

National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee

CO 37

Inquiry into Childhood Obesity

Evidence from : The Football Association of Wales & The Welsh Football Trust

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in this consultation. The issue of childhood obesity is both a concern and a focus for us at the Football Association of Wales and The Welsh Football Trust.

Incredibly, some experts believe obesity is responsible for more ill health than smoking. Being significantly overweight is linked to a wide range of health problems, including: diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, arthritis, some cancers, stress, anxiety, depression and infertility. In addition, the associated ill health caused by obesity can lead to a considerable strain on the resources of the National Health Service (NHS). Whilst we were disappointed to learn that 35% of children aged 2-15 in Wales were classified as overweight, the news did not come as a huge surprise. We recognise the need to reverse this trend and would welcome a strategic and co-operative approach to improve the health of the nation.

Our involvement with young people and educators (e.g. teachers and coaches) across Wales means that we are well placed to identify some of the issues that exist within local communities. Unfortunately, many young people now lead sedentary lifestyles where they are unaccustomed to undertaking any sort of exercise. If this does not change, then even more young people will be classified as overweight or obese in future.

It is our belief that early intervention, with a focus on two key areas, will help reverse this trend. Firstly, we feel that investing time and resources to increase participation levels in sporting activity will help introduce people to a more active lifestyle. Secondly, educating young people and their guardians and providing them with the motivation to lead a healthier lifestyle, is also key.

The Sport Wales Active Adult and School Sport surveys demonstrate that there are over 350,000 people (which equates to more than 10% of the population) participating in some form of recreational football activity. As the most participated sport in Wales, football contributes greatly to the lives of people from all ages and backgrounds. Indeed, Sport Wales data demonstrates that this is a sport with an excellent balance of participants across all social grades. Despite this fact, we feel that there is scope for the FAW, the WFT and the Government to do more. We know from research conducted by Sport Wales that more people want to participate in football and other sports. We would greatly welcome a co-ordinated approach with the Welsh Government and other sports to help attract hard-to-reach groups to get active.

Our experience also suggests a need to raise awareness of issues related to obesity. We believe that working with schools, young people and their guardians would help improve awareness and educate people around the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. We have seen the benefits of introducing role models to schools for example, and the impact this can have on the lives of young people. We feel there is an opportunity to work with Welsh Governing Bodies to assist with health related educational programmes.

Having researched 'Designed for Life,' the Welsh Government's overarching health strategy in 2015, we have an understanding of how the Government aims to deliver a healthy Wales in partnership with other agencies and sectors. Football and other sports have a huge reach and potential to motivate and engage both adults and children who are overweight or are at risk of being overweight.

The Football Association of Wales & The Welsh Football Trust