

British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) – Written evidence (NPS0035)

Introduction

The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) is the professional body for sport and exercise sciences in the UK. Our mission is to drive excellence in sport and exercise sciences through the promotion of evidence-based practice and the development and enhancement of professional and ethical standards.

Q1 How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle?

Local delivery could be improved by focusing on the 3Cs i.e., coordination, collaboration and consistency. Specifically -

- ✓ **Coordination:** Ensuring that all organisations involved in sport and recreation have common goals and priorities or at least are not in competition with each other.
- ✓ **Collaboration:** Effective and efficient local delivery needs to be tailored to the area and community demographic. One size does not fit all. Partnership working needs to take place across the local area (e.g., between local community sports clubs) but also between local providers and national policy makers and funding bodies. This collaboration between the 'local' and the 'national' needs to be built on mutual respect, trust and understanding and involve the right stakeholders to instigate sustained action. The evaluation criteria for funded projects/providers should be developed collaboratively between national/local funders and local providers.
- ✓ **Consistency:** If getting more people to be more active more often was easy we would have an active and healthy nation by now. To make a long-term difference and have a positive impact we need consistency in policy, sustained funding and a focus on adherence and behaviour change rather than on 'taster sessions.' Whole systems approaches are needed to enable this consistency.

Examples of success can be found in Sport England's Local Delivery Pilots including South Tees 'You've Got This' which created a 'partnership exchange' to bring organisations together to share knowledge, ideas and decide on priorities and funding. See - [Local delivery | Sport England](#) and [youvegotthis](#)

Going forward it is important to consider the evaluation of 'social prescribing programmes' which include recreation to combat loneliness and to improve mental health.

Q2 How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle?

The health and wellbeing of our children is so important that in all settings we should ensure that interventions to increase active behaviours should be based on theoretical understanding and empirical evidence. An example of an approach that can be used in all settings is the COM-Behaviour model devised by Professor Susan Michie (UCL), which focuses on the capability, opportunity and motivation of the individual to be active.

We think three things are needed in **Schools**. First, increased high quality training of Teachers in PE, particularly for Primary School Teachers. Secondly, a better balance between contemporary and trending activities (e.g., free running and rollerblading) and traditional sports developed in the Victorian era. Finally, a rethink of the design of schools and the use of recess to promote unstructured outdoor play. The physical layout of the School is an important environmental determinant of activity and should be designed in such a way as to encourage outdoor recreation in all weathers. Members of the Select Committee may find the following research on creating an Active Schools Framework helpful –

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7006100/>

Outside Schools we recommend two connected initiatives both of which (whilst outside of Schools) need to be endorsed by Schools. The first being a national (social) media campaign to promote unstructured outdoor play and to tackle the culture of hyper-protectiveness of children. This will contribute to the development of fit, healthy, autonomous, and resilient kids. Secondly, the embracing of new ideas and technology to promote outdoor play. Good examples include.

- ✓ Beat the street an activity aimed to turn towns into games, where kids can earn points, win prizes and learn more about the area while being more active. You can walk, run, scoot or cycle to Beat Boxes that are situated across the town, where you swipe your card. The more Beat Boxes you swipe in a day, the more points are earned - encouraging activity.
- ✓ Treasure Trails. The aim is to explore a city, town or village, by following a trail, find clues and solve a challenge. The adventure brings in fascinating facts and stories to keep it entertaining, even educational. There are trails all over the UK.

Q3. How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles?

There is a dearth of evidence about physical activity engagement in ethnic minorities and disabled people. Some evidence shows that representative social marketing campaigns (e.g., This Girl Can) were very well-received among young females of BAME backgrounds living in urban settings. More funded research is needed which particularly engages these populations.

For all groups we need to give people a range of local, accessible, cheap but ideally free options for physical activity. This can be done by improving the walking and cycling infrastructure. This infrastructure could include Calorie Map to encourage those wanting to lose weight to exercise more. An important aspect of this infrastructure is safety features including street lighting in and around Parks and exercise spaces.

For older people, the importance of sport and recreation in addressing reduced health status and loneliness and isolation amongst other social impacts needs to be recognised. For example, coffee mornings attached to exercise classes, or gardening seminars alongside circuit training need to be encouraged. Intergenerational activity is key e.g., primary school children visiting care homes and being active together.

Going forward there is a role for Social and Community Care workers, who provide support to people with a disability, to promote active living. To do so these professional groups would need access to tailored CPD.

For some people with a disability there is a real fear that if they are active then this could impact on benefit payments. This needs to be addressed.

Q4 Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?

To answer this question the government needs to evaluate its strategy so that lessons can be learned from what has worked and what has not over the last five years.

Arguably there is an extreme disconnect between the desire for an 'active nation' yet a focus on sport in the title when some people are turned off by sport. Transport, health and education strategies are as important in achieving an 'active nation' as sport. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to the development of a national plan for **Active Recreation and Sport** rather than one for **Sport and Recreation**. Active recreation is more important than sport in terms of participation and public health and arguably deserves more thought and attention than has previously been the case. Care needs to be taken when promoting healthy and active lifestyles with the use of the term 'sport'. Whilst many of us love sport and are motivated to move by it there are many people in our communities who do not like sport and do not consider themselves 'the sporty type'. Some young people dislike the comparative and competitive elements of sport and the associated impact on self-esteem. To reach these people great care needs to be taken with the terminology and imagery used to promote health enhancing physical activity.

Going forward either as named outcome priorities or clearly embedded within them, the following need to be included -

- ✓ Reducing health inequalities across population groups
- ✓ Educating parents and carers on how to develop active 'toddlers' to build an active generation which has the fundamental movement skills needed to be active across a life span.
- ✓ Addressing climate change through sustainable and carbon neutral recreation and sport.

Q5. Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection?

No, it is not.

We have the active peoples survey run by Sport England and the Health Survey for England (HSE) which every now and then focuses on Physical Activity. However, the sample sizes are small and use self-report measures which are prone to over reporting. This was evident in the 2008 HSE when approximately 52% of men and 50% of women met the then Department of Health guidelines for physical activity yet when this was measured by accelerometer in a sub-sample it fell dramatically to 10% and 8%, respectively. Whilst these findings are a little dated, we include them here because they are so important, and an argument can be made that the lessons from them still need to be acted on.

A solution would be the formation of a Physical Activity Observatory. This would be able to create a big data set using data from smart phones with GPS to more actively assess where interventions are needed in the population and regions. An example of an Observatory being the former National Obesity Observatory which 'was established to provide a single point of contact for wide-ranging authoritative information on data, evidence and practice related to obesity, overweight, underweight and their determinants. It has an e-Atlas; an interactive mapping tool for the analysis of data on the prevalence of obesity and its determinants for local authorities in England. The e-Atlas enables users to compare a range of indicators including prevalence of childhood obesity using data from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) with, for example, local area deprivation scores and rates of physical activity.' See - [The National Obesity Observatory for England – Health Economics Research Centre \(HERC\) \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

Q6. How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?

It can be tackled through a sustained approach that has at least three strands. First it starts at the 'top' where diversity in senior leadership is fundamental. Secondly it should not be tolerated, and offenders should be sanctioned by bans, fines and job losses. Finally, all organisations should have a powerful Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, a monitored diversity action plan and education programmes similar to the one in BASES - [BASES Diversity Monitoring | BASES.](#)

Regarding 'ableism' BASES would like to take this opportunity to recommend to you the following resource which the Association 'signed up to' in November 2020 -

[Help us to stop ableism in messages about physical activity and sedentary behaviour – Get Yourself Active](#)

Q7. What can be done to improve and implement effective duty of care and safeguarding standards for sports and recreation actives at all levels?

Four things would improve the situation –

1. Having the same, consistent and transparent safeguarding process in schools, sports organisations, and community clubs etc. National Governing Bodies need to be accountable for implementing and monitoring safeguarding measures.
2. Children need to know who to go to if there is an issue, and they need to be supported and reminded regularly of what to do if they have concerns.
3. Compulsory DBS checks need to be conducted for every coach, official and volunteer as standard practice.
4. Some of the complexity of ensuring the effectiveness of the Duty of Care that sport has to its participants need to be addressed. One such complexity is when a Sport Scientist finds themselves 'between a rock and a hard place' if a Head Coach / Performance Director is saying one thing and an athlete is saying another. Such complexities can be addressed in part by i) more and better training on duty of care and ii) having in place structures that ensure athletes' complaints are investigated immediately.

BASES takes its safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and our approach can be found here - [Safeguarding and Welfare | BASES.](#)

Q8. What are the opportunities and challenges facing elite sports in the UK and what can be done to make national sports governing bodies more accountable?

Opportunities: COVID-19 presents an opportunity for elite sport to 'build back better' by, for example, prioritising the people in the sport rather than the sport itself. There is an opportunity to rethink our attitude toward competition and finding evidence-based ways to use it to develop the resilience of young people and other participants. There is an opportunity to reclaim the original meaning of the term 'amateur sport' i.e., doing it for the love of the activity. In a post-Pandemic world, sport has the opportunity not only to improve the health of the nation but also its wellbeing and happiness. We need to take fun more seriously.

There is also an opportunity to rethink our approach to how we recognise, reward, and promote good coaches. Coaches should be valued not by the standard of the athletes they coach but on how those under their mentorship develop. For example, just because 'you' coach Olympians does not mean you are a better coach than someone who coaches beginners. Value added and the development of the whole person is what is important.

Challenges: There is a sense that some sections of the public have become disenchanted with elite sport during the Pandemic. Breaches of COVID protocols, trips away whilst the public have been in lockdown etc mean that elite sport needs to rebuild the respect of these sections of the public.

An issue facing sport is ensuring that the organisations who sponsor it have a good reputation for promoting health, wellbeing and equality.

At the time of writing the development of COVID-secure sport and recreation facilities which are safe to play in is a challenge and in advance of the next pandemic there may need to be a rethink about how we design sport and exercise facilities.

Accountability: Arguably the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics present both the biggest opportunity and challenge for elite sport. On the one hand it offers an opportunity for an uplifting festival of the human spirit and triumph over adversity. However, all of those involved in the Olympics and Paralympics need to be accountable for i) ensuring that it does not act as a transmission vector for COVID-19 and ii) ensuring it can evidence a sustained increase in the levels of physical activity of the general population.

The funding of elite sport receives should include, if it does not already, provision for grassroots development, training of youth/community coaches, safeguarding and offering graduates opportunities for development and careers within organisations through internships.

Q9. What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?

We recommend that the Committee consider the merits of a 'whole system' approach to the promotion of physical activity.

The link below provides a good starting point for understanding this approach in Australia -

[Whole of Systems Approaches to Physical Activity Policy and Practice in Australia: The ASAPa Project Overview and Initial Systems Map - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

In addition, the Select Committee may want to note that Sport New Zealand and the governing bodies for six of the country's most popular codes are taking a stand to improve experiences in youth sport (Hockey NZ, Netball NZ, NZ Cricket, NZ Football, NZ Rugby and Sport NZ) signing a statement of intent, listing steps they will take to pave the way for substantial change in the way young people

experience sport. These changes include: pushing back against early specialisation and over-emphasis on winning; improving the quality of experience for all young people irrespective of ability; changing attitudes and behaviours of those involved in youth sport; and other factors that are driving young New Zealanders away from sport. Further information can be found at –

<https://sportnz.org.nz/about/news-and-media/media-centre/sports-bodies-join-together-to-change-youth-sport/#:~:text=Individually%20and%20collectively%20we%20commit,caregivers%20involved%20in%20youth%20sport>

Q10. Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation?

Yes, because it will provide the opportunity to address the following –

1. Supporting the nation to get moving again after lockdown.
2. Improving coordination, collaboration and consistency.
3. The need to address the needs of those at both ends of the age continuum i.e., older people and the under 5s. We believe both these groups have been disproportionately affected by the Pandemic in terms of their physical activity behaviour.
4. It would provide an opportunity to promote the link between physical activity and mental health and wellbeing,
5. Reviewing whether the investment in large scale / mega sport events can be justified on the grounds of a legacy of physical activity when the evidence for such claims is highly contestable.

In drafting the plan careful consideration needs to be given to i) the timing of its launch to ensure the lessons and impact of the Pandemic have been learned and understood and ii) how it is to be implemented and resourced.

Conclusion

BASES wants to thank the Select Committee for its important work and for taking the time to read and reflect on the responses we have made to the questions posed. We strongly encourage the Select Committee to write a report and make recommendations to government on active recreation and sport which are a proportionate response to the damage that COVID-19 has done to the sector. Whilst more funding is required it is a necessary but not sufficient response to the challenges we face. Great ideas, evidence-based policy, embracing change, co-ordinated action and inspirational leadership are needed in recreation and sport like never before.

Written on behalf of the Association by Andy Smith, David Broom, Rita de Oliveira, Mark Faghy, Mark Ross and Neil Maxwell with thanks to Ruth Ashton, Stephen Bird, Jack Fahey and the BASES Board.

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