

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Inquiry into the physical activity of children and young people – focus group discussions with stakeholders, 25 January 2018

Discussions with representatives of Ramblers Cymru, Children in Wales, Play Wales and the Mental Health Foundation

Barriers

- Need to look at what happens to make children inactive.
- At secondary school age the obvious one is peer pressure. If you are the only one in your group who's interested in being active then it's really hard to take part.
- Some of the barriers – emotional or social – that prevent young people being active, for example being overweight or have self-harm scars, not very good at sport (low self-esteem).
- Impact of poverty – communities without opportunity i.e. no play areas or places to hang out; however some socially economically deprived areas report greater play opportunities.
- Footpaths are not well signposted. People are not confident to use the paths.
- Outcomes drive the service provision; if you set the outcomes on obtaining maths and English that is what schools will focus on.
- Example of two girls who wanted to play football but faced discriminatory attitudes from boys in the team; not helped by coach, who always picked them last because they were girls.

Role of adults/parents/family

- Adults are less tolerant to children playing out (no ball games signs, etc).
- Parents are more fearful about their children playing out either because of potential dangers or because of other people's attitudes (seen as a nuisance).
- Sometimes parents who work full time don't have the energy to engage in physical activity; they're not good role models.
- Need a 'whole family' approach.

Effectiveness of sports education in secondary schools

- Environment does not lend itself to free forming activity particularly for the younger age group.

- Focus is on attainment and achievement.
- Lunchtimes can be very short – some children are skipping lunch/grabbing a snack so they have more time to play.
- Some schools only activate their free school meal cards in time for lunch so some children are going without food all morning – not good for energy levels.

School hours

- Don't necessarily agree with extending the school day but would like to see one afternoon a week set aside for 'activity time'.
- Would like to see free access to facilities after school hours (Play Wales has been working with families in Butetown to provide access to the school playground for an hour after school).
- The Five Ways to Wellbeing could be brought into under graduate teacher training.
- The curriculum review will provide opportunities for change.
- Don't need to measure the impact physical activity has on children but need to be creative about what we measure.
- Children won't learn unless they are in a good place mentally.
- Often the children with mental health issues/behavioural problems are the ones that are kept in at break time as a punishment for disrupting classes but they are most likely to benefit from physical activity.
- Also a problem for children with additional learning needs as extra tuition/support often takes place at break time/lunchtime.

Priorities

- Need parity between physical and emotional and social well-being.
- Cannot just tackle obesity in isolation.
- Recognition of the benefits of activity on mental health.
- Five ways to well-being – needs to be an understanding across everyone who works with children (education, social care, health, etc).
- Not just about schools – if parents have poor habits that reflects on the children. Has to be tackled across the board.
- A systemic view of physical activity is needed.
- Should be about sport for everybody not sport for excellence.
- Need to find balance between those who excel and the rest.
- How about outcomes for fitness and emotional well-being? Five Ways to Wellbeing – use those as measures to look at how that works within schools.



PE in the curriculum

- Lengthening the school day to allow more activity – would be very demanding for teachers – would need teachers’ buy-in. Could be costly if formalised.
- Better use and access to school grounds for children to do what they want in that space – would contribute to better sense of community.
- Need to enable young people to do something outside of school. Being active is not just about getting into a team but about doing something that gives you pleasure.
- Emphasis should be on enjoyment and fun.
- The Daily Mile campaign has made a real difference but it’s only at primary school level.
- Schools need to be able to offer things that are physically active but not necessarily sport e.g. dance.
- ALN – need to make sure all children can join in.

Play as an activity

- Focus on play is important. It contributes to mental health and community cohesion.
- We don’t have longitudinal studies on activity levels through play but we do know that play does contribute to children’s physical activity level.
- When children start comprehensive school they are only 11 and still want opportunities to play.
- Modern social trends have decreased children’s likelihood to play – increased screen usage, neighbourhoods where speed and volume of traffic has increased. Need to look at what has happened in our communities to stop children from playing out.
- Contribution of the local environment – traffic volume and speed, parked cars, no space to play.
- Play Wales has developed a toolkit to support local authorities, town and community councils, politicians at all levels, open space planners, housing associations and parks and playground managers when developing and upgrading accessible play spaces.
- They also piloted a scheme in a part of Cardiff over the summer where the street was partially closed for a number of hours to allow children to play.

Recommendations

- Public health campaign that comes into the training of anyone who works with children and young people to think about mental health and well-being.



- Incentives for school.
- Devise measurable KPIs to include emotional literacy.

Discussions with representatives of Welsh Rugby Union, Welsh Sports Association, Glamorgan Cricket & Cricket Wales, and Welsh Netball

Experiences for children

- The first experience for a young person is key, and that first experience is often within the school environment.
- Sport and activity should be fun, social and enjoyable and then children will continue doing it.
- We need to encourage children to 'have a go', and we need to encourage and promote team work.
- The majority of children won't end up on a podium so it's important that there is a focus on fun activities for the majority.
- There should be less emphasis on technical skills.
- It's important to highlight and talk about personal success and achievement.
- We need to enable children to feel personally responsible for getting their 1 hour of activity done each day.
- We need to signpost schoolchildren to activities outside of school.

Traditional gender defined roles and how to increase participation by girls

- Times have changed and we shouldn't now have boy sports and girl sports.
- Women role models are really important to encouraging girls to take-up and continue with sports and other activities.
- For girls in particular, the activities have to be fun and sociable.
- We need to consider the language and terms used, i.e. refer to 'activity' and not 'sport' when talking to girls.
- Buddy systems are really important, particularly for girls.
- *Our Squad* - evidence shows girls are more likely to do something if they have a buddy.
- WRU developed a 'bring your bestie' hashtag for social media when promoting events.

The parents and family

- Parental experience has a massive impact on the participation and enthusiasm of children.



- Dr Camilla Knight (Swansea University) is looking at parental experiences and parental engagement.
- We really need to educate the parents.
- We need to break down traditional role expectations, i.e. a dad can be a netball coach
- Family support is needed; you cannot just look to improve the school experience.

The school experience

- In terms of the school experience we need to concentrate the efforts on primary schools, where the number and quality of opportunities need to improve.
- Culture of schools and the quality of provision is critical.
- There's a limited menu of sporting activities on offer in schools; a broader menu is needed.
- There's a postcode lottery with schools; leadership is really important and can have an adverse or positive impact.
- KPIs needed – quantitative measuring of how much schools are delivering; qualitative measuring of what the schools are offering and what is the feedback from children.
- A holistic school commitment is needed.
- Schools should be incentivised to deliver more physical activity.
- Afterschool childcare acts as a barrier for parents; schools could deliver activity opportunities after school for free.
- Enhanced school day should be investigated, not just for PE, but time should be made available for exposure to varied physical and cultural activities.
- PE mustn't be seen as a chore; it must be fun.
- Daily mile should be linked with technology, i.e. class Fitbit, and carry results through to other lessons for investigation, i.e. IT lessons.
- Class Fitbit – e.g. how many steps has Charlie done today; can we work out which lessons he was in when he walked the most.
- Pilot in a school in Monmouthshire – the IT department has offered drones to monitor activities in PE lessons.
- We should investigate incentivising extra-curricular/general involvement from children in physical activity.

The role of teachers

- One main problem = not all teachers in primary school are qualified PE teachers, or have adequate training, and aren't able to deliver quality experiences.



- Activity levels in primary schools is varied and patchy, and dependent on the training/experience of the responsible teacher(s).
- Teacher training is key.

The curriculum

- Physical literacy is key.
- Physical literacy should be embedded into the school curriculum; this would deliver the requirements and follow the spirit of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- Sport and physical activity should be part of the core curriculum, and assessed by Estyn.
- If schools aren't assessed on something they're not pushed to deliver.
- Opportunities for physical activity shouldn't be confined to PE lessons.

The role of sports groups/organisations

- Sports groups/organisations focus on experiences in the community.
- Collaborative working across all sporting groups is needed.
- StreetGames and Parkrun are great initiatives; we need more of these.
- There's a need to define what each sport could do really well to improve the common experience for all children.
- Schools should allow sports groups/organisations into schools to deliver/support classes.
- Sport groups/organisations can help with more formal education; they can go into schools to deliver sport/activity lessons.
- Example – one Cardiff cricket club offered to go into schools in Cardiff to deliver cricket lessons/cricket-based activities, however only two replied; one said 'no thanks' and the other did not accept the offer because 'cricket' wasn't something Estyn assessed.
- Sport Wales is pushing physical literacy.
- Sports groups could work with the BMA and RCN to educate staff, who can then inform their patients.

The role of the community

- We should open schools up to the community, and turn the school into a hub.
- Holland, New Zealand and Australia use the community as a hub.
- Great example in Hampshire – school building keys are handed over to a social enterprise at the end of the official school day, and the enterprise then arranges



and hosts activities for the community. This example has proper legal and governance structures in place

- Schools should open-up facilities to the community; we know there is resistance from schools to do this.
- We should map the facilities on offer in our communities.
- Local authorities closing local recreation facilities isn't helping the wider problem.

The role of technology and the media

- Social media is really important; this has already been evidenced in American public health research.
- We need to make more use of technology.
- We need a national 'big picture' campaign which appears in traditional media and social media.
- *Our Squad* needs better funding to make it a national campaign that gets into every home.
- More media coverage is needed to promote good examples; the red button coverage has shown to work with netball.

The role of Government and public bodies

- Schools/Government need to listen to children and what they want to do.
- We need change on a national level in order to achieve dramatic impact.
- Infrastructure isn't conducive to cycling or walking as commuting options.
- National Resources Wales, Public Health Wales and Sport Wales are coming together but it's too slow and needs to happen quicker.
- Public Health Wales hasn't co-ordinated the effort to join things up; it isn't interested in what sport/physical activity can offer.
- The MoU between Public Health Wales and Sport Wales has no effect.
- Public health priority isn't prevention; it's very risk averse.
- The health sector wants more and more evidence that physical activity works as a prevention measure.
- Social prescribing is important; we should sign post people to activities in their area.
- Frontline NHS staff are an untapped resource.
- Cost is a huge barrier, but the activities needn't be expensive, and we need to work smarter because it's not all about more money.
- Red/amber/green labelling is needed for sport and activities, i.e 30 minutes of tag burns enough calories for a chocolate bar.



Discussions with representatives of Diabetes UK Cymru and Royal College of Surgeons

General comments

- Digital technology and social media are contributing to the obesity crisis and sedentary environments, but there is an opportunity to use it positively as an incentive
- Parents need to take an active role in increasing their children's activity levels, need to involve the whole family
- 'It's about moving and not being sedentary'

Schools

- Schools tend to focus on kids who excel and compete in elite sports
- 'It should be about physical activity not sport'
- 'PE is now down to once every 2/3 weeks'
- 'Schools are key', need to start in primary schools
- Physical activity lessons have reduced over time in schools
- In Australia they do an hour of physical activity every day in school
- Participants liked the idea of a school giving financial incentives for attendance, and perhaps doing something similar for being active, with fit bits or mobile phone apps etc.
- Schools should have a KPI on physical activity. 'Estyn should monitor physical activity levels in same way as attendance'
- Schools selling off playing fields is an issue
- 'Beat the streets' in the Valleys is a good initiative to encourage walking to school
- Discussed Committee Members visit to Bassaleg school where every child was assessed and given a tailored exercise programme – participants thought this sounded like 'a great model' and that you would then be able to identify 'at risk' children and support them

Data

- There are big gaps in the data on physical activity levels. They support calls to extend the Child Measurement Programme to improve data collection, past aged 4–5.



Diet

- ‘Diet is a far bigger problem’, physical activity cannot be looked at in isolation, there needs to be a dual focus on diet and exercise
- The food industry needs to be regulated, there is a role for Governments in addressing this
- Legislation can restrict the food industry in terms of ingredients
- Welsh Government can set nutritional standards in schools and remove junk food in public vending machines but what about at home?
- Restrict junk food advertising, ban supermarket displaying chocolate at tills
- Ban junk food vending machines in schools and hospitals
- Put calories on menus? Could learn from food hygiene ratings
- Lessons should be learnt from smoking, it has been successfully stigmatised. Need a similar culture shift around diet and being active.

Planning and infrastructure

- There are things you can recommend in terms of infrastructure and planning, cycle and walking routes around schools etc
- Planning around schools, Health Impact Assessments
- Can prevent fast food outlets opening around schools

Obesity and diabetes

- We have the highest levels of obesity and diabetes in some areas, in Torfaen it’s 10% of the population.
- Noted that this inquiry should feed into the forthcoming obesity strategy, and the Obesity Alliance Cymru produced a [policy paper](#) with 18 recommendations for the strategy.
- Nothing’s been done with the obesity pathway since it was introduced in 2010, apart from the previous Health and Social Care Committee’s Inquiry into bariatric services in 2014.
- RC Surgeons said ‘youngsters are being referred to me with 75%, 80% body fat and no one has told them you will be dead within 5 years’ [if you don’t change]
- Type 2 diabetes is getting younger, it used to be seen only in people over 40 (and called ‘maturity onset’), but we are now seeing it in children and young people, ‘I saw someone aged 10 with it’.
- In Cardiff there’s nothing to refer children aged 7-11 to, no appropriate treatment, so if they are aged 7 [and obese, with type 2 diabetes], they’d have to wait 4 years before they can go on the national referral exercise scheme. The treatment drugs are too aggressive for children and there are no services for the paediatric consultant to refer them to. These children and young people need much more intensive support.



- There will be preventative savings in reducing obesity and diabetes – diabetes is currently 10% of NHS spend, and 80% of this is spend on complications which could have been managed by diet.
- Public Health Wales has a role, with public awareness campaigns etc.
- The current messaging on obesity is ‘quite soft’ and ‘not frightening enough’, ‘look at the shocking photos on cigarettes...’, ‘we need to use scare tactics’

