

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol | Culture,

Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Cymryd rhan mewn chwaraeon mewn ardaloedd difreintiedig | Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas

CCWLSIR SDA 07

Ymateb gan Chwaraeon Cymru | Response from Sport Wales

## Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee inquiry into sports participation in disadvantaged areas

18 March 2022

## About Colegau Cymru

Colegau Cymru is a post-compulsory education charity; we promote the public benefit of post-compulsory education and learning. We also convene the further education (FE) Principals' Forum, which represents Further Education colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales. Colegau Cymru also undertakes research, policy development and provides practical support to FE colleges in Wales, including on work-based learning (WBL) which is a key part of FE college activity.

Colegau Cymru welcomes the opportunity to submit a short evidence paper to the Senedd's Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee inquiry into participation in sport in disadvantaged areas.

We are grateful to Pembrokeshire, NPTC Group and Coleg Cymoedd in particular, for their input to this submission.

## 1.0 Background

1.1 Since 2014 Colegau Cymru has enabled the Further Education (FE) sector in Wales to increase the number of students who are active, to tackle inequalities, particularly in gender, disability and BME groups and encourage the development of the future workforce.

1.2 Our <sup>1</sup>Active Wellbeing Strategy for Sport, Physical Activity and (2020-2025) was launched in October 2019, with the vision of Active Colleges, Active Lives, Active Wales aligned to a clear purpose to enhance the emotional, social and physical well-being of the college community. Promoting Active Wellbeing emphasises the benefit of sport and physical activity in encouraging good wellbeing and enhancing educational outcomes, promoting both healthier college communities and a workforce fit for future employment.

1.3 Numerous research papers support the major role physical activity plays in reducing mental health. In April 2021, Colegau Cymru commissioned <sup>2</sup>BlwBo Limited to undertake qualitative research to explore the connection between activity and eudemonic wellbeing and its impact on educational attainment in FE. The research recognised the extensive role Colegau Cymru and our Active Wellbeing Strategy play in supporting Further Education Institutions (FEIs) and learners to take active wellbeing opportunities. The study also found that being active has a positive impact on learning and academic attainment and the importance of physical activity as a tool to reduce the disparity in educational attainment between disadvantaged areas.<sup>3</sup>

1.4 Young people in the FE sector will play a key role in the future prosperity of Wales, both as a skilled workforce and the parents of future generations. By creating healthier, more active and resilient individuals, there is an opportunity to ensure that the future workforce is fit for employment and has a good understanding of the wider benefits of being healthy and active.

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<sup>1</sup> Colegau Cymru (2020) Active Wellbeing Strategy 2020-25. Available at: <http://ow.ly/j9QU50Cgg1t>

<sup>2</sup> BlwBo. (2021) The value to learners of Active Wellbeing in FEI in Wales. Available at: <https://valueofactivewellbeing>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., page 20.

## 2.0 What are the main barriers to participation in sport in disadvantaged areas? How do these intersect with other factors?

### 2.1 Young Women and Girls

2.1.1 In FE, gender is a significant factor in participation in sports in disadvantaged areas. Girls' motivation and enjoyment of sport reduces throughout adolescence and often negative attitudes towards sport are formed. Table 1 highlights that females in the NPTC Group catchment area are more likely to take part in physical activity if they live in less deprived areas, using Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data. The mean IMD percentage for females was 61.7 % suggesting that females in the least deprived areas participated in physical activity more than those in the most deprived areas. The mean IMD percentage for Males was 49.6% suggesting males from least deprived and most deprived were equally split.

IMD Percent			
Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Female	61.7768	38	26.34305
Male	49.6136	70	28.81570
Total	53.8932	108	28.45130

**Figure 1 – Deprivation by Gender Group**

2.1.2 ColegauCymru commissioned <sup>4</sup>BlwBo Limited to review the impact of the pandemic on Further Education (FE) sports learners with online focus groups held with learners from 12 FEIs in Wales, analysing the impact loss of sport has had on their wellbeing. This research included a hugely diverse range of learners in terms of their backgrounds, lived experiences, ethnicity, age and area of study, but 'active wellbeing' was identified as an area that brought learners and communities together.

2.1.3 Here some learners highlighted how the return to structured provision and training opportunities (in and out of college) was favouring male provision over female. There was also a perception among some female learners that sport and fitness facilities generally were not as accessible for females.<sup>5</sup>

2.1.4 Transportat has also been a persistent feature. Whilst many students made their own way to training when it was possible, there is an issue with early bird, weekend and evening provisions around access for those in disadvantaged areas who are reliant on public transport from disadvantaged areas.

<sup>4</sup> BlwBo. (2021) Wellbeing insight, FE sports learners and the recovery from Covid-19 Available at: [Postcovid-19insight](#)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., page 4.

## 2.2 Language

2.2.1 Language barriers have also been raised in this research. Some learners stated that Welsh language provision was very important in helping them engage and transition from sport experiences in Welsh medium secondary schools. Although references to inequalities were not widespread, colleges can be aware of the logistics they might consider as facilities reopen, and activities can be programmed in for learners in ways that include and engage with all – as well as ESOL learners.

## 2.3 Mature Students

2.3.1 Beyond gendered barriers, there are also specific barriers for mature students and those with full timetables of taught lessons. For these groups, time barriers, personal preferences, and work-life balance act as important determinants to engage in sports participation. Research from BlwBo and Colegau Cymru's 2021 report highlighted mature students are often hesitant to participate without other mature students being present.<sup>6</sup> In these focus groups they also emphasised time as a significant barrier, especially for learners who had children, and found it difficult (logistically and personally) to prioritise their own opportunities to learn above the needs of family members.

2.3.2 In these cases, the design of active wellbeing provisions needs to be shaped accordingly for certain groups of learners to engage in sporting activities: to build learning around wellbeing activities as something that contributes to the formal learning experience. This will include learners from disadvantaged areas.

2.3.3 Colegau Cymru continues to work with colleges to enable the FE sector in Wales to increase the number of students who are active and to tackle inequalities in participation in these disadvantaged groups.

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<sup>6</sup> See BlwBo. (2021) The value to learners of Active Wellbeing in FEI in Wales. Available at: <https://valueofactivewellbeing>, page 16.

### 3.0 How clear a picture do we have of current participation levels in disadvantaged areas? Does the current data enable policy interventions to be effective?

3.1 ColegauCymru has worked closely with colleges and Sports Wales in capturing data on participation levels across colleges to take learning and insight from a range of sources such as ‘UPSHOT’ online monitoring. More importantly, colleges are now starting to link participation data from projects with other college and Welsh Government data on gender, ethnicity, disability and deprivation from disadvantaged groups covering their catchments areas - as outlined below.

#### Coleg y Cymoedd

3.2 A sample of 323 project participants at Coleg y Cymoedd demonstrated the catchment area of the college in areas of deprivation without specifically focussing on this as an outcome. The table highlights that as of 2019, Coleg y Cymoedd has been working with many learners in the most deprived areas of Wales. Colleges are keen to use enrichment (including activities such as sport) to improve outcomes more generally.

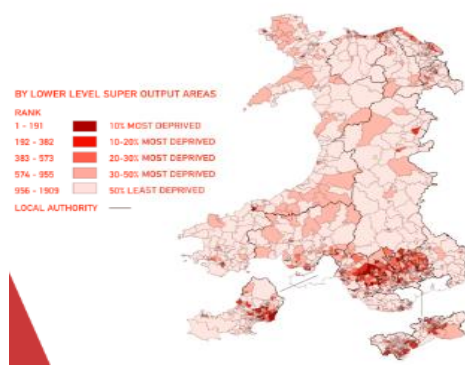


Figure 2

Deprivation Level	Rank	No. of Learners
Most Deprived	1- 191	65
	192- 382	53
	383 – 573	58
	574 – 955	80
Least Deprived	956- 1909	67
		323

Figure 3

#### NPTC Group

3.3 Data collected using ‘UPSHOT’ highlighted the current and past participation levels at NPTC per the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Figure 5 identifies levels of physical activity with an overlay of multiple deprivation, with the highest level of social deprivation based on their south campus area - analysis is focused on this region.

3.4 The number of attendees who took part in physical activity was downloaded based on their postcode and converted to IMD (%). This indicates how deprived the area for the postcode is, with a lower percentage highlighting the most deprived areas and a higher percentage being the least deprived areas.

3.5 Of the 114 students enrolled at NPTC group analysed, with a mean age of 19.1 (plus or minus 1.2 years). In general, more students are engaged in physical activity the higher the IMD percentage (i.e.

less deprived areas). Indeed almost 60% of attendees are in the higher IMD quartile (least deprived areas) and only 40% attendees are from the lower IMD quartile (most deprived areas).

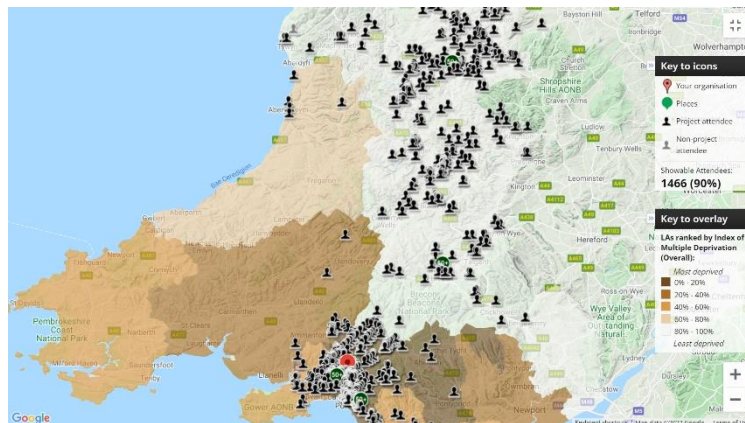


Figure 4 – Participation levels of NPTC students based on levels of Multiple Deprivation

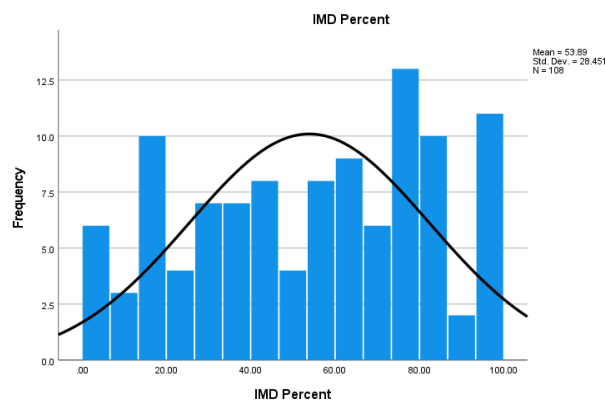


Figure 5 - Number of participants based on IMD percent

3.6 The analysis on students at NPTC clearly shows that participation levels are lower in the most deprived areas per IWD. There is a need to identify the reasons why these students do less physical activity.

### Data Issues

3.7 There are still significant issues in the available data in terms of what we have and how this is measured to gain a clear idea of current participation levels. This complicates accurate interventions being made in this area.

3.8 Some data is available but does not provide as much information as it could. For example, the report on sports participation within <sup>7</sup>Welsh Local Authorities shows the percentage of adults participating in sporting activity – however this data is not broken down in terms of areas of deprivation.

3.9 Whilst the WIMD overall Index identifies both Health and Access to Services as measurable domains, there is no specific reference to sporting activity. Other data collected widely used by FE

<sup>7</sup> StatsWales (2021) <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/National-Survey-for-Wales/Sport-and-Recreation/percentageofpeoplewhoparticipateinsport3ormoretimesaweek-by-localauthority-year>

institutions through UPSHOT mainly only collect head counts. This prevents data on demographic variables being analysed.

#### 4.0 How should public funding be used to increase participation in disadvantaged areas?

4.1 The further education sector offers a route to increase participation in disadvantaged areas via its network of learners, outreach, campuses and facilities. Consideration should be given as to how further public funding can be effectively used to further increase participation via the FE sector, building on the positive track record.

4.2 For example, to avoid uncertainty and the challenges associated with short term funding, Welsh Government should introduce active wellbeing (or equivalent) as part of core funding to colleges. This would enable the running of activity but also for colleges to expand on the work they do in targeting disadvantaged and underrepresented groups to participate in sport.

4.3 Through the pandemic the use of blended learning has helped ESOL, female and mature students who often experience greater barriers due to cultural differences and logistical barriers. There is potential for public funding to increase participation through remote technology to engage students from disadvantaged areas and break down some of the perceived barriers (culture, lack of social support/friendship groups, and family support). Investing in this technology would provide access a wider audience. Any interventions from public funding must include these groups.

#### 5.0 How effective are current interventions at increasing participation in disadvantaged areas?

5.1 Colegau Cymru is actively engaging with FE colleges across Wales providing activity support since 2014 – supported by Sports Wales and a wider network of organisations to promote participation, tackling inequality and increasing volunteering. This has seen over 30,000 young people involved since 2014 and over 6,000 learners involved in 2020. This strategy has actively engaged with diverse and underrepresented learner groups including disabled learners, as well as young women who have made up over 50% of participants.

5.2 Sports Wales project investment has provided individual colleges opportunities to integrate active wellbeing activities into lesson plans and formal learning where practically possible, developing a strong track record of delivering active wellbeing activities over time. Below are some examples.

##### Gower College Swansea

5.3 At the start of 2021 Gower College launched a new health and wellbeing strategy, *GCS and You*, providing a broad framework to enhance the health and wellbeing of both employees and learners. The focus was developing a positive environment and embedding a culture of wellbeing and providing healthy lifestyle choices which meet the needs of the diverse community.

##### NPTC Group of Colleges

5.4 NPTC Group of Colleges promotes physical activity via the 'NPTC Get Active!' scheme – a dedicated hub for students and staff across NPTC colleges providing opportunities for students and

staff to engage in physical activity and maximise the health benefits exercise provides. The campaign is already seeing results engaging students and staff in sports across all campuses and has close links to similar local authority provision.

### Pembrokeshire College

5.5 The nature of current interventions at Pembrokeshire College has been focussed on the benefits to health and wellbeing that sporting activity brings. The college's Active and Wellbeing officer is an active sportsperson and is tasked with communicating to learners the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and the regular exercise. Sessions have focussed on the benefits of hydration, regular sleep patterns, a healthy diet and oxygenation of the brain through exercise to facilitate a fitness to learn through a healthy body and mind.

5.6 In addition, the cardio gym at the college has a very competitive membership rate for learners with free access during college hours. All learners are given an induction so that they can safely access the facilities.

### Other information

5.7 Sport Wales investment has provided a welcome catalyst for colleges to develop new ways of working, creating a more sustainable approach to future delivery. This investment is utilised to deliver new activity and develop new areas of engagement and has influenced strategic level organisational change in all colleges.

5.8 Colleges are increasingly recognising their role in their communities to support young people and others in their catchment as further outlined elsewhere in this response.

5.9 In spite of the positive interventions and example above, it can be difficult to properly evaluate effectiveness. There is little comprehensive and linked up research on the types of physical activity students in disadvantaged areas engage in so information is limited.

5.10 In terms of actions, a review of the sporting facilities currently available in further education colleges throughout Wales could be undertaken and additional funding made available to ensure that all colleges have sufficient sporting facilities to promote and sustain the inclusive sporting agenda.

## 6. Has the pandemic caused any persistent changes to participation levels in disadvantaged areas?

6.1 The pandemic has undoubtedly caused persistent changes to the participation levels in disadvantaged areas. There are concerns that existing inequalities and gaps in participation are likely to increase as a result of the pandemic and those living in disadvantaged communities have been disproportionately affected.

6.2 Anecdotal evidence suggests that the pandemic has affected physical activity, especially in disadvantaged area, based on using UPSHOT to record physical activity. Post pandemic, female participation has been identified as an issue. Head count based on 2021-22 data shows a reduction in Enrichment / Academies of around 30%. However, male participation has not been affected in the same way and the reduction in physical activity is related to female participation, especially indoor sports that were restricted during the pandemic. Many outdoor sports returned much earlier.



6.3 However, this data is limited to head counts rather than individual student information. Only Sport Academies have been used where individual student information is uploaded and therefore linking the data to postcode doesn't provide a comprehensive insight into disadvantaged areas.

#### BlwBo research - Covid-19 Insights

6.4 Research from BlwBo on the pandemic's impact on wellbeing provisions outlined the effects on students.<sup>8</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these gaps in participation in the FE system even for learners in academy and sports programmes.

6.5 In some cases, opportunities were lost as a result of the pandemic and restrictions on participation had a knock-on effect on students even after some restrictions were lifted. Learners highlighted the effects on their confidence and related to this, concerns about the impact on skill levels and ability to compete on a level playing field with others. While learners have continued to train, training in isolation over the long term has been difficult and many became nervous about returning after so long out.

### 7.0 How effectively do different sectors (e.g. education and health) collaborate to improve participation in sport in disadvantaged areas?

7.1 ColegauCymru has continually sought to develop partnerships to support events, projects and increase participation across a wide range of activities by embracing collaboration at an organisational level. We have also encouraged colleges to also engage in local opportunities.

7.2 CollegesWales Sport Programme has actively engaged with over sixty partners within Wales, the UK and internationally with many working directly with FE colleges to increase participation and tackle inequalities. Some of the most notable partnerships include the Erasmus+ youth exchange in Spain with WRU apprentices and the Community Sport and Activity Programme (CSAP) Project.

7.3 There are some good examples of collaboration with local government and individual health boards, or between different parts of the education sector as set out below. However, there is definitely room for improvement and more consistent engagement between education, health, local government and others in order to maximise participation in activity for people in disadvantaged areas.

7.4 Colleges continue to invest in facilities and work with a wider range of populations and local community partners - actively involved in encouraging strategic level change, sharing best practice and promoting colleges as communities to external stakeholders. These changes are now making good progress recognising the role colleges play providing young people with activity that works around their free time and ultimately their life chances when they progress from the FE sector.

7.5 However, cross-sector collaboration is yet to be fully exercised. There is still a lot of improvement to be made in this regard as schools, health areas and sports development departments need to work more closely to provide wide ranging opportunities for people to participate in an array of activities.

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<sup>8</sup> See Blwbo reports: [The value to learners of Active Wellbeing - BlwBo.docx \(live.com\)](#) ; [Wellbeing insight, FE sports learners and the recovery from COVID-19 – supporting the future of Welsh Sport - BlwBo.docx \(live.com\)](#)

This will allow people to develop basic skills, competencies and confidence which may then encourage greater participation.

### Pembrokeshire County Council

7.6 Individual colleges like Pembrokeshire College have highlighted some examples of good practice in engagement with hard-to-reach groups through their collaborative projects. Working closely with Pembrokeshire County Council, the health board and learners on Health programmes spend time with local health care professionals. While programmes are specific to each learning area there are synergies between departments through joint programmes such as the Level 2 Gym instructors programme, Sports Massage, and sports injury rehabilitation.

7.7 Pembrokeshire County Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2020 – 2024 reports that since 2015 active disability sports clubs' members have more than trebled, active disability specific coaches have more than doubled, active volunteers and disability specific clubs have doubled, and the opportunities for disability sports participation have trebled. Pembrokeshire College has played its part in facilitating this increased participation by hosting disability sport in its Sports Hall and Campus 6 gym facility.

### NPTC

7.8 Primary school education also has a key role to play and FEIs are extending collaboration. For instance, students at NPTC work with the Physical Activity and Sport Service (PASS) to promote better health through active living targeted in deprived areas.

7.9 The PASS team advertise and train the students to be effective coaches and pay for Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS). In return, students at NPTC Group coach primary school children in deprived areas. This "symbiotic" relationship has worked well in the past few years but has stopped due to COVID. This has major implications for primary school children and adult volunteers alike. Whilst this was an effective collaborate partnership, the quality and quantity of such arrangements are often neglected or generally poor.

## 8.0 Are there examples of best practice, both within Wales and internationally, that Wales should learn from to increase participation in sport in disadvantaged areas?

8.1 In addition to those examples cited earlier in this response, ColegauCymru would like to highlight the examples of good practice below.

### ColegauCymru and Sports Wales

8.2 FE colleges work closely with Sports Wales and ColegauCymru to increase participation in sports and activity. There are good examples of projects that have been cascaded to all FE institutions – many of which have been highlighted in earlier in this response.

8.3 Senior management have been increasingly supportive of this agenda to promote strategic development. As colleges with established strategies and designated managers and delivery staff have significantly better project results and internal investment, those with more recent development are now making good progress.

8.4 Many colleges have invested in innovative new facilities for sports, fitness, wellbeing and health related activity. These facilities are open to local communities and schools and provide employment and quality learning spaces for students. Colleges are now establishing and employing new staff members as project managers to oversee developments in this area.

### US Girls

8.5 In response, to the barriers girls and young women living in areas of deprivation face to participating in sport and physical activities, Street Games created the 'US Girls' programme. Through networking and influencing activities, the programme aimed to encourage and support community sports organisations to make girls' participation in sport a core part of their work.

8.6 Since 2015, Street Games has continued to provide guidance and support to local projects to help them sustain the activities that have been created addressing participation levels in disadvantaged areas. US Girls has been able to effectively help girls in areas of deprivation try things they may never have had the opportunity to do elsewhere. This has been achieved through working with Colegau Cymru and other organisations across Wales.

8.7 Street Games listen to the girls and young women and tailor offers to meet their needs and increase physical activity participation levels. This collaboration with FE colleges is central to continuing development and further insight to support more learners in disadvantaged areas.

### Pembrokeshire College

8.8 Pembrokeshire College are launching a range of initiatives to encourage active participation in sport. The 'Sporting Academies' project operates in rugby, football, Multisport Ladies Academy and a Swimming Academy. The initiative strives to engage learners from across the college into college teams so that they can enjoy the benefits of sporting activity.

8.9 The college has also introduced the Faculty of Specialist Vocational Education which encompasses the Sports Department and the Life Skills Academy. A key theme has been to widen participation for all learners including those with additional and complex needs in sporting activity. This is gaining traction and regular sporting events are held in the College's Sports Hall with Boccia being the main activity.

## 9 Conclusions

9.1 In summary, there is considerable work going on in the further education sector to provide opportunities for people from disadvantaged areas to take part in sport and physical activity. The further education sector, via its learners, campuses and other connections provides a positive route to continue to tackle the challenges of increasing participation. Set against this is the need to convince some young people of the benefits of exercise over more sedentary activity.

9.2 However, the Committee may like to focus on the following areas to maximise impact and understanding of interventions:

- Increasing data and research – some colleges have made good use of systems such as UPSHOT to understand patterns of activity. There is more that could be done to link up data and understandings across education, health and leisure services to gain a better picture and target interventions appropriately.
- An audit could be undertaken of sport and activity facilities across Wales located in or near to disadvantaged areas, including FE colleges, with funding provided to fill gaps or upgrade facilities as necessary.

- Facilities need to be genuinely inclusive, adequate funding provided for disability sport, as well as provision of activities or areas that are culturally sensitive. This could form part of an audit of facilities.
- There is the potential to build online activity options which became more popular during the pandemic and allow people to participate from home if space allows. This can allay fears about entering new spaces and build confidence.

## Melusi Moyo

Cynorthwydd Polisi a Materion Cyhoeddus | Policy and Public Affairs Assistant

## Dr Rachel Bowen

Cyfarwyddwr Polisi a Materion Cyhoeddus | Director of Policy and Public Affairs

Rachel.bowen@colegaucymru.ac.uk

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