

Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

Ymchwiliad i'r achosion o COVID-19 ac effaith y feirws ar ddiwylliant, y diwydiannau creadigol, treftadaeth, cyfathrebu a chwaraeon / Inquiry into the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, creative industries, heritage, communications and sport

CWLC COV05

Ymateb gan Codi Pwysau Cymru/ Response from Weightlifting Wales

Impact of COVID19

On

Elite @ Grassroots Sport In Wales

Ray Williams

National Coach

Weightlifting Wales



In Answer to questions from the Health Committee please read my views which are my own.

- What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector

The role of physical inactivity has been and still is under-recognised in Wales. Physical inactivity contributes almost the same on the nation's burden as obesity and diabetes which are recognised as adding to the nation's mortality.

Wales has a low number of people meeting the recommended WHO activity guidelines compared with other European countries. There is no specific national physical activity plan and the activity guidelines have not improved the nations' health over the last twenty years.

The unprecedented environment the COVID Pandemic has created in Wales and the wider world in the domain of Elite Sport has been in short, the loss of a Calendar year of sport and still the uncertainty of when it will recommence.

The fact that training with social distancing rules has started in some professional sport is a positive indication that the peak has potentially passed and with stringent adherence to protocols the risk of a second surge will be avoided is being monitored.

- How effectively has the support provided by the Welsh Government, the UK Government and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

As the National Coach of a funded Sport the support by Sport Wales during the pandemic period as our funding partner has been positive. SW provides a weekly update and signposts sports to the ERFP from which member clubs can apply for financial assistance to help offset continued outlays such as rent, utilities etc.

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The support staff of SW are available via several media pathways to discuss individual athlete needs which is vital as training albeit in isolation continues.

Many leisure centres/gyms will have lost most of the income over the last several months, it is vital that there is continued support post lockdown. AMS should visit and discuss with LAs and third sector facility providers to gauge the impact at local level on them. Local Authority gym facilities have become easy targets over the years of austerity, due to the fact they are not statutory services. This needs changing. 1/3rd of all COVID deaths are reported to be type 2 diabetics, and obesity are major factors. Both these conditions are preventable

- What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

The tragedy of it is that it has taken this pandemic for the realisation of how vital health and fitness is amongst the Nations population of every age. It is a fact that sedentary lifestyle is a contributory factor that increases the risk of COVID19. Welsh Government has over the last twenty years continually eroded Sport and PE in schools. This has led to an unfit nation. The fact that the lockdown has made people realise that a fit body helps create an active mind provides a unique opportunity for the WAG to drive fitness and sport as the 'new normal'.

- What lessons can be learnt from how the Welsh Government, the UK Government, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

As the saying goes, lessons can always be learnt, and they will be. The passage of information has been adequate from Sport Wales and the NGBs have been efficient in disseminating national policy/changes to the memberships in good time so actions could be made where needed. The disruption and cancellation of major events has caused budget realignments and plans for Domestic and International events based on when countries will open up for the influx of 1000s of athletes and entourages.

- How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can the Welsh Government support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

This pandemic has confirmed that sport is a major part of people's lives, Wales can and must ensure new innovative ideas of employing a Whole Nation Approach after the lockdown.

The sports/fitness sector can be pivotal in leading the way on the 'new normal' way of life after the pandemic has passed. Elite sport will continue to provide and showcase tangible outcomes for our top sporting performers and SW/NGBs are planning now to hit the ground running in catching up for Birmingham 2022 preparations.

Training is on-going but, the fact that competitive programmes are redundant at present will need a structure to be in place, so the sports are Games ready by 2022. This may need extra funding requirements for smaller sports who may not have the membership revenue to drive on at pace.

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The intermediate and novice planning can be more time phased, there is ongoing communication with member clubs within my sport and loan and purchase of equipment to allow training to take place in home environments.

The fact that this virus is a global pandemic means all the nations we compete against have suffered to some extent and had to overhaul plans for coming out of the lockdown.

With community sports/fitness participation and more generally the healthy nation strategy, Wales has a golden opportunity to make fitness and sport a daily part of life. Lockdown has identified the importance fitness and good health plays in life.

For decades, Wales has taken a linear and analytical approach to fitness, this has made little or no progress on the fitness of our nation. Facts are that we languish toward the bottom of most obesity leagues within Europe, and associated health problems to obesity and diabetes etc. are problematic to our nation in high proportions of our population, especially in more deprived areas.

My feelings are that more synergy is required between public bodies and government to look at a needs analysis for each LA for infrastructure that would support a new approach.

One example is a covered outdoor play area in every 21st Century new-build school. This would allow the pupils to utilise the pitch 365 days a year and provide the potential of a Community Hub.

The Welsh Government should revisit the draft 2022 curriculum document and based on the COVID 19 Pandemic alone make PE mandatory for 120 minutes a week in every Primary and Secondary school in Wales.

Children in poorer communities NEED structured PE. The lack of progress in this area is a failing of government and I have read the 2008 curriculum promises and the climbing higher documents about every child hooked on sport by 2020 and it has not happened, now we carry on like the titanic heading for the obesity iceberg with a continuance of the same unstructured AoLE.

Welsh government need to complete a framework for action that will improve the physical health of our nation. This must include a knowledge hub that is cross agency and cross sectoral, sharing knowledge for better practice in the future.

We can use this tragedy to make Wales a fitter and healthier nation that is more able to fight chronic illness in the future

The last 20 years has with the best will in the world been a failure in respect of a fitter nation. Radical change starting at Primary School level is required. One hour a day of structured PE a national standardised curriculum across Wales.