

PACYP 44

Ymchwiliad i weithgarwch corfforol ymhlith plant a phobl ifanc

Inquiry into physical activity of children and young people

Ymateb gan Cymdeithas Chwaraeon Cymru

Response from Welsh Sports Association



# Inquiry into physical activity of children and young people

**Health, Social Care & Sport Committee  
National Assembly for Wales**

## **Abstract**

The Welsh Sports Association (WSA) is the independent umbrella body that supports and represents the sport sector in Wales, including over 60 National Governing Bodies of Sport.

The WSA understands the 'sport sector' to mean anyone involved in the business of sport and active recreation in Wales. Our role is to provide the collective voice for this sector and enable our members to become stronger, more successful and sustainable through providing a wide range of business support services.

Kate Evans, WSA Communications Manager

The WSA's vision is for a 'vibrant, active nation', and our mission is to empower our members to be stronger and more successful, contributing towards a society fit for the future. Physically active children and young people are key to ensuring this via a generational shift in attitudes towards health and wellbeing.

While we welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and understand the need for brevity, we feel that the response criteria do not allow us to do justice to what is a very broad topic. If you have any questions relating to our response or require further clarification, please do get in touch.

**Q. 1. What do we know about physical activity levels in children in Wales? How robust is the data on this issue?**

1.1. The collection of data on physical activity has become disjointed of late. While the absorption of the 'Welsh Health Survey' into the 'National Survey for Wales' means there is now a single reference point, the differences in collection methods mean that there is no comparison with previous data, and due to the volume of information, there are delays in the publication of specific data sets. For example, the latest data specifically on the participation of children and young people in sport is from 2013/14, and much is self-reported and therefore prone to error. More up to date information is necessary for accurate insights and to enable more meaningful intervention.

1.2. Physical activity in secondary school age children is currently measured via the Welsh Government's 'Welsh Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Survey'<sup>i</sup>. Despite a reasonable sample size, the authors report it is increasingly difficult to engage schools in this type of research - raising questions on how representative it is of all pupils in Wales given the school level response rate of just 46%.

1.3. The results from this survey indicate:

- Physical activity levels in children are well below the 60 mins of activity daily as recommended by the Chief Medical Officer.
- 1 in 5 young people are overweight or obese.
- 1% of children cycle and 32% walk to secondary school.
- 20% of boys and 11% of girls are physically active on a daily basis
- While there is data related to affluence, gender and health board it is not available at a Local Authority level or coterminous with Education Authorities so that interventions can be made specific to area need.

1.4. Sport Wales' 'School Sport Survey'<sup>ii</sup> looks at levels of sport and physical activity among school children. The last data set in 2015 achieved over 116,000 responses and showed good gains in physical activity. Formally a biennial survey, it will now be undertaken every 3 years from 2015. As it is self-reported by children from ages seven plus, it can be prone to subjectivity. In terms of additional data, National Governing Bodies (NGBs) funded by Sport Wales are also required to report on membership of under 18's. However, the collection of this data is varied between sports and our members report that there is little guidance from Sport Wales on benchmarking.

1.5. In contrast to the relative lack of availability of data on physical activity, there is a significant body of research on physical inactivity. The World Health Organisation (WHO 2017) describes the

current global levels of physical inactivity as being due in part to a combination of insufficient participation in physical activity during leisure time, and an increase in sedentary behaviour during occupational and domestic activities. It also suggests that an increase in the use of "passive" modes of transport has also been associated with declining physical activity levels (WHO 2014).

1.6. The rise in digital technology use among children is also contributing to increasingly sedentary lives, with Ofcom's report in 2016 on '*Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes*'<sup>iii</sup>, revealing that internet use among children has reached record highs, with those aged 5-15 spending around 15 hours each week online – overtaking time spent watching a TV set for the first time. This is reflected in the significant increase in weekly hours spent gaming by children in the UK in recent years, with 12-15-year olds averaging 13.4 hours a week gaming<sup>iv</sup>.

## **Q. 2. Differences in gender-based attitudes towards, and opportunities for, participation in physical activity in Wales.**

2.1 The latest Sport Wales 'School Sport Survey' shows that girls are less active than boys, with 52% of boys and 44% of girls taking part in sport three times or more a week. Overall, 73% of girls are confident trying new activities compared with 85% of boys. Older girls show much lower levels of confidence than boys. The proportion of girls who said they were 'very confident' is low – 29% of girls compared with 42% of boys, falling from 29% to 19% in secondary school<sup>v</sup>. The survey also shows that a quarter of secondary school age girls said they would do more sport 'if I was better at sport' and the same proportion would do more 'if they were fitter'. According to Sport Wales, this equates to 19,600 girls who have the potential to get more active<sup>vi</sup>.

2.2. Confidence issues can be a major barrier to participation for girls but if it can be overcome, there is real potential for growth - more than a third of girls in Years 7 to 11 (approximately 26,000 girls) say they would do more sport if they were more confident. Pupils with higher levels of confidence are twice as likely to be hooked on sport and benefit from the health and well-being outcomes that physical activity brings<sup>vii</sup>.

## **Q.3. 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.**

3.1. As outlined by the recent Ministerial Review into Sport Wales, clarity is required on the remit of sport to help deliver the wider physical activity agenda. It must be recognised that approaches to reduce inactivity vary substantially from increasing participation amongst those already active, and sport cannot be accountable for the entire physical activity spectrum alone. This will be a real test of the 'ways of working' of the Well-being of Future Generations Act in requiring public bodies such as Public Health Wales and Natural Resources Wales to take an integrated and collaborative approach to deliver a physically active nation.

## **Q.4. 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.**

4.1. We believe that the "Healthy and Confident" purpose of education as outlined in 'Successful Futures'<sup>viii</sup> should be inspected as rigorously as for numeracy and literacy. The school setting is the

one place where *every* child can acquire the basic physical skills needed to become healthy and resilient individuals. A fundamental shift in attitudes is needed so that the health and wellbeing of every pupil is recognised as much as their academic success.

4.2. Sport Wales' School Sport Surveys have consistently shown that participation in sport and physical activity is closely correlated with ability, confidence and enjoyment of physical activity. Therefore, it is *imperative* that a new curriculum ensures that children and young people are inspired by their experiences of physical activity within the schools setting. Embedding physical literacy in the school curriculum has the power to help build an entire generation who are healthier, more confident and more able to participate in physical activity regardless of their background. In doing so, educational leaders and teachers must be supported in developing their own confidence and ability to deliver the best educational experience for all young people. We know that where a head teacher values physical activity, it is embedded within the culture of the whole school. While schools and teachers must be given support and guidance, there also needs to be clarity with regards the role that National Governing Bodies can play in helping to support schools in producing physically literate children with the skills knowledge and motivation they need to thrive in the future.

4.3. As highlighted by the UK Government's Duty of Care in Sport Review<sup>ix</sup>, while we have a responsibility to ensure that all children and young people can be physically active, we must ensure that this is within a safe environment. We look forward to Welsh Government's response to the Duty of Care Review, and we echo its call for clarification around ministerial responsibility for safeguarding and the required standards, and support for organisations - not only to understand their obligations but to deliver them effectively so that every child can be safe.

4.4. The reduction in funding for facilities is also an increasing barrier. Whilst there exists a commitment to legislate to open school facilities to the community, our anecdotal experience shows that there remains a lack of appetite to do so. Again, the sport sector is keen to work with education to support them on this and would welcome any opportunities to engage further. As part of that work, in conjunction with Sport Wales and other key partners, a Blueprint for Facilities Development<sup>x</sup> has been created to help guide planners and developers to take a collaborative approach to designing facilities that are both sustainable and fit for purpose. We know that this approach works from our experience of NGB collaboration on artificial 3G pitch planning<sup>xi</sup>.

4.3. Another significant issue is around funding - with one-year funding streams for partners, combined with the infrequent insight on target demographics, makes long term strategic planning for accurate intervention very difficult. In addition, Sport Wales' funding criteria means that NGBs are not able to deliver sport within the curriculum, or help to train teachers to do so themselves. We feel that this is a missed opportunity in sharing the considerable skills and expertise of the sector to ensure that *all* children consistently received a high quality physical education experience which would ensure sustained participation in physical activity.

## **Q.5. Physical activity guidelines and how we benchmark physical fitness in children.**

5.1 The current curriculum does not include any formal assessment of physical education (PE) in schools, meaning that while there are guidelines on the amount of time children should spend doing PE there are no obligations on schools to do so, and no measurement of the quality of the educational experience. The number of minutes spent doing PE is captured via Sport Wales' School Sport Survey,

but again, this is self-reported and could include the time taken to get changed etc, not just the time spent undertaking physical activity. Many within the sector believe that both a child's physical fitness and physical competency should be assessed within the curriculum framework.

5.2. For the first time and without explanation or consultation, the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines on physical activity have been included within Sport Wales' 2017/2018 funding offer letters to delivery partners. However, there is no agreed measurement framework to demonstrate delivery against these guidelines, and our members cannot be expected to take sole responsibility for delivery of these guidelines within existing budgets.

**Q.6. Measurement, evaluation and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's programmes and schemes aimed at promoting physical activity of children AND Q.7. Value for money of Welsh Government spending to promote exercise in children.**

6.1. We have grouped these questions together as we do not believe value for money can be accurately assessed without an effective measurement and evaluation system. While there are pockets of robust assessment of delivery according to specific projects e.g. Sport Wales' Calls for Action funding<sup>xii</sup>, a consistent data collection process which is aligned to accepted outcomes frameworks across Welsh Government's well-being objectives are necessary to enable accurate evaluation and value for money assessments.

6.2. In addition, we believe that more can be done to develop stronger links with our academic institutions so that we can better align their valuable research to collective public policy aspirations. For example, Wales is leading the way on developing research to understand the physical literacy journey, but there appears a disconnect between the academic and practical applications of this work. More must be done to explain the concept and benefits of physical literacy and what it means for both teachers and children.

6.3. Investment in greater insight on latent demand for sport consumption among young people is also necessary in terms of future facilities planning, and in enabling sports to develop their offer in response to emerging trends. This would provide the evidence to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness (and thus, business imperative) of collaboration across facilities providers and delivery partners, ensuring that opportunities to be physically active are optimised. This must be not just by type of activity but also by location, so that the activities in which children and young people want to participate can be easily accessible. Offers must be affordable, and where possible multi-sport to provide varied choice, and within local communities, according to demand.

6.4. The sophistication of technology has simplified the designing of measurement tools that are easy to use, such as the '*Dragon Tracker App*' developed by Sport Wales and educational experts, which can be accessed via iPhone and android platforms. A tool for practitioners to measure Physical Literacy, the latest version of the App assesses Competency as well as Motivation and Confidence, Knowledge and Understanding. Greater collaboration with the education sector would improve the understanding and applicability of resources of this type in supporting teachers and community activity delivers to provide enjoyable PE experiences for children which are measurable and easily evaluated, so that we can have a greater understanding of what works.

## **Q.8. 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.**

8.1. As the main deliverers of structured physical activity opportunities outside of the school environment, the WSA feels strongly that this discussion must include the National Governing Bodies of Sport – not just Sport Wales. Our members also believe that other stakeholders in the third sector such as Play Wales and Sustrans can also play a strong role.

8.2. While ‘Sport’ has now been included within the Health ministerial portfolio, we feel that our considerable contribution to delivering improved wellbeing through physical activity is not appreciated sufficiently among health decision makers, particularly given the false economies of reductions in public health spending around physical activity<sup>xiii</sup>. Evidence shows the wider benefits of physical activity are that young people who participate in organised sports are less likely to smoke cigarettes and use illicit drugs<sup>xiv</sup>. Research indicates that sports participants are more likely to engage in healthy nutritional choices such as the consumption of fruit and vegetables<sup>xv</sup> and there exists a ‘consensus that participation in sport for children and adolescents is associated with improved psychological and social health, above and beyond other forms of leisure-time Physical activity<sup>xvi</sup>’.

8.3. However, as outlined in the Ministerial Review of Sport Wales, we recognise that as a sector we must do more to evidence this wider impact, and we are currently working with Sport Wales, Welsh Government Sports Policy and other key stakeholders to examine a Social Return on Investment model which can demonstrate our wider contribution in a way which is aligned to public policy objectives.

## **9. Conclusion**

9.1. We were encouraged by the previous Welsh Government’s commitment to physical literacy, and the recommendations of Professor Donaldson’s school curriculum report for healthy and confident children. However, the pace of change of implementation appears glacial, particularly given the increasing financial burden of the obesity crisis and mental health issues on our NHS.

9.2. We are likewise disappointed at the length of time taken to publish the detail underpinning the strategies of Programme for Government. A clear direction from Ministers on how their policy priorities should be delivered is needed, as compounded by a lack defined remit for Sport Wales in the physical activity arena, we are currently risking a generation of children missing those opportunities that are so vital in instilling a sustained positive attitude to health and well-being through physical activity.

9.3. Whilst the ambitions of the Well-being of Future Generations Act are laudable, we understand that robust measurement of the objectives are yet to be put in place. Without a robust standardised assessment tool that demands effective collaboration, the pervasive silo working and budget protection culture will continue. To deliver the long-term aspirations within the Act, we need strong leadership across public bodies to enable effective partnership working which is outcomes-based, with budget planning and allocation sitting alongside this.

For further information, please contact 

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<sup>i</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2015/151022-health-behaviour-school-children-2013-14-key-findings-en.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://sportwales.org.uk/research--policy/surveys-and-statistics/school-sport-survey.aspx>

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0034/93976/Children-Parents-Media-Use-Attitudes-Report-2016.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0034/93976/Children-Parents-Media-Use-Attitudes-Report-2016.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/274434/time-spent-gaming-weekly-among-children-in-the-uk-by-age>

<sup>v</sup> <http://sport.wales/research--policy/surveys-and-statistics/school-sport-survey.aspx>

<sup>vi</sup> Based on School Sport Survey 2015 and Pupil Level Annual School Census Data 2015.

<sup>vii</sup> <http://sport.wales/research--policy/surveys-and-statistics/school-sport-survey.aspx>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150225-successful-futures-en.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/610130/Duty\\_of\\_Care\\_Review\\_-\\_April\\_2017\\_\\_2.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/610130/Duty_of_Care_Review_-_April_2017__2.pdf)

<sup>x</sup> [http://sport.wales/media/1701808/1165\\_sports\\_wales\\_facilities\\_for\\_future\\_generations\\_report\\_v8.pdf](http://sport.wales/media/1701808/1165_sports_wales_facilities_for_future_generations_report_v8.pdf)

<sup>xi</sup> [http://www.wru.co.uk/downloads/Executive\\_Summary1.pdf](http://www.wru.co.uk/downloads/Executive_Summary1.pdf)

<sup>xii</sup> <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/888/Clive%20Grace.pdf>

<sup>xiii</sup> *Return on investment of public health interventions: a systematic review* (Masters et al 2017)

<sup>xiv</sup> *How Healthy is the Behavior of Young Athletes? A Systematic Literature Review and Meta-Analyses*. Journal of Sports Science and Medicine. 11(2): 201-220 (Diehl et al 2012)

<sup>xv</sup> *Sports Participation and Health-Related Behaviors Among US Youth*. Archives of Paediatric and Adolescent Medicine. 154(9): 904-11 (Pate et al 2000)

<sup>xvi</sup> *A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents: informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport*. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, 10:98 (Eime et al 2013)