

# PROMOTING PARA-KARATE: A BREAKTHROUGH INITIATIVE

## A. INTRODUCTION

1. The Karatedo Federation of Hong Kong China Limited (**KFHKCL**), as a member of the World Karate Federation (**WKF**)<sup>1</sup> and the Asian Karate Federation<sup>2</sup>, is the sole governing body of the sport of karate in Hong Kong on an amateur basis. It is recognized as the National Sports Association (**NSA**) for the sport of karate by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (**HKSAR**) and the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China.
2. Since 1 April 2009, as a result of cumulative high achievements in major international karate championships, karate has secured Tier A support from the Hong Kong Sports Institute under the HKSAR Government's Elite Vote Support Scheme. The winning of a bronze medal in Karate - Women's Kata by Hong Kong athlete LAU Mo Sheung Grace in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics represents a milestone achievement in the development of the sport of karate in Hong Kong. The visibility and popularity of karate in Hong Kong have gained tremendously as a result and are expected to reach new heights when the Covid-19 pandemic is over.
3. KFHKCL has been promoting karate as a traditional martial art and a modern sport. It embraces the concept of inclusion and encourages participation by both able-bodied and persons with disabilities. KFHKCL expects its dojo members to be fully integrated to provide equal access and to accept all who would like to participate. Admittedly this is easier said than done, particularly as KFHKCL's integration policy has not been supported by any top-down programmes due to resource and other constraints.

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<sup>1</sup> WKF is a permanent non-profit organisation governing all styles of karate with a legal status founded on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1970 (with the name of World Union of Karate Do Organisations). It comprises over 190 National Karate Federations affiliated at worldwide level. WKF has the aim of promoting, organising, regulating and popularising the sport of karate all over the world, of protecting the physical and mental health of the athletes, of contributing to the development of friendly relationships among the National Federations and of defending the interests of karate throughout the world.

<sup>2</sup> The Asian Karate Federation is comprised of about 45 karate federations each representing a country or region in Asia. It is a non-profit continental governing body of the sport of karate duly recognized by the WKF.

4. In 2022-23, KFHKCL will embark on a breakthrough initiative: the promotion and organising of segregated Para-Karate programmes which are targeted at only individuals who experience disability and designed to meet individual needs based on impairment.
5. This initiative is in keeping with the policy of the HKSAR Government to adopt all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities recognised in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which entered into force for the People's Republic of China (including the HKSAR) on 31 August 2008. The HKSAR Government works with the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee (the principal advisory body to the HKSAR Government on matters pertaining to the well-being of persons with disabilities and the development and implementation of rehabilitation policies and services in the HKSAR), the rehabilitation sector and the community at large to ensure compliance with the Convention, to provide support to promote participation by persons with disabilities in a variety of social domains (including sport activities), and to facilitate the enjoyment of their rights under this Convention. The HKSAR Government has also been actively promoting the spirit and core values of this Convention to the community<sup>3</sup>.

## **B. THE PARA-KARATE LANDSCAPE**

### ***WKF and AKF***

6. As the only karate organisation recognised by the International Olympic Committee, WKF is committed to comply with the Fundamental Principles of the Olympic Charter<sup>4</sup>, of which the following principles with regard to inclusiveness and non-discrimination are particularly relevant:

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<sup>3</sup> See paragraphs 113-114 of [the Common Core Document of the Fourth Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China in the light of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (September 2019)

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Article 1.3 of [the Constitution and Rules of WKF](#)

#### *“Principle 4*

The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practising sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.

