

# Culture, Media and Sport Committee

## Oral evidence: Women's sport, HC 177

Tuesday 9 January 2024

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Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Dr Rupa Huq; Giles Watling.

Questions 231 - 330

### Witnesses

I: Jeanette Bain-Burnett, Executive Director of Policy & Integrity, Sport England; and Stephanie Hilborne OBE, Chief Executive, Women in Sport.

II: Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP, Minister for Sport, Gambling and Civil Society, Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Polly Payne, Director General, Culture, Sport and Civil Society, Department for Culture, Media and Sport; and Adam Conant, Deputy Director and Head of Sport, Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jeanette Bain-Burnett and Stephanie Hilborne.

Q231 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Our session this morning is the last in our inquiry into women's sport. We are joined by Jeanette Bain-Burnett, head of policy and integrity at Sport England, and Stephanie Hilborne, the chief executive of Women in Sport—you are both very welcome. I remind Members that they should declare any interests at the point that they ask their questions.

I will start with a question to both witnesses. The Government recently announced their new sport strategy, which aims to get 1.25 million more women active by 2030. What do you both see as the most urgent things to be addressed in order to achieve that aspiration? Jeanette, I will start with you.

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** First, we welcome the challenge and the opportunity of the Government's strategy. Our strategy, "Uniting the Movement", is all about tackling inequalities, so we feel like we are really well aligned with that. On the most urgent things to do, I would focus quite a lot of attention on girls at this point. We have seen a significant uptick in the participation of girls—particularly teenagers—over the past few years, which we think has a lot to do with the work that is happening in schools and the inspirational impact of women's sports. We feel that there is a really strong wave that we need to take advantage of. Some of the work we have been doing in schools has focused on listening to the voice of girls and understanding what they are interested in and what keeps them engaged, and I think continuing to do that is a really important factor. We also need to recognise that there are lots of different aspects to getting girls and women involved, and that it is about not just building their confidence, but everyone being involved in that, and ensuring that they know that these kinds of activities are for them. That would be my opener.

**Chair:** Thank you. Stephanie, what are your priorities for attention on this?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** Thank you for inviting us here. Women in Sport is 40 years old this year. It is very much here because of what sport does for women and girls. We are very conscious that the extreme gendered health inequalities that there are—ranging from the impacts of osteoporosis through to self-harm in teenagers—could be reduced if girls and women were more active. At the heart of the matter is the fact that we need to tie everything we are doing here into the fight against misogyny, given that, ultimately, sport's etymological origin relates to freedom from responsibility, and sport can either fuel misogyny or tackle it. In terms of how we address the issue, our charity does a lot of research. Our research shows that, in fact, girls are still being exposed to the same very limiting stereotypes in sport as they have always been. You would think it would have moved on, but it profoundly has not.



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The biggest gap is still in participation in team sports, where there is a 22% gap between girls and boys. We need to do quite a lot to start tackling that. Some of that work is very deep and cultural, but, clearly, the Government cannot suddenly change culture across the country, so the question is, "What can they do?". The target of having 50% women leadership in sport should be there, and it should really be acted on. At our last count, 23% of the leaders of the 20 most participated in sports were women, which means three men for every woman leading a sport. There is a massive gap between men and women in coaching, in particular. We want to see 50% investment across any Government funds, a requirement for gender impact reporting and budgeting in any body that receives Government funds for sport, and 50% public service broadcasting coverage of sport.

We are really excited by impact that the profile now finally given to women's team sport for the first time has had. For those girls who already play a lot of sport and love sport, that has had a profound impact on their ability to dream. Our latest research shows that the figure of 50% of those girls who were dreaming of reaching the top level went right up in two years to 69%—just across the time that we had the Euros. The problem is that there are very few girls in that category, and the overall dream rate for girls remains at a stubborn 29% of girls wanting to reach the top of sport, compared with over 50% of boys. We have quite a lot to do still. I could go on forever, so will stop there.

**Q232 Chair:** Stephanie, you have touched on the fact that we have seen so much more coverage of women's sport, and we have seen some really strong performances by so many of our female sporting heroes. There is a lot of inspiration out there. The Government have now announced their sport strategy and have accepted the 10 Carney review recommendations. Do you feel that women's sport is heading in the right direction or do you see bumps along the road?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** I think we see that the increased coverage has had a big impact. We need to remember that when we last looked at this, three or four years ago, about 4% overall of sports coverage was of women. We saw from your earlier evidence that the BBC now says that 30% of its coverage is female, although that still means twice as much is men's. We know that there has been an impact. At the elite level there has been a shift: interestingly, it has been in cricket, rugby and football, which were the traditionally male team sports. There is still some coverage of netball, but virtually none. That was the major team sport for girls—and hockey, of course—before we were allowed to play those other big three sports. There still needs to be change at the top but, yes, that movement is very exciting. It is actually moving, for all of us who have been so frustrated by this.

The culture is slow to shift, though, isn't it? The shift has not yet happened; we still have this heavy, early years stereotyping meaning that, on arriving at school, girls have less ability to throw, kick and catch a ball than boys. We do a lot to try to catch boys up with their fine motor skills when they join school, because they tend to be behind with writing, but

we should be making sure that generalist primary teachers are fully aware that the girls are arriving with lower skills in sporting areas, so that there is extra to make up for that.

We still have this connection where girls say to us their sport is not as valued as much as for boys. The whole connection between status and sport for men is extremely strong. The whole definition of masculinity really circulates around that at school, so you have this combination of girls coming in with less skills, boys saying their status matters so much, and then this oppression. We know that even before they get to secondary, girls' self-belief in sport is halved. Then, when they get to secondary they have to face the challenges of female puberty and the onslaught of social media. There is so much that is not yet shifting in the right direction, but we have this inspiration and drive from what the Lionesses, the great netballers and the others, including the cricketers—and now I've got to say rugby players and hockey players—have done over the last recent period.

**Q233 Chair:** Thank you. Jeanette, we have had this bold new sport strategy—yet, the backdrop is that the activity gender gap for women is now the biggest since reporting began, and the gender gap between girls and boys is the same as it was in 2017 and 2019. First, why are we seeing such stubborn figures and, secondly, what is Sport England's role in addressing that issue and implementing the sport strategy?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** What is causing the gender gap? I think Steph has started to address some of the attitudes and cultural trends that create barriers and then maybe become internalised barriers for girls and women. One of the big things that has come through our research has been safety. For instance, safety in terms of wanting to be working out or exercising in public spaces that don't feel safe, especially at this time of year. There are ongoing challenges with abuse and perceptions of women who are athletic. There are a whole range of factors.

Let me turn to our role at Sport England. First and foremost, we are really committed to investing in a whole range of partners to do targeted work with girls and women. We have seen really good results when we have done that. I was here a few months ago talking about some of the work we have done in schools on Studio You—a project specifically about supporting girls to be active in schools. But many of our partners will be delivering programmes: squash, boxing, wrestling—they all have targeted programmes about saying to girls and women, "This activity could be for you, and here is a way you can get involved." It is about flipping the narrative that says, "This is not for you", and finding ways to openly invite women and girls into sports that they might not think are for them.

There is also something about the wider infrastructure. Where we have facilities that may not be welcoming to women or where women may not feel they belong, we need to find ways to proactively shift the narrative and open up facilities for women and girls. You have to look at this from lots of different angles and be intentional in how you say to this audience that these activities are for them.



Q234 **Chair:** What are you saying to the Government about what more you need from them to deliver on those plans?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** One of the things for us is the recognition that the plans that have been laid out are quite ambitious, but they need to be owned by all of Government. Obviously, DCMS is our sponsor and the Department focused on sport, but there is so much that could happen in health and in the built environment and across all other Departments. It is about recognising that there is a role for everyone in the Government ecology to play in opening doors for more participation and inclusion.

Q235 **Chair:** That is a really good point. There have been some really strong, high-profile campaigns all about trying to get women to be more active; the This Girl Can campaign was really inspiring. What do we need to do to get women past getting active and into some sort of meaningful long-term engagement with sports?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** From our research, we know that most women in mid life, for example—I count myself as one—do not connect the words “sport” or “exercise” with joy: they connect exercise with having to do something to lose weight. We need to address and shift that.

Jeanette is right, obviously, that this begins young, but we know that at each life stage women face different barriers. The unpaid care responsibilities in mid life were cited in our research and are a major reason why women have less time in that period of their lives. We know that there is a leisure time deficit for women and even that in less privileged communities teenage girls are expected to do a lot more of the work at home and that the value they put on their sports lowers. We have to shift all those different elements.

The project that we did with Places Leisure on teenage girls pointed to the need to go out to the girls from the leisure centres, which clearly need more investment, to invite them in and to provide more single-sex opportunities. That counts across the board, right into mid life as well. Single-sex opportunities and more opportunities for group sessions that people know are led by women, for example—all that really starts to shift the dial. If you have been stereotyped away from something, you need something you can trust to bring you back into it and we know that the people thing retains women. If you start doing something, it is often the friendships you build that helps retain you.

**Chair:** Jeanette, do you have anything to add?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** I was just thinking that for a number of years we have provided design guidance, which supports inclusive design—for example, if you are extending a leisure centre or building a new one, how do you make sure you are considering the needs of the users? That is a really important thing that needs to be adopted and looked at as something to be standardised. Obviously, for some of these things you can opt in or opt out, when it is guidance and not policy, so we should focus on the development of inclusive design as a policy area. For example, we have seen when we have looked at the design of leisure centres that



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privacy, modest dress and women-only areas for changing—some facilities have open changing areas—are really important for some women and girls. Recognising that in each community there will be different needs, and finding ways to build in inclusion, is one of the things that we should be focusing on.

**Stephanie Hilborne:** That goes out to parks and park design as well.

Q236 **Dr Huq:** Thanks, both. I have a couple of questions, building on that, on socioeconomic and ethnicity-type barriers. Jeanette, in November you announced that you are going to be investing £250 million to help those in the most socially deprived areas. How do you target women within that?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** It is a good question. One of the things that is converging through our place investment is that, through This Girl Can, we did some place-based investment on what we called core cities. We learned quite a lot from that about the importance of creating and designing programmes for girls and women that factor in a whole range of needs, including cost of living, childcare and female-led sessions. We are building on that learning through our investment into place and recognising that in each of the places that we invest, as we assess need and where the equality gaps are deepest, we need to be working alongside partners in those places to design work for women and girls. All of our work around women and girls—not all of it, but much of the work that you will see over the next few years—will be in specific locations, working with specific groups of women, as opposed to a kind of broad brushstroke.

We have also learned quite a lot through our This Girl Can campaign. The latest data that we see coming through shows us that there are particular groups of women and girls who are experiencing deeper inequality. That does have to do with ethnicity, and it does have to do with socioeconomic background. Our next wave of the This Girl Can campaign is going to focus specifically on particular groups where we see that intersection and the deeper inequalities.

Q237 **Dr Huq:** Is financial assistance being provided to women in lower-paid routine jobs? I think all the research shows that cost is a barrier, but time could be one too. If you are working several jobs, juggling several children, caring for your elderly parents, you know—what are we called?

