

P-05-986 Allow small gyms and personal training spaces to open sooner during COVID restrictions, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 12.07.20

Dear Petitions Committee,

I refer to the above petition being discussed on Friday the 17th July 2020.

I'd like to include the email I sent directly to Mark Drakeford, that hasn't received a reply to begin with and then expand from there.

"Hi Mark,

I'm sure you have noticed my tweets and my current petition

<https://petitions.senedd.wales/petitions/200102>

I'm just reaching out again as you said you were in talks with the gym industry about reopening and the potential of outdoor training.

Crossfit is the biggest group of gyms (we are all affiliated but run independently) in the UK, by some distance. I'd love to open some dialogue and educate the government on how we work, how we can socially distance and how we don't share equipment like a commercial gym.

Now, you may be sitting there thinking this is about income for me and getting the business back open, but you'd be wrong. Owning a CrossFit gym is a labour of love and is about the bigger picture for me. I have another full time job that supports my hobby of owning a CrossFit gym and haven't taken a penny from the gym business since owning it. I can also say that my community of members have all insisted to carry on paying memberships in order to keep the gym afloat so clearly it has nothing to do with that.

We are the ONLY answer to this pandemic. There is heaps of research showing that being overweight or suffering underlying health issues related to to being overweight puts you at a much higher risk of dying from COVID. Yet, you open pubs (outside), fast food chains and non-essential retail first, where if we're all honest, social distancing isn't and will not be happening. We are a solution to the issue. These are causes. Think of us as swimming teachers and the NHS as the lifeguards. You've stopped swimming lessons for a substantial period of time and when the hypothetical swimming pool re-opens, the lifeguards will be overrun. I thought we were trying to save the NHS? This is going to put a huge demand on it with a future pandemic of obesity and obesity-related disease.

COVID-19 will go and there will be a vaccine that will only be effective on COVID-19. What happens when the next, new 'COVID-19' comes along? We spend our lives preparing our bodies to deal with whatever gets thrown our way and I believe that is the only solution. Unfortunately, we are being prevented by your government.

I would also love to read the research you spoke about earlier when you mentioned gyms are a 'coronavirus hotspot'. Is there evidence here to support this? And is it of a high level, I wonder?

I look forward to hearing from you."

I think this sums up the majority of my feelings on the governments response and on their current restrictions in place. Although since it has changed and outdoor fitness classes with up to 30 participants have been allowed, this has slightly altered and so have my views, until finding out that close-contact services including nail and beauty salons and piercing and tattoo businesses will be allowed to open on the 27th July, before indoor gyms. It has also been discussed that indoor hospitality might open from the 3rd August, yet no mention of gyms other than brief discussions with the industry. Again at this point I would like to highlight that CrossFit gyms make up the majority of UK gyms and are nothing to do with UK Active. We operate considerably differently from your average gym, but are not being included in these discussions.

I would also like to add that I am disgusted, disappointed and completely confused as to how the sale of alcohol at a premises has become more important in society than health and fitness. Alcohol, as your health advisors will inform you, is a depressant and probably not the best mix with the current social situation of lockdown. I should probably add that I do love a beer and am probably not the 'fitness freak' you may be imagining. Alcohol is very high in sugar and calories and will lead to many long term underlying health issues and issues with weight, the two largest contributors to death from COVID-19. It also inhibits peoples' behaviour and as you have seen from the scenes in England, has altered everyones perception of social distancing.

I'd further like to reiterate the issue of Mr Drakeford stating that "gyms are emerging as a source of coronavirus infections". This is unsubstantiated nonsense, with absolutely no reasoning or research to support it. In fact, the only research presented so far has confirmed the complete opposite and I do believe a First Minister should be held accountable for false accusations or slander and should be more responsible with his words.

Lastly, I would just like to point out again that in this discussion I have absolutely no financial gain to be made and feel that I may well be the only person who can say this. I am doing this all because I whole heartedly believe in it and know it is the the only way to reduce the effects of chronic disease, from diabetes to coronavirus. I have never taken a penny from the CrossFit business I own.

I thank the petition committee for discussing my petition and for presenting it to the Welsh government.

Many Thanks

Andrew Starling

Petition author, Owner of Crossfit Llanelli, L2 Crossfit Coach