#### *Principle 6*

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

7. WKF has been making all efforts possible to get karate accepted in the Olympic Games and in all other Games of the Olympic cycle and remain in the programme of the mentioned events once included<sup>5</sup>. Karate made its Olympic debut at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. Moreover, Karate experienced its first Olympic event at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires. Additionally, Karate has also been included in the sports programme of the Youth Olympic Games in Dakar in 2026.
8. Importantly, WKF is committed to promoting Para-Karate as a parallel form of karate for athletes with a disability. In 2012, Para-Karate was presented to the public for the first time at the World Championships in Paris in a demonstration competition. This was followed in 2014, 2016 and 2018 respectively with the official Para-Karate World Championships in Bremen (Germany), Linz (Austria) and Madrid (Spain). The latest Para-Karate World Championships were held in Dubai (United Arab Emirates) in November 2021 as part of the 25<sup>th</sup> WKF Karate World Championships.
9. On 12th June, 2015 the International Paralympic Committee (**IPC**) Governing Board accepted WKF as the 30<sup>th</sup> sport discipline within the Paralympic Family. In other words, Para-Karate has been recognized as a paralympic sport since 2015, reflecting WKF’s success in developing this sport.

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<sup>5</sup> This commitment is made explicit in Article 1.9 of [the Constitution and Rules of WKF](#)

10. Likewise, AKF performs its activities on an amateur basis in compliance with the principles set forth in the Olympic Charter. United Arab Emirates, which hosted the Para-Karate World Championships in November 2021 as part of the 25th WKF Karate World Championships mentioned above, is a member of the AKF.

11. The following insightful observations in the document “[\*WKF handicapped: Karate Adaptation for Disabled People\*](#)”<sup>6</sup>, are worth noting:

“First things first, it is important to state that karate is for everyone. ‘Everyone’ here means even people with physical and mental disabilities like blindness, autism, and prosthetics. Many people view karate – and most other martial arts- in the image of movie depiction and see it as a sport for the macho fit and super athletic.

The reverse is, however, the real truth. Karate is not just about fighting. It is a discipline in its strictest sense. It seeks to impart to those who take part in it some important life skills like perseverance, mental sharpness, focus, and self-control. These are skills that everyone could use regardless of their mental or physical state.

Actually, it can be argued that people with certain disabilities need karate’s life lessons even more to help them overcome the handicaps that life hands them at every turn.”

### ***The HKSAR Government***

12. Locally, the HKSAR Government attaches great importance to the development of sports for persons with disabilities<sup>7</sup>, with the landmark establishment of the Hong Kong Paralympians Fund in 2001. Based on the recommendations of a consultancy study completed in 2016 and the comments received in the subsequent public consultation, the Government has embarked on a work plan to support athletes with disabilities and promote sports participation by persons with disabilities in a more comprehensive manner. For example, the Elite Vote Support System for Disability Sports

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<sup>6</sup> Document at <https://wkf-handicapped.com/karate-adaptation/> accessed on 18.2.2022

<sup>7</sup> The HKSAR Government’s policy on the development of sports for persons with disabilities can be found in the Home Affairs Department’s website at [https://www.hab.gov.hk/en/policy\\_responsibilities/sport\\_policy/sport\\_policy\\_promoting.htm](https://www.hab.gov.hk/en/policy_responsibilities/sport_policy/sport_policy_promoting.htm) accessed on 18.2.2022

was launched as a pilot scheme in 2017 and permanentised in 2019 to provide athletes with disabilities with the opportunity to receive full-time training and direct financial support. Hong Kong para-athletes have claimed a total of five medals at the Tokyo Paralympic Games 2020, comprising two silver medals and three bronze medals.

13. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the executive arm of the Home Affairs Bureau on sports matters, is tasked with organising physical recreation and sports activities for different target groups, including students and persons with a disability. Among other things, this department (i) formulates policies and strategies for the provision of leisure and sports facilities and activities with particular focus on physical fitness and sports safety, (ii) organises programmes for elderly people and enhances programmes for people with disabilities; and (iii) provides subvention to NSAs (including KFHKCL) and sports organisations for training athletes and organising sports activities.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Hong Kong Paralympic Committee & Sports Association***