**Chair:** The sandwich generation.

**Dr Huq:** The sandwich generation! That's the one.

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** Hello!

**Dr Huq:** Yes, we're all there! Is financial assistance being earmarked and provided to women facing those challenges?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** Our investments work through partners, and we encourage our partners to look at all the layers of inequality that their potential users and the populations in their areas are experiencing. I



probably would not be able to say, "Yes, there is specific investment for that specific thing," but I will say that our work is being driven now more than it ever has been by tackling inequalities. We have some really great examples from the work that we have done over the past few years that when you recognise the barrier and you address it directly, it creates more opportunities.

Let me give an example. In Bristol, there was a project where there was green space on an estate but it did not feel safe for families to exercise. We had a female activity leader who went in and created a project in the green space, free of cost. This was funded through the Together Fund, which was one of our funding streams at the time, and it created an atmosphere where families could exercise together. As opposed to just being like, "Okay, let's find something for the women to do," it was recognising the need for community space, and that increased the activity of whole families. There was a particular focus on mothers in that project. What we hope is that we will be able to mobilise more activity like that, recognising the barriers, addressing them directly and seeing a change.

**Q238 Dr Huq:** We have also seen closures and so on—it is often low-hanging fruit for local authorities. The figures show some shockingly high statistics for inactive south Asian and black women, more so than south Asian and black men, who are more inactive than their standard white counterparts. Why do you think that is? Why are we doing worse on this than everyone else?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** Stephanie has alluded to some of the challenges. There is an overlap between south Asian and black female communities, with lower-paid work and lower-income families. There are some stats around single-income families. The make-up of an individual's life means that there is less time for leisure or to focus on self-care. Finding ways to encourage communities to do activity together and to fold activity into their lives is probably the way forward.

It is a real problem and a very clear trend in the data. We have worked with a number of local, south Asian-led organisations to support them to work in their communities and to find ways to design that activity for the lives of the people in those communities. Of course, there is an underlying challenge around poverty, which is a little outside our remit, but it is recognising that that is a barrier.

**Dr Huq:** Yes. Sorry, Steph, I shouldn't aim all the questions at Jeanette: it was just because of the money that she is giving.

**Stephanie Hilborne:** Absolutely, the underlying issue about how active you are is very connected to your wealth, effectively. It is definitely a major player and, with the social care crisis, who picks up on that? Women do, from every background, but probably more so when you have less money to pay for private care, for example. We are about to do some research this year to try to pull apart some of the issues that Jeanette was talking about to try to segregate the data about economic situation from cultural background—how much of this is the exacerbation of stereotyping



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and cultural versus how much of it is the job you are in and how long your hours are. We are trying to pull apart some of that to understand it better.

If you look at the starting point of school, sport in school has to be so important, because it should be the leveller. Every girl, whatever her background, should be able to enjoy and take part in the right type of school sport. Again, we would say there needs to be more understanding about single-sex provision, which has an overlap with certain cultural and religious backgrounds. It is not just at secondary school either.

**Q239 Dr Huq:** What can be done to break those cultural and other deep-rooted stereotypes that can put women and girls off sport? I am thinking of two things I saw locally recently. One was Ealing hockey club, which is trying to be very anti-elitist. Certain sports, such as hockey and lacrosse, are seen as a bit jolly hockey sticks, but they have lots of boys as well. The other one was Ealing riding school—there are hardly any horse-riding schools left. Apparently they used to be all over the place—there was one in Croydon and one in Southall, but very few are left. The one in Ealing turns no one away: even if you do not have money for the fees you can muck out and help with the horse poo and then get free lessons after you have done a number of sessions. What can be done to smash those stereotypes? It is not just football and the Lionesses.

**Stephanie Hilborne:** The whole basis of this is stereotypes. We have done research into the early years stereotyping. We are trying to think of ways to raise the public consciousness among all of us, because every parent wants the best for their kid, but we are finding that the language used towards, and the expectations of, girls and boys remains very much focused on “Be careful” or “Take care” for girls and “Go out and lead” for boys. There has to be an overall public awareness-raising exercise.

Teachers need more support to understand what has already happened in terms of that stereotyping and what they might be contributing to accidentally—because they want the best for the kids. What girls have told us in our research is that they see boys congratulated for kicking a good ball in football, but they will not get any mention when they have done a good job in badminton or whatever it is, because the teacher is falling into thinking that status matters more for the boy so they have to reinforce it.

Obviously teachers are amazing, but we do not understand how deeply stereotyped we all are—to the point where members of my team find themselves accidentally saying, “You look pretty” to a niece and “What a good shot” to their nephew, and having to correct it during that day. It is so deep in us. Through the teaching community and the coach community, far more work needs to be done to understand how deep these stereotypes go and how deep misogyny goes, because we are not taught about this and we are not aware of it as we grow up; it just becomes part of us and we pass it through to the next generation. A lot of this is about awareness and a lot is about training.

Men have to be a really big part of the solution as well. We have actually just done some research into little boys. The research that has been done



on male stereotyping of boys is largely focused on how negative it is for the adult man to have been stereotyped in the way they were: taught to repress emotions, or taught that if you are not good at sport, you might not need to exist. But little research—virtually none—has been done on the impact on girls' sport, and it has a massive impact. We need to bring men into the conversation properly so that everyone understands the issue at its root. Sport is both an expression of generic stereotyping and a fueller of it, so it is a very important part of the wider picture.

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** I don't know if I can add anything to that, Steph. I will talk about This Girl Can. I completely agree with Steph that everyone is responsible for reversing stereotypes and making sure that opportunities are open to all. I also think that it is really important to have a really strong set of images that are constantly reinforcing that women and girls can do these things and do these things, and that it's normal and joyful. We need to continue to do that at every level. I will also reinforce the point about coaching. First of all, we are working on the workforce around coaching, but coaching needs to be really focused on reversing some of the stereotypes. It is almost like you are moving from deficit into positive.

Q240 **Clive Efford:** Good morning. Thanks for coming to give evidence to us today. Can I start with you, Jeanette? I have listened to what you have described and set out in your answers. I have been following the participation issue for many years. I was shadow Sport Minister from 2011 to 2016, and we are still talking about the same problems—that there is a gender gap and also a class gap, whereby those from lower-income communities are participating far less than people from higher-income areas. That is still the same; we are still talking about the same problems.

This Girl Can must have been launched in 2015. Here we are nearly 10 years later and we are still talking about This Girl Can. It is a great brand that has had many great successes, but it is piecemeal—not actually making a big change. Is sport a reflection of society? We beat sport up for not making these breakthroughs, but when we look at sport, does it actually reflect or give us a window into cultural and societal problems?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** Is that question to me? I was hoping it was for Steph.

**Clive Efford:** It is to Women in Sport, actually—Stephanie.

**Stephanie Hilborne:** Okay. It is really interesting that you are connecting it, because if you think about the Women's Football World Cup and the kiss and if you think about misogyny, it is the same thing. Is it reflecting or is it fuelling? Is sport fuelling society's misogyny or reflecting it? Of course, they are very interlinked and we have to address them together, but because we are in the sport space, our focus must be on how sport can change to help shift society, as well as to understand where society is and therefore why sport is like it is. I mean, they are just interconnected,



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aren't they? It is chicken and egg. It is really important, because sport is so dear to any country's heart and is seen as such an important thing.

The historic exclusion of women from sport was totally appalling. We talk about the football ban now, although we weren't talking about that until the last few years, but if you look at some of the quotes from the founder of the modern Olympics, they are appalling. They basically say that you should teach girls from birth that their job is to applaud the men. We are coming from a very bad place in sport. Actually, compared with then, we have achieved equality in terms of access to events at the Olympics. It took about 120 years—it was only achieved in about 2012—but we have made that shift, so there has been some progress.

If we can keep up the visibility and the respect at the highest level, where it connects to elite, it can make it seem normal. That is the core thing. I think you talked about that, Jeanette, in that we have to make it normal for girls to play sport and not simply go into the activities that are very aesthetic, but go into the ones we have seen on the telly more recently, which are about being tough and resilient, with all the teamwork and the stuff that that can build. Most of us will not end up being elite sportspeople, but if we have those experiences when we are young, it absolutely fuels our skills at work. It absolutely fuels our inner confidence and resilience. It is all totally connected.

I would support This Girl Can. We were very much involved at the beginning of it. It has been a brilliant campaign. We have also done work on imagery of women in mid life, of which there was virtually none if you looked at leisure centres until recently. We did a whole project with Getty Images on that and those are being used a lot. We have to recognise that until we change the leadership at the top, we will not shift this. The leisure industry is principally run by men when it should be 50:50, so we do not have the lived experience in the people making the decisions about the leisure centres, how they are designed and how they are run. Until we shift to men and women equally running sport and leisure and until we introduce gender impact reporting and budgeting to try to get some of that shifting going on, we are not going to get there.

- Q241 **Clive Efford:** That brings me to my next question, which is about facilities. Largely, facilities are in the hands of local authorities, which have been smashed to bits financially over the past 14 years. That has led to those non-statutory services, such as sports facilities, being squeezed and charges being put up. That then begins to exclude, pushing back on what you are trying to achieve in terms of reaching into those more deprived communities that are becoming active. What assessment have you made? I will start with you, Stephanie. What has been the impact of that on what you have been trying to achieve in terms of bridging the gender gap in sports participation?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** The impact of the leisure facilities—

**Clive Efford:** Yes, and those cuts and the increasing charges.



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**Stephanie Hilborne:** We know that it has had an impact. For instance, with swimming pools, I know that in earlier sessions you heard figures of about 1,200 of them being over 40 years old and 450 having been lost. Women depend a lot on swimming for their activity and exercise classes, so we know that the leisure centre is particularly important to women.

The decline of the investment in leisure facilities—we know why it is—is of profound significance to women. We have to think about the public open green and blue estate. If you really start thinking about the fact that we should all be able to exercise for free, that means really high-quality natural green spaces and pure water in our rivers and seas so there is a chance for people to open swim without pollution. It connects into those huge debates. How we do it without a massive reinvestment in local authorities is hard to see, because we know where they are at. It brings it—Jeanette talked about cross-Government—right into that department.

Q242 **Clive Efford:** Before you answer, Jeanette, can I just add that the Public Accounts Committee seems to think that you do not know where your money is going when you give money, particularly to local authorities? Would you like to comment on that as well?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** We wrote to the Public Accounts Committee after that session and we laid out where our investments are going. Our approach to investment is focused on understanding where the greatest need is. We work with a whole range of partners across England. We have 43 active partnerships, and each of them can account for the investments they are making and the populations they are serving. They do a range of different types of work. That includes investment in capital. It also includes investment in activity. Most recently, we have done a whole range of work with smaller organisations through the Together Fund, which has really opened up reach into places and with people we would not usually be working with. There is a whole range of stuff happening.

