Pwyllgor Iechyd, Gofal Cymdeithasol a Chwaraeon
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee
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Inquiry into physical activity of children and young people

Response from: **Sport Wales**

Background

1. Sport Wales is the national organisation responsible for the development of sport in Wales – from community participation to elite success. We are committed to developing an active, healthy and prosperous Wales, where every citizen has the opportunity to participate in sport and physical recreation, and reach their potential, irrespective of background and circumstance.
2. Working with partner agencies, on a national and local level, we aim to increase the frequency of participation in sporting activity, as well as improving elite performance. We take a broad view of sport, from traditional sports, such as swimming and netball to activities such as Zumba and dance. We are also the main adviser on sporting matters to the Welsh Government and are responsible for distributing funds from the National Lottery to sport in Wales.

Overview

3. Sport Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to this important consultation by the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee on physical activity of children and young people.
4. The benefits of regular sport and physical activity for physical health is well established. For example, there is clear evidence that physical activity and sport can improve physical and mental well-being (external link). There is also some a fairly well-explored evidence base linking physical activity and sport to individual development outcomes like educational attainment and employability (external link).
5. Sport Wales has systematically planned and invested in young people's sports participation for the last 10 years. This includes programmes such as Dragon Multi-skills and Sport, and 5x60 (external links), and through broader investment in local authorities and National Governing Bodies of Sport to develop extra-curricular and community opportunities. Over this time, we have seen a significant increase in young people's participation in sport in Wales. The numbers of children and young people who participate in sport on three or more occasions a week is up from just 27% in 2011, to 40% in 2013, and 48% in 2015.
6. In 2012 Sport Wales launched the Calls for Action programme to increase the participation of people from groups that were less likely to participate in sport. Many of the projects we have invested in have specifically targeted children and young people from groups that had low levels of participation in sport. The programme is being independently evaluated over three years in real time, with ongoing feedback and learning (external link).

What do we know about physical activity levels in children in Wales? How robust is the data on this issue?

7. Physical activity includes a broad spectrum of activities. This includes sport, but also includes activities such as active travel (cycling to school), play, and gardening. We adopt the Council of Europe's definition of sport, which is *all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.*
8. As a leading authority on sport, producer of Official Statistics and creator of insight, Sport Wales collects and interprets data related to sports participation in Wales. Our main source of data and insight is derived from our world-leading School Sport Survey (external link). **The statistics from the School Sport Survey are classed by the UK Statistics Authority as Official Statistics This means that they are produced in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (external link). This sets out necessary principles and practices to produce statistics that are trustworthy, high quality, and of public value.**
9. Through our latest survey in 2015, 116,000 children and young people from 1,000 different schools across Wales had their say on participation in sport. What we know from this is:

a. 48% of pupils across Years 3 to 11 in Wales take part in organised sporting activity outside of curriculum time on three or more occasions per week

b. There is little difference in sports participation on 3 or more occasions a week: 49% of primary pupils and 48% of secondary pupils

c. There are still significant gaps in sports participation according to pupils' age, ethnicity, disability, and relative deprivation. Higher levels of sports participation were recorded for: pupils in Years 5 and 6; mixed race and black/black British pupils; pupils from the least deprived schools; and pupils in secondary schools who were Welsh speakers

d. Pupils who are very confident in trying new activities without worrying are twice as likely to participate in sport on three or more occasions a week.

10. Further information, statistics, infographics, and an animation on the results can be found here (external link). It is difficult to benchmark this data with the rest of the UK or internationally as this kind of detailed data is not routinely collected from children and young people outside Wales.

11. Through our experimental research with the National Centre for Social Research and production of a good practice guide to asking children and young people about sport and physical activity (external link), we know that when asked about physical activity, children struggle with the term, there are issues with the recall of information, and older children more likely to give socially acceptable responses. Children, were clearer on what was meant by sport and due to the relative regular nature of sporting activities, are less likely to have recall issues.

12. We routinely evaluate and look to improve the trustworthiness, quality, and public value of our statistics. This includes cognitively testing questions for understanding, and reviewing our methodologies. This year we reviewed the School Sport Survey seeking feedback from a range of partners, including schools, local authorities, National Governing Bodies of Sport, Estyn. While it was acknowledged that the Survey produces valuable data for a range of stakeholders, the review also revealed several areas for development. These include: improving the child-friendliness of the survey; increasing school buy-in; rethinking the timing of the survey fieldwork and dissemination of survey findings; maximising usage of the data; and exploring the potential for data linkage. We now have a programme of planned improvements.

13. What we have across the public sector and Higher Education sector is, however, different ways of collecting data and measuring levels of participation. This inconsistency isn't in the public interest. Some work has commenced looking at this, but a better co-ordinated and more systematic approach would be welcomed.

Differences in gender-based attitudes towards, and opportunities for, participation in physical activity in Wales

14. The data from our 2015 School Sport Survey (external link) suggests that at all stages (primary and secondary) and in all environments (sport during PE, school clubs and sport outside of school) males enjoy sport more than females. The difference in gender-based enjoyment of sport is greater in secondary school than in primary school.

