

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

CELG(4) PS 13

Inquiry into participation levels in sport in Wales

Response from : National Union of Teachers

1. 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.

It is quite plain to see that the Government is not achieving the goals it set out to achieve in the *Programme for Government*, which was to, through Sport Wales, widen participation in sport and programmes targeted at increasing physical activity. There has been a decline in the percentage of both Primary and Secondary school children participating in sport or active recreation with a 12% decline in secondary school pupil participation from 2009 to 2011.

We would envisage that this decline could mostly be put down to pupils, mostly girls, who are in year 10 and 11 in secondary school not being engaged in being active for a number of reasons, including lack of enjoyment in the sports/activities on offer at school therefore a reluctance to continue outside school, vanity (not wanting to sweat, etc), peer pressure, and family pressures (having to work after school and at weekends). How this trend can be reversed is a very difficult one to answer but getting children active and enjoying being active is essential if they are to continue to be active after school and when they leave full time education. Being active and healthy should be a way of life and the future generation of adults can only be active and healthy if they see a need to be active and that that need can be fulfilled. If they enjoy competing in team sports such as football, rugby, netball and hockey (which are the 4 main team sports taught in schools) then there must be a clear and easy progression for them from school sport to a local club and they must be able to see this progression and be able to make use of it. There should be enough local clubs for them all to be able to join and enjoy themselves, and if this is not the case, then there must be some sort of financial assistance, guidance and advice available in order to set up a club.

The same can be said for individual sports, which includes keeping fit by going to the gym. Extra-curricular participation, and not just after school clubs, is influenced by the quality and number of facilities that are easily available in the catchment area. There are far more individual sports on offer for children to participate in than there are team sports so the needs of these children have to be addressed. The biggest reason for children not carrying on with organised sport after school and when they leave full time education is the lack of local clubs or facilities which are accessible to them. Another major factor is enjoyment, or the lack of enjoyment when it comes to drop out rates. Children need to have fun and it's essential that they enjoy

themselves when being active and choose an activity which they enjoy and get a real benefit in its participation.

Whilst the overall participation figures in primary schools is relatively positive at 78%, it would be interesting to see the geography of those surveyed in order to compare those children who live in the major towns and cities, where there are more clubs and access to facilities is better, to those that live in the rural communities of Wales, where there are fewer clubs and a reduced number of good quality facilities.

It's disappointing to see that the number of children under 16 making use of the free swimming has dropped considerably since 2008/09. Part of the problem could be that quite a few swimming pools have been closed down during this period but what also must be taken into consideration is the age and gender of those who don't take advantage of the offer. It's very possible that the same group of children, girls in years 10 and 11 in secondary school, are the ones not engaging with the offer possibly due to reason such as lack of enjoyment of swimming, not being able to swim, vanity, lack of self-esteem (body consciousness) and family pressures (having to work after school and at weekends).

Focusing on increasing the number participating in structured sporting activities provided in school holidays and at weekends is good but, according to the 2011/12 figures there has been a decline in both free swims and the number participating in structured sporting activities since 2010/11. We need to know how that is progressing in 2012/13 to see if the trend is continuing and need to address it if it is.

Sport Wales' Community Strategy

The content of Sport Wales' Community Sport Strategy is very encouraging and if the priorities are met then it will have been a resounding success. However, there are two things which are a cause for concern.

Firstly, under the 'Quality Education' priority it is expected that Sport Wales will 'work closely with the education sector to ensure head teachers and governors value the importance of PE' but two of its success criteria, namely 'delivery of 2 hours of high quality PE to every young person each week' and 'every teacher trained to deliver high quality PE' are worrying. The reason they are worrying is because in the vast majority of secondary schools in Wales, pupils in Key Stage 4 receive only 1 hour of timetabled PE a week unless they choose PE as a GCSE subject. This is worrying as this is the age where, as Sport Wales' research shows, pupils get disengaged with sport. Therefore, Sport Wales and the Welsh Government should ensure that these pupils in Key Stage 4 get a minimum of 2 hours timetabled PE every week and not the 1 hour that the vast majority currently get. Also, the Welsh Government needs to ensure that all PE teachers, regardless of age and experience, have access to vital training in order that they can deliver the high quality PE that Sport Wales wants. This means that an element of funding is required in order to cover any costs (course fees, supply teachers, etc) that schools will incur in ensuring they get the training.

Secondly, the message from the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage, Huw Lewis AM, says that the Welsh Government will 'continue to support our current and future talented athletes to bring success that we can celebrate together'. He

therefore needs to ensure that national Associations, such as the Welsh Schools Athletics Association (WSAA), are allowed to continue to nurture the athletes of the future by ensuring they are properly funded to do so. The English Schools Athletics Association national championships are shown live on sky sports, and are probably paid a handsome amount for allowing them to be shown. We're not saying this should be the case here in Wales, but the national championships and Wales' participation in the subsequent under 17 Schools International Athletic Board championships against England, Scotland and Ireland should be safeguarded by means of funding or we will lose our future Commonwealth Games and Olympic hopefuls.

Whilst lottery funding of £9m over 3 years is to be greatly welcomed, Sport Wales must decide very carefully how to spend this money and ensure that it has the maximum impact on attracting children to become active and get hooked on sport.

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

To the best of our knowledge the only datasets which have been made know in this inquiry are the ones Sport Wales have gathered on Primary and Secondary school children participation rates.

It would be an idea for the Welsh Government, in conjunction with Sport Wales, to research the participation rates of those included in the different equality strands and more so those children who live in the deprived areas in Wales. I'm sure that the results of such a study would be eye-opening as those families with low incomes wouldn't be able to afford to pay club membership for their children, let alone purchase the equipment necessary to participate fully in their chosen activity. It is the very same families who would usually purchase low cost, processed, unhealthy food to feed their children, which ultimately leads to an increase in children being overweight or obese. This would then lead to them being less active as they find it either embarrassing, due to low self-esteem and mental well-being problems, or find it too hard, due to being overweight or obese, to be able to participate. In a way it can be seen as a vicious circle and the ones to suffer always seem to be the low income families who live in deprived areas of Wales.

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

Opportunities

Sport Wales' community Strategy is a great opportunity to increase sport participation in Wales, and if they get it right then this could have a major impact. As for specific opportunities, there is a great opportunity here to get children who come from low income families and who are living in poverty active and into sport.

Barriers

As mentioned in point two above, those families with low incomes wouldn't be able to afford to pay club membership for their children, let alone purchase the equipment necessary to participate fully in their chosen activity. It is the very same families who would usually purchase low cost, processed, unhealthy food to feed their children, which ultimately leads to an increase in children being overweight or obese. This would then lead to them being less active as they find it either embarrassing, due to low self-esteem and mental well-being problems, or find it too hard, due to being overweight or obese, to be able to participate. In a way it can be seen as a vicious circle and the ones to suffer always seem to be the low income families who live in deprived areas of Wales.

Another major barrier is the lack of provision of good quality facilities in the communities in Wales. With the climate in Wales changing where we see a lot more rain and floods, every Secondary school in Wales should have access to an all-weather surface. The wet weather must be a major headache to those schools who don't have this facility, especially when their playing fields (the PE teacher's classroom) are flooded and cannot be used. This facility should also be made available to the public outside school hours and at weekends where it can be hired and the money used to recoup some of the costs involved with running it. Only by meeting this need can those schools without this facility engage more children and ensure a higher standard of Physical Education in our schools. The Primary schools in the catchment area should also be able to make use of this facility when it's not being used as this will hopefully catch them at a younger age and get them interested in sport and being active. It's not just football and hockey that this facility can be used for, but for many other activities as well.

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

We are aware, after the inquiry into child obesity in Wales, that other Welsh Government initiatives do exist in order to increase physical activity.

MEND

MEND has been in existence and going into schools since 2005 and whilst it may have had a positive impact on many children's lives, the truth of the matter is that we still have 36% of children who are overweight or obese and this figure has increased or stayed constant for a number of years now. In order to properly evaluate MEND's impact we need to know exactly what they recommend as a healthy diet, as this is the key to a child's health and well-being. They could be active 5 days a week but it wouldn't make much difference to their health if the food they ate was processed, unhealthy food (sugar and processed carbohydrates being the two main culprits). The change in dietary advice in 1983 told us all to start eating between 55-60% carbohydrates in our diet and since this change in advice obesity has rocketed in Wales and the UK. I'm sure there is a positive correlation here between the increase in obesity and the decrease in physical activity.

Cross cutting programmes for example leisure and sport related programmes such as Creating an Active Wales

Getting children active is an excellent idea for them to have a healthier lifestyle but exercise alone will not reduce obesity levels unless the children's diet is changed. With a change in diet and an increase in physical activity our obese and overweight children have a chance of losing weight and getting back some essential self-esteem and our healthier children can have an active and healthy childhood. Being healthy is a way of life and needs to be encouraged if obesity rates in our children are going to fall. Therefore a campaign encouraging both could be very beneficial. Eating the right, healthy food (real food and not processed sugar and carbohydrates) can give children more energy to burn whilst taking part in sport and other activities. Children need to be educated in order to see how and why this is the case. With this in mind, the 'eatwell' plate needs to be withdrawn from all schools and public places and replaced with advice on which real, healthy foods to eat and in what proportions. Only when this is done will the children of Wales start losing weight and get more active and hence work towards the Welsh Governments initiatives.

Tackling Child Poverty

It will be interesting to see how Sport Wales goes about tackling child poverty through community sport. I'm sure there are very many youngsters who live in poverty with the talent needed to become professional athletes in their chosen sport but need a chance to discover their talent and some guidance to learn how to nurture that talent and use it for their benefit.

5. 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.

Having two professional football teams in the English Premier League in season 2013/14 will have a huge effect on participation levels in those areas, especially children wanting to participate. But, rather than waste millions of pounds in making a bid for the 2026 Commonwealth Games, Cardiff Council should look to reverse the increase in the cost of hiring park football pitches, which has been increased from £38 per match to £55 per match, as it will have a huge negative effect on established clubs who regularly use those facilities. The same can be said for rugby and cricket clubs who use the park pitches as the fee for playing rugby has increased from £20.50 to £60 and the fee for playing cricket has increased from £26.80 to £55. Many of these clubs have stated that they will not be in a position to continue as they wouldn't be able to cover the costs, as it's not just about paying for the playing and changing areas as they have to pay the referees costs, buy playing kit, nets, and other items which are not cheap to buy, and in this current economic climate, this could mean clubs folding and this would be a tragedy. The future and longevity of these clubs are the youngsters of today. If they have no clubs to join then their participation in that sport will be lost. The main reason for the unhappiness over this increase in fees is the fact that the facilities as they stand are very, very poor and clubs are reluctant to pay nearly double the fee with no improvement in the facilities. Any money, or at the very least part of the money, which could be earmarked for a bid to host the Commonwealth Games should be invested into improving the facilities currently on offer and if this was done then I'm sure the increase in fees would be viewed differently. The Cardiff Council increase could be the first step in

other councils increasing their fees for the use of park pitches and facilities. This is something which is unique to the big cities in Wales, and South Wales in particular, as in mid and north Wales nearly all Saturday league football, rugby and cricket is played on clubs own pitches, which are owned by the clubs themselves, or on school pitches.

As the steering group have now completed their feasibility studies into the 4 main work streams with regards to the bid for the 2026 Commonwealth Games and have reported back to Ministers before the Summer of 2012, it would be beneficial to know the outcome of these studies and what decision the Ministers came to after their meeting.

The initial impact of the Ryder Cup legacy was seen to be an excellent one for Newport and for golf in general as Golf Union Wales stated that 40% more boys under 18, and 60% more girls took up membership in 2011, thanks to the 'Securing the Future' Ryder Cup Legacy Fund. However, it would be good to see what those figures were for 2012. We did request information from Golf Union Wales but have been informed that they are responding directly to this inquiry so no further information was forthcoming. It would also be good to know if any funding has been given to golf clubs around Wales in order to improve their current facilities to make golf more appealing to youngsters.

The impact of the Olympic and Paralympic legacy has been minimal here in Wales. Some clubs, immediately after the Olympics, saw a large number of young people showing an interest and these have been in the sports which Team GB were successful during the Olympics, such as cycling, boxing and athletics. It would be interesting to find out what participation is like now, nearly 10 months after the Olympics ended.

The Olympic and Paralympic legacy shouldn't only be just about young people taking an interest in sport, but it should be about investing money into grass root sports by improving existing and building new facilities, and also getting more coaches involved with clubs by offering excellent coach education opportunities which are cost effective. Doing this could increase participation but it could also lead to inspiring the next generation of Commonwealth, Olympic and Paralympic athletes. Therefore, investment in elite, national sports, especially at school level, is also essential. The Welsh Schools Athletics Association (WSAA), who helped bring through world class athletes such as Colin Jackson, Iwan Thomas and Jamie Baulch, and assisted in the development of others such as David Guest, who is a British Decathlete, and Non Stanford, who was a Schools International Athletic Board medallist in cross country and who is now a top class triathlete, are in danger of folding as they have no funding other than what's paid to the Association from school affiliation fees. With funding in schools now being cut all the time, this is getting to be less and less and the Association will cease to exist unless the Olympic legacy is passed on and they receive funding. Allowing the Association to fade away will have a huge negative effect on athletics in Wales and with athletics being one of the most successful events for Team GB at London 2012 then this, which comes under the vision for sport in Wales' Sporting Excellence key priority, cannot be allowed to happen. I'm sure there are other national Associations in the same predicament as the WSAA and these must also not be allowed to simply fade away.