

29/4/19

Dear Dr Lloyd and members of the committee,

I would like to take this opportunity to formally respond to the Physical Activity of Children and Young People report on behalf of the Wales Institute for Physical Literacy at The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD).

I am delighted that the Committee have recognised the important role that early childhood plays in the development of physical literacy, and as such physical activity throughout the life-course. The early years is a unique window of opportunity when young children are excited by movement and are still highly motivated to be active and engage in vigorous and imaginative play. The recent First Minister's Manifesto (2018) identifies the need for a healthier Wales with a 'focus on preventing and intervening earlier' (p18). To capitalise on this window of opportunity in early childhood requires skilled staff with an understanding of motor development. SKIP-Cymru is a programme of professional development that enables Early Years staff to teach children the motor competence and confidence for later physical activity. These early foundations are crucial 'to support longer healthier happier lives promoting physical and mental well-being and resilience among young people' (First Minister's Manifesto, p 19)

As also highlighted in the First Minister's Manifesto 'Wales has led the world in early years education' (p24). If the SKIP-Cymru programme is rolled out nationally, as per recommendation 5 of the report, then Wales once again will be leading the world in addressing what is a global issue in relation to declining levels of motor competence and in particular addressing issues associated with deprivation. We know that children in areas of socio economic deprivation are more likely to be delayed in their motor development and as such at greater risk of a spiral of disengagement in physical activity and a negative health trajectory. This deprivation gap is highlighted in the recommendations, and is also highlighted in the manifesto stating that 'we can and must alleviate the worst effects of poverty in children's lives' (p 26).

I am pleased to see recommendation 1 identifying the need for a national measurement framework, but would suggest that this needs to also include motor competence in early childhood. Motor competence in early childhood is strongly associated with later physical activity. There is currently no data for children's motor competence in Wales (or the wider UK) other than a small sample from ongoing post graduate studies which are showing 100% of pupils in areas of deprivation having extreme developmental delays in their motor skills.

SKIP-Cymru includes aspects of working with parents and families and as such also contributes to the need to focus on family orientated approaches highlighted in recommendation 3 and builds a strong school and community ethos for valuing movement and physical activity, supporting recommendation 11.

We know from evaluations of the pilots of this work that children make significant improvements in their motor skills, but more than that staff and parents have reported increased levels of confidence, increased physical activity in school and at home and higher engagement in learning.

We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss a phased roll out of SKIP-Cymru across Wales and the revised costings for this work. The 2018 manifesto highlights the need to 're-engineer existing funding programmes to have maximum impact' in relation to child poverty. A targeted approach with an initial focus on areas of deprivation could both generate data about levels of motor competence and impact on pupil motor competence. Money from the soft drinks industry levy could be used to support this work as per recommendation 20.

I would like to congratulate to the committee on such a comprehensive and challenging review of the situation regarding children and young people's physical activity at a time when we are facing such a threat to our children's health.

Kind regards

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Dr. Nalda Wainwright.

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