Coming back to what happens with local authorities, the investment we make into local areas is a very, very small investment. However, we try to make sure that it is targeted investment. For example, when we invest in football, our investment is not into the bigger things you see around men's football. Most of our investment goes into inclusive football—for example, opportunities for girls and women and for facilities to be opened up. There is a bias when it comes to football facilities; still, women and girls' football is put in time slots that are not convenient. Our investment is going into making sure that there are facilities that are dedicated to women and girls, so that there is an opportunity for them to be included and they are not seen as an aside to activity. That is the approach we are taking.

Q243 **Clive Efford:** If you were sitting here 10 years ago, you would have given the exact same answer to that question. Why have we not moved the dial on?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** Well, I wasn't sitting here 10 years ago, but what I can say is that if you track the investment we are making into local places and local organisations, you will find that we are seeing increases.



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Over the past few years, we were hit by covid, and most of the activities we would want to invest in had to stop. We invested significantly in recovery, and we got to the point last year where Active Lives figures were saying that we were back to pre-covid levels. Obviously, we cannot take full responsibility for that, but we know that we have a sector that is resilient and that if we continue to invest in it, it will continue to be able to lift those rates of participation.

**Q244 Clive Efford:** You started your answer by saying that when you invest through sport governing bodies you do not just give investment to the sport governing body to keep its core funding going, but you invest in specific projects that make a difference. When I pushed you, you said “those local organisations we work with”. I wonder how much of the money you get as Sport England is predetermined to go to the sport governing bodies, with innovation and those small grassroots groups that want to get funding left with the bits and pieces that are left. How much of your funding do you have the freedom to innovate with?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** That is a really good question. I suppose one of the best ways for me to answer it is to explain a little about what our strategy says. Our strategy is about mobilising change across a sector. What it recognises is that Sport England, sitting where we sit, does not have the reach and networks and contacts that we need to have. What we do is bring together a set of partners. We can categorise our partners in different ways. We have a set of partners we call system partners that we have invested in for five to seven years. Some of those are national governing bodies, some of them are active partnerships—regional partnerships that are responsible for particular areas of England—and some of them are equalities partnerships. We have people like Activity Alliance, Intelligent Health and the Richmond Group of Charities.

Those partners are part of a bigger plan for us to work with groups of people that we would not usually reach. It is a slightly more complex investment strategy than just saying, “Okay, we allocate a certain amount to NGBs.” However, when we do allocate money to national governing bodies, we have an agreement with them about the specific outcomes we are looking for from them and the specific audiences we expect them to work with. It is not just, “Here is some core funding,” but, “Here is some funding for you to work strategically to tackle inequalities using the tool of your sports.” For the other groups, it is about finding ways to work with the audiences most in need of getting active and about innovating. That is particularly how we work with active partnerships, which are our regional partners.

**Q245 Julie Elliott:** Good morning. The Government recently published plans to encourage two hours of PE a week, to help ensure that girls get the same access to sports as boys. Is that enough? Will it work to get girls into sports?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** The announcement about the investment in schools is welcome. There is no additional money for girls’ sport—we have to make that absolutely clear: it was very much saying that we will continue our



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primary school premium. We believe that that should be followed through a gendered lens, so we should check that schools are spending that equally on girls and boys.

**Julie Elliott:** Is that not happening at the moment?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** We do not have definite data on how much it is happening, but we know that the tendency is for more after-school and in-school provision—certainly in team sports—to be targeted more at the boys. We will know whether it is happening only when we do gender impact reporting. Most money, when it is spent by the Government or anyone else, is not followed through to see whether men or women or boys or girls are benefiting more. It should be: as a matter of course, we should be following that money through.

Q246 **Julie Elliott:** Is that something that Sport England could do?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** Yes, with its grants Sport England could. To back what Jeanette said, we are really impressed by Sport England's strategy. To plug one thing that Jeanette said, I do not think that 10 years ago Sport England or the Government would have been saying that we need time set aside in the facilities for girls. We have made a bit of progress.

Sport England could definitely give its grants while saying, "We expect you to carry out a gender impact assessment as part of this grant." Government Departments could be giving their agencies grants and asking for the gender impact assessment of those grants as a starting point going towards gender budgeting in future. At the moment, we just do not.

The Prison Service is the most extreme version of Government expenditure—the very vast majority, easily 95%, is obviously spent on men because of the prison population. We just do not follow the money and where it is going. We need to do that; that is one definite thing that could improve.

On school sport generally, we know that schools have their work cut out and that engagement with school is a challenge post pandemic. There is a really strong case for sport becoming a much bigger part of school life in the context of that.

Q247 **Julie Elliott:** Can I press you a bit on that? Do you think there should be changes in the way PE is delivered in schools? Should it be a core subject inspected by Ofsted?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** We would support its being inspected, but I am not quite sure whether it is inspected already.

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** It is not inspected by Ofsted but there was a recent Ofsted review of PE provision. I would say that one shift we could make would be to make sure that schools make the connection between wellbeing and physical activity. If that connection is made, there will be greater investment.

Q248 **Julie Elliott:** How would we make that happen?



**Stephanie Hilborne:** It is a challenge, isn't it?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** It is challenging but it is a part of the work we are doing at Sport England. We recently launched a consensus statement on physical literacy, which is all about the experiences that children and young people have of and their relationship with physical activity. It recognises that unless children see physical activity as a positive thing and have positive experiences, they are not going to continue to be active. That is particularly true for girls; what we are seeing is that girls are having less and less enjoyment through physical activity. If we could work with educators on that idea and shift how we think about it, that could make a real difference.

Q249 **Julie Elliott:** Jeanette, there is a sharp drop-off rate in secondary school. What can Sport England do about that? Is there anything that you can do about that?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** There are things that we can do through our partners. For example, we fund and have significant conversations with the Youth Support Trust. Within its agreement, it works on all our school sports partnerships and it invests in the development of a physical activity workforce in schools—we have influence over that. When we think about the specific policy that we hold, it is all about physical literacy and positive experiences. All the investment we are doing through our partners, and the kind of influence that we are pushing them towards, is in that vein.

Q250 **Julie Elliott:** If we follow that through, do you monitor what sports bodies' activities are happening in schools to see that some of these good policies are actually delivering? Do you monitor that?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** We can always do with more data, but we have our Active Lives Children and Young People Survey that comes through every single year.

**Julie Elliott:** Do people have to fill that in?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** Yes. Do people have to?

**Julie Elliott:** Is it voluntary?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** It is a survey. May I just chip in briefly? With the secondary school drop-off, we know that that is rooted in the primary school experience and then exacerbated by the experience of female puberty. We believe that PE teachers should have more training in how to support girls with managing periods, that bras should be a necessary requirement on the PE kit list—they are for only a very small percentage of lists currently—and that we need to have a really sharp focus on single-sex provision at that age. We have not got data yet, but the general feeling is that is declining; there is a reluctance to segregate the sexes for sport in secondary school, and that is actually going to make the situation worse. There are some aspects that we could—

Q251 **Julie Elliott:** If I come back in on that bit, do you think that single-sex



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sport facilities and opportunities for girls are more likely to get girls to participate?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** Yes, that is what our data shows, and particularly the girls who are not keen on sport currently. In our latest “dream deficit” report, 22% of those girls who are less keen on sport said they would do more if they did not have to do it with the boys.

Q252 **Julie Elliott:** Of course, you mentioned the sports PE kit. If something else is added, that is an extra cost to people who cannot afford things already.

**Stephanie Hilborne:** Well, that is a major issue.

Q253 **Julie Elliott:** Trust me, as a grandmother of many grandchildren, the cost of uniform and sports kit is just outrageous.

Can I just push very briefly and look at sport outside of school? Participation is not where it needs to be in school, but if we look at outside of school, it is even worse. How good, Jeanette, are organisations at finding an inclusive approach to finding talent, and also at attracting enough female volunteers and those role models to coaching roles who actually encourage girls to participate?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** I probably cannot speak too much to talent, but in terms of coaching and volunteering, I would say it is an area for growth. There are some really good programmes being run by the likes of UK Coaching, and I could probably write to you about the specifics of some of those.

**Julie Elliott:** That would be good, yes.

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** I would say that is a particular area of growth and we have identified it as something that would have a really profound impact on participation through our data.

Q254 **Julie Elliott:** Finally, Jeanette, private school facilities are usually phenomenal in the sports arena. Should the Government be doing more to make those available for state school use?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** We have done quite a lot of work on opening facilities and we recognise that the more facilities can be opened to communities, the more opportunity there is for participation.

**Julie Elliott:** Should the Government take action on that?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** I think it is an important area of work, yes.

**Julie Elliott:** Stephanie, what do you think on that?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** We would obviously support the access to high-quality facilities that are not being used. Private schools are obviously independent, so you would have to have regulation or something to force them ultimately. But where they are willing to open up, that is brilliant. It is the big gap in those two forms of education, isn't it? The biggest,



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perhaps, is that access to a good sporting experience at school, which is just so profoundly wrong.

Additionally, it is gendered, and I think that is one of the issues here. This is about the female side of sport. Because the provision is so poor across the board, people are almost reluctant to then add the extra problem of the gender provision. So we would fully support any additional access that can be given.

**Q255 Giles Watling:** Thank you for coming this morning. Stephanie, first of all, I was absolutely fascinated by something you threw up earlier about the deeply embedded prejudices that we all hold. You put it so succinctly. As the brother of three sisters and the father of two daughters, I absolutely understand how these prejudices have played out over the years, as well as being of a certain age—when I was young, girls played hockey, netball and lacrosse, and boys played football, cricket and boxing. Those are being broken down because of what is happening in the media, with the Lionesses and so on, but not all of those deeply embedded prejudices. I am also a member of four different sports clubs, which have changed over the years in so many ways and have opened up, but there is still bar-room banter. There is still all of that. Can you get into the sports clubs and affect that, do you think?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** We are doing some work at the moment with Welsh Rugby on the volunteer base at club level. The first thing is to understand what it means for there to be such a gender imbalance in the people running the clubs, as well as the coaches. We are about to work with Sport England next year on the female coaching taskforce to really get to the bottom of the coaching issue. Welsh Rugby is responding to the review it had, and is in a moment of change. They want to really understand how they can get more women into the rugby clubs so that they are part-running them—50% running them.

It all goes back to these issues about the structure that has been set up around men's leisure time. The structure is not one that is necessarily conducive, even if the culture was, to women coming into it. I think the big challenge, when we are addressing questions such as, "Why aren't more women running those clubs?" or "Why aren't there more women in coaching?", is that the problem is not the women. It is the environment we are expecting them to thrive in.

**Q256 Giles Watling:** And how would you access and get into that environment in order to change it for the better—for more inclusion?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** This is the issue, on a local level—I spent many years working at the local wildlife trust. A top-down approach to that won't necessarily help, but, if you are one of the bodies that has an interface with multiple local clubs, you have to spot natural leaders among the men and the women to get in to make those changes happen. The clubs are a community in their own right, aren't they? They will follow leadership in their own community.



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You can see small examples where that has happened. I know it is not an underprivileged area, but Jim Carter made a tremendous difference 20 years ago at the Hampstead Cricket Club, introducing women's cricket; however, as soon as he wasn't there, showing leadership, the challenges came—have they got the women's coaches? It is a tricky question to answer, but, if we can raise awareness about the problems that we are facing and change some of the structures at a local level, to make it more likely that women would engage—

**Giles Watling:** Would that be a way of tackling the deeply embedded prejudices that you were talking about earlier?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** It would, yes.

