

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

CELG(4) PS 15

Inquiry into participation levels in sport in Wales

Response from : Minister for Culture and Sport

I would like to welcome the Committee's inquiry into participation levels in sport in Wales and I am very pleased to be able to provide written evidence as part of the inquiry. This inquiry will, I am sure, raise some important areas and will help to reinforce the important links and synergy that exists between sport and physical activity. Ensuring that young people are physically literate is a vitally important step as it helps them to become and remain interested and involved in sport. It is clear that we need to overcome the significant difficulties that exist of engaging more young people in particular on a more regular basis in both sport and physical activity. To achieve this, we need to join up our policies in a more co-ordinated fashion which will help us to become a fitter and healthier nation. There are of course some good examples of collaboration across Welsh Government portfolios but we can improve in this area and I will be working with my ministerial colleagues to ensure that we drive forward our shared aims and objectives. This is a point which I stressed when I spoke at the Sport Wales National Conference recently.

Sport helps to define us as a nation. I am very passionate about sport and enjoy participating and watching. Participation in sport teaches us about life and we can learn self discipline and teamwork from it. We can learn how to win with grace and lose with dignity and it can help to transform people's lives, not only by helping people to maintain a healthy lifestyle but to also help those who experience a range of social problems. Within the last year there have been some remarkable success stories within Welsh sport, involving promotion medals and championships won by teams and individuals and that undoubtedly gives the nation a huge boost and helps to inspire people to take part in sport.

I have only been Minister for Culture and Sport for a short time; however, I have already seen how important sport is to the people of Wales. I am continually meeting with representatives from a range of sport organisations and have been impressed

with the breadth of sporting talent that exists. But success does not come on its own; it requires a huge amount of dedication and support given by so many volunteers and coaches. These people help not only to create quality experiences and opportunities so that people enjoy participating in sport but also help enable our more talented sportsmen and women reach their true potential.

The Committee have raised a number of areas and I will address these in the order in which they were listed.

The extent to which the Welsh Government and Sport Wales are achieving the goals set out in the Programme for Government, the Creating an Active Wales action plan and the Vision for Sport in Wales with regard to participation levels in sport;

Participation in sport plays an essential part in both short and long term physical and mental health and is also associated with academic and cognitive performance. Other potential benefits linked to sport, particularly involving children and young people, include the acquisition of social skills through active play, leadership, teamwork and co-operation and better concentration in school displacement of anti-social and criminal behaviour. Physical Education in schools can also help to deliver physical literacy and sports literacy and provide access to those who may have become disillusioned about sport and physical activity.

Within the Programme for Government we set out clearly that:

We remain committed to ensuring all children and young people are able to access a range of sporting opportunities as part of the formal curriculum, after school and in the community.

We remain committed to ensuring that children and young people are provided with basic physical skills from an early age and that physical literacy is an important a developmental skill as reading and writing.

The Programme for Government also contains other commitments which can support the whole school approach to physical activity. This includes actions such as delivering improvements in rights of way for cyclists and walkers, including legislation establishing duties to provide cycle routes.

Within the Sport Wales Vision for Sport document which was launched in 2010, there are two clear aspirations:

- getting every child hooked on sport for life and;
- Wales being a nation of champions.

Role of Sport Wales

Sport Wales are the Welsh Government's adviser on sporting issues and are also responsible for helping to deliver our policies on sport across Wales.

We have provided a budget for investment in sport and through the annual remit letter to Sport Wales we have set outcomes we expect to be delivered with that investment. They are fully engaged in driving forward our goals set out in our Programme for Government and the Creating an Active Wales Action Plan and to drive forward their aspirations contained within their Vision for Sport document.

Welsh Government / Sport Wales: Investment in Sport

The Welsh Government support the development of our communities enabling those who suffer social problems to have quality opportunities to engage in sport. As part of that community investment we are continuing to support our Free Swimming programme which is being delivered successfully across all 22 local authorities in Wales. This involves investment of £3.5m this year which supports the delivery of more than 1 million free public swims each year and attracts over 170,000 people to free structured sessions. Our long term ambition is to get every child to be able to swim by 2020 which has been well communicated to our partners.

