the competitors. This serves to underline the profit-making motivation of the promoters, at the expense of participant welfare.

"There is no such thing a qualified referee / judges in the shows that I have seen. The matchmaking is poor, medical side poor or non-existent. It has the potential for money laundering – it's absolutely open to that sort of thing. There is no accountability whereas we have to be accountable for everything. They are doing it as a business, they are doing it for the money and we're doing it for the love of the game and that is the difference between us."

In Summary

- There is a notable gap in the literature relating to injury rates from boxing in general, and more specifically comparative analysis of rates between ‘traditional’ and ‘white collar’ boxing.
- White collar boxing has generated significant amounts of news coverage related to serious injuries and fatalities incurred at white collar events, against a backdrop of more positive coverage of amateur boxing in general, influenced by the success of British boxers at successive Olympic games.
- It is clear that the promoters of white collar boxing have identified a gap in the ‘market’ for competitive events involving novice boxers. In doing so, they are exploiting a legal grey area which allows events to proceed in the absence of enforceable minimum standards of medical provision, coaching and training, and officiating.
- In theory, responsibility for licensing events lies with local authorities, but few shows reach the attendance threshold above which an event licence would be mandatory. Most white collar shows therefore proceed with the relevant local authority unaware, and unable to enforce the terms and conditions of their own license requirements.
- Of the coaches surveyed for this research, only 5% have had direct involvement in white collar boxing, though 50% claim to know other coaches who are involved, and nearly 1 in 5 has had some involvement in the past.
- Respondents highlighted a range of poor practices prevalent in white collar boxing, including mismatching of opponents, insufficient training and unlicensed coaches supporting fighters in training or competition. More than half of the respondents witnessed insufficient medical personnel and procedures at white collar events, and half had witnessed crowd trouble.
- One of the most significant concerns expressed by coaches participating in the focus groups were that NGB’s administrative bureaucracy, while supported by most coaches, encourages some to take short cuts, which are enabled (and to an extent encouraged) by the lack of regulation in white collar boxing.
- Boxers are underprepared, both physically and mentally, which is exacerbated by the high rate of mismatching. Consequently, many bouts end inside the distance with injury (often serious) to one of the competitors. Other bouts are allowed to continue because officials lack the experience to know when and how to intervene.

Conclusions

The majority of coaches taking part in this research are of the opinion that white collar boxing should not be allowed to continue in its present unregulated form. Most coaches believe that significant intervention in the form of regulation is required to ensure participant safety and protect the hard-fought and hard-won reputation of amateur boxing.

Coaches are equally uncomfortable with the idea of governing bodies for amateur boxing taking responsibility for organising or promoting white collar events. They would prefer instead that the NGBs should have a regulatory role in enforcing minimum standards of participant preparation, training, officiating and medical provision. Coaches are particularly clear that no boxer should be allowed to fight competitively without a minimum of 12 to 18 months’ training and preparation.

From a legal perspective, this presents something of a paradox, given the role of local authorities in event licensing, and health and safety enforcement. However, coaches look to their governing

bodies to promote good practice and intervene to prevent some of the worst excesses of unregulated boxing.

White collar boxing is unlikely to be banned in the immediate future. Any such intervention is likely to require primary legislation, or an amendment to licensing procedures which would take considerable time and is beyond the scope of the governing bodies. The decision facing the NGBs is therefore how to uphold the reputation of the sport by ensuring that the rigorous standards of the amateur game are applied to white collar boxing, without assuming direct administrative control.

It would seem prudent therefore, to undertake measures aimed at addressing the current situation with regard to unregulated or white collar boxing. Failure to do so may expose individual participants and promoters to civil liabilities, and potential criminal convictions, but from the perspective of the NGBs, there is also a considerable risk of reputational damage to the sport of boxing in general. This would ultimately reflect on the governing bodies and impair their ability regulate and oversee the safe conduct of the sport.

To align with official governing bodies, promoters must adhere rigorously to a set of rules and regulations, prioritising the safety of the participating boxers. This commitment encompasses regular health assessments, diagnostic scans, adherence to regulated weight divisions, and the establishment of appropriately equipped ringside medical facilities.

In contrast to amateur boxing, white-collar boxing may be characterised as a commercial enterprise that prioritises financial profit, while ostensibly presenting itself as a charitable endeavour. Notably, this venture operates independently of the sport's NGBs, and is therefore beyond their reach in terms of accountability and regulatory oversight. This absence of a regulatory body tasked with overseeing and ensuring, to the greatest extent possible, the safety of the participants, presents a significant challenge to the legitimacy of the existing NGBs and ultimately exposes participants to a higher risk of injury

The advent and rapid growth of disciplines such as Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) or 'Cage Fighting', though not licensed by any Boxing governing bodies, has demonstrated that it is possible to establish and uphold an internally regulated framework marked by licences, adherence to stipulated rules, and safety protocols for the participating combatants. The continued existence of white-collar boxing should be equally contingent upon the implementation of such regulatory measures, demonstrating that it is 'properly conducted' and, consequently, warranting a similar legal exemption as afforded to conventional boxing under common law.

The evidence of coaches contributing to this study is that participants are at a higher risk of injury because of the lack of regulation and oversight. Promotional claims notwithstanding, there is no legal requirement on the providers of white-collar boxing to organise accredited referees and judges, while trainers are not required to hold an NGB qualification. Moreover, participants in this research were readily able to cite examples of poor practice which suggest that boxer welfare is being overridden by a desire to stage events which are financially viable. It is worth reiterating that it is not possible to corroborate any such claims within the scope of this report. Nevertheless, the volume of examples, and the vehemence with which they have been disclosed is indicative of significant concerns on the part the coaches who took part in this research.

Safe and secure conduct of white-collar boxing therefore necessitates the implementation of a comprehensive regulation and transparency. Such regulatory measures aim to mitigate the physical and legal risks inherent in these events. Until such regulation is instituted, participants remain susceptible not only to serious injury, and the promoters of these events may therefore be liable to a range of civil claims and criminal prosecution. It is in the interests of all those who support boxing to agree a way of regulating white-collar boxing

Recommendations

All Boxing

NGBs have made steady progress in improving boxer welfare over many years. While recommendations related to boxer welfare are designed with the regulation of white collar boxing in mind, they are equally applicable to all boxing contexts. The following recommendations are made in response to issues of concern highlighted in this report.

- a) **Governance** – white collar boxing should be subject to and bound by the extant rules and regulations of the recognised national governing bodies in England, Scotland and Wales.

Boxer Welfare

- b) **Data** – a significant shift is required in the quantity and quality of injury data collected by the boxing authorities. The current absence of a comprehensive injury database creates a notable vacuum in the knowledge base which needs to be addressed. We note England Boxing’s recent announcement regarding its ‘Locker’ membership system in this regard.
- c) **Age** – participants engaging in white collar boxing must be aged over 18 and under 40 at the start of their training regime. NGBs should explore alternative competitive outlets for overage boxers to allow them to continue to engage with the sport in a meaningful way.
- d) **Medicals** - all boxers must undergo a full medical by a doctor registered by the national governing body before they embark on the training regime. In addition, all boxers must be subjected to a full pre- and post-bout medical by a doctor registered by England Boxing. Any decision by a doctor to withdraw a boxer from training or competition on medical grounds should be lodged with the relevant NGB.
- e) **Insurance** - all gyms and event promoters must have full insurance cover for all staff, officials, and participants. Where relevant, there should be provision specifically covering ‘unregulated boxing’.