**Giles Watling:** Jeanette, have you got any comment on that?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** Something that has been shifting is that sports are examining themselves and their governance and they are putting in new codes of conduct. We have seen this in rugby and cricket, through some interesting programmes, including one called Chance to Shine; we have seen it with the FA and the LTA. Because of the way that sport is structured—it is layers and layers and layers—there has to be a commitment at every level to examining yourself and to change.

One of the things we do is called the code for sports governance, which requires the organisations that we fund to a certain level to do a diversity and inclusion action plan. That will include them looking at all their data and at how many of their participants or members are from particular backgrounds, or are male or female. That is really important. If it is taken seriously, and is taken through to action, then you can see change. We have some really great examples of where things are changing at that granular level.

Q257 **Giles Watling:** Is Sport England reaching out to the clubs?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** Yes. We have a team that focuses on reaching into club level and provides resources, support and challenge for them. We obviously cannot do everything ourselves. We are about mobilising and influencing the culture across the sector.

Q258 **Giles Watling:** Thank you. I want to move on to unlocking and delivering new facilities. This is to you, Jeanette. What progress has been made on this, and will the facilities that you are aiming to unlock cater to things other than football?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** When you say "facilities", do you mean school facilities or wider community facilities?

**Giles Watling:** I mean wider community facilities, and school facilities.

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** We have a real commitment to multi-sport facilities. Even though some of our investment is focused on football and upgrading pitches, a lot of it seeks to be multi-sport. What was the second part of your question?

**Giles Watling:** Will it cater to sports other than football? You have just answered that.

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** Yes, absolutely.

Q259 **Giles Watling:** Will you ensure that those facilities have changing facilities for women and girls?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** Yes. Our design guidance requires any facility that we invest in to have appropriate changing facilities.

Q260 **Giles Watling:** Thank you. Stephanie, what changes would you like to see in facility provision?

**Stephanie Hilborne:** I think the main ones have been touched on. Obviously, the challenge is that a lot of this is community funded. On the physical environment, having decent change facilities in the clubhouse is particularly important because of our biology. It is actually a hygiene issue.

When you go out beyond traditional clubhouses—when you are talking about leisure facilities and so on—the safety of the walk from or access by public transport to the leisure facility is a major issue. We have touched on that, and the design guidance for parks has been touched on in previous sessions. Single access points, where teenage boys hang around, are a no go. Basically, the money we spend on public parks is not nearly enough, and because women hardly use them for sport and exercise, when you look to gender budgeting, you realise that is a problem.

**Giles Watling:** So it is about making them more user-friendly for all.

**Stephanie Hilborne:** Exactly, yes. That makes it an attractive and positive experience.

Q261 **Giles Watling:** Jeanette, how are you holding sports bodies to account for inappropriate behaviour?

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** I have just mentioned our code for sports governance. Because we are not a regulator, it is a challenge for us in specific cases to hold sports to account. However, when there are serious allegations and things are raised with us, we take each situation really seriously. You will know that there are a number of investigations and commissions that we have made to get to the bottom of things that are happening in specific sports. As a general rule, our approach is to raise standards of behaviour through our code for sports governance. We take that really seriously, but—

**Giles Watling:** You don't have the power of a regulator.

**Jeanette Bain-Burnett:** There is a gap. One of the things that we really welcomed in the Government's sports strategy is the call for integrity in sport. I know they received a lot of responses to that. We contributed to that, and we are really interested in being part of whatever the solution is.

**Giles Watling:** So it is moving in the right direction. I have one final

general question for both of you.

**Stephanie Hilborne:** Can I just quickly pick up the point about the independent regulator? We are fully supportive of that, and it should have been in before. We didn't support more consultation on it because Tanni Grey-Thompson's report in 2017 should have already had an impact. We need an independent regulator particularly for children and women over 18. Embedding a duty of care, protecting athletes regardless of age, introducing a new duty to report, collecting data and monitoring these issues are absolutely vital to support that.

**Giles Watling:** Thank you. You have just answered the question I was about to ask.

**Chair:** Thank you both for giving evidence to us today. If you think of anything else that we should take into consideration, please do drop us a line afterwards. We are really grateful for your time.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Stuart Andrew MP, Polly Payne and Adam Conant

Q262 **Chair:** You are all very welcome to this session. This is our final panel in our inquiry: Stuart Andrew, the Minister for Sport; Polly Payne, the director general at the Department; and Adam Conant, the deputy director and head of sport. Thank you all so much for your time today.

Minister, can I start with you? The Government have been really busy over the last few weeks and months. They announced the policy relating to women's sport—Get Active—and the response to the Carney review, so there is a lot of work ongoing. What are your priorities for those pieces of work?

**Stuart Andrew:** Frankly, it is implementation, and implementing all of it. When you look at the various parts of both the review and the strategy, implementation of all of them will help us to maximise the potential to get more women and girls active. Government can do only so much, which is why, although a lot of the levers are across Government—and so we are bringing Government Departments together—we are also bringing together other stakeholders, like national governing bodies and those involved with physical activity, so that we are playing our parts and holding each other to account for the delivery and implementation of the recommendations in Karen Carney's review and the sport strategy.

Q263 **Chair:** To deliver them, though, is going to take money. What kind of funding are the Government committing to both these pieces of activity?

**Stuart Andrew:** When we look at Karen Carney's review, there are three recommendations for Government. One of those is about the provision of facilities. We are investing about £400 million in facilities up and down the country, including the recently announced £25 million Lionesses fund, which is specifically for, if you like, gold-plated pitches and facilities for



women and girls. That will make sure there are opportunities there at peak times for them.

Then there is the wider context of tennis provision in parks, swimming pool support, which we have been providing, and multi-purpose pitches, as part of that wider funding. In terms of school funding, we have been working very closely with colleagues in DfE. We have announced £600 million to ensure that there is the provision of PE for two hours a week, which was our recommendation, and that there is equal access for girls in schools.

**Q264 Chair:** You have said that you very much see both these announcements as joint efforts, and that they need to be delivered across a whole range of society, including local government. But given the fact that there is a reported shortfall of £4 billion across local government over the next two years, and that local authorities are talking about being able to deliver the absolute bare minimum—the statutory parts of their responsibilities—how do you see them being able to lean into these announcements?

**Stuart Andrew:** First of all, that is why, in terms of the sport strategy and its implementation, we have the national physical activity taskforce. Both the LGA and DLUHC are represented on that board. That will allow us to understand the challenges and issues that we need to look at and address. We are constantly working with our colleagues in DLUHC and the LGA. Our taking up the issues around swimming pools stemmed from that, and obviously we went to the Treasury to seek support for the swimming pool fund, which is being rolled out as we speak. That is why the taskforce is so important, to understand all the different challenges and how we might address those and support each other in addressing those.

**Q265 Chair:** When it comes to changing participation, we are obviously here today to talk about women's sport, and participation is an issue. It is stubbornly fixed pretty much at where it has been over the last decade. There is still an enormous gender gap in sports engagement as well. What do you think is the single most important thing that needs to change in order to get equality of access and participation, to really see those rates begin to make a meaningful difference?

**Stuart Andrew:** I don't know if there is just a single one. If I am being really honest, I think there are a lot of issues we need to address. That is what we are trying to do and why, with Karen Carney's review, we will have the implementation board to bring together everybody responsible for the key recommendations that she makes, holding them to account for how those are being delivered. On the sports strategy, it is about how we are making sure that facilities are suitable for women and girls. We know that some of them are just simply not. That is why this funding is so important: to bring those facilities up to scratch and provide environments that are welcoming. Being blunt, I think it is also about changes to attitudes, which is a more societal issue. I feel really passionately about this issue. In this role, I am fortunate to be able to go out and about and see that where it works well, the difference it makes to those women and



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girls is phenomenal. We want to see that opportunity for all parts of the country.

Q266 **Chair:** One of the things concerning me is the fact that among all the announcements, there are not participation targets for young girls. There is not specific funding directed at girls. One of our previous witnesses said that without the data, we will maybe see through a lens that sports activity is going up, but we will not necessarily know whether it is going up amongst that cohort we are seeking to target. Why did you decide not to include, for example, a participation target for girls in the active strategy?

**Stuart Andrew:** One of the issues we are looking at here is that we want 1.25 million women to be more active, and then 1 million more children. We are working with DfE, and we have updated the school sports and physical activity plan, which sets the ambition of two hours per week and equal access. Guidance will be published very shortly through DfE on how schools can achieve that and what best practice is. But then we will also have things such as the school sports mark—

**Adam Conant:** School games mark.

**Stuart Andrew:** School games mark—forgive me, I can never remember all these terms. That will then bring more transparency about what is actually working and what the level changes are. Constantly in the taskforce, where evidence is showing that we perhaps need more evidence or we need to change our approach, then we will do that, because it is really important to us to get this right, frankly.

**Polly Payne:** I think it is also worth saying that as a Department, we have really focused on making sure that all our funding that goes towards sport—whether that is the Sport England funding from us and the National Lottery, which is about £300 million a year; the UK Sport funding, again from us and the National Lottery, which is about £150 million a year; as well as all the facilities funding, the £400 million that has already been mentioned—is particularly targeted at under-represented groups, obviously including women and girls. We are really focusing on that with Sport England and UK Sport, as well as with our facilities funding. With all our funding, we are making sure that it is focused particularly on under-represented groups, including women and girls. From the Department's point of view, that is really important.

**Stuart Andrew:** Absolutely.

Q267 **Giles Watling:** The multi-sports grassroots facilities programme will be required to share plans to ensure women and girls receive this funding. How will that work?

**Stuart Andrew:** We are working with organisations such as the Football Foundation, tasking them with reporting of that. As Polly has just mentioned, hard-to-reach groups are the key focus of a lot of our funding, so we want to understand what is happening with the facilities. Each of those that get the funding have to develop effective EDI plans, so that we

know they are working to get equal access for women and girls into those facilities.

**Giles Watling:** You will conduct a review of the existing facilities.

**Stuart Andrew:** As we are funding them, but then we have this specific Lionesses fund, which is for some sites specifically offering the peak times to women and girls. Women and girls get the priority at those sites. That was a key ask of the Lionesses. It is working with the FA as well, which is providing £5 million of that, to ensure that we are doing everything we can. There is also the Sport England place-based funding of £250 million, which is looking at how we get women in various communities—each area and its challenges will be different—working with local stakeholders who know their communities best to get that right.

**Giles Watling:** It is a massive job, because you are having to build it bespoke.

**Stuart Andrew:** It is a big job. I am under no illusion that the challenge we have in front of us is an enormous one, but that is precisely why we are putting a lot of effort into this.

Q268 **Giles Watling:** I have a list of the funding here. Do you think that the funding is adequate for the job in hand?

**Stuart Andrew:** It is probably the most significant funding we have seen for a generation, frankly. Could we have more? I would always love to have more money, of course I would, but this is a big piece of work that we are doing to provide facilities around the country. As I say, the Lionesses fund is something that will be quite unique, and it will be interesting to see how that model works. Our hope is that it will bring about another 8,000 women and girls who are currently not active into a more active environment, because the facility is more welcoming and appropriate for their needs.

**Giles Watling:** Absolutely. We touched on that with the earlier panel. Yes, Polly?

**Polly Payne:** It is also worth talking about trying to work out what the need, the demand, is. At the moment, the Football Foundation is undertaking some work to update a snapshot which will be about the facilities required to meet the demand from women and girls. Obviously, there is a bit of dynamic stuff in there, but hopefully the demand will increase.

**Giles Watling:** It is chicken and egg, to a certain extent.

**Polly Payne:** It is a bit chicken and egg, but I think it is important to have that kind of data as well about the gap we need to fill.

**Giles Watling:** Absolutely. Adam, I saw you nodding your head.

**Adam Conant:** It is worth adding to what we were talking about with the grants that have already been made, that this was identified as a gap in



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Karen Carney's review. The Football Foundation, again, are taking it away to look at what post-event insurance can be done, so that as the strategy that the Minister talked about is being implemented at a local level, we can identify what we can do about it if it hasn't been done. The foundation is due to come back to us this month.

**Giles Watling:** We will hear further later.

**Adam Conant:** Yes.

Q269 **Giles Watling:** Thank you. I would like to move on to something that is important to me as an MP representing a coastal constituency. Sadly, we have a pretty poor safety record, and that is about ability to swim and an understanding of our waters. Swim England has welcomed the Government's swimming pool support fund, but it is not enough to help pools all across the country. I happen to know that our local authority does a fair bit of work with the two swimming pools that we have, but only 4% of the population of my area use those pools, and yet we are asking all the taxpayers to pay for it. How do we balance that? Because it is important that people learn to swim.

**Stuart Andrew:** Absolutely, it is. This was one of the first issues that was raised with me following my appointment to this role, about swimming pools. I heard it loudly and clearly from colleagues around the country that there were significant issues. That is why we lobbied hard to secure the funding available.

We have split that funding in two. One was to target those pools that were at immediate risk of closing due to the high energy costs. We went through as vigorous a process as possible to identify the most vulnerable. Now, we are going through the second phase, which is to look at how we make these pools more sustainable, improving their energy provision so that it will save the local authorities or the community groups that are running them money in the long term, keeping those facilities open.

You are right: in terms of getting more people to go swimming, that will be one of the issues that the taskforce will be looking at. We are talking about getting more people active—well, that is why we have the national governing bodies and other representatives on that taskforce, so that we can ask them, "What will you do to encourage more people to learn to swim?"

Q270 **Giles Watling:** You can assure us, then, that the Government—in this instance, on swimming pools—are not managing a retreat.

**Stuart Andrew:** Oh no. I hope that we have been able to demonstrate that actually the provision of the facilities is really key to us implementing the strategy. If people do not have the places to go to do the physical activity, we will not hit those targets. It is very important to us.

Q271 **Giles Watling:** And with regard to financing, it cannot just be the taxpayer—it would be sponsorship and promotion.



**Stuart Andrew:** Absolutely. That is why we want to bring the taskforce together, because innovative approaches are happening around the country, and we want to share that best practice right across the country if something is working well in one area and it has been a new approach. We have been working with colleagues in Gloucester where they are offering £1 swimming, but they have seen their numbers go up. It is things such as that that we really need to understand and share best practice on, so that is why the taskforce will really be important.

**Giles Watling:** And it will be easier to finance if lots of people come. If you build it, they will come.

**Stuart Andrew:** Exactly.

Q272 **Julie Elliott:** Good morning, everybody. How can the Government improve accountability in schools to ensure that girls are receiving equal access to sports, especially sports that they enjoy, in a way that works for them? Do you think that the aim of two hours of PE a week should become mandatory, Minister?

**Stuart Andrew:** As I say, we are working with our partners and colleagues in DfE on this, because we recognise that they have a massive role to play in how we bring about a culture of young people taking physical activity and sport as an everyday part of their lives, so they have a really key role to play. Again, that is why they are on the taskforce with us. I have a meeting in the next week or two with the Schools Minister so that we can check on the progress we have made and how we can be more transparent in the way that you suggest.

**Julie Elliott:** So do you think that the two hours should be mandatory?

**Stuart Andrew:** At the moment, I think we would prefer to do it as guidance, but to show what best practice looks like and see what the benefits are like, because those who are providing it talk to us about the difference that they see in their students.

**Julie Elliott:** If the guidance doesn't deliver two hours a week, do you then think that it should be made mandatory?

**Stuart Andrew:** That's why I say I think that we will look at evidence.

**Julie Elliott:** You've got an open mind on it.

**Stuart Andrew:** I always have an open mind on these things, yes.

Q273 **Julie Elliott:** The Government do not collect data on which sports pupils participate in in the day, so we do not actually know the gender breakdown of who does which sports. However, from survey responses we know that girls are more likely to have access to netball and rounders and boys are more likely to have access to football and rugby, for example. Do you think that that could be considered pigeonholing? What effect does that have on opportunity and, particularly, the discovery of talent?



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**Stuart Andrew:** To be really frank, one of the things that I have found challenging in my own mind is that with the success of the Lionesses, only 63% of girls were able to take part in football in school, and I worry about the others. I do not think that there should be the pigeonholing; it is about what interests the individual and gets them interested in physical activity. That is why working with Sport England—I keep getting this—

**Adam Conant:** Studio You.

**Stuart Andrew:** Studio You has been so important, because it is actually asking the young people themselves what they would be interested in and how we provide that to them. Looking at innovative schemes such as that will be really important for us, but we will continue to look. Data will be really important in how we analyse how we are doing.

Q274 **Julie Elliott:** I am aware that a lot of these questions link with DfE, but the two things go hand in hand. If we look at the talent pipeline, what are the Government going to do to focus on secondary schools and ensure that young women can access the same opportunities as young men? If you dip your toe in, you might be fantastic or love it, but if you don't have the opportunity to dip your toe in, you'll never know. What is happening in that area?

**Stuart Andrew:** I keep referring to the taskforce, but our last meeting was purely focused on children and young people; we were looking at exactly those points. It is such a broad issue and there is so much to do that we are going to revisit it as a taskforce. That is why in the interim I am having meetings with my colleague in the DfE so that we can look at what we need to do to bring about that tangible change and opportunity.

Q275 **Julie Elliott:** In the refreshed school sport and activity plan that was published in July last year, the Department for Education said the non-statutory guidance would be published by the end of 2023, but we have not seen it yet. Again, I know it is not your Department, but it is linked to what you do. Do you have any idea when that might be published, and if you don't, could you find out and write to the Committee?

**Stuart Andrew:** My understanding is that it is very imminent, but if I may I will get a better answer for you. I hate saying the word "soon".

Q276 **Julie Elliott:** You mentioned the Carney review. I was a strong advocate for that review to happen and then for it to be implemented. The Carney review asks for additional investment in the talent pathway but does not specify where it should come from. Where do you expect to see it coming from?

**Stuart Andrew:** I don't know whether Adam can give a better answer than me, but I think this is one of the things where the implementation board is going to be key at looking at and addressing how we achieve those recommendations. I think all 10 recommendations are linked to one another, so implementing them all is going to be key.

If, for example, we improve the media representation of women's football, that provides opportunities for better broadcast rights and sponsorship



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deals—those sorts of things. I think it is going to be a combination of getting all of that working and implemented at the same time to maximise the opportunity and grow the game in a sustainable way. I think that is the best approach.

**Q277 Julie Elliott:** The Government announced in reply to the Carney review that the responsibility of talent pathways is the role of the FA, but that NewCo is responsible, alongside the FA, for not settling for anything less than a world-leading standard. As part of that, the Government announced the creation of an implementation group before Christmas in reply to a written parliamentary question. You said the Department was “working at pace with industry to confirm who will sit” on it. Can you provide any information on who is going to sit on it, how this accountability is going to work, and what element of transparency in this process there will be? I am happy for anybody to answer.

**Adam Conant:** The core members of the implementation group will be those who, first and foremost, have recommendations in Karen’s review and our response. The Football Association will have a continuing role in the running of the game, even though NewCo has been created. NewCo will be there within Government: within the DCMS, but also the DfE, given the clear responsibility on school sport. The Football Foundation will be there, given its role around facilities, as we heard earlier. Sport England will have role, and I think we are also looking at UK Sport having a role too, given the wider development environment, but we can confirm that.

The question we are still working out is what independent voices we have on that group. We think it is really important that getting everybody together is about having a bit of challenge, rather than self-congratulation that we have come so far. We are working through who those names will be, and we can confirm that very shortly. The group itself is going to meet in March for the first time.

**Q278 Julie Elliott:** Moving on to that—it is meeting in March for the first time, and I think the second meeting is scheduled for July. The season starts in September, but fixtures will be out by the July meeting. Does the implementation group have any teeth? In effect it is going to have one meeting before all of this starts to happen. It seems that that one meeting isn’t going to be enough.

**Adam Conant:** In terms of direct levers, we are pretty clear in the Government response that we are not turning to legislation as an option, we are using the implementation group to provide really clear scrutiny. Within the Government response, we set out a series of actions that we are expecting everybody to come to the first group armed to give us an answer on. There are things that, as you say, will relate to the next season. The standard of medical provision needs to be improved ahead of the ’24-25 season, and the FA has undertaken to come back to us on that. What we will be doing is asking the questions, then reserving the right as Government to be clear in public afterwards if those standards haven’t been met, and to expect further action. So that is why it will first be in March.



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**Q279 Julie Elliott:** So you are seeing it as a work in progress; that is what you are saying. The Government are fully supportive of NewCo, and its inclusion of the women's championship is welcome because, as we find in men's football, the strength of the pyramid is what provides a strong pathway for players to reach elite level. Would you say that the creation of NewCo supports the growth of the football pyramid?

**Stuart Andrew:** Yes. There is a real opportunity here, and that is why we want to support all those who want to see the development of the women's game. So yes, I think it is a good opportunity.

**Q280 Julie Elliott:** If I could expand a little bit, what role do you think NewCo will have in supporting the smaller teams? We have very much seen the problems of the pyramid and the dynamics of power in the men's game. There is clearly a key role here. What do you think the Government and NewCo will do to make sure that happens?

**Adam Conant:** There is real value in the fact that it is starting afresh and doesn't have any of the structures in place that we already have in the men's game. That allows NewCo to get it right on the distribution of funding and how the sponsorship deals work, and to create an environment where—we talk about this in our response—it is a board for the whole game rather than the current division we see on the men's side. That in itself helps to have a stronger voice for some of the smaller teams.

**Q281 Julie Elliott:** Do you think the smaller teams primarily in the championship should have an equal say to the bigger teams?

**Adam Conant:** I think in the response we say that the board should be across the whole game and everyone should have an equal voice. I am conscious that with the setting up of NewCo, there is a different voting structure.

**Julie Elliott:** Which there is a lot of concern about.

**Adam Conant:** Exactly. We want to make sure that as they are establishing that, it isn't to the detriment of everybody in the game. The championship needs that strong voice to avoid the same situation.

**Q282 Julie Elliott:** In those situations, would you see the regulator possibly intervening to stop NewCo making a decision that would be to the disadvantage of smaller clubs? Would that be a possibility?

**Adam Conant:** To give the bigger picture on the regulator, I will take a step back. In the first instance, what the regulator is trying to do on the men's side is tackle the problems that are clearly there and have been identified, in an environment where the men's game has failed to tackle them for many generations of football. In the women's game, there is the opportunity through NewCo to tackle those problems within the industry rather than—

**Q283 Julie Elliott:** That's what my question is getting at, really. We know that these problems exist in the men's game; they haven't been addressed successfully as yet. Hopefully, the new regulator and everything else will



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start to address them. I am asking the Minister this: are you going to keep a very firm eye on this with NewCo and the new structures, and if you see the slightest possibility that it is starting to happen in a new structure, will you or somebody intervene to make sure that it doesn't happen and smaller clubs are protected?

**Stuart Andrew:** Absolutely. In the first instance, the regulator will have a duty to be working with NewCo and sharing information and all of that, but if we see that it is going in the same direction as the one we currently see with the men's game, of course we will be looking at that very closely indeed.

**Julie Elliott:** Thank you. I will keep watch in that case.

**Stuart Andrew:** I am sure you will.

Q284 **Clive Efford:** Good morning; thanks for coming in to give evidence to us today. Having listened to that exchange, I want to know how much the Government themselves are investing in women's sport.

**Stuart Andrew:** My goodness. I don't know the total amount. The trouble is that we have various funds.

**Clive Efford:** You are here to talk about women in sport.

**Stuart Andrew:** I know. As I mentioned, we have £600 million going in through the schools, £400 million going through the facilities, and the £250 million place-based funding that Sport England is doing. As Polly mentioned, we are looking at all of those hard-to-reach groups—those who we need to get more active—and of course women and girls feature as a major part of that.

Q285 **Clive Efford:** Does the Department know, overall, what the Government are putting into women in sport?

**Polly Payne:** We don't divide it quite like that. We have particular funds, such as the Lionesses fund, with £25 million, or the This Girl Can funding, which are aimed at women and girls exclusively. However, the majority of our funding, as you would expect—

**Clive Efford:** Goes to men's sport.

**Polly Payne:** Well, the majority of our funding, as you would expect, is for women and men. I think you're quite right; at the moment, the balance is not right, and that is why, as I said before, as a Department, we have been emphasising that all our funding should be looking at under-represented groups. That will hopefully redress that balance over time.

Those almost aggregated numbers are the ones that I went through before, which is the £300 million or so per annum for Sport England, the around £150 million per annum for UK Sport, and obviously the pupil premium—the £600 million over the two years—as well as the £400 million for facilities. I couldn't give you an exact number for women out of all of



that because so much of it is for all groups, but particularly targeted at under-represented groups.

**Q286 Clive Efford:** But when there is so much lobbying going on for equality of investment in women's sport, isn't it a bit much that you cannot tell us how much the Department invests in women's sport? You do not have a figure or even a target—you can't have a target, presumably, if you don't know what the base figure is for investment in women's sport.

**Polly Payne:** There are many voices that you will have heard that set out how difficult this is to do when talking about gender budgeting. As a Department, we are focusing on the outcomes, and we have talked about very clear outcomes in increasing the participation of women—that is the 1.25 million more—so we are judging ourselves more by the outcomes and what we manage to achieve than by the particular inputs. That is because of the difficulties in disaggregating.

**Q287 Clive Efford:** Right. It is difficult to understand how you can know that your money is being effective if you don't even know how much you're spending in the first place.

What about sport governing bodies? What do you do to ensure that sport governing bodies are addressing the issue of the inequalities in investment in sport and participation in sport? How do you, as a Department—I should ask you, Minister, really, as it is you who is here to answer questions—how do you, as a Minister, satisfy yourself that sport governing bodies are playing their part?

**Stuart Andrew:** I think that there are a number of ways. I personally have regular meetings with various national governing bodies, and I put these things on the agenda because they are important to me and I want to know what they are doing to tackle these issues. Again, that is why the taskforce and the delivery of the sport strategy is important. That is why having the national governing bodies there—I should say that we brought them in in the development of that sport strategy, because it felt important to me that they were actually contributing to, "What is the task and how are we going to achieve it?" rather than just writing a document and then saying to them, "Go and implement," without having considered what their challenges may be. That taskforce is very much engaging. I have to say, I have been quite impressed by how the national governing bodies are really focusing on this.

We will also be establishing the board for women's sport, and, of course, all those stakeholders will be on that. We will be looking at who needs to be on that, particularly focusing on where the greatest opportunities exist so that we are sharing that information. Where some national governing bodies have schemes that have been really effective—I think that the Lawn Tennis Association, for example, has been training teachers on how to teach tennis—it is about how we might roll out things like that across the other national governing bodies. Sharing best practice—what challenges each of them are facing and how each of them have addressed those—is going to be key to how we deliver it.



**Q288 Clive Efford:** Do the Government see expanding women in sport and the exposure of women in sport, particularly at the elite end, as an opportunity to create even more revenue flowing in the direction of women's sport so that it can then be expanded? If we look at the example of football, everyone is talking and raving about it because of the massive success of the Lionesses, but that has nonetheless generated an enormous amount of revenue around that sport. Is there an argument for the Government providing seed corn money for other sports to achieve the same so that they can attract the sort of investment and sponsorship the Lionesses have started to enjoy?

**Stuart Andrew:** Through the facilities we are providing, we are hopefully providing a pathway for elite female athletes, but I do not think it is just women's football that has seen an increase in popularity. We have seen phenomenal successes in women's rugby, both league and union. Things that make a difference are things like the Rugby League World Cup, where we see the men's, women's and wheelchair tournaments all happening at the same time, with the men's and the women's final on the same day in the same stadium. Those sorts of things will undoubtedly help to raise the profile of elite women's sport. In Karen Carney's review, she talks about how we maximise the media revenues and sponsorship for football, but we see that as a blueprint for all other sports, too. Again, it is about exchanging those ideas and opportunities.

**Q289 Clive Efford:** You mentioned football—while we have you here, can I ask why you think we have not had a deal between the Premier League and the English Football League?

**Stuart Andrew:** We have been very clear that we want a deal to be brought by football itself. We think that is the best way forward. We have made very clear to all sides our view that they need to do that. However, that is why, as we have made clear, we will have provisions, or the regulator will have a backstop power, to be able to bring about that deal if they fail to do so. I still urge them to come to a deal, and to do so quickly.

**Q290 Clive Efford:** Did Richard Masters, at a meeting with Rick Parry and Polly Payne in September last year, say that there was unanimous support from Premier League clubs for a new deal with the English Football League, and that the deal could be struck within two weeks?

**Stuart Andrew:** A meeting with Polly?

**Q291 Clive Efford:** Were you not briefed on that?

**Polly Payne:** I would have briefed the Minister. We have had a series of meetings. We meet the main actors regularly, and we have been encouraging them to do this deal for some time. I cannot remember the detail of that particular meeting, but at various times we have been told that the clubs were very close to agreeing a deal and that the deal was forthcoming. We have been taken to the brink of hope a number of times. It is disappointing that it has not actually happened.

**Q292 Clive Efford:** So on more than one occasion, the Premier League has said that it was close to a deal and then reneged on it?



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**Polly Payne:** I would not describe it quite like that. We have been having regular meetings, and I know they have been close to a deal for some time, and unfortunately it has not quite—

**Clive Efford:** “They” being who?

**Polly Payne:** Various members. We talk to the chairs and CEOs of the various football organisations on a regular basis about a number of things: distributions; the forthcoming regulator.

Q293 **Clive Efford:** But this is about the Premier League agreeing a deal with the rest of the football pyramid, which is essential. We are on the brink of seeing other clubs disappear if we are not careful and do not see some urgency in this. Do you not think it is time that the Premier League stopped messing around? Either it knows that its members—its shareholders—are unanimous, or it does not and it is messing you around.

**Polly Payne:** As the Minister said, we have done nothing but encourage this deal. We have all been putting pressure on, and we would love it to happen as soon as possible. That is why we have been having meetings.

**Clive Efford:** It sounds a little bit soft, though, doesn’t it?

**Polly Payne:** It does sound a bit soft, but that’s why—

**Clive Efford:** Isn’t it about time you really started to crack the whip with the Premier League and got them to the table in earnest?

**Stuart Andrew:** In fairness, we have been. We have had really significant meetings at official level, and both the Secretary of State and I have met—

**Clive Efford:** But they’re ignoring you.

**Stuart Andrew:** And that’s why we are putting in the provision of the backstop. We want to send a very clear message that if football does not sort this out, the regulator will have the powers to do that. I agree with you: I want to see them come to a deal, and we are going to continue to make that point to them. It is incredibly important to us, but that is why we were very clear that we were going to factor this into the powers of the independent regulator so that, should we have this constant stalemate, there will be another course to sort the issue out.

**Clive Efford:** We will move on, because I have gone off-piste a little bit.

Q294 **Chair:** Before you do move on, Clive, may I ask something? Minister, you and others have often trotted out the independent regulator and the football governance Bill as being the silver bullet to address some of these issues, yet we still do not have this legislation coming down the track. When are we likely to see it?



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**Stuart Andrew:** I keep using words such as “soon”. I genuinely hope that within the next couple of weeks we will be able to present the Bill to Parliament. That is my ambition.

Q295 **Clive Efford:** We all look forward to that. The public service broadcasters have made it clear to us that they would like to see digital rights in the Media Bill. We have made it clear in our report that we would like to see that. When is the digital rights review going to be completed, so that you can make your minds up?

**Adam Conant:** It is still under consideration at the moment. It’s a similar line to the Minister’s, I’m afraid: we plan to set out the detail on that one in due course.

Q296 **Clive Efford:** It’s a bit late in the day. Are we anywhere near completion of the reviews, so that we can know what the Government’s thinking is?

**Adam Conant:** As I understand it, it is taking place at the moment and is close to completion, but I’m afraid I do not have anything more on that one.

Q297 **Clive Efford:** You have not ruled out, then, the possibility of amending the Media Bill.

**Stuart Andrew:** All of these issues are being taken into consideration at the moment. I understand the element of frustration, but it is important for us to look at all of the details in granular detail, so we are doing that as we speak. I would be happy to write to the Committee with any further details that I can provide, if that would be helpful to you, Chair.

Q298 **Clive Efford:** It has implications for women in sport, because the costs of sports rights have more than doubled, but for the BBC, for instance, the income in real terms has gone down by 30%. The BBC has given a great deal of exposure—for instance, to the Lionesses—and I would say it has contributed significantly to the popularity that they have achieved, and not after a lot of lobbying to get the BBC to do it many years ago. Are you concerned about the potential implications for women’s sport being covered on TV if free-to-air TV is undermined by the new wave of digital platforms and the new way that people are accessing sport on media?

**Stuart Andrew:** Because it is such a changing environment, we obviously need to take careful consideration of what that means and the risks that that might bring. It was a clear part of Karen’s review, and the implementation group will be looking at those specific issues. You are right: if it was not for the broadcasting that ignited the enthusiasm of the nation, we may not have seen anything like the successes we have seen and the interest in women’s football. But all of that will be considered by the implementation group, as it was one of the key issues that Karen raised in her review.

Q299 **Clive Efford:** I am conscious of the amount of time I am taking, so I have some quickfire questions for you. When are we going to see women’s teams’ stadiums for football?



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**Stuart Andrew:** I don't know.

Q300 **Clive Efford:** Is that an issue that the Department has considered?

**Stuart Andrew:** I think it is more about making sure that the facilities we have are suitable for women and girls. That is really important.

Q301 **Clive Efford:** We have heard from some that the 3 pm slot on a Saturday is the best one for televising women's sport. What is the Department's view?

**Stuart Andrew:** We support that. Well, I do.

**Clive Efford:** Wow—a decision!

**Stuart Andrew:** It is easy to say that, as a one-word answer, but I think it is important that we find a slot for women's football because that will bring about and maximise the opportunities for media rights, funding and sponsorship. What slot that is is obviously important. I understand that there are concerns about the impact of that on the men's game, but if 3 pm is not going to be the slot, questions will have to be asked—which we will look at in the implementation group—about how the women's game gets compensated. Those will be key points for us to look at.

Q302 **Clive Efford:** Are you in discussions with broadcasters and the media about increasing the visibility of women's sport?

**Stuart Andrew:** I have not personally had any direct meetings with any broadcasters. I don't know whether anybody else has.

**Adam Conant:** We have, most recently in the context of the rights issue around the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. That was signed very late, and we needed to understand what was going on. We also listed the World Cup, and the Euros back in 2022, to ensure that that visibility is there for future events.

**Clive Efford:** Just football, then. No other sports?

**Adam Conant:** We consulted across a range of sports at the time, and there were really mixed responses on the balance between visibility and the impact on the commerciality of the sport. At the time, our view was that listing the two football events was the right way forward, but obviously we are able to go back to it and keep it under consideration.

**Stuart Andrew:** There are also the Olympics, of course, which will include a lot of women.

**Clive Efford:** Well done.

Q303 **Chair:** Thank you, Clive. Can I move on to culture and the duty of care towards women and girls? As you know, over the last few years it has seemed that a year does not go by in which we do not have some kind of high-profile scandal around abuse, discrimination or sexism. We have had the ICC report into cricket, the Whyte review into physical and emotional abuse of gymnasts, and the issues with Welsh Rugby Union. Minister, do



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you worry that the sports sector is still falling short of its duty of care to women and girls?

**Stuart Andrew:** This is such an important issue, because it goes to the heart of how we bring about confidence in everybody wanting to take part in sport. People need to know that they are accessing a safe environment that is welcoming.

A lot of work is being done. UK Sport and Sport England have brought out their proposals and guidance to the NGBs, and we are seeing more of the NGBs addressing some of these issues, but I absolutely recognise that there is even more work to do. That is why, as part of the sport strategy, we did a call for evidence on integrity issues. Responses have come in, and we are carefully assessing them to see what issues we need to address.

I was also very keen to meet individuals who had complaints or poor experiences in sports and to hear their personal stories. That gave me quite a valuable insight into the real challenge they had just to get their voice heard and how the process was quite complex for them to address. The reason I mention that is that we are looking at all of that at the moment, to see how we can bring about a much better system in which people can have their complaints addressed effectively. However, we recognise that it is for sport to do that, so we will hold them to account as part of the implementation of the strategy, of which integrity is a significant part.

Q304 **Chair:** You say that you have spoken to people and taken a lot of evidence, and you say that there are obstacles. What are the main obstacles that people experience?

**Stuart Andrew:** The experiences vary depending on the sport was the thing I picked up initially. We are still going through the responses, so there is quite a lot to consider. Some sports have been really responsive and some have not. Forgive me—I will not mention the individual ones at this stage. Having integrity in the sport strategy was important because we want to ensure that the taskforce looks at that, too—how we address that and what best practice looks like so that we can have a much better experience. That will then bring about confidence for people to feel that it is a safe environment for them to participate in.

Q305 **Chair:** Do you think there is an issue where some organisations simply do not understand what sexism and misogyny looks like or what constitutes it?

**Stuart Andrew:** There will probably be individuals who do not understand what it looks like and what it means, and they need to understand the impact that it has on individuals. It is really important.

Q306 **Chair:** To what extent, then, is it the responsibility of the Government and organisations such as Sport England to spell it out and have really clear policies on what constitutes sexism and misogyny?

**Stuart Andrew:** I think that is why the 19 guidance rules in Sport England post the Whyte review have been important. As I say, more of the national governing bodies are addressing that, but it will be a focus of our taskforce to ensure that we see the delivery as we expect.

Q307 **Chair:** Do you think we will see any more big scandals around individual sports in the months and years ahead?

**Stuart Andrew:** Obviously, I really hope not. That is why we were very keen that integrity was a key feature of the strategy. It was important that we made that a significant part of what we are doing because we recognise that unless there is integrity in sport and people feel it is a safe environment, it will be a challenge to get more people active, particularly the harder-to-reach groups, if they do not feel that they are in an environment that is welcoming or safe.

**Polly Payne:** An important part of this is the leadership and having the right people in the different bodies. That is part of the update in the code for sports governance. Under that update the national governing bodies that get funds from Government have been asked to do detailed, ambitious diversity and inclusion plans. Those are being looked at by UK Sport and Sport England at the moment. They have to be submitted by the spring. Hopefully that will help with culture change through leadership and having diversity and inclusion throughout the different organisations. So that is another element.

Q308 **Chair:** But what can the Government do if you find individual sports that are not living up to their responsibilities on this?

**Polly Payne:** If they do not have proper ambitious plans that are held to, we can make that part of our funding requirement.

**Chair:** So you could remove funding from sports bodies.

**Polly Payne:** We mostly try to support and encourage. If you remove funding, that can have very negative consequences on the people that you are trying to help and support. It is more about working with and trying to support to get to the right place in this.

**Stuart Andrew:** Yes, with education and training.

Q309 **Chair:** Minister, you spoke about how integrity is part of the sport strategy, but the targets in the Government's sport strategy only relate to the first objective around participation. How will the Government measure progress in this area? How do you know if you are getting it right?

**Adam Conant:** We are currently working with both Sport England and UK Sport on the KPIs—their framework agreement as the arm's length bodies. A key thing that we are focusing on is measurement and participation, as you say, but we do not have anything on integrity at the moment and we need to, so we are actively working to find the right metric with the right timescales to be able to say, "Are we going in the right direction?" There is complexity around that. What we do not want is to measure how many



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sports bodies have had zero complaints, because that can drive you to hide complaints rather than tackle the complaints when they come forward. We are just going through that process at the moment to work out what the right answer is.

**Q310 Chair:** The other issue, of course—we have had evidence of this—is that sometimes women do not report instances of sexism, for example, because they just don't think their report will be taken seriously. How do you encourage people to speak up about what they have experienced?

**Adam Conant:** That is a really important part of our response to the call for evidence. As the Minister says, we have had about 700 responses, and we are going through them at the moment. Some key themes in those are around the failure within the process to reach the appropriate conclusion—the independence of the process—but there were also concerns about bringing complaints forward because of the consequences, either personally or for sporting performance and selection and everything else in that environment. Our response will set out a clear plan for what we will do next, how we will ultimately come to an answer on how we tackle these integrity issues in the round and what that looks like in terms of independence of investigation, the right processes being in place at national governing body level and so. As I said, we will hopefully bring that forward in the coming months.

**Q311 Chair:** Here is an example that you will all be aware of. The tragic death of Sheffield United's Maddy Cusack raised some real questions about her treatment. There was the FA's seemingly quite flawed investigation into that. I know that the family are calling for a new investigation. Is that something that Ministers have discussed? Would you support the call for a new investigation on their behalf?

**Stuart Andrew:** My understanding is that the FA are going to review the evidence that was gathered by the club, and I think that that is right. We have to have a spotlight on these issues if we are going to address them properly. I wouldn't want to pre-empt what the review of the evidence that the FA are looking at will say, but I am glad that they are at least looking at it. It is important, if there are concerns, that they are addressed and that there is confidence that they will be looked at properly.

**Q312 Chair:** There is another issue regarding the FA. Our inquiry purposely hasn't focused on gender identity and sport, because that is a whole inquiry on its own. But that is an issue that continues to be raised with us. Looking specifically at football, the FA seems to be quite slow to act on that in their guidance and policies compared with other sporting bodies. Have you had any conversations with the FA about that? What is your understanding about the process that they are going through on this issue?

**Stuart Andrew:** We had a roundtable with national governing bodies on those issues back in 2022. We know that some governing bodies have looked at this, taken action and reviewed against their international bodies' policies, but we recognise that there are other bodies that are, perhaps, still being a bit slow. It is therefore our intention to have another

roundtable with them all very shortly to see what the progress is. That will, of course, include the FA.

**Q313 Chair:** What would your message on this be to organisations like the FA?

**Stuart Andrew:** The Government view is very much that fairness and safety are the priorities; that has to be the focus as they develop those policies. It is for each sport to develop its own policies, because each sport is very different and the impacts will be very different. That is why we want to have this roundtable with them: to see what progress is being made and to hold them to account.

The other thing is that I am really keen that, in whatever discussions we have about this, the temperature and the language are right—we are also talking about individuals here. That is what I am keen for us to do.

**Chair:** That, again, is why I think that it is really important that the policies are out there. Everybody knows the score.

**Stuart Andrew:** Exactly. I think you are absolutely right, and that is why we are keen to bring them all in.

**Q314 Julie Elliott:** In the last month or so, there have been some very disturbing posts on X—formerly Twitter—from Joey Barton about former professional women footballers commentating on men’s football. While I am sure that he is doing that because he has a new podcast launching in February, it led to ITV quite rightly putting out a strong statement against him, defending their women commentators. As far as I am aware, those comments are still on social media, and Facebook or Meta is hosting the new podcast. What can be done from a Government point of view to bring pressure on social media companies not to support people who put out things that are so offensive and so disgusting, as he has done? Do you condemn the comments?

**Stuart Andrew:** Yes, of course. They are dangerous comments that open the floodgates for abuse and that is not acceptable. I am always slightly wary in these situations that these sorts of people want the oxygen and I do not want to fuel that. I want to put on record my thanks for the amazing contribution that women and girls make to football and sport more generally in this country, whether that be at the top of the FA or in groups such as Women in Sport, the players themselves, or the thousands of volunteers we all see as MPs in our constituencies. The opportunities for young people to play football at the weekend would not exist if it were not for the fact that we had so many volunteers, many of whom are women. So I condemn those comments.

**Q315 Julie Elliott:** I agree—that is why I say he is clearly doing it, to give oxygen to contemptible remarks—but as politicians we have to call out what is clearly just completely unacceptable language, comments and comparisons.

**Stuart Andrew:** I agree.

**Q316 Julie Elliott:** Once again, it goes back to social media companies



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allowing the comments to be made and supporting the promotion of these podcasts. There is an issue there. What can we as politicians do and what can the Government do to try to stop these things happening?

**Stuart Andrew:** I did not want for one minute for it to sound like I am not condemning it. For the record, I genuinely am. You are right. The Online Safety Act puts an obligation on Ofcom to bring about guidance so we are waiting for that.

**Julie Elliott:** I do not think it would stop this happening.

**Stuart Andrew:** I think this is what we probably need to have a look at. Again, these will be the issues that we will look at in terms of that whole integrity in sport. We need to wait and see what Ofcom comes out with first, as part of the new powers in the Act.

Q317 **Julie Elliott:** Would you as a Minister take the issue up with the two social media platforms to ask them what they are doing about it and report back to us?

**Stuart Andrew:** I can happily do so. I am also meeting Women in Football next week and they wrote to me literally last night.

**Julie Elliott:** I look forward to seeing what the social media companies say to you in response to you taking that up with them.

**Chair:** Will you come back to us and let us know?

**Stuart Andrew:** Yes.

**Chair:** Finally, we have Rupa.

Q318 **Dr Huq:** Thank you. You mentioned the ecosystem of all the fans that makes women's sport function. Part of that is the parents who have to drive sportswomen around—I know this myself!

I wanted to ask about the compatibility of being a parent and being a sportswoman. The Carney review talks about how there should be a world-leading parental package for players. It seems a bit uneven at the moment. There have been advances in football. We keep talking about football, Lionesses and those things. In the 2022 squad—the Europe-beating one—I think there was only one parent, who was Demi Stokes, the defender. There are people such as Katie Chapman, who is now retired but she was playing from 2001 up to the 2015 World Cup. She was very much the exception and she did an interview in *Grazia* where she described the struggles of juggling all those things. What would the world-beating package we are aiming for, which can help women throughout pregnancy and career—the whole thing—look like?

**Adam Conant:** This is one of the priority areas coming out of the review that we want to pick up with the board of Women in Sport because we think there is best practice to look at. With women's football at the moment, under the FA it is 14 weeks' maternity pay and rugby union is 26 weeks. With UK Sport, funded by the taxpayer and the lottery, public

funding can still be received up to nine months after giving birth. There are really good examples to look at.

**Q319 Dr Huq:** Should we not have consistency if it is weeks in some areas and nine months in another?

**Adam Conant:** Those are exactly the sorts of questions we want to get into. To the Minister's earlier point, this is obviously a holistic look at what is going on in sport. To do that, you need to be able to fund it, and to fund it, you need a thriving environment and so on. We want to say, "This is what best practice looks like. How do we help you get there by using this board of women's sport?"

**Q320 Dr Huq:** Are there concrete steps that you would take to improve offers from professional governing bodies where it is just a number of weeks or whatever?

**Adam Conant:** First, they are all competitive, so showing where they rank in comparison with other sports will have a huge impact. Secondly, it is about supporting the wider pay and parental leave environment to help get them to a position where—

**Q321 Dr Huq:** It is not just pregnancy and the initial maternity; it is the whole life of the child. I think Katie Chapman had three boys, some while playing and some predating all this, so we need to make the whole ecosystem conducive to that. Again, we have to consider the biological body clock. If people wait until they retire, that might be too late.

**Adam Conant:** We completely agree, and we want to look at it in the round.

**Dr Huq:** It is about childcare while you are playing. Again, Katie Chapman describes all the things that she would be offered in a tournament, and she would think, "Oh, God, how am I going to make this work?"

**Adam Conant:** We agree.

**Q322 Dr Huq:** Okay. What about sports science? It is a degree subject—I think Seb Coe did sports science at Loughborough. What action is the Government taking to encourage more women into fields like that, and to increase the scope of sports science to look at things like health and physiology-related issues through a women and girls lens?

**Adam Conant:** Again, this is something that we want the board of women's sport to look at; it should look at best practice. Karen's review showed that the proportion of research done in sports science is really low on the women's sports side—I think it is about 6% of all research. That clearly needs to change and be driven up. What we need to do is look to best practice. At the moment, for example, UK Sport is working with Manchester Met University to look at the impact of the menstrual cycle and contraception on performance. That is crucial to delivering the change that we need to deliver. The FA and FIFA have just undertaken some work to look at ACL injuries in women's football—there is a disproportionate number at the moment. What we as a Government are doing is bringing



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the right bodies together and saying, “We need more of this.” We are looking at how we can learn from best practice to tackle the issues you identify.

**Dr Huq:** Does anybody else have anything to say?

**Stuart Andrew:** The comment I would make is that if we were seeing the same level of injuries in men in one thing like ACL, we would have seen a lot of action a lot quicker. That is why we want to use the new board that we will be establishing to bring together all the various stakeholders who have something to contribute here.

Q323 **Dr Huq:** We are grateful that you are accepting the Carney review proposals, one of which was to have this board of women’s sport. What progress has been made? When are we going to see it happen?

**Stuart Andrew:** Again, we are looking at the composition of that. We want to make sure we have the right people on it. We are making sure we are bringing together the right people we need to address the issues. Our ambition is to have the first meeting by March. Once we have a composition of that committee and a date, I will be happy to let the Committee know.

Q324 **Dr Huq:** Okay. We have obviously talked a lot about the Lionesses and the Euros of 2022. It happened in Wembley, symbolically; we beat Germany and all those things. Two world wars and one—no, I won’t start that. There has been another World Cup since the Euros. What role can you have as a Department in encouraging those big events here? There is always a spike in interest every time that happens. I think they even had the Subbuteo sticker books. Before, you wouldn’t have seen that with women’s football. That really was a high point, and we can have even more highs after that.

**Stuart Andrew:** We have a great reputation in this country for hosting these major events, and we want to continue to host such events and to ensure that we use them to maximise interest. That will help us to fuel more people wanting to be interested in those sports.

We were both at the launch of the Women’s Rugby World Cup and it was just amazing to be in Sunderland to see all those girls who were on the pitch getting really excited about what that tournament meant to them personally but also to their community. Making sure that these events are spread around the country will be really important. That is why we are very passionate about making sure that we do what we can to secure these events in the first place and then to maximise the opportunities that arise from them.

If we need to learn anything from the Lionesses and the Euros, it is just how quickly such opportunities can come, so we need to be ready to maximise on them when they do.

Q325 **Dr Huq:** Are there any more bids for those kinds of things in the pipeline for women’s events, because often interest peaks and then it sort of flops



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afterwards?

**Stuart Andrew:** Yes. I have mentioned the Women's Rugby World Cup, which will be amazing; I am absolutely sure of that. I have forgotten the other one.

**Adam Conant:** The T20 cricket world cup in 2026.

Q326 **Dr Huq:** How do you maintain that level of interest, given that, as I say, you have that summer, everyone is excited and it's on the telly, and then it's forgotten?

**Stuart Andrew:** That is a really good question. I think there are things that these events do that highlight areas of work that need to be done. For example, when we discovered after the Euros that only 63% of girls were able to play football in school: big problem—need to address it. It is about learning from the events that we've had and then preparing for the future.

One of the things that I thought was particularly impressive was the Rugby League World Cup, where a lot of work was done beforehand to ensure that facilities were ready to capture the imagination of the people who were inspired by that tournament, so that there were facilities and the equipment that those communities needed to match the uptick in interest in the sport. We are constantly learning how to maximise the legacy of these events.

Q327 **Dr Huq:** Okay. We need more mums in sport—more like Jessica Ennis-Hill and Serena Williams, across all sports.

We also produced a report on safety at major sporting events on 29 December. I know that you have not formally responded, but what do you think of that report?

**Adam Conant:** As you can imagine, we are going through that report in fine detail at the moment, but there is a huge amount in there for us to pick up on. On the recommendations around stewarding, we have already had conversations with the SGSA as to how they take them forward. Clearly, there are lessons to be learned from Wembley: you talked about a positive final, but there was a less positive final and they have to continue to learn the lessons there. It is also about continuing the work across the piece on safe standing and everything else. There is a lot in the report for us to get stuck into—

Q328 **Dr Huq:** In particular, making all these events feel more welcoming for women and not like some testosterone thing to give a wide berth. Do you have any views on that, or on making all these things more family-friendly?

**Adam Conant:** I completely agree. I was lucky enough to go to a number of games at the Women's Euros around the country, and the atmosphere and the environment were wholly different from the men's game. People were going, including my friends and family, who otherwise would not have gone to sport. That is really important; we have to capture that.



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It comes to the point around abuse, really, as well. We must have societal change, so that people can see a space for themselves in women's sport—in a stadium and so on—so that everybody can benefit from the power of sport. If we are not using these amazing role models, like the Lionesses and so on, to do that, then we are really failing.

It is absolutely crucial now that we build on all that momentum, and create the environments that you talk about in stadia and so on. But that will be everybody's responsibility—from the football authorities to the broadcasters to the Government to the social media companies. That is the big lesson for us at the moment.

**Q329 Dr Huq:** Lastly, Minister, I know that you globetrot a little bit and speak to your counterparts around the world. You were in Qatar for the World Cup. What discussions have you had with Commonwealth counterparts about the future of the Commonwealth games? There is a bit of a question mark over them; they might not continue. We have left Europe, but we've not left the Commonwealth—it's our thing. What is going on?

**Stuart Andrew:** I have taken that opportunity. I was fortunate enough, as you say, to "globetrot" to Australia to see the women playing in the Women's World Cup and I took the opportunity then to speak to my counterparts in Australia about the situation.

I have also spoken to the Commonwealth games organisers and have encouraged them to look at what solutions may exist. I know that they are in discussions with colleagues in Australia at the moment, and we are just waiting for an update from them on what might happen, but the Commonwealth games are just that—it is the Commonwealth. It is the ownership of the whole of the Commonwealth, and it is incumbent on us all to try to help the Commonwealth games organisers to find a solution to the problems they face.

**Q330 Chair:** Before I let you go, Minister, can I just grab you quickly about cricket? You will have seen reporting that Colin Graves is set to return to Yorkshire Cricket. This is the man who described the awful racist abuse that Azeem Rafiq experienced as "banter". Are the Government concerned about his return?

**Stuart Andrew:** Our view, very strongly, is that after Cindy Butts' inquiry and recommendations, the ECB committed to bringing about change, and we expect to see that. We will be keeping a very close eye on that. I have had meetings with the ECB, as has the Secretary of State, and we will be ensuring that change that we need to see. It goes back to the point about creating environments that are welcoming for anybody who wants to take part in sport, whatever it be, including cricket. We expect to see that maintained. We want to see those delivered as the ECB committed to doing.

**Chair:** I thank you all for appearing in front of us. Is there anything else you want to add before we let you off the hook?

**Stuart Andrew:** I do not think so.



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**Chair:** In that case, if there is anything you think of afterwards, please drop us a line. Please write to us on the things that we have agreed. I am grateful to all of you for appearing before us.