



Ein cyf/Our ref DET/509/21

Bethan Sayed AS/MS
Chair
Culture, Welsh Language and Communication Committee

12 March 2021

Dear Bethan,

Thank you for your letter of 9 February on behalf of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee regarding the impact of COVID-19 on sport.

You have raised a number of important points and I will address these in the order that you have raised them.

Recommendation 1.

The Welsh Government should work with Sport Wales and others to conduct further research on the impact of the pandemic on levels of participation in physical activity on groups with protected characteristics in order to inform post-pandemic planning and policy. This research must include an assessment of the impact on participation for women, the BAME community, and on children and young people.

Sport Wales has commissioned Savanta ComRes with a view of gaining an insight into the nation's habits and behaviours during the Coronavirus pandemic. This insight has taken place on two occasions (May and October 2020). Both studies contain specific data for protected characteristic groups including participation rates for women and children, and those from lower socio-economic groups, however, sample sizes were not sufficient to report on BAME communities with confidence. A summary of the results for both iterations of the survey can be seen here:

<https://www.sport.wales/research-and-insight/comres-research/>

In addition to these figures, Sport Wales is in the process of commissioning Savanta ComRes to conduct another survey to ensure we continue to track the impact of the pandemic on participation figures, both among protected characteristic groups and the wider population.

Moreover, the National Survey for Wales reported its participation findings in April 2020, capturing the pre-Covid-19 period. This gives data for women, children and the BAME community. Sport Wales is currently in the process of undertaking the 2020/21 National

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Dafydd.Elis-Thomas@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Dafydd.Elis-Thomas@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Survey for Wales and will utilise that publication as a comparison over the course of the pandemic year to explore further the impact on these individual groups.

Sport Wales has also commissioned two systematic reviews via a partnership with the university sector in Wales in the Welsh Institute of Physical Activity, Health and Sport (WIPAHS). The first is a systematic review of the effect of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic on sedentary behaviour in children and adults. The other is a systematic review of the developing socioecological model to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on correlates of physical activity and sedentary behaviour. Both reviews will provide academic research into the impact of Covid-19 to help shape the way in which targeted interventions can be undertaken in future.

Alongside Sport England, Sport Scotland, Sport NI and UK Sport, in collaboration, Sport Wales have commissioned the Sport Industry Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University to undertake a data gathering exercise on race in sport as well as AKD Solutions who are undertaking a lived experience study. This work when brought together, as well as our other areas of research and understanding of race in sport will support both Sport Wales and their partners in their post-pandemic approach to engagement with the BAME community.

Recommendation 2.

When conditions (in terms of controlling the virus) allow, the Welsh Government must ensure that gyms, sport venues, and other exercise settings (including group exercise classes that meet outdoors) are among the priorities when coming out of lockdown.

The Welsh Government wants to ensure people are able to take part in sport and leisure as soon as possible but only when the scientific evidence suggests that it is safe to do so. The regulations will be reviewed every 21 days.

Recommendation 3.

We would welcome more detail on how the maximum number of 30 was decided on. To enable us to do this, the Welsh Government should publish the scientific evidence upon which this rule is based. Furthermore, the Welsh Government should outline what assessment it has made of the impact that a 30 person limit will have on the resumption of sport activities particularly at grassroots level.

The number of 30 outdoors was part of the original unlocking process and adopted for consistency across the four nations, whilst avoiding mass gatherings. It was a general rule that applied, rather than something designed specifically for sport. It had the incidental benefit of allowing some team sports to resume.

Recommendation 4.

The Welsh Government should outline its view on:

- **the conditions that would enable piloting of safe spectator sporting events;**

Our Coronavirus Control Plan, published in December, explains the conditions under which we would move between the different alert levels. Test events will be considered at alert level two and the return of spectators to stadia, in restricted numbers, will be considered at alert level one.