The Welsh Government is also working with Sport Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association and a number of local authorities to deliver some pilot schemes to extend our free swimming scheme to veterans and serving armed forces personnel on leave and I will be considering the results of these pilots in the near future.

Ensuring that young people take part in sport at an early age is key if they are to maintain their interest in later life. Sport Wales have a number of programmes in place such as the 5 x 60 programme which focuses on secondary schools pupils and this is complemented by the Dragon Sport scheme which focuses on primary school children having fun whilst taking part in sport and physical activity.

Sport Wales introduced the Young Ambassadors (YA) scheme as part of the London 2012 Games and these young people have gained a great deal of success in inspiring key partners and stakeholders to help deliver sporting opportunities. The scheme enables children from primary school age onwards to participate in structured training that allows them to act as ambassadors for sport in their school, taking part in running after hours sporting activities and being involved in reaching out to others who might not otherwise participate in school sporting activities. Over 3000 children have become YA's in Wales so far, of which around 1800 are still active (the balance having left school). They have been instrumental in increasing participation in sports activity, especially amongst female students in the schools within which they operate. My officials are discussing this programme with Sport Wales with a view to both broadening (more ambassadors in more schools) and deepening (joining up with other programmes such as Show Racism the Red Card) this programme.

In terms of grassroots development of sport, this year Sport Wales will provide investment of investment of over £5m to a number of governing bodies of sport across Wales which will help to create more sustainable sporting opportunities.

Sport Wales are also working with new partners such as Street Games to offer more accessible opportunities for young people who may not be members of school or sport clubs or are located in disadvantaged areas. This leads me onto equality of

opportunity in sport which is key to our overall agenda. The Welsh Government via Sport Wales are working closely with Disability Sport Wales who report that last year they were able to provide over 1 million sport participation opportunities, covering a variety of sports.

To help drive forward our overall aims of increasing participation in sport for all and to help get every child hooked on sport for life, Sport Wales have developed a number of underpinning strategies that relate to priority areas. These include a Community Strategy, which is supported by a Child Poverty Strategy and the Elite Sport and Coaching strategy. Collectively these strategies lay solid foundations which will help to meet our challenge of increasing participation rates, achieving success through our elite sportsmen and women and providing young people in particular with better quality sporting opportunities, irrespective of their social backgrounds so that they enjoy their experience of sport and stimulates them to include sport as a natural part of their everyday lives.

Informal Sport and Physical Activity

Organised sport in Wales has an important role to play in helping Wales to become more active and for people to gain a health benefit. But we must not forget that taking part in informal sporting activity and physical activity more generally is potentially just as important and helps form a structure which can help us in our everyday lives which can lead to providing significant health benefits.

In Wales we are very fortunate to have many areas of outstanding beauty which provide opportunities for people to engage in outdoor activities and to use our “green gym”. For example, well managed, welcoming woodlands provide an excellent setting for outdoor physical activity. The use and enjoyment of woodlands and green space can contribute to the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of all people in Wales and can make a particularly important contribution to the specific health needs of communities.

The Welsh Government Woodland Estate, managed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) covers an area of 126,000ha. Each year, approximately four million visits are

made to woodlands managed by Natural Resources Wales, including 500,000 visits to one of the five visitor centres located in Wales's woodlands. NRW have also begun to work with Welsh Athletics to develop and promote trail running in Welsh Woodlands – with Coed y Brenin already having in place several well used running trails. Welsh Athletics also hold major events in NRW managed woodlands, this years championship rounds being held in Gwydyr (Bettws y Coed way). This is a good example of taking advantage of our natural resources providing opportunities for individuals and groups to take part in a range of outdoor activities such as mountain biking, cycling, walking, horse riding, orienteering, husky racing and many other activities.

I must make reference to our three National Parks in Wales which cover an area of over 4,000 sq km. The special qualities of each park are different in terms of their landscape character, historical and cultural heritage but each attracts millions of visitors each year, many of who participate in a range of outdoor activities.