14. On the other hand, Hong Kong Paralympic Committee & Sports Association for the Physically Disabled (**HKPC&SAPD**), was established in 1972 serving the dual roles of (i) the National Paralympic Committee (**NPC**) for Hong Kong and (ii) the NSA tasked to develop para sports in Hong Kong. As the NPC of the HKSAR, the Association is committed to (i) promoting the Paralympic Movement in Hong Kong, (ii) enabling local para-athletes to achieve sporting excellence, and (iii) selecting athletes to represent Hong Kong in the Paralympic Games, the Asian Para Games, National Games for Persons with Disabilities and other competitions sanctioned by international sports federations. As the NSA, the Association plans, organises, develops and promotes sports to the physically impaired so they could enjoy the fun of sports and lead a healthy lifestyle.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See [Government Budget 2021-22, Head 95: Leisure and Cultural Services Department Controlling Officer's Report, Estimates for the year ending 31 March 2022](#)

<sup>9</sup> See information in HKPC&SAPD's website under "[History & Milestones](#)" accessed on 18.2.2022

15. Specifically, the objects of HKPC&SAPD are to support people with physical and visual impairment in Hong Kong in accordance with the jurisdiction of IPC by encouraging, motivating and facilitating their participation in sporting activities and events and assisting in the provision of training, facilities and equipment for this purpose<sup>10</sup>.
16. It appears that the focus of HKPC&SAPD has been on the para sports of archery, athletics, badminton, boccia, lawn bowls, shooting, swimming, table tennis, tenpin bowling, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair fencing. HKPC&SAPD provides training of these para sports ranging from grassroots to elite levels. Competition rules have been set and athletes are classified according to the types and levels of impairment<sup>11</sup>. On an annual basis, HKPC&SAPD selects eligible athletes for each of the above-mentioned para sports to represent Hong Kong in international competitions. Selection is based on an established selection and appeal mechanism, and lists of selected athletes are promulgated in HKPC&SAPD's website.<sup>12</sup>
17. HKPC&SAPD make good use of district sports facilities as training venues. In addition, it provides at The Jockey Club Sports Building of the Hong Kong Sports Institute in Shatin (which opened in 2015) a dedicated training area for elite athletes with disabilities, especially for bocci, table tennis and wheelchair fencing<sup>13</sup>.
18. Further, one of the ten goals laid down in HKPC&SAPD's Project 2026: 2021–2026 Strategic Development Plan is to “Develop More Para Sports in Collaboration with Counterparts”.<sup>14</sup> In this regard, it is noted that HKPC&SAPD, in collaboration with The Judo Association of Hong Kong, China, has launched the Para Judo Development Plan in April 2021<sup>15</sup>. To identify talents to take part in training courses held by the Judo Association, HKPC&SAPD will hold Para Judo experience day and invite organisations

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<sup>10</sup> See clause 3 of the [Articles of Association of HKPC&SAPD](#)

<sup>11</sup> See HKPC&SAPD's website under “[Sports & Classification](#)”, accessed on 18.2.2022

<sup>12</sup> See HKPC&SAPD's website under “[Squad](#)”, accessed on 18.2.2022

<sup>13</sup> See [media release of the Hong Kong Jockey Club dated 29 October 2015](#)

<sup>14</sup> See page 16 of [HKPC&SAPD's 2020-2021 Annual Report](#)

<sup>15</sup> See HKPC&SAPD's [Summary of the 2019-2021 8th Executive Committee Meeting held on 19 January 2021](#)

for visually impaired to promote the event and recruit participants. By analogy, Para-Karate should also be HKPC&SAPD's befitting target as it has since 2015 been recognized as a paralympic sport by the IPC.

### **C. VISION, MISSION and VALUES to PROMOTE PARA-KARATE**

19. Against the above background, it is opportune for KFHKCL to embark on the breakthrough initiative of promoting and developing Para-Karate. This initiative conforms to the objects of KFHKCL as laid down in its Memorandum of Federation and has been duly approved by the General Committee of KFHKCL in accordance with KFHKCL's Articles of Association.

20. The initiative will be executed with the following vision, mission and values.

#### ***Vision***

21. KFHKCL aspires to be an exemplary and a highly efficient, effective and ethical organisation in promoting, organising, regulating and popularising Para-Karate in Hong Kong.

#### ***Mission***<sup>16</sup>

22. KFHKCL commits itself:

- (1) to enhance the participation in karate practice for persons with disabilities
- (2) to promote the physical health of persons with disabilities through karate practice
- (3) to provide Para-Karate athletes with quality psychosocial experiences involving<sup>17</sup>:

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<sup>16</sup> As access to and awareness of sport opportunities for people with a disability continue to rise, definitions of sport participation have also begun to shift. In addition to access and the quantity of sport participation (which includes how often an individual engages in sport, the duration of each practice or competition, and the length of the season), researchers and practitioners alike are increasingly focused on the quality of sport participation – participants' subjective perceptions that their participation in sport has been satisfying, enjoyable, and generates personally meaningful outcomes ([M. Blair Evans et al., \*Integrating insights from the parasport community to understand optimal Experiences: The Quality Parasport Participation Framework, Psychology of Sport and Exercise\* Volume 37, July 2018, Pages 79-90](#)). KFHKCL's mission statement attempts therefore to embrace access to as well as the quantity and quality of Para-Karate participation.

<sup>17</sup> These six experiential aspects of sport participation were advocated by researchers as the core of an evidence-informed framework of optimal para sport participation that conceptualizes



- i. Autonomy — independence, choice, or control;
- ii. Belonging — a sense of belonging to a group;
- iii. Challenge — feeling appropriately challenged;
- iv. Engagement — feeling motivated, focused, or involved in an activity;
- v. Mastery — a sense of accomplishment; and
- vi. Meaning — a sense of responsibility to oneself or others.

(4) to partner with like-minded organisations to create an environment and system conducive to achieving the Vision.

### ***Values***

23.KFHKCL embraces:

- (1) karatedo – upholding the true art and spirit of karatedo;
- (2) athlete focus – acting in the best interests of the athletes and based on individual needs<sup>18</sup>;
- (3) excellence – the achievement of excellence in all pursuits;
- (4) sportsmanship; and
- (5) an inclusive society that ensures no one is left behind.

## **D. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

24.A preliminary plan for KFHKCL to kickstart promoting and developing Para-Karate is worked out as follows.

### ***Sport Classification and Competition Rules***

25.Karate techniques like kicks, punches and stances were originally designed for execution using two hands and two legs. Eyesight is important for timing

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comprehensively the positive social experiences that go along with sport participation. See: [Kathleen A Martin Ginis et al., \*Broadening the Conceptualization of Participation of Persons with Physical Disabilities: A Configurative Review and Recommendations\*, Arch Phys Med Rehabil. 2017 Feb; 98\(2\):395-402.](#)

<sup>18</sup> This recognises particularly that disabled persons' degree of impairment varies widely and sport programmes should as far as possible be tailor-made to suit individual needs by, for example, modifying the level of challenge, setting goals flexibly and designing individualised activities.



and focus. As such, it is necessary to form some adaptive rules for Para-Karate in order to accommodate persons with disabilities. These persons have to be grouped or classified based on the type and severity of the disability so that training and competition can be arranged accordingly. The aim of grouping is to include as many disabled people as possible whilst maintaining the core features that makes karate such a challenging discipline, for example, perseverance and self-control. Grouping also enables athletes to be subjected to training conditions that their bodies can withstand and that athletes with similar disability levels are matched against each other in competitions for fairness purposes.

26. In 2006, WKF created the Para-Karate Commission in an effort to develop and promote Karate among athletes with disabilities. The Commission has formulated rules and regulations for WKF-recognised Para-Karate competitions to preserve athlete safety, as well as to promote fair competition by means of a transparent and consistent set of standards. These rules and regulations are set out in the document titled “[World Karate Federation: Para-Karate Kata Competition Rules](#)”. Individual Kata only is performed in WKF-recognised Para-Karate competitions; kumite and team events are excluded. Further, Para-Kata Athletes must be at least 16 years of age.

27. Under the WKF rules and regulations, there are three general Categories for Individual Kata in Para-Karate:

- a) Visually Impaired Athletes
- b) Intellectually Impaired Athletes
- c) Wheelchair Users (Physically Impaired Athletes).

These categories are further divided into Sport Classes according to the functional classification of the athlete’s disability (as described in the [WKF Para-Karate Classification Rules](#)). In Para-Karate competitions, a Compensation Score in the form of Extra Points, as determined by a Classification Panel according to the influence of the athlete’s particular impairment when performing the Kata, will be added to the Judges’ Score.

28. In essence, Sport Classes are competition subcategories that group athletes according to their degree of disability and thus enable the athletes to compete equitably with each other, while allowing for them to express their maximum athletic and technical potential. WKF Sport Classes are as follows, divided by gender (male or female):

1. Visually-Impaired Athletes:

K10 – Athletes with Visual Impairment  
(Blindfolds are required for all Visually Impaired Athletes.)

2. Intellectually-Disabled Athletes:

K21 – Athletes with low to moderate Intellectual Disability

K22 – Athletes with more severe impairment

3. Wheelchair Athletes:

K30 – Athletes with Physical or Motor Disabilities

(Class K30 will compete using Wheelchairs. All other classes will perform the Kata standing up.)

More information about the WKF classification system is contained in WKF's [\*Para Karate Classification Rules\*](#) and [\*Para-Karate Classification Information Sheet\*](#).

29. The above well-established competition and classification rules, as well as their future updates and amendments made by WKF, will be adopted by KFHKL. However, bearing in mind that not all Para-Karate trainees have to be destined for competitions, Para-Karate training will also be offered to disabled persons not eligible for participation in competitions under the WKF rules, particularly those under the age of 16. On the other hand, to ensure safety of the trainees, persons with any impairment with an underlying health condition that is considered unsafe for sport will not be admitted. For this purpose, reference will be made to the list of non-eligible impairments at Appendix 4 of WKF's [\*Para Karate Classification Rules\*](#). Further, only Kata training will be provided. Kumite will be excluded.

### ***Funding***

30. As this is a new initiative, additional funding will need to be sought from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. A budget will need to be prepared quickly for submission to the department for supplementary provision in 2022-23 and recurrent subvention in subsequent years. Sponsorship will be sought from business organisations for individual projects as necessary further down the road.

### ***Partnership and collaboration with HKPC&SAPD and other like-minded organisations***

31. As the NPC of the HKSAR, HKPC&SAPD is no doubt the major stakeholder in KFHKCL's initiative. As mentioned above, KFHKCL's initiative is in keeping with HKPC&SAPD's strategic goal to develop more para sports in collaboration with counterparts.
32. Whilst KFHKCL assumes the primary responsibility to lead and manage the project as well as to provide karate training to persons with disabilities, HKPC&SAPD's contributions in the following areas are indispensable:
- (a) co-promoting Para-Karate to persons with disabilities through their established network;
  - (b) provision of para-sports coaching to Para-Karate coaches so as to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills for providing training to persons with disabilities in a safe and appropriate manner; and
  - (c) identification and development of classifiers for Para-Karate.
33. Accordingly, KFHKCL will liaise with HKPC&SAPD to explore the signing a Memorandum of Understanding with them to ensure both organisations will be working hand in glove in promoting and developing Para-Karate in the coming years.

### ***Delivery of Para-Karate training***

34. Having carefully considered the relevant clauses in the Memorandum of Federation and the relevant Association of KFHKCL, the General Committee of KFHKCL concluded that the practical option for delivery of Para-Karate training is to designate a dojo or dojos to do the job under a fixed-term but renewable agency contract. The contract will incorporate terms which define in detail the division of responsibility between KFHKCL and designated dojos as well as both parties' rights and obligations, and ensure KFHKCL's effective control over the designated dojos.

35. To proceed with this option, the General Committee of KFHKCL will invite expressions of interest from dojos and select qualified dojos based on a list of predetermined criteria. Hopefully, a handful of dojos, located at different strategic locations of Hong Kong, could be recruited to participate in this meaningful initiative.

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