

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

CELG(4)-19-13 : Paper 2

Inquiry into participation levels in sport in Wales

Response from : Welsh Sports Association

### **About the Welsh Sports Association (WSA)**

1. The Welsh Sports Association (WSA) is the recognised independent voice for sport, physical recreation and outdoor pursuits in Wales. Since its foundation in 1972 the WSA has been the 'umbrella' organisation for National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sport in Wales, providing them with representation and support. Currently over 60 NGBs are members of the WSA with an estimated 500,000 plus individual members participating in sport and recreation under their banners.
2. As well as being the voice for the sector the WSA offers a wide range of services to its members including guidance, training, information, governance support, financial management, development support and other services.
3. This response has been put together by the WSA in consultation with its members.

### **MEETING GOALS**

4. A number of National Governing Bodies (NGBs) have challenged themselves to meet aspirational targets to help meet the goals set out by Welsh Government and Sport Wales. In the last year, significant increases have been seen in participation levels in sports such as gymnastics (25%), swimming (39%), cycling (24%), boxing (33%) and athletics (12%), as well as a 20% increase in disability sports clubs.
5. These increases are mostly the result of systematic and sustained efforts to improve the way the sport is delivered. To make significant change, NGBs have looked at elements such as whether they need to adapt their format, rules, venues and infrastructure. They have considered how to make their sport more family friendly; how facilities might be developed or better used to enhance capacity; what coaches, officials and administrators are needed, and what training and support they need; how their clubs can be consulted and engage with changes; utilised tools such as market segmentation to review who is mostly likely to be attracted to their sport and adapted their approach to suit this audience: created business development and mentoring schemes to help clubs improve their operation and so increase their membership. The InSport programme from Disability Sport Wales is also helping NGBs and clubs do more to create opportunities accessible by people with disabilities. NGBs have had to do all this... and make sure they keep the people currently involved!
6. All this is a vast amount of work. For small sports, particularly those entirely run by volunteers, undertaking this level of change, whilst still trying to ensure that the day to day business of the organisation runs smoothly is a huge challenge. Even in bigger sports with paid staff, the bulk of delivery is done by volunteers. Engaging the voluntary workforce in this change takes time, so none of this happens overnight. So while there are some great

examples of good progress, the work involved and the time lag before results are seen should not be underestimated.

### **DATA AND STATISTICS**

7. Sport Wales conduct biennial surveys on adult and young people's participation. The data provided is very useful in providing trend information and can be broken by equality strand and socio-economic group at national level. The fact that the surveys are only done every other year does mean that they are slow to show any impact of events or major initiatives.
8. NGB membership data is generally collected annually and is linked to the seasonality of the sport involved. Data is only collected on people who affiliate to the NGB or take part in organised programmes. Most sports can breakdown data by gender and an increasing number by disability and ethnicity. Data on socio-economic group is not normally collected although analysis by postcode can be done by some NGBs. Increasingly NGBs are interrogating the data they hold and using it to inform planning and decision making. In smaller NGBs, where the data is often held in a simple format on a volunteer's personal computer, this is harder and more time consuming for already stretched volunteers to do.
9. A small number of NGBs have recently started work on using 'results based accountability' to help plan and deliver outcome based services. This is expected to help gather and present data in a more cohesive way.

### **OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS**

10. Barriers to participation can be practical such as poverty, access, lack of coaches, transport and facilities, or attitudinal such as cultural acceptability, lack of role models, feeling unfit or not good enough, community insularity.
11. There are opportunities to address some of these practical barriers. We list below some matters worthy of serious consideration.
  - a. **Investing to Save:** Consideration should be given to the provision of additional support to activities in disadvantaged areas. This should be new money from health or community regeneration budgets or ESF funds if possible - rather than a reallocation of the existing sport budget which would be self defeating. This would be investing to save- not only -but especially - in regard to pressure on our health service since lifestyle diseases and obesity threaten to overwhelm us.
  - b. **Statutory listing:** We know that we live in austere times and the pressures on local authority budgets are considerable. We are concerned that because the provision of sport and leisure services is not a legal duty this area is at risk of being further diminished simply because it is an easy target for cuts.

The published Programme for Government states in chapter 2 that the aim is: 'To support the delivery of effective and efficient public services that meet the needs of people in Wales.' We would submit that the provision of sport and leisure is vital to the needs of the people of Wales and ought not to be discretionary. This is not to say we are suggesting that sport and leisure should be immune from cuts – clearly realism must apply. We *do* suggest, however, that by requiring its provision as a

legal duty then at the very least local authorities would need to pause before acting, to make proper impact assessments and ensure decisions are balanced and made for the right reasons.

- c. **Broadened access to the environment:** In Wales we have a spectacular natural environment that is a haven for outdoor pursuits. We need to ensure that as many people as possible are able to access our waterways and countryside and are able to enjoy a wide variety of outdoor pursuits through the sustainable use of our natural environment. The associated health benefits and well-being generated from a more active population, as well as the boost to local economies, increased tourism and job opportunities in the countryside are compelling reasons to be developing Wales as a sporting destination.

We are well aware that there are tensions however which can arise between more casual users and those with property rights such as landowners, farmers, anglers etc. It is vital that such issues can be managed intelligently and sensitively so that as many as possible can enjoy the obvious benefits responsibly - and without damaging our precious environment.

Changes to the law in Scotland in 2003 enshrined an already accepted presumption in favour of access. Critically it created a clear, equal and intelligent basis upon which any such issues could be managed for the protection of all interested parties and for the stewardship of the environment itself. This is in stark contrast to the more restrictive approach afforded by the CROW Act which applies in England and Wales.

It is widely accepted that the Scottish system has been extremely successful in both securing access, managing conflicts and protecting the environment for the benefit of all. A report commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage in 2011 states as one of its findings 'The Responsible Behaviour Surveys show an increasing and widespread awareness of the key responsibilities for access to the outdoors as detailed in the Code among both recreational users and land owners/managers.' (The code referred to is the Scottish Outdoor Access code)

The Programme for Government states that the Welsh Government will take action to 'improve public access to land and water with a particular focus on access for families and children' (Environment & Sustainability - Chapter 11). Furthermore in Chapter 4 of the Programme (21<sup>st</sup> Century Healthcare) the government undertakes to promote physical activities. We would submit that following the Scottish model would represent significant progress in regard to delivering on both these commitments.

- d. **Schools:** We believe that PE and sport in schools should be given greater priority and importance as it is here that young people establish skills and habits that provide the basis for their adult behaviour. This greater importance would be reflected in actions such as primary school banding including a measure of children's physical literacy or sports participation, improved time for PE in initial teacher training, continued professional development for teachers in PE (including how to deliver inclusive PE), better links with local clubs to provide enhancement opportunities, an extended school day to enable extracurricular activity. We are

particularly keen to see Estyn comment on a school's progress in forming and fostering school club links. Further work should also be done to examine ways that clubs can be supported to increase their capacity to make these links.

- e. **Volunteering:** Volunteers are essential to the provision of sporting opportunities. We believe it is time to have a complete review in regard to the incentivising of volunteering. Innovations such as tax credits, benefits to companies who devote staff to volunteering in company time, use of those not in employment or education should all be explored and costed.

12. As well as addressing practical barriers, there is a need to address attitudinal issues in order to change peoples' behaviour. There are large numbers of people in Wales who do not think of themselves as sporty or active and just do not see it as something they would do or something they should ensure their children do. For these people, a significant attitudinal shift is needed. During the 1970s campaigns on drinking and driving had a dramatic effect such that it is no longer socially acceptable to drink and drive. Similar shifts in attitudes are taking place about recycling. It would be great if taking part in sport and ensuring your children take part in sport became a social norm in Wales, and that not doing so was frowned upon. This would require significant campaigning and good cooperation right across public sector, third sector and commercial partners.

#### **LINKS WITH OTHER INITIATIVES**

13. Links between the activities of NGBs in Wales and Welsh Government physical activity initiatives could be improved. For example, there is only one Welsh NGB link on the Change4Life website. NGBs don't appear to be organisations that departments across Welsh Government automatically include or consult when designing any physical activity initiative. Links and collaborative work right across government could be improved. Sport cannot deliver the significant behavioural change needed to deliver the targets in Creating an Active Wales without greater collaboration with education, children's services, health, transport, economic development and planning.
14. A clear example of this is facility provision. There are places in Wales where facilities have clearly been planned with the involvement of the whole community and sport's needs have been considered alongside those of education, library services, etc. Typically, these facilities can be accessed easily and clear booking and access arrangements are in place. Often there is also a café or social area available. These facilities are usually well used during both day and evening, making best use of resources. There are other examples where there are school sportshalls that are barely used out of school hours and where there are similar leisure facilities within a few miles of each other.

#### **MAJOR EVENTS AND THEIR LEGACY**

15. Some sports have seen substantial increases in their membership figures since the Olympics and Paralympics. The London games provided a fantastic window for Olympic and Paralympics sports and many NGBs for the sports involved are able to give anecdotal examples of clubs receiving large numbers of enquiries from interested individuals. Where

they have capacity and well developed infrastructure, sports have been able to capitalise on this interest. Over the past few years for example, a number of gymnastics clubs have moved from running sessions in leisure centres to having their own bespoke facilities. This, together with significant investment in coach and workforce development, has meant that they have had far greater capacity to accommodate new members. Rowing has seen a 7% increase in clubs since the Games. However, many rowing clubs are heavily reliant on having the correct equipment to cater for beginners, which can be extremely costly. Access and facilities are a phenomenally large challenge in the sport. For example, three Swansea based clubs do not have appropriate access to water, they launch boats from a slipway and their boats are stored unsecured in an open air public car park. These three clubs are struggling to cater for new participants as they face these significant infrastructure challenges.

16. For the Ryder Cup in Wales, a legacy fund project was created and the Welsh Government committed £2million to this. This funding was used to create specific beginner facilities which could be used to introduce people to the game as well as to break down a number of the perceived barriers which prevented people from trying the sport. These facilities have seen great gains not only in membership but visitors to the clubs. Golf Development Wales (GDW) was also set up to maximize the impact of the Ryder Cup. In the year after the run up to the Ryder Cup, participants in GDW linked schemes increased by nearly 43%.