15. Similarly, male pupils are more likely to express confidence when they are trying new activities – with 85% being 'very confident' or 'confident' compared with 73% of females.

16. We know from our qualitative research exploring sports participation amongst 14-21-year olds (external link) that both girls and boys drop out of sport during secondary school and for very similar reasons. The available quantitative research data indicates that the drop-off is more pronounced for girls than boys, but that the issue exists for both genders.

17. Although there is an upward trend in sports participation, there is still an 8-percentage point gap in participation rates between males and females. We have a programme of investment addressing the inequalities that exist. This includes Our Squad (external link), an initiative aimed at inspiring, empowering and encouraging more women and girls in Wales to get active and give sport a go.

18. Following the publication of Facilities for Future Generations (external link), we have recently commissioned an audit of facilities across Wales. Facilities play an important role in the health of the nation. It is crucial that we and local authorities have an accurate and consistent view of opened, closed, and planned facility developments

across Wales to identify where the gaps in provision are and ensure all those living in Wales have equal opportunities to get active.

The extent to which Welsh Government policies are aimed at whole populations and/or particular groups, and what impact that approach has on addressing health inequalities.

19. Historically Sport Wales has taken a differentiated and targeted investment approach to increasing participation in sport amongst different groups. These approaches have reflected the duties placed on Sport Wales by various equalities legalisation and ultimately The Equality Act 2010.

20. The National Assembly for Wales has relatively recently passed two ground-breaking pieces of legislation that have created a new framework for how we focus our work. These Acts are the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Both of these laws, and the general public policy direction of Welsh Government, now require public bodies, including Sport Wales, to address issues relating to differential participation in sport amongst particular groups, and what impact this may have on health (and other) inequalities. Sport Wales has welcomed this policy approach because it will enable a co-ordinated response from public services to address issues of differential levels of physical activity amongst children and young people.

Barriers to increasing the levels of physical activity among children in Wales, and examples of good practice in achieving increases in physical activity, and in engagement with hard to reach groups, within Wales, the UK and internationally.

21. Over the past four years we have undertaken and commissioned a wide range of research (external link) in order to advance our understanding of the sport and physical recreation landscape in Wales. The breadth and depth of data gleaned from this research is vast, and collectively it has provided us with a wealth of insight and intelligence. There are some clear themes which emerge. These themes fall into five inter-related areas which taken together explain why engagement in sport continues to vary so significantly across our population – Elements of Engagement (external link). These are:

    a. **Motivation**: an inner desire or drive. 'The energy for action'

    b. **Confidence**: a belief in one's ability to attain a high level of performance or to achieve desired goals, and a sense of certainty that doing so will be worthwhile

    c. **Awareness**: knowing when, where and how to take advantage of relevant opportunities

    d. **Opportunity and Resources**: opportunities are available and easily accessed

    e. **The Experience**: the experience is worthwhile**.** It reinforces one's motivation & confidence and increases the likelihood of continued engagement

22. The Elements of Engagement focuses on understanding people. It is a framework through which we are understanding and developing our insight, and in an applied way, developing a suite of resources to help increase or sustain engagement in sport and physical recreation.

23. We have many examples of good practice. Two significant programmes of investment that have seen noteworthy change are the Physical Literacy Programme for Schools and the Calls for Action programme (as outlined in paragraph 6). Our evaluation of the Physical Literacy Programme for Schools reported improvements in young people's physical, social and emotional development, as well as their engagement, attendance and behaviour.

24. As part of our continuous improvement, we have been developing a revised model of investing in and delivering community sport in Wales.

Physical activity guidelines and how we benchmark physical fitness in children.

25. The Chief Medical Officers' guidelines for physical activity are grounded in robust scientific evidence. They outline differentiated advice for different population groups (external link) (Under 5s, Under 5s who are capable of walking, Children and Young People - 5-18yrs, Adults – 19-64yrs, Older Adults – 65+yrs). At a practical level, the nuance of the guidelines is often missed.

26. Physical fitness in children is important. We would advocate focusing on physical literacy. Physical literacy (external link) is the motivation, confidence, physical competency, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life. This is an area of work we have focused on in recent years; developing the Physical Literacy Journey and supporting materials (animations and resources). The Physical Literacy Journey was developed to support future curriculum planning and delivery, and has been aligned to Successful Futures in terms of a progressive continuum (journey) with steps along the way to track progress. It has been populated with examples of the 'how' and the 'what' in terms of physical literacy in action, and supports the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience, but also holistically across the curriculum. This, together, with a range of academics working in this field, Wales is leading the way in the UK in this field.

Measurement, evaluation and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's programmes and schemes aimed at promoting physical activity of children.

27. Measurement, evaluation and effectiveness of our programmes and schemes is central to our work.

28. Over time and using insight, we have made adjustments to the Free Swimming Programme, shifting its emphasis to 'learn to swim' provision and ensuring that every child in Wales can swim by the age of 11. A formal review of the Welsh Government's Free Swimming programmes will begin soon. The review will determine whether the programmes have achieved their stated outcomes for children, young people and older adults, and whether they can achieve a greater impact on sport participation levels. The findings and recommendations from this review will help shape and steer the sector's strategy and proposals for community sport in Wales.

