

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Game On: Community and school sport, HC 593

Tuesday 25 February 2025

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Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Mr Bayo Alaba; Mims Davies; Zöe Franklin; Mr James Frith; Damian Hinds; Dr Rupa Huq; Natasha Irons; Jo Platt.

Questions 1 - 52

Witnesses

I: Montell Douglas, Olympian; Anna Hopkin MBE, Olympian; Ali Oliver MBE, Chief Executive, Youth Sport Trust; and Alistair Patrick-Heselton, Paralympian.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Montell Douglas, Anna Hopkin MBE, Ali Oliver MBE and Alistair Patrick-Heselton.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. This is our first session of Game On, the Committee's inquiry into community and school sport, which will be looking at how to engage more people in sport as well as the challenge facing clubs and schools in doing so. We will also be looking at what more can be done to ensure that the right opportunities are there for everyone so that young people across the country can leverage the benefit of sports in their lives, whether that is simply for fun, improving their mental health, because they want to pursue a career in sport, or maybe they are dreaming of performing on the international stage.

There is no better place to start than hearing this morning from three athletes who have done just that, Montell Douglas, Alistair Patrick-Heselton and Anna Hopkin, all of whom have forged successful careers in representing GB at the Olympics and Paralympics and now spend their time working with young people in school or club settings and, of course, from Ali Oliver, MBE, who is the Chief Executive of the Youth Sport Trust, which is committed to creating more sporting opportunities for young people. You are all most welcome. Thank you for coming today to kick off this inquiry, which we want to make as far-reaching and impactful as possible. We are very grateful for your time.

Ali, can I start the questions with you, please? Less than half of children are achieving the 60 active daily minutes of exercise, as recommended by the UK's Chief Medical Officer. There are really growing disparities in participation across certain demographics. We heard so much about the legacy of the 2012 Olympics. Did it ever transpire?

Ali Oliver: Thank you for having us here today. Thank you for the question. Some things that were inspired by the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games have lasted the test of time. For example, the school games programme, absolutely, and particularly within that the inclusion of more opportunities for children with special educational needs and disabilities. That whole inclusion thing that stemmed out of an amazing Paralympics in London has stayed alive.

If we are honest though, the changes that occurred in 2010, post the change of Government, the dissolving of school-sport partnerships, the removal of specialist sports colleges and the various work strands that sat alongside took away the momentum that was building towards London 2012. I think if we had the data today—we obviously have the active lives data, but we do not have the same wealth of data for school sport and physical education that we had leading up to the London Olympic and Paralympic Games.

However, we do know that the infrastructure of specialist sports colleges—schools that were innovating and using sport to drive standards, improve ethos and culture in school and tackle things such as attendance and



behaviour and pupil progress—anchored school-sport partnerships around them, which in turn were the delivery mechanism to a family of some eight to nine secondary schools and about 40 to 50 primary schools. That infrastructure shifted participation in the country between 2002 and 2010 from one in four children doing two hours of PE and school sport a week to nine in 10.

We don't have comparative data now but we do have active lives data that not only shockingly tells us that fewer than half of children are getting what the Chief Medical Officer recommends as the minimum—it is not really good, it is the minimum—but more worryingly, I think, we know that 30% of children get less than 30 active minutes a day. There is quite a lot of conversation about the 47% that are meeting the goal. The real concern is for the children who are largely inactive and the consequences of that for their health and wellbeing, their engagement in learning, and of course for their overall happiness and long-term health.

Q2 Chair: There were 41,000 fewer hours taught in PE in 2023-24 than in 2011-12. You have talked about the impact on learning, mental health and wellbeing, and of course fitness. What other impacts of that drop in the amount of formal PE teaching have there been on young people?

Ali Oliver: Thank you for stating that statistic. There are also 7,000 fewer PE teachers since London hosted the Olympic and Paralympic Games, so the decline in provision in the curriculum is matched by a decline in the size of the profession¹. One of the most important things, I think, is that that decline has mirrored a squeeze on physical education in schools as other subjects have become increasingly important. The focus on the core subjects, the EBacc subjects and the subjects we count, whether at SATs or Progress 8 and Attainment 8 level, have all squeezed physical education. That has sent a message through the school system that being physically active and physical education are not as important as other subjects, missing the point that physical education is such an amazing access subject for young people to other subjects. It is what helps them to engage in schools, build self-confidence and the ability to use feedback—all of those things that I am sure the Committee are fully aware of.

It also sends a message to children that this just isn't important: that this is only important perhaps if the present company were those for whom we were supposed to be delivering—those with the talent and ambition. It almost says to young people, "This is not important in my education." It is the subject that gets squeezed or the subject that gets cancelled regularly as other subjects catch up or revision takes place.

We have talked about the cognitive impact and the health and wellbeing impact, but it also has a lasting, lifelong impact on attitudes, and particularly our relationship with movement. It is enduring and that has an impact on adult participation and all of the subsequent impacts on our health, on our economy. We know that children who are involved in

¹ Correction by witness: There are 7% fewer PE teachers, which is 1,777 fewer (figures are available via [The Youth Sport Trust PE and School Sport Annual Report 2024](#) p. 46)



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enrichment activities are more likely to be in employment at age 21 or 22, if they have been involved in enrichment activities at school, for example. That is just one scenario.

Q3 Chair: We had a call for evidence ahead of this inquiry and the Government making PE a core subject comes through quite strongly in that. Do you agree with that? How realistic is it to include two hours a week in the school syllabus?

Ali Oliver: The calls for physical education as a core subject are in part driven by what has happened to the subject because it is not in the core and how, therefore, if it is not placed into the core, we will continue to see the cuts, the squeeze and the low status and value. However, I think another side of this is about what do we know about what is happening to our children? I was in the room next door last night for the launch of the Play Commission led by the Centre for Young Lives and Baroness Longfield and Paul Linley. We were talking about the fact that children today have on average 20 minutes less playtime at school than they did 30 years ago. That has a consequence on all manner of things, but importantly, child development and their cognitive development, how they develop normally in their brain and so on.

We are constantly mindful of whether you have to make physical education a core subject because if it is not a core subject it does not get the time and the value. Or are we striving to help people understand that in an increasingly inhumane world, when children are growing up more attached to digital devices than the human connection that they have with people, and spending more time indoors than outside in the natural environment, they experience significantly less risk and challenge in their lives because of concerns about their safety, and all of this impacts how children develop and learn, how their brains develop, with long-term consequences?

To answer your question, if physical education was a core subject, it would have a higher status. It would bring with it a level of accountability that would drive up standards and commitment. We would understand young people's progress and whether our children are developing at the right level and able to meet the right expectations at the end of each key stage. It would undoubtedly have a huge impact on teacher training, which is a problem at the moment, particularly in primary, where our primary classroom teachers who deliver PE today predominantly have on average four to six hours of training in PE, which is woefully inadequate. Even at secondary, largely a postgraduate profession, teachers have not studied physical education at undergraduate level. They have studied sports science, sports studies or sports management. I believe that these things would add up to make an enormous difference to the quality of experience, the importance placed on physical education in school, and then the consequent benefits for learning across the curriculum.

The two hours can be a red herring. The two hours was an excellent motivator for the nation. Everybody knew that we were, for the best part of a decade, driving towards giving every child two hours, and it was



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measured annually. It was reported on right through to the Prime Minister's delivery unit, which was monitoring it and it galvanised people.

However, of course, two hours of poor-quality physical education or physical education that is not inclusive, or where half an hour of those two hours is taken up by changing clothes—we have seen some amazing innovation since the pandemic, where children now come to school in their PE kit the day they have PE so we can maximise the time. That said, two hours on its own could end up giving more time for poor-quality experiences, which might again erode the time available.

Core status would bring lots of benefits. We would like core status because it genuinely is an access subject and should be part of the foundation of every child's learning. Today, if children are not getting it out of school—they are not climbing trees, they don't roam in their community, they are not playing out as much—if they don't get it in their community, we have to create the opportunity in school so that they are then healthy, successful learners.

Q4 Jo Platt: Thank you for attending this inquiry. I want to explore what the aims of physical education should be. I am interested as a mum whose children are now older but partook of some amazing activities that were provided by school and knowing the merits of that, and also as a previous athlete. I gave that up at 15, but I understand the benefits, not just for physical education but for everything else as well. Ali, what should the aim of PE be? Is it enjoyment, skills development or the ability to partake in sport?

Ali Oliver: That is an absolutely brilliant question. At the moment, I don't think it is clear to us as a nation what we think this subject is about, and that can lead to many different interpretations. However, along with the Association for Physical Education, we believe that there should be very clear outcomes at each key stage. There are important outcomes at key stage 1 for physical education, which have to be that young people develop fundamental movement skills and that they are able to play with others successfully.

Today, because of the consequences of the pandemic and what happened to the generation of children in the beginning of primary schools today, lots of what are called primitive reflexes have not been removed. Those are reflexes that we are born with but which should be socialised out of a child early on. If you see a child holding a pen like this, that is a primitive reflex. If you put your finger in a baby's hand, it grips it firmly. That is a primitive reflex that we need to learn to adapt to a fine motor skill, to hold a pen, for example. There are some very clear things that should be happening at key stage 1.

At key stage 2, we expect young people to start to experience a range of skills, the skills of rolling, twisting, balancing, catching, throwing—all those sorts of things that develop the neural pathways. They support cognitive development, as well as giving access to a range of activities later on. By the end of key stage 2, we want children to have confidence and competence in movement, have a very positive relationship with



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movement and be able to play with others, be able to achieve things in a group and together work towards an achievement.

By the time we get to key stage 3, we want children to have the opportunity to choose different activities, experience a range of things and choose things that suit them. I was talking to Anna outside about her choices at school, which were very limited. It was a team-sport curriculum, and if you didn't choose team sport you were not included. We want young people to choose so that in key stage 3 they are developing more of the skills for life and work. We are taking the ability to play with others into resilience and teamwork. We are developing perseverance, communication skills and leadership skills. At the same time, we are starting to work out which things we are suited to.

By the time we get to key stage 4, the outcome has to be, No. 1, we understand why we need to be active for the rest of our lives, particularly as we are going into exams. The most effective way to prepare for an exam is to move for 20 minutes before the exam, firing up the neural pathways in the brain, rather than sitting outside the room cramming notes. We also want to educate young people. How do they carry on being active for the rest of their life? Do they understand what grassroots sport is, what community sport is, what leisure and recreation is out there, health and fitness? How do they carry on?

There are two things here—preparing for an active and healthy life and also preparing for a successful life in education and work beyond.

Q5 Jo Platt: I like that. We need to understand why I gave up at 15 and did not continue.

Academics have identified that current PE favours children who are already technically able. Another question for Ali: what changes do we need to foster more positive relationships between children and sports?

Ali Oliver: In early years, we currently see very little physical development. In the main, school-readiness is the thing that this Government are really passionate about, lifting 75% of children to be school-ready by 2028. However, by the time they enter primary school, we already see significant deficits in young people's movement and that those primitive reflexes are not being removed. Early years is an important step. Absolutely it is teacher training and within teacher training, focusing on the inclusion of all young people, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities. We need to make sure that the people who develop a positive relationship with movement are not just those who have normal ability.

I also find it hard to believe that today, when there is so much concern about how we manage mental health in schools, we are not looking at how we are training educators and school leaders. The curriculum assessment review is looking at the moment at the purpose of subjects and Ofsted is looking at accountability in schools. We need to equip the school leaders of tomorrow with a proper understanding of ways to improve wellbeing and engagement in learning that are not just about



remedial mental health, first aid, counsellors and so on. We are not really getting upstream of issues.

Q6 Jo Platt: To the athletes, starting with Montell: how important is choice to young people, and did you have enough choice for sports in and outside of school?

Montell Douglas: When I think back to when I was a child—this is 30 years ago—I had probably my first ever race in school, which was just a basic sports day at the park, and I think that sparked the initial passion for sport, but not everybody has that experience. When I look back, it has always been my teachers who were very forthcoming who gave me massive inspiration to continue and keep pushing.

As for choice, years ago was a very different world from now, which is why we do the work that we do, especially now, since the pandemic. I distinctly remember going back into schools after the pandemic and there were a lot of issues around year 9s. That was mainly because they were the year 7s transitioning around the pandemic and they missed huge amounts of core development and transitional development. The same happened to year 6s and year 7s. A lot of work was going on in schools specifically for those age groups.

Teachers were expressing their concerns to me as an athlete mentor and working with young people that the children were not as developed, or that they were a bit more dependent on certain things, that their social skills were a bit different from even the new year 7s. That was very clear to me, not just as an athlete but as someone who loves sport and knows about traditional stuff in school and what that was like 30 years ago for me. The choices were vast because there weren't the distractions of the digital age. Facebook came in when I was at university in 2007, so even I was trying to figure out what this was. I didn't have those things. I was getting bruises, I was climbing around, I was very active. This generation is very different. They have a lot of challenges not just with choice, availability and access but also with the confidence to even try new things.

Failure for me was just the way I won all the time. I was constantly going out to fail because I could go and do it again and there was no judgment. I did not feel pressured to always succeed in something. I was doing it for the love. I had a massive encouragement from the people around me because they were also from a generation that did not have those distractions. For me, choice was doing as many sports as I possibly could. I was doing sport five or six times a week. I was on every school sports team between the ages of 11 and 15, from football to hockey to basketball—not just athletics, which is what I continued with after 16 and made it to Olympic level.

Initially for me, sport, and PE in particular, was about enjoyment and being with friends, and also the personal development of acquiring a skill in something that I genuinely loved. I don't think every child or young person has that experience or that love, but it is about how we nurture that love and how we offer more access to things that they also might not



think they would enjoy automatically. They don't have to have lots and lots of choice, but if they try something they might feel better about it down the line.

Q7 Jo Platt: That was a good answer. Can I have a really short answer to this next question? Alistair, when delivering sport to children, should there be more of a focus on enjoyment and fun over learning technical skills that obviously put children off?

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: Yes, 100%. Certainly when I look back on my own experiences of sport, it only came about when I got to England. I was born in Belgium and lived in Dominica and I only got to England when I was about five years old. Then I was exposed to all these different sports and thought, "Wow, I can do so much here." But everything that I had done prior to that was just play, and I think that is the biggest problem. Sometimes I will be in a school and hear, "Oh, are we going to do sport? Are we going to do football?" Young children turn away from that; they lose their confidence, and so I say, "No, we are just going to play and have a good time." I think that once someone feels safe and secure, they will feel, "Okay, I belong here," and they will try, give their best and learn.

I always remember that because in Dominica when we would just play, we would always play a game called Dodgems where we were just running in between each other. I think that transferred well to when I was trying to play football and trying to dodge someone, and that would transfer into the next thing I was doing. Then I lost a lot of confidence when I was told we were going swimming—"I haven't done that. I can't swim." They said, "But you'll learn to swim by the end of it," and so I thought, "Well okay, I'll stick at it." But for so many people, once they are shown that adversity, they will think, "I can't do this, I don't want to do it." It only takes one friend to support them in that and say, "Yeah, we won't do it together" and that becomes very infectious. It's all about trying to grip youngsters with, "Let's just play and have a good time."

Q8 Jo Platt: From the community world and from sports, how do we make it fun for children to be included?

Anna Hopkin: Coming back to the element of choice, offering a huge variety of sports to kids. School is such a good place to start from, having links to communities and offering taster sessions or the possibility for kids to try a range of sports and create links with clubs so that they can continue learning and growing through whichever sport they choose.

As Ali said, often PE is focused on team sports, and that is not for everyone. It certainly wasn't for me. I felt that the sports available to me at school were not sports that I could excel at, even though I was an incredibly sporty kid and did gymnastics, running, cheerleading—and swimming, obviously. I didn't necessarily feel I was able to excel or see success in those PE lessons.

A lot of the sports that I engaged with were community sports and I could only really do that through the support of my parents and friends



joining clubs with me, because I was a very shy child. The thought of turning up at a club on my own with no support was very scary, but having parents introduce me to clubs and then sharing lifts with friends and going to clubs with that social support was very important to me. Sport can start with school but then can branch out into the community and create an environment where kids go to school together to a community club or sport, and that is where it begins.

Q9 **Damian Hinds:** That leads nicely to what I want to point out. We quite often say “PE and school sport” as a single phrase and we use the two halves of it almost interchangeably as if they were the same thing. When we talk to people like you, we realise that they are not the same thing at all. What do you think is the right balance, particularly in school? We have the school day and many schools provide wraparound, before and after. Thousands of primary schools already have breakfast clubs of course, but there will be even more in the future. There are out-of-school clubs as well.

I don’t know who is the best person to kick off on this one, but what should the balance be between physical education and, particularly in the face of all the distractions, the electronica we were talking about—getting kids just doing something, getting outside, getting active and enjoying themselves?

Ali Oliver: I am happy to kick off. Physical education is something that these children should experience every week of every year of their education. We are consistent on that at the Youth Sport Trust and I know it echoes the position of the Association for Physical Education.

We want children, every child, to be able to experience enrichment every week and we know that we are nowhere near that at the moment. It would not necessarily come from competitive school sport. It is the opportunity to play and be active on the fringes of the school day, as Anna said, and in a range of things. But we want daily physical activity for every child, and the breakfast clubs are an amazing opportunity to have active breakfast clubs. They have a proven evidence base: feed a child a nutritious healthy breakfast and they will learn better; engage a young person in physical activity before they start their school day and they will engage better in their learning.

That seems like a wonderful opportunity, but 60 active minutes is a minimum. Talking about 60 active minutes gives the impression that if we do one block of 60 active minutes, we will be fine; but for children, it is about continually moving, through the school day. Daily physical activity should be bursts throughout the day and the 60 active minutes is really beneficial for health when it is moderate to vigorous physical activity. We should have PE every week, whether on one or two days, and we have always talked about a minimum of two hours for that, notwithstanding the caveats I put on time. Then every child should have enrichment at least every week if not every day, particularly those young people from more disadvantaged or low-affluence backgrounds who are



very unlikely to be able to access enrichment activities beyond the school day if we don't provide that within the school day.

- Q10 **Damian Hinds:** That covers it well, I guess. We have a curriculum review going on at the moment. What are your hopes and expectations about what that will deliver?

Anna Hopkin: I don't quite know in terms of specific times or how it would look but I think it is just providing the option for kids to be involved, whether that is before or after school or as a designated PE lesson throughout the week. Protecting that time for sport and physical activity within the curriculum is really important. Without that protection, it is so easy for kids to have absolutely no introduction to physical activity at all, and that really stands through the rest of their upbringing and how they pass that down to their own kids and their kids. The introduction to physical activity is so important and having that as a protected time within the school curriculum is essential.

- Q11 **Damian Hinds:** Ali, presumably you have given evidence to that review. If you are at liberty to divulge, what have you asked for and do you expect to get it?

Ali Oliver: We asked for four things and absolutely we expect to get them.

Damian Hinds: Very good.

Ali Oliver: The first thing is around the value and status of the subject. This is about where it sits among other subjects. In a broad and balanced curriculum, it should have equal status.

Secondly, the aims of the curriculum for physical education at the moment feel a little outdated. They are certainly not ordered in a way that emphasises some of the points that have been raised already today around making sure that every child is physically literate, confident, competent and motivated to move, has a positive relationship with movement and has also developed a range of skills through the physical, which is so important to their performance in the classroom and later in work. At the moment, there is a small number of aims and you still see such language as "young people are supported to excel." Notwithstanding that, yes, of course some children want to excel, but it is much more important, in the curriculum aims that we are talking about, for every child to be active and feel comfortable being active.

At the moment the four programmes of study in the curriculum are largely the same, just slightly more complicated versions, and we need very different programmes of study for each of the four key stages.

Finally, you can study or you can experience physical education every year of your primary and secondary education and leave with nothing on paper. There is a GCSE in PE and there are BTEC qualifications and so on; but for many children and young people who don't opt for that subject, there is nothing to show at the end of it. We have been saying that it is really important that children experience some sort of benchmarking, or



that there is some sort of passport at the end of physical education that is a summary of what I can do, what I have learned, where I will continue to be active next, so that there is something tangible that they can show to employers or further education, higher education; but also to show how they have reflected on how they have grown and developed so that later in life, when other pressures come on them, they continue to know why it is important to be active.

Q12 **Damian Hinds:** There was a trend back in the 2000s where lots of kids took a half GCSE in PE. Are you expecting that to return?

Ali Oliver: It is not something that we have talked about or discussed. One of our concerns with GCSEs per se is a little bit like what I talked about with the profession coming out of sports science degrees with nine months of postgraduate teacher training. GCSE PE is not just GCSE PE; it is GCSE sports science. It is not a GCSE in being physically educated or having reached a certain level of physical education. We have been calling for some time now that if we are going to have a GCSE PE, let's change that syllabus, or let's be really clear that this is a GCSE in sports studies or sports science.

Q13 **Damian Hinds:** What was the role of the PE and sport premium in schools? Inevitably, from time to time, there will be moves to just fold that into general school funding. Would you be happy to see that happen, or do you think it should remain as a ringfenced fund?

Montell Douglas: Putting in the premium was due to the lack of something being there in the first place. Shifting towards PE being core and prioritised might alleviate the need for that premium, in the sense that it does not have to have something specialist towards putting it in. From what I know about the PE sports premium, initially it was put in because the schools generally had oversight of how they would want to spend it and incorporate sport. If we are shifting towards it being core, the argument would then become, "Is it specialist? Are we talking about elitism? Are we pushing it to the point of excelling?"

However, maybe the premium is needed because PE and sport are not a priority and we are considering physical education as something ad hoc, an add-on but also something we can leave behind. You would never say, for example, that we were just going to leave a maths class behind and say, "You don't have to do that," but it happens a lot in schools that PE can fall by the wayside and students don't have to participate in it at all.

We are talking about lifelong skills. It is physical literacy. It is not just about feeling great and being a better human inside and out; it is also about how a person will impact the world. As an athlete, I know female leaders who have done sport are more likely to be in the C-suite. I am aware of that now because I moved into business but it was quite a startling fact for me. I never envisioned being an athlete at the beginning because I never saw professional female athletes in the 1990s; it wasn't a thing. But slowly going into something where it was just about being passionate has allowed me to move into certain spaces because of the



experience I had first and foremost with physical education in school and not in elite sport, which is what it became later.

Q14 Damian Hinds: You do not think it is important to have a ringfenced fund?

Ali Oliver: Can I build on that a little bit? I think Montell is absolutely spot-on. In many ways, the primary PE and sport premium, which was introduced post the London Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2013, was a response to the end of specialist sports colleges and school sport partnerships, which had had ringfenced funding from 2002 in sports colleges going right back to 1997.

The concern with the primary PE and sport premium is that it is an enormous sum of money, which the Youth Sport Trust believes could have played a transformative role in the provision of physical education and sport in primary schools, but it was not invested in a strategic way. It was individual payments to individual schools. I am sure the Committee is aware that now, for the average primary school, for the under-16 children it is £16,000 and for the over-16s it is £16,000 plus £10 per pupil. It is a huge amount of money, but it has not been strategically invested.

A lot more was achieved through school sport partnerships, where the funding was invested strategically with an agenda of transformational change, building capacity in teachers, building school-to-community links, developing youth sport leadership, making gifted-and-talented pathways more inclusive for more young people. There was a very clear strategy attached to it with that national ambition. Every year we were measuring how much progress had been made on each of these dimensions.

The primary PE and sport premium has been more money, no accountability, no clear expectations around particular target populations, and it is very difficult for us to say what it has done. Our ask is to continue ringfenced funding.

If physical education became a core subject and there was improved status and value of sport in schools and if, for example in our national professional qualifications for school leaders we were talking about the importance of sport as part of the educational experience, you might not need it because it would happen naturally. But at the moment, and right back to 2002 with school sport partnerships and sports colleges, the reason for the investment was that we needed to give this subject some focused effort and attention because teacher training was lacking, schools and communities were not closely linked together and young people with disabilities or from minority populations were not getting the opportunities.

Q15 Damian Hinds: For completeness, a lot of primary school heads would also tell you that they were able to do things with the primary PE and sport premium that they were never able to do in the past. I don't want to put words in your mouth but it sounds to me, from what you are saying, that you would keep ringfenced funding but not put it in the



hands of individual schools. Is that correct?

Ali Oliver: You are absolutely right that many schools have done some terrific stuff with the primary PE and sport premium, so I don't want to undersell that, but nationally can we say where we are and how different that is to 2013? No, we can't. I think the ideal is that you have an infrastructure that ensures universal support for every school everywhere, and that is what the school sport partnerships were—they were a universal support mechanism for schools. There was someone leading a school sport partnership based in a sports college where there was great innovation and development and then a team of deliverers in that partnership supporting every school. You had that. At the moment, we spend £11 million on the school games organisers three days a week to serve 50 to 60 schools each. You don't need to spend a lot of the £320 million to boost that network, to give it the right level of capacity and capability but leave money in the hands of primary schools.

One way that we could do that is by considering it as a physical activity and sport pupil premium, so that schools in the most disadvantaged areas have more resource in their hands to make sure that young people from the least affluent backgrounds are getting the social and cultural capital, but every school gets the benefit of a local partnership. That is what we would call for—the best of both worlds.

Q16 Damian Hinds: But some of that happens anyway because of the way that national governing bodies work and how they target their programmes. There does tend to be some up-weighting towards disadvantaged areas.

Ali Oliver: Yes, because Sport England, quite rightly, has a strategy around tackling inequalities. Investment into national governing bodies is to do that, but it feels as if we should take the very best of the past, the very best of the present and try to create an even brighter future.

Q17 Damian Hinds: I have one more question. It is a very quick question but it might be a longer answer because it is a fairly complicated question.

Every few years we rack our brains about why it has never worked in the past when we have tried to open up school facilities to outside clubs and community groups. Every few years there is a government programme to do so. We did one relatively recently, when we were in government. There is probably another one coming in another couple of years from the new Government. Why does it never quite work as planned?

Anna Hopkin: Volunteers are a huge part of leading community clubs and sports clubs. The school day finishes at a time when people are still at work. To create high-quality sports clubs in school facilities, you need high-quality coaches and staff to run them, and also high-quality facilities and equipment for specific sports. The people who usually run those sports clubs don't get paid a lot of money to be a coach or a sports club leader. A lot of them are volunteers and they cannot be getting to the school at 3 o'clock to run those sessions. How do you provide funding for



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the leaders of those clubs within those facilities, and how do you ensure that the equipment is there?

Like a lot of schools, my primary school didn't have any indoor sports hall or anything. Our PE was outside or nothing really, just because of the size of the school. It was 90 kids in the primary school. I don't know how a club could have run within that primary school, but if there could have been adaptations or the right equipment provided to set up within the school and bring in the right staff and coaches to inspire the kids, I think the kids would have absolutely loved it—everyone would have been a part of it.

But how do you get the people to run those clubs? As Ali said, PE teachers are just the class teachers who have a very limited level of training for teaching PE. The training is not there for them to expect them to also teach a specific sport within a sports club. It becomes about a level of funding for that kind of provision.

Ali Oliver: Could I add something to the point about who provides the activity? A number of national governing body clubs provide staff to work on school sites. But one of the things that is very hard for a school is who is responsible in the school for the letting of their facilities, and the only way—well not the only way, but often the way—that that is done is through their post being paid for based on the revenue they generate from letting the school site, which makes the highest payer the customer. Often those customers are not the community clubs that are local and in need of more facilities, and often that does not represent provision for young people because the young people are largely not the paying customers.

We have never made it statutory. There is a lot in PE and school sport that is non-statutory. There is very little of anything that is statutory here, which is a challenge. Furthermore, we know that 70% of sports halls are on school sites, 1,300 swimming pools are on school sites, but we have to say that site must be managed as a community facility, and therefore the resourcing of the manager becomes the important point. Does the school have to raise the money to do that, in which case they will use the revenues from the facility, or is that part of the resourcing of the school site? Then we can think much more creatively, as Anna said, about how you can genuinely make sure that clubs have access.

Chair: We will come back to school facilities in a minute, Ali, so we need to move on. We have so many questions to ask you, so can you try to keep your answers as pithy as possible? We are desperate to pick your brains and we need to rattle through a little bit quicker, please.

Q18 **Zöe Franklin:** Returning to the school games organisers, I have a question for Ali and then I have some questions for Montell, Anna and Alistair. How effective do you think the school games organisers have been in increasing sport participation? We have started to touch on the issue of diversity. Organisers are potentially engaging with small groups of schools, rather than ensuring that a wide range of schools are getting support for sports competitions, the events and so on.



Ali Oliver: The school games organiser network has been tremendously successful, given its resourcing and the context within which it is operating. In the last 12 months, 2.2 million competitive sports opportunities have been provided through the school games organiser network, a huge volume of activities every single week of every single school year.

How effective the network has been in achieving more than delivering the school games will very much depend on context. Organisers are funded for three days a week, £23,800, which is not far off the minimum wage for some of these individuals. The funding is for three days a week, but many of them are appointed to a five-days-a-week role, which is how it gets quite close to the minimum wage.

For the 220 former school sport partnerships, the SGO funding goes into the partnership and it forms part of a broad offer. Coming back to Damien Hinds's point, many primary schools will invest in their school sport partnership using their primary PE and sport premium. But that is not the way that is done everywhere, so my final point—picking up on the Chair's comment about being concise—is that we have a postcode lottery around the school games. In some areas, you have a three-days-a-week post that can do something but nothing else. In other areas, we have a £2 million school sport partnership that is running a huge empire of activity, working in partnership with the local council and others to target those in the greatest need.

Q19 **Zöe Franklin:** Moving on to the national governing bodies of sport, do you think that there should be more of a requirement for them to engage with schools through the school games organiser network? I know that many do great work in this area, but should it be that if they want to evolve with government funding, they need to engage with the school games organisers, Ali?

Ali Oliver: Yes. Again, history shows us that when we had a PE and school sport strategy, national governing bodies all had a PE and school sport club links officer. That was part of the strategy and part of the funding. They had personnel dedicated to this. They were in the school sport partnerships and they worked together. At the moment, it is often the larger, wealthier sports, such as the FA, that buy in extra days of the school games organisers to grow, in particular, equal access for girls in football, but it should be all sports.

Q20 **Zöe Franklin:** Thank you, Ali. Now a question for our panel of athletes. I am interested to hear about your experiences of taking part in extracurricular activities such as inter-school competitions, like all those other competitions that take place at school, What was your experience? Do you think there are enough opportunities for young people to compete in those kinds of opportunities? Do you want to start, Alistair?

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: I certainly played with the football team and I played in the netball team; I played in any extracurricular team I could—the swimming galas and things like that. I think they are very important. As a child, those were the days I lived for. When we talk about



all the collateral effects, one thing that school sport and PE did for me was it made me tired. We always talk about being tired, you go to sleep. As athletes, we know that sleep is probably the best legal drug there is. When you sleep well, you wake up and you have all those neuro connections and arrive at school the next day feeling ready to talk and greet people. I think the two go hand in hand so well. Opportunity in sport was very new to me when I got to England, but it was always just an opportunity to play. It was the one thing that really drove me.

Ali, I remember you raising this point. Sometimes, and certainly from my observation, we have these great facilities and academies, but why do you have a football goal with a basketball hoop right above it? That means anyone who sees someone playing football thinks, "I can't play basketball there," or, "They are playing basketball so I can't go and play football there." The design around certain aspects of things for kids to be allowed to play is very difficult.

Extracurricularly, sport is great because it gives a great structure to what we do—although even if we didn't have a school football team afterwards, we would have stayed after school and played football anyway. That is very much how it went, and that is what we lived for. It is very important in keeping children together so they can experience being children. I think that is one thing that we are not doing any more—allowing kids to be kids. They have too much choice around everything, and their brains are not ready for so much choice. There is nothing wrong with saying, "We are going to go and do some PE now" and there will be a million choices of PE, so, "Today we will be doing this, tomorrow we might do that" and just let them play.

Q21 **Zöe Franklin:** Anna, do you have any thoughts on this?

Anna Hopkin: On opportunities for kids to compete, it is quite easy to create opportunity within team sports. Every school has a football team or a cricket team, and you can have inter-school competition. The opportunities are there if those are the sports that you choose and are good at.

Swimming is my sport and I did primary school swimming galas, but it was very much a group of us who were part of a swimming club in the local town, who kind of asked to create a relay team. The primary school was super-supportive of it, getting the local newspaper in to celebrate when we did well, but swimming was not cultivated by the school. It was very much that there were a few of us who were part of the local swimming club. We were talented at swimming and felt like we could do well against other primary schools. I don't know if the opportunities are there for those kinds of individual sports and maybe the slightly more obscure sports.

When I was at high school, probably the only sport I really competed in was athletics, which was run really well. For competition, we had inter-high school competition within the local town. We all got a bus to the stadium. There were presentations, celebrations, when we were successful and the school really celebrated how well we had done.



Again, though, I was part of an athletics club outside of school. I think our preparation for that school competition was maybe three weeks in advance of the competition. We would be told that we had to come after school to run a couple of laps around the track to prepare for that competition. The preparation was not cultivated by the school; it was very much that if you were part of a local athletics club or a cross-country club, and you were talented in that sport, you would be picked for the competition. There are certain sports that could be a lot better catered for.

Montell Douglas: That was a beautiful segue into saying I think it varies depending on the sport. I was doing athletics. Athletics is one of the most accessible sports we have in this country because you are never far away from a club at any point. It so happened that mine was literally at the end of the road my secondary school was in, but that is not the case for everyone. Participation boils down to time, resource, money and access and also an awareness of what is out there. We always have parents and teachers asking, "Where can I do this, where can I do that?" and usually it is really close by and they are just not aware of it. It helps if we can champion the clubs, speak in communities, making them more aware that there are things going on that children can access.

But we are also fighting the battle. I have friends, for example a single parent with three children who works 70-hour weeks, and there is also a schoolteacher who has young children and if they want to do those things, who is collecting the children? She doesn't finish until 5 pm. Those are real challenges that we have to think about, about being a mother, that can also hinder access.

It was very different for us growing up, having access, able to accept lifts, as Anna said. I did exactly the same thing; I would never have been able to do my sport otherwise. Those things are also among the challenges, let alone just being aware of what is around. Schools are fighting those battles because we need extra people on board and, as has been mentioned, a lot of the people are volunteers.

Q22 **Zöe Franklin:** Can I ask one more question? This takes us beyond the competitive sport realm. As a panel, you have noted the impact that school PE and sport has on health and wellbeing. I would like to hear your thoughts on the inclusion of other extracurricular, physical-related activities, perhaps things such as yoga and Pilates, that help to build an understanding that activity is not just about competing in sport but about that lifelong wellbeing aspect of physical education. I don't know who is best to answer that question.

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: Me. We used to play chess after school, funnily enough. I think it can be anything that exposes you to other people, certainly when you are young. One thing I used to do when I was very small was never look someone in the eye, certainly not grown-ups anyway, but then after a while of doing it, talking with friends, we would just sit, play chess, and things like that. Wet days also, when we would have playtime at school and couldn't go outside but would be tucked up



inside, well, "Let's get the draughtboard out then." We would do those sorts of things, and the whole time we were doing that, we were talking, conversing and feeling a lot better. Someone who had learned tai chi at home, or their dad had showed them tai chi, came to school and showed us tai chi in wet breaks. I look back at all that learning that I got to do with my friends and think, "Is it even like that any more?" I sometimes think that there is a big disconnect, being young now, and young people are being forced.

We were talking about facilities. Running tracks, athletics tracks—we used to have one near me, the Roger Bannister track, that served the whole county. We would be doing running with our friends and our training would be after school: "Race you up and down the road!" Then at the end of the year, we would go to the borough sports, every school would come together, and we would race on the one track, and it actually felt like you were all on the same level because you all had one track that you could use.

Now there are more and more tracks dotted around and those who are more affluent, who go to the best schools or academies, have more access to the tracks. By the time you reach these levels, there will be those who are left behind, who will never get that opportunity, purely because from day one they are always two steps behind because they never had access to those things. They are becoming more and more common to some, but there is still a majority or large proportion that they are not available for, so those children will always be left behind.

Ali Oliver: School Games, which was started as a competitive school sport programme to put competition back at the heart of state schools, has now evolved. It is funded by Sport England, which of course has tracked their strategy. School Games organisers are now doing quite a lot of what you have described. There are colour runs, cheerleading, yoga. Particularly for young women and girls, the active lives data shows us that fitness activities are on the rise for young people, following their voice and where they want to go.

Experimenting with different activities can be an amazing way of levelling an experience. You have probably heard that there has been a huge boom in dodgeball in school. Why? Because no one has played it before, so when we all play it together, everybody is at the same standard because we are all learning together. That would be the same for yoga or Pilates—those sorts of things.

Q23 **Mr James Frith:** I want to come to you, Montell. Having been a parent at a sports day, I love this image of an eventual British record holder taking part in the school sports day. I can imagine the parents, the fellow parents, would have been treated to this vision of speed in front of them. It is a magnificent image.

I am visiting the Bury Athletics Club's track this week. What is your expectation of athletics clubs, and what the track as a club should be doing in a small town in the shadow of a great city, which is Bury in Manchester? Looking back, but also what do you understand the current



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infrastructure looks like? What do you think a local MP should be doing to support a local track? What advice would you give a track with ambition?

Montell Douglas: Great question. Is that Bury St Edmunds?

Mr James Frith: No—Bury, Manchester.

Montell Douglas: Bury, Manchester. I wondered if I had been there because I did my English schools in there. That is another thing—having amazing experiences; you remember those things and those moments.

It is interesting because there has to be accountability somewhere. I would say for an MP, as a lover of sport, appreciating the coaches, the volunteers, the work that they do within essentially one of the most grassroots sports we have in the country but very successful at an elite level. It can be quite strange, a dichotomy in sports, to have that kind of level. I would say being very present and being face front.

The reason I say that is because a lot of the time, and especially now when we are speaking about how we perceive sport and physical education and the importance of it, for me a lot of it boils down to attitudes to those things. We can talk about yoga and Pilates. Football now is massively on the rise. There was a shift in attitude towards what those things did for their game. Initially, it was primarily around something very specific and not to do with that, but then it became about wellbeing and their effectiveness within their teams and how they work together as a team in a team sport that was previously very individually based.

It is the same when you are looking at the clubs and how they can transform that attitude. Being present and supportive is important because there is a lack of that, especially face front, meaning I would want to know who that person is. We are talking about grassroots and communities and we are talking about a foundation level. It is very important that people feel connected with those people. Outwardly looking—you mentioned me being someone doing a school sports day. People find it very strange when they ask about my perception of sport. I said that the only time I decided that I wanted to be an athlete was after I came back from the Olympic games, which is a very strange thing but it is the truth. I did athletics all the way from 16 to 22. I did it because I loved it. I never envisioned that part of it.

You can change your attitude and perception of lifelong things. MPs and people with power will be on the ground seeing the needs of the people that they are servicing, rather than asking and guessing. We always say, especially in the work we do, "Ask them." I am not Gen Z; I very much do not know. I am nearly 40. It is a very different world now from where I was, so I can only presume the love of the sport and bringing my passion in—speaking and going to Bury, for example—but I would need to know what their challenges are because they are very different from mine. Speaking to them in any which way and being at the forefront is the primary thing you can do because we all love someone to look up to, whether it is someone we know or otherwise.



Q24 **Natasha Irons:** Thank you so much for coming today. I am going to take it back to the community setting and not just school, because obviously your passion for sport or your lifelong journey with sport is not just going to be confined to the classroom. Ali, we have heard in evidence about the Grand Canyon-sized gap between school and community sports. What kinds of things can be done to better facilitate that connection? How can we bring them together a bit more?

Ali Oliver: A number of things. The first is coming back to schools and their civic responsibility and civic duty. The Youth Sport Trust is working with multi-academy trusts, who are really taking these things much more seriously today. They need to be connected to their community to deliver the best education. They need to take the benefit of everything in their community; equally they need to give to it. This is where our vision of a modern-day school sport partnership would have outward-facing roles within it.

We are piloting this in three areas of the country at the moment—in Knowsley, Perry Barr and Tower Hamlets, where we have appointed a placemaker, who is someone in the community. They know the place really well, but they connect with the school and they are forming a bridge between the two. Something like that in a future school sport partnership would be really powerful.

We have not spoken at all today about youth sport leadership, which is enormous. Coming back to the first question I was asked, about the London 2012 legacy—you know about the amazing games makers who were the volunteers there—we have hundreds of thousands of young people leading and organising sport in their community and incredibly powerfully as peer leaders. Those young people are amazing at forming links and taking their friends with them, and we should be capitalising on that way more.

We also talked about opening up the school site, which would be another great way to bring the community into the school, and even if the activity does not happen on the school site, bringing coaches from the community into the school, who are then the community coaches who work in the community. But all of this needs to be strategically planned and managed. At the moment there is nothing to do that. There is all the potential but nothing to do it.

Q25 **Natasha Irons:** I will follow up with our athletes. Thank you so much for being here; you are putting us all to shame. How did you enter sport outside of a school setting? You touched on this a little bit and you talked about the difficulty with signposting and finding the clubs around you. What was your experience and what can we do to better signpost communities to the stuff that is available to them and make sure of the wraparound outside of school stuff?

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: I was very lucky. One of the boys who I was playing with at school said, "Alistair, I play for a Sunday team—you should come along." It just so happened that his dad was manager of the school football team. I went along on a Thursday—I had to walk 2 miles



to get there, as you do when you are a kid—and I played football and enjoyed it so much and wanted to go back. It is taking me way back in time now and I am thinking about all those good days, but that is just very much how it was. When I look at signposting within my school at the time, there would not have been anything that would have shown me, even though there were so many football clubs all around. I grew up in Harrow so there would have been loads, but there was never any signposting within the school to say, “If you would like to try this, you could go here or do that.” It was just by chance that one of my friends happened to share an opportunity with me.

Q26 Natasha Irons: Do you think that it has changed at all? Is it still difficult for young people to find things to get involved in?

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: It is within their schools. Even though they still have access to it, I think as a parent that there is still more onus on parents. Local football clubs are found via a Facebook post—I hate saying that because I don’t like social media at all—and that is what it has come to. As a community, as people, we are becoming more lazy. If we post it here everyone will see, and they will have to, so they don’t need to research to find anything out. That is just how it goes. It is very difficult. It is only once you are within that environment that you get the word of mouth where you will then start exploring more and more and find out what there is. What is great is that football clubs often share cricket ground clubs, so there is access to other sport if it is needed.

Q27 Natasha Irons: Anna, did you have any ideas on how we could make it easier for people to find what is going on in their local community?

Anna Hopkin: A lot of kids don’t know what they love and enjoy until they try it. In schools, you have all the kids there in one place, so why not use that as an opportunity to introduce them to a range of different sports? As Ali said, bring club coaches in to run sessions or even after-school clubs doing a taster session, with the first session free, and bring all the kids in, allow them to try a range of different sports. That immediately signposts them to, “If you like that, this is where we congregate at this time on this day.” It might be that there is a future Olympian in a child in some sport that they have never tried before. They have never tried it so they never get to unleash their potential and find what they love or are successful at.

Even if it is not with the intention of having kids finding sports that they will go on and become successful at, if it means that they retain and remain in that sport for the rest of their life and pass it down to their kids as well, that has a huge benefit on community and society as a whole in changing the societal norm around physical activity.

More presence of trying different sports, seeing the clubs, being told where they train and when they are available, because a lot of the time it is reliant on—for me, Mum was amazing at discovering brand-new clubs and introducing me to them, or word of mouth from friends. If I did not have those two avenues to introduce me to different clubs, I don’t think that I would have tried half the sports that I did. I am so grateful for



trying a range of different sports and it has given me so much confidence and built my self-esteem in sport and in other aspects in life. It is so important that kids have the opportunity to be part of that as well.

Montell Douglas: On the signposting that you mentioned, a lot of the time we are relying on parents to know these things. We had all different exposing experiences in sport. Mine was that at secondary school we did it in PE. My teacher put me in school sports, so I was representing my school and then you were in districts. It just happened that then I got scouted. A coach saw me and asked, "Do you train?" I said, "Literally I am in the school sports hall." That was pretty much all I had done. It happened to be the end of my road, but I had no clue that it was the end of my road.

Now, though, although we are in a digital world, community sport, from what I know and from friends and family—and I have young children—is still very much word of mouth, because it is always about validation and credibility of the club and they know someone who knows someone. If you say, "How did you find it?" their friend at school came. It is still very much that, but bridging the gap between the teachers, for example, or advocates of sport within a school—it does not have to be a teacher, it could be anybody—to signpost that, and being active around it and pushing that and not allowing people just to find their way, because they will get lost. We don't know what we don't know, at the end of the day.

Natasha Irons: Perhaps there is a role for local councils in bringing together clubs and putting it on their websites so that everyone knows that there is a one-stop shop of what is happening in your area.

Q28 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** I want to go back quickly to what you think are the biggest challenges for access to facilities. Alistair, you mentioned affluence; Montell, you mentioned connections. Is there anything else that you would like to touch on? I will start with the athletes.

Anna Hopkin: There are a lot of barriers for people participating in sport and finding those facilities. A huge one, particularly in my sport, is the closures of swimming pools. A lot of swimming pools have closed, especially in the last 10 years, and the population is only growing. There are fewer swimming pools available and swimming is one of those sports that in my opinion should be essential for kids to learn, if, for nothing else, a safety element. If kids cannot access those facilities or those facilities are too far away and they don't have the transport and the money to spend to get themselves to the facilities—and once you get there the costs of running those facilities are going higher, so then the costs for clubs to run are increasing as well, which means that the fees for certain clubs can be extortionate. Particularly in some areas of the country and for some families, it is not feasible to access those facilities.

Those facilities need to be better supported to make sure that we are not having continual closures. In 10 years' time, how many more facilities will have closed, and how many people will that have affected who cannot access that sport and physical activity? What will that do to the health of



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the nation in 50 years' time? That is such a big issue at the minute, and something that we need to tackle.

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: The other thing on the affluence point is the security of the facilities. I remember when I used to play football in Holland you could be driving along the road and in plain sight of the road you could see open fields of football pitches, basketball courts and everything else, whereas a lot of the facilities that I see in England these days tend to be in towns and villages where they are often quite secluded in terms of access to them. It is not just that children or young people don't feel so safe accessing them, but as a parent, do I feel safe letting my child go there or do I have to attend with them? Are there security cameras that oversee these things?

That might answer the question if it was well-documented that it is being monitored so that the safety aspect of things is taken into account. Even if you were to provide a swimming pool, for example, you have to allow for a changing facility there. How will that be monitored and does it feel safe for people using it? Everything has to be underpinned by security first and foremost because if no one feels safe they will never attend, no matter what we do. That is one observation that I have always had on the facilities that we have. Even if they are state of the art, if the people using them don't feel safe and secure it is an uphill struggle.

Montell Douglas: As Alistair just pinpointed, a lot of the time the safety of the space—the security of it—can be attributed to the quality of the facility. I know personally that training in north London, which was the base for London 2012, leading up to the home games in athletics, every Olympian was training there and it was very much a community venue. That still goes on now and it is one of the most used because the quality of the facility is unprecedented. There is not much like it. You have indoors, you have outdoors. We only had outdoors growing up. It is very different if you have access to a high-quality facility. It does not have to be state of the art, but just for safety it has to do the sport or activity that it is designed for.

I know, for example, at north London, Lee Valley Athletics Centre is one of the best in the country. We have a humongous gymnastics community there. They take up the whole of the indoor throwing area. They lay mats down and if you want to do indoor throwing you cannot use one of the best indoor throwing places because gymnastics take it over because they don't have any space like it, they have said. That just shows that the quality of the space for what it is intended is not always matched up, especially in more niche sports when you have higher equipment. Do not even ask me where you can do bobsleigh, because it is not a thing. You can try when it gets snowy but it is very difficult; and it becomes harder with the specialist sports. When it is open, you can grab a football and you can do it anywhere. We can provide access to swimming pools and athletics, which are way more accessible than some niche sports, but the quality still needs to be there for everyone to access anything from a safety point of view.



Q29 Mr Bayo Alaba: Ali, with school estates and resources and how best they can be utilised, you mentioned earlier the statutory protection around the finance and how you charge for facilities. Do you see that as something that schools should try and do if they want other parts of the community to access their facilities? Is that something that we could do?

Ali Oliver: There is a huge appetite among schools—I touched on a lot of the academies that we work with—that want to forge a closer relationship with their community and execute their civic duty and responsibility. Therefore, I don't think that this is about a lack of will. It is about prioritisation, particularly when budgets are tight and the school is measured on a certain set of outcomes, one of which is not access to the school site or the number of children who are involved in enrichment activities. That is where the mismatch comes. It is tragic that we have young people, 84% of whom want to do more sport and physical activity, and we have facilities that are locked up and behind gates and we cannot seem to marry the two.

It comes down to what we want from schools and how we resource them to do it, or how we re-emphasise the things that are most important to us in society. At the moment it seems that the emphasis is very much on the academic curriculum, on academic results and the sorts of things that Ofsted currently looks at, as opposed to a broader, more balanced curriculum and a wider community engagement with the school.

Q30 Chair: Ali, we know that sometimes private schools have phenomenal facilities. One of my issues with the Government's VAT on private school fees is that it is such a blunt tool and I would much rather have seen that used as a way of encouraging private schools to open their facilities more to the local communities and to other schools. It is early days, but are you seeing any unintended consequences of the VAT on school fees on private schools sharing their facilities, particularly when their charitable status used to encourage that as part of the process?

Ali Oliver: I don't have any evidence of that yet, which may be because of the early days. I sit on the HMC Sports Committee, where I am talking with and working