Matching

On principle, boxers should be as evenly matched as possible to ensure fairness and reduce the risk of injury. In practice, this comes down to three key elements:

- f) **Experience** - boxers must be evenly matched in terms of bout experience (normally this should be zero bouts) and the matching supervised by an NGB-accredited supervisor.
- g) **Weight** - boxers must be matched in terms of weight in accordance with the rules set out in the NGB book. Differences should be no more than 2.5kg – 3kg. This needs to be monitored throughout the process, accounting for weight loss during the training etc.
- h) **Training** - boxers should have engaged in the same level and amount of training, with the minimum requirement being **x** hours per week for 12 weeks. This training programme should be logged consistently, and overseen by an NGB-accredited coach.

Conduct of Bouts

- i) **Timing** - bouts should consist of a maximum of 3 x 2-minute rounds.
- j) **Equipment** - all participants in white collar boxing should be required to use 16oz gloves. Consideration should also be given to use of headguards.
- k) **Officiating** - all bouts must be officiated by officials with appropriate national governing body qualifications.

Next Steps

It is important to recognise from the outset, that the recommendations outlined here would require amendments to current working practices in gyms, clubs, and at events. Any such changes would result in disruption, and are likely to face opposition from volunteers and professionals alike, delaying their implementation. However, coaches have made it consistently clear that that action is required to address significant shortcomings in the delivery of white collar boxing which place participants at a higher risk of injury than in other forms of the sport.

Arguably, the existence of a national governing body, which establishes, upholds, and enforces rules relating to safe conduct, legitimises any sport. This is particularly true of boxing and other martial arts however, where participants consent to engage in an activity which might otherwise be considered unlawful in other contexts. Crucially, NGBs provide accountability and a means of redress when things go wrong. The coaches taking part in this research were clear that generally, they do not want their governing bodies to promote white collar boxing, but they accept there is a need for oversight and scrutiny which could be achieved through regulation.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that any entity wishing to stage events (whether amateur, professional or for charity) should be prepared to adhere to the regulations of the recognised governing bodies for boxing in England, Scotland and Wales. Indeed, abiding by NGB policies and processes adds legitimacy to the 'product' being sold to potential participants, spectators and those who would benefit from the charitable donations which arise from white collar boxing. Equally, the NGBs have a vested interest in protecting the reputation of their sport as a safe activity which produces positive physical and mental health outcomes for its participants.

Medical checks, if made mandatory in white collar boxing as they are in the amateur game, would be the single most important regulatory move. Their introduction would force white collar boxing to engage with the existing network of medical personnel which supports boxing in Britain. While there may be a cost implication for the promoters of white collar boxing, it must be reiterated that mandatory (and enforceable) medical checks do not prevent community clubs and amateur shows from operating effectively.

By engaging with qualified doctors and paramedics with experience of examining and treating boxers and boxing-related injuries, improve standards of care over time, providing reassurance to participants, coaches, promoters and spectators. Inevitably, these checks will result in some fighters being withdrawn from bouts, in some cases before entering the ring.

Enhanced medical oversight of white collar boxing adds weight to the argument for a longer period of training before participants should be allowed to compete. Boxers must literally be fighting fit, and an independent, medically-qualified practitioner is well-placed to judge whether or not this is the case. However, it is clear from these findings that coaches are of one voice in saying that 8 weeks is insufficient preparation time, both physically and psychologically. Increasing the minimum preparation time to 3 or 6 months might go some way to alleviating these concerns, but the more significant impact would be in deterring those who are unsuited to entering the ring.

By taking on a regulatory role in overseeing white collar boxing, NGBs could achieve other significant improvements to its conduct. The process of matching opponents, highlighted by many coaches as a significant weakness in the preparation and staging of white collar events, would be enhanced if promoters were to engage consistently with the processes and systems in amateur boxing. Similarly the conduct of bouts would be enhanced by the adoption of practices designed to protect novice boxers, overseen by suitably qualified and accredited personnel.

In short, the provision of a safer environment for participants in white collar boxing is in the interests of all supporters of boxing.