There are a number of commitments in the Programme for Government which aim to secure better access to the outdoors for physical activity, in particular for families and children. I believe that there is a degree of inequality inherent in the uneven distribution throughout Wales of the provision and standard of green space, including allotments, and access to outdoor recreation; with too many places and activities deemed off limits. This is at odds with my sense of social justice, and also fails to meet current and predicted future demand. I have been considering the options available for improving access opportunities and changes to legislation may form a part of the solution. It is early days yet but the principles upon which I am basing my deliberations include the need to modernise and simplify the current regulatory framework. It is currently burdensome to administer and complex for the public to comprehend. It is also the role of this Government to seek to benefit the many rather than the few, whilst also protecting nature and safeguarding existing commercial and day to day land management activities.

Active Travel

I am responsible for the delivery of the Active Travel Bill. This Bill aims to make walking and cycling the normal way of making short purposeful journeys within

communities. More people will experience the health benefits of this exercise; we will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions; and we will help address poverty and disadvantage through enacting this legislation.

The following Welsh Government programmes have improved access to the outdoors for healthy recreation over the period covered by Creating an Active Wales:

Access to the Countryside

Since 2007, the Welsh Government has invested in access improvements around the Welsh coast through the Coastal Access Improvement Programme (CAIP). Funding has been focused on improving existing and creating new paths at the coast towards the aim of completing the Wales Coast Path - a Programme for Government and former 'One Wales' commitment.

Rights of Way Improvement Programme

Local authorities in Wales were required to produce statutory Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIP's) under Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). These cover a 10-year period and provide a prioritised plan for the improvement of the local rights of way network for a wide range of users – walkers, cyclists, horse riders and people with sight and mobility problems. Natural Resources Wales administers funding to local authorities to support implementation of their improvement plans.

Splash - Access to Water Challenge Fund

As part of the Welsh Government's outdoor recreation agenda, we encourage wider public access to Wales' rivers, lakes and reservoirs for recreational purposes. Although Wales has significant water resources many of these remain under-utilised for public recreation. In 2008/9 the Splash access grant was first made available by the Welsh Government to support any projects that facilitate access to water. Over £2 million has been made available over 6 years (2008/9 – 2012/13) and has proven to be very popular, leading to the funding of many varied access related projects.

Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey

In relation to access to the outdoors we know as a result of the Wales Outdoor Recreation survey the following:

- High proportions of the Welsh adult population visited the outdoors in 2011 with an average of 95% taking any visits in the last 12 months and 88% taking any visits in the 4 weeks prior to interview. This is based on recording participation in a very broad range of outdoor activities;
- Walking was the most frequently undertaken activity in 2011, particularly in terms of visits taken in the last 4 weeks (undertaken on 84% of visits). In 2011 walking was the single main activity undertaken in 62% of visits, a lower proportion than in 2008 (66%);
- Around a quarter of adults (27%) visited the outdoors 'frequently' based on an average of 21 visits or more in the last 4 weeks. The frequency of participation recorded was at a similar level in both 2008 and 2011. Between 2008 and 2011, there were significant increases in the proportions undertaking road cycling, wildlife watching, visiting playgrounds and informal games on visits;
- In terms of the potential health benefits of outdoor recreation, in just over two-thirds of outdoor visits taken in 2011 participants reported that the main activity was enough to raise their breathing rate (68%) and in over half of these cases (58%) the activity was intense enough to make the participant out of breath or to cause them to sweat;
- As for the main destinations of visits, the most visited types of place were woodland/ forests (18%), local parks (12%), hills, mountains and moorland (11%) and beaches (11%). The proportions of visits where woodland/ forests or beaches were the main destination type were higher in 2011 than in the previous survey (increasing from 14% to 18% and 7% to 11% respectively), while local parks and roadside pavements or tracks were less likely to be the main destinations visited (decreasing from 15% to 12% and 12% to 9% respectively).

This information illustrates the significant impact that our outstanding natural outdoor recreation facilities can have on attracting people to become more active and on a regular basis.

The availability of datasets and statistics to measure participation levels in sport, particularly those disaggregated by equality strand and socio-economic groups;

In March this year the Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2013 was passed by the National Assembly of Wales. The effect of the order was to name a number of organisations in Wales as producers of official statistics. Sport Wales was included in the list of organisations designated as producers of official statistics. This means that Sport Wales adhere to the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice which involves working to a set of principles and protocols that ensure that statistics are fit for purpose and the methodology is sound and transparent. Furthermore, in line with the Government's Open Data initiative all Sport Wales data is accessible via their website and displayed so that people can access easily and understand.

Sport Wales / Welsh Health Surveys

Sport Wales run two major surveys every two years, the Active Adults Survey and the School Sport survey. The latest Sport Wales School Sport survey (2011) reveal that 65% of secondary and 78% of primary school pupils participated in extra curricular sport and 85% of primary school pupils took part in sport with a club. The trends in adult participation have remained the same over the past 25 years, with between 35% and 40% of adults aged 15 and above taking part in sport at least once a month.

The Sport Wales 2013 Active Adult survey is currently underway which involves a sample size of approximately 18,000 to 20,000, this coincides with the School Sport survey which involves a sample size of about 40,000, the results from these surveys are expected in the Autumn. This data will help to illustrate how well we are progressing in getting more people in Wales actively involved in sport, both as participants and volunteers.

The opportunities and barriers to sports participation that exist for different groups of people, including by equality strand and socio-economic groups;

The Welsh Government want to ensure that all age, gender and social groups have equal opportunities in sport and that every young person, irrespective of their personal and social background has life chances to develop and to enjoy sport and reach their true potential. Sport Wales have been carrying out research into why some young people do not take part in sport and the reasons why they drop out at different ages. There are a number of reasons including lack of enjoyment, having fewer sports available so sport is not exciting and some felt taking part was getting to competitive and took away the social element of participation. Sport Wales continue to focus on providing quality opportunities for women and girls to take part in sport and having undertaken some qualitative research they will be making this area a corporate priority theme for the next year and will be forming a task group in order to scrutinise their work in this area.

The Sport Wales Child Poverty strategy includes long term aims which include Sport Wales increasing participation amongst children and young people living in poverty and to see an increase in volunteering amongst adults in lower social grades, contributing to Sport Wales' target of getting 10% of the adult population in Wales volunteering in sport by 2016.

Sport Wales are also working closely with Stonewall to ensure that lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender people can enjoy participating in sport and they can feel safe, welcome and free from discrimination. That is something which the Welsh Government fully supports and I am pleased that the result of this work has been the development of an LGBT charter to be launched in the near future by Sport Wales. We believe that everyone should be able to participate in sport, irrespective of background, sexual orientation or ability.

It is also important to acknowledge the additional barriers faced by disabled people and to do all we can to address them. For many disabled people the biggest barrier is their own or other people's attitudes. We need to consider carefully how we promote

both sport and physical activity to those disabled people who may falsely believe that exercise is bad for them or beyond their capability. Non-disabled people may have negative attitudes towards people who are different; overly paternalistic attitudes; or apathetic attitudes where the needs and concerns of disabled people are ignored.

Disability Sport Wales are continuing to provide more and better quality opportunities for people with a disability to take part in sport. They have supported the placement of Development Officers in each of the local authorities in Wales in order to create and sustain grassroots opportunities in sport. An interesting comparison which reflects the progress being made is that in 2002 there were only 31 registered disability sports clubs across Wales and now we have over 330.

In order to maximise opportunities and to adopt a collaborative approach it is important that Sport Wales engage not just with local authorities but also work with governing bodies of sport. This is essential when we consider what sport facilities are in place and to ensure that people have opportunity to experience good quality sporting opportunities. Following discussions with the governing bodies of sport, which includes the FAW, WRU and Hockey Wales, Sport Wales have agreed in principle to an investment of up to £3m over 4 years to develop 3G pitches. These type of facilities can play an important part in creating a opportunities for the wider community and to encourage groups, such as women and girls to take part in sport.

What are the links between programmes to develop sport in Wales and other Welsh Government initiatives to increase physical activity?

As I indicated earlier there is a close link involving sport and physical activity and we need to ensure that these areas play a key part in people's everyday lives, especially amongst young people, which will help our future generations to lead a more active, healthy life.

A Schools and Physical Activity Task and Finish Group was established by my predecessor and the Minister for Education and Skills. The Group was chaired by

Baroness Tanni-Grey Thompson and looked at how best to develop the role of schools in increasing levels of physical activity amongst children and young people. I have noted with interest the conclusions of the report and I look forward to working with the Education Minister to take this work forward.

As for school sport, the PE and School Sport (PESS) Initiative was established in partnership with Sport Wales to address this area. Funded by Welsh Government, the key aim of the PESS initiative is to improve standards in the provision of PE and sport in schools and complements the Sport Wales, Dragon Sport and 5 x 60 programmes. PESS enhances the quality and range of opportunities provided for young people to engage in physical activity and improving their health and fitness.

In addition a Physical Activity Executive Group has been established which will set a new direction to increase levels of physical activity. The Group is still in its infancy but the first meeting was a very productive one and I look forward to the Group developing future policies which can help refresh the approach to increasing levels of activity in Wales. This work will also support the delivery of a number of Programme for Government commitments.

The impact of the Olympic and Paralympic legacy, the Ryder Cup and other high profile Welsh sporting events and achievements on participation levels in Wales.

The London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics was a sensational sporting event which helped to raise the profile of sport across Wales. Our aim is to ensure that we use large scale sporting events as a springboard to help encourage people of all ages, gender and social group to take part in sport and that it becomes sustainable and long term. Sport Wales report that within some sports there have been significant increases in club membership in the last 6 months or so and that events such as the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games have had a marked positive effect.

Gemau Cymru, is the flagship London 2012 sports legacy project and the signature event in the Welsh sporting calendar enhancing the performance pathway of Olympic, Commonwealth and Paralympic sports and providing an opportunity for talented young athletes to compete within a high profile multi-sport environment. It is supported by the Welsh Government's Major Event Unit, Sport Wales and the Urdd. Last year the event included 13 sports and attracted over 1,300 athletes from across Wales taking part in competitions in venues in Cardiff. My officials are working with Major Events Unit colleagues to maximise the benefits of Gemau Cymru and to promote its long term impact and sustainability.

Disability Sport Wales have worked hard to build upon the momentum gained from the London 2012 Paralympic Games and demonstrated that having the right infrastructure in place, having a clear vision and working with a range of partners can gain results; this is reflected in the growth in both the number of disability sports clubs being established and club members in Wales.

Golf Development Wales was established as a result of Wales' successful 2010 Ryder Cup bid. It is the development arm of the Golf Union of Wales and is a strategic partnership between the Golf Union of Wales, the Golf Foundation and Sport Wales. The Ryder Cup Legacy Fund was created to ensure that staging the Ryder Cup in 2010 had an impact on the nation, not just for the event but for many years to come. A £2m commitment from the Welsh Assembly Government, at the time, provided a first class opportunity to boost the development of the game in Wales. In total 40 projects were supported at 38 facilities across Wales. The year after the Ryder Cup about 33,000 people took part in Golf Development Wales schemes and junior membership in clubs increased, particularly amongst junior girls.

Hosting mass participation sporting events can help attract and inspire people to take part in sport. For example the Welsh stage of the 2012 Tour of Britain Cycling event saw many thousands of people line the route from Welshpool to Caerphilly.

We have just witnessed an exceptionally exciting football season resulting in a great deal of success for several of our Welsh clubs. In order to capitalise on Welsh

sporting success I am considering how we might best maximise the opportunities of having two football teams playing in the Premiership and another in the football league. I am holding meetings with a number of partners including the Premier League to help determine how our clubs can link in with their schemes which can help to stimulate growth in the game at a grassroots/community level and to offer opportunities for harder to reach groups.

Conclusion

Sport is the life blood of Wales. Already tens of thousands of us are involved as participants, volunteers, coaches, spectators – or in the case of many parents in particular – some combination of all of those things. And although we are witnessing a period of unprecedented success of our elite teams and athletes, we find ourselves at a difficult juncture. Physical activity rates amongst hard to reach groups remain stubbornly stalled, and the finance available to sports clubs and local authorities is increasingly stretched. However, the Welsh Government recognises that these factors place even greater responsibility on us, and our delivery agents, to show real leadership. Working with local government we will encourage meaningful collaboration, not just to address the financial situation – but to develop better, more coherent services. We are also working with partners to ensure that our existing programmes are delivering the results we expect. We remain committed not just to incremental gains on the physical activity agenda, but to delivering a real step change in the way people lead their lives. And we know that unlocking the potential of informal and organised sport is absolutely key to making this breakthrough.

John Griffiths AM
Minister for Culture and Sport
July 2013