29. The PE and School Sport programme (external link) and subsequently the Physical Literacy Programme for Schools (external link) were funded by Welsh Government and managed by Sport Wales for 15 years to help raise standards in Physical Education. During the time, Key Stage 3 PE attainment levels increased from 61% in 2001 to 91% in 2015. An evaluation of the Physical Literacy Programme for Schools can be found here (external link). This recent video reel (external link) demonstrates the benefits and achievements of both programmes, as well as the broader Sport Wales school-based work.

30. As we said in paragraph 6, our Calls for Action programme is being independently evaluated over three years in real time, with ongoing feedback and learning (external link). Beyond the headline numbers, the aim is to assess what impacts are being achieved and how, the character and degree of innovation, and the lessons for Sport Wales as well as for front line practice. Key learning and topics from the evaluation include: participation; value for money; governance and partnership; timing and pace; ways of working; and structural change.

Value for money of Welsh Government spending to promote exercise in children.

31. Value for money, or our preferred term, return on investment, is an area that needs considerable development. This is something that has been identified within the Ministerial Review of Sport Wales and is a broader issue across the public sector. Value for money is one of the themes that we're exploring within our evaluation of Calls for Action and are testing more broadly. Whilst there is merit in looking at this at a micro-scale or at an organisational level, there is much more value in having a consistent approach across the public sector with the Well-being of Future Generations Act as a framework.

The role of schools, parents and peers in encouraging physical activity, and the role of Sport Wales, NHS Wales and Public Health Wales in improving levels of physical activity.

32. We want children from all backgrounds to have the best start in life, that everyone will have the opportunity to reach their full potential and lead a healthy, prosperous and fulfilling life. This is everyone's role. It is a cross-governmental agenda and not limited to Sport Wales, NHS Wales and Public Health Wales. It would benefit from a better coordinated and integrated approach.

33. Confident, positive and resilient parenting is fundamental to preparing children for life. Parents have by far the greatest influence on their children. We know from our insight that parents' involvement in sport is positively associated with their children's physical activity levels. Sport Wales is looking forward to working with a wide range of partners, including the education and health sectors, to review the way we maximise our collective efforts and resources to enable more children – regardless of their background – to be active through sport.

Through our work on the Physical Literacy Journey, we have provided resources to help support parents (external link) enable their children to be physically literate.

34. The Young Ambassador programme (external link) was introduced to Wales in 2009. Young Ambassadors are tasked with increasing awareness and opportunities to improve the health, wellbeing and physical activity levels of other young people, whilst also developing themselves to be the best that they can be through learning valuable leadership skills such as communication, influencing and team work, that are fundamental in supporting them on becoming confident, resilient and employable young people. The programme has an incredible reach (external link); there are 3,283 Young Ambassadors across Wales and the programme runs in 57% of all primary schools and 91% of secondary schools. The power of the young person's voice has inspired more sports organisations to offer opportunities for young people to become decision-makers through forming school councils, youth panels and becoming board members. Further information on their impact can be found here (external link). There is a need to harness the Young Ambassador movement with a greater importance placed on self-determination and peer support when developing and delivering opportunities to be physically active.

35. Schools are a critical partner; they provide the spaces and opportunities to thrive. We know from our action research on physical literacy in schools that:

    a. Professional development of teachers is needed to ensure that pupils can develop their physical literacy and thrive;

    b. Early childhood motor development and early movement, needs developmentally appropriate activities, and a programme of professional development to enable this significantly impacts pupils' physical development;

    c. Quality Physical Education needs to build on Foundation Phase to support and develop physical literacy, this requires an understanding of pedagogy in physical holistic learning;

    d. Professional development and change needs to be strategic so that it has buy in from Local Education Authorities and Head teachers in order to develop whole school and community approaches.

36. For NHS Wales and Public Health Wales, we acknowledge the work being done on reducing Adverse Childhood Experiences, the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Schemes, social prescribing, and 'making every contact count'. As we have said, there is scope for all parties to take a better coordinated and integrated approach.

37. Similarly, children and young people's physical activity needs to be an integral part of public policy, for example:

    a. A key feature of the new curriculum and monitored by Estyn;

    b. A part of Initial Teacher Training to ensure all teachers in Wales have the skills and confidence to facilitate physical literacy;

    c. Part of the planning system to create the right local physical environment that provides easy access to local physical activity spaces;

    d. A key consideration for public funded programmes (e.g. the importance of providing modern, inspirational school sports facilities and the need to ensure 21st Century School Programme is set up to achieve this);

    e. A requirement of all child care provision;

    f. Further development of safe routes to schools.

38. Developments in digital technologies have brought about a huge step change in how people live their lives. A lot of young people have only ever known life in the 'digital age'. Unlocking the full potential of the digital and data revolution will be fundamental in transforming how people engage with sport and physical activity.

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