- **the relationship between the vaccination programme and the return of spectators to sporting events;**

Our vaccination programme goes from strength to strength. We hope over time, vaccines can help us move away from the need for very strict lockdown-type restrictions and will help to protect us against the risk of serious illness. However, the pandemic has taken another turn as we have seen the emergence of new variants in the UK and overseas, which may increase the risk of severe disease, the rate of infection and may even limit the effectiveness of the current vaccines. These changes and uncertainties mean we need to take a more cautious approach to coming out of lockdown. We can indicate that the restrictions set out in alert level three are the first step we are working towards. The rollout of the vaccine to the next five priority groups by the end of April also provides another clear milestone against which we expect to re-evaluate our approach based on the latest evidence.

- **details of any engagement it is having with Welsh clubs playing in the English football league to ensure joined-up thinking and an update on the current timescales that it is working towards in that regard.**

The Welsh Government has regular dialogue, directly and through the stakeholder engagement groups, with a range of clubs, organisations and sport governing bodies. We will provide as much notice as possible about the changes we are prioritising for upcoming review periods and will work with organisations to support them to return in as safe a way as possible.

Recommendation 5.

The Welsh Government should respond to the concerns of EMDUK regarding Phase 2 of the Sport Freelancers Fund. In particular, the effectiveness of arrangements to support self-employed people within the sector.

Since the initial Sport Freelancer Fund was launched, Sport Wales has delivered a second round of this support mechanism. Increasing the initial £1,500 offering to £2,500 for all previous and new successful freelancers. The fund has been able to support 1,090 freelancers with an investment of £2.75m.

In addition, the Sport Private Provider Fund was also launched, which allows many freelancers who have been able to evidence substantial losses also being able to access support. This fund, as well as supporting freelancers, has been able to provide much needed financial support to a wide section of the commercial sport sector. Although the fund closed on February 19, applications continue to be assessed and it is anticipated that more than 400 commercial providers will be successful in their applications. It is worth noting that these remain the only schemes of their kind across the UK.

Recommendation 6

In terms of the Spectator Sports Survival Fund, the Welsh Government should:

- **provide more detail on the rationale behind allocating the vast proportion of the Fund to Rugby Union;**

The level of funding provided is proportionate to the scale of the losses reported by each sport and the funding they have already received from other sources. The funding for rugby union reflects the losses the four regions have suffered as well as those suffered

by the WRU – principally the Wales v Scotland 2020 Six Nations fixture; the 2020 Autumn Nations Cup; and the 2021 Six Nations.

- **confirm whether this funding has been re-allocated from spending elsewhere or is it new money;**

The funding is new money allocated from within the Covid-19 revenue reserve.

- **confirm the timescales for reaching a decision in relation to any additional funding mentioned in the written statement from 29 January 2021; and**

We will continue to monitor the situation, particularly in relation to summer sports over coming months, and will review the situation fully in September 2021 to consider if any further support is required, in the context of how the pandemic has evolved and the funding position at that time.

- **confirm whether there are any conditions attached to the funding provided to governing bodies, if so, how will the Welsh Government ensure that funding is fairly distributed among different tiers and levels of activity – particularly the grassroots level.**

The grant offered to the governing bodies will reflect the Welsh Government's standard terms and conditions and the priorities for which the funding was agreed.

- **We also previously heard concerns regarding the financial sustainability of leisure trusts, given the extended reduction in incomes they have faced. What assessment has the Welsh Government made of the financial sustainability of leisure trusts, and what financial support is available to help those trusts that need it to survive the pandemic?"**

Economic studies recently commissioned by Sport Wales suggest that Welsh Leisure and Culture Trusts continue to incur significant monthly costs, even with the closure of leisure clubs. Furthermore, the studies suggest that the suspending and/or deferring of membership by clubs and leisure centres only postpones the cashflow problem to a later date. The commissioned studies also highlight concern for self-employed coaches working in the outdoor sector and in the outdoor centres across Wales, who will be unable to recoup lost income from the winter season, if travel restrictions remain in place over the summer months.

With regards to financial support provided, core support for leisure trusts was agreed to be provided via the Local Authority Hardship Fund. However, in addition to this, a total of £572k was also distributed directly to leisure trusts via Sport Wales's repurposed funding through the Sport Resilience Fund at the start of the pandemic.

Further to this, as part of the Sport and Leisure Recovery Package, announced by Welsh Government, Sport Wales made further grants totalling £2.5m to local authorities to distribute (including to leisure trusts).

Recommendation 7

We would welcome an update on the Welsh Government's post-pandemic recovery planning to include:

- **detail on how it is engaging with the sport and health sectors to ensure a joined-up approach to policy-making;**

As the pandemic has challenged the status quo of so many aspects of how we live and work in Wales, our refreshed 2021-22 Health Weight: Healthy Wales (HW:HW) Delivery Plan will ensure that physical activity is embedded in our recovery plans and will place a focus upon both our physical and mental wellbeing. This is being launched by the Minister for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Welsh Language on 18 March. The plan sets out a range of approaches which will integrate work across both sport and health sectors to ensure that we can drive targeted approaches.

For example, the pandemic has disrupted regular activities and exercise routines. We want to increase opportunities to be physically active, this is central to enable good physical and mental wellbeing. That is why as part of Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales we have invested £600k for Sport Wales to develop a 60 Plus Active Leisure Scheme offer. This will enable Sport Wales to continue to deliver targeted physical activity opportunities to contribute to a reduction in health inequalities amongst the 60 plus population that are currently inactive or the least active in 2021-22. Through the funding, Sport Wales are working through Local Authorities to deliver targeted provision to those who are currently inactive or the least active. This will work with the health sector through areas linked to National Exercise Referral Scheme and social prescribing.

Sport Wales and Public Health Wales are jointly delivering the Healthy and Active Fund, which represents a significant commitment of £5.4 million over three years to support projects which aim to sustainably increase the physical activity of those who are currently sedentary or have very low levels of activity and improve levels of mental wellbeing, with a particular focus on strengthening community assets. The 17 successful projects offer support to a range of different demographics and ages across the life course and we are working to develop common evaluation and monitoring tools to help support and evidence delivery.

- **the implications of the rollout of mass vaccination for the COVID-19 recovery timetable; and**
- **what lessons it has learnt from the pandemic about the preventative health benefits of physical activity. Will this experience lead to a step-change in this area, and if so, how will this be achieved?**

Although the full impact is not yet known, the pandemic has likely exacerbated physical inactivity and caused a rise in sedentary behaviour. Sport Wales report that there is currently no data on what impact the pandemic has had on physical activity, but lockdowns, movement restrictions, gym closures and other measures have disrupted regular activities and exercise routines. However, before the crisis, data from the National Survey for Wales 2019-20 adult lifestyle showed that only 53% of adults reported being active for at least 150 minutes in the previous week.

Regular physical activity can prevent and help manage heart disease, diabetes and cancer and reduce depression and anxiety, cognitive decline and can boost brain health. There are also established links between physical inactivity and obesity, which has proven to be a contributory factor for poorer outcomes related to Covid-19. The pandemic has highlighted the continued need to place a focus upon non-communicable disease.

The COVID-19 crisis has altered patterns of physical activity in ways that were unimaginable before the outbreak. Enforced restrictions on mobility and the closure of sporting activities and indoor gyms has highlighted the limitations of many areas for enabling physical activity and reinforced inequalities in physical activity opportunities.

For example, we know that there are risks regarding sedentary behaviours with increased working from home. However, unprecedented reductions in mobility and increases in localised physical activity has also empowered people to think more about their health and wellbeing and has connected people more to spaces in their local areas.

We will be investing £6.5m into our Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales 2021-22 delivery plan which will develop target approaches through an over 60s leisure offer, develop local pilots through a children and families programme and develop systems based approaches which will place communities at the heart of decision making. There are significant opportunities through our green spaces and we will work through programmes such as the Valleys Regional Park to help us empower local communities.

As part of the delivery plan we will also be developing a National Daily Active Offer through schools which will place a focus upon bringing together a range of partners and programmes to take a more co-ordinated approach to encourage physical activity before, during and after school. This will consider a range of evidence linked to behavioural change from the pandemic.

I trust that you will find these responses helpful. I would like to thank the Committee members for their work which has undoubtedly provoked some useful discussion and will help us to respond positively to the ongoing challenges faced by the sector.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Elis-Thomas'.

Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Diwylliant, Chwaraeon a Thwristiaeth
Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism