

[The lottery and the Olympics](#) [1]

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Some oppose the cost to public funds of the Olympics, and some criticize the inconveniences to which Londoners have been subjected. There can be few, however, who deny credit for the superb performances of our athletes. They have shown a dedication and commitment that has rallied most of the nation behind them in their efforts, and given them generous praise for their achievements.

That so small a nation can do so well is remarkable, and many commentators, including Lords Coe and Moynihan, have praised the role of the National Lottery in this. The Adam Smith Institute is proud of the role it played. In 1990 we invited the orchestra conductor, Denis Vaughan, who had suggested the idea, to write a paper for us setting out the case. Within two years of that publication, the National Lottery bill had cleared Parliament, with credit to Sir John Major and Virginia Bottomley for the role they played.

The lottery is voluntary. No-one has to buy a ticket, and those who do can dream of the chances of winning millions. Funds are raised that taxpayers might not be prepared to give.

The distribution of lottery receipts has been remarkable. Of every £1 spent on tickets, 50p has gone into the prize fund. Of the remaining 50p, 28p is assigned to good causes, 12p in government duty, 5p to retailers as commission, and 4.5p in operating costs to Camelot, and 0.5p as their profit. It returns to good causes a higher proportion of each £1 than any other official lottery. It is reckoned to have increased funding for the arts and sport sevenfold.

Perhaps too much lottery money has gone to support institutions such as the Royal Opera House, where more might have been given to local arts ventures, repertory companies and youth orchestras, but large numbers of people on modest incomes have benefitted from the support it has given to sports activities. Lottery funding has enabled athletes to undertake full-time training in preparation, to attract top-ranking international coaches, and to train in the world-class facilities that it funded.

The pay-off achieved by our athletes at the Beijing Olympics and even more in London is the reward for a bold idea well executed. The arts, medical and other charities have been aided by the National Lottery as well, but the Olympics highlights the difference it has made to sport. And every penny is raised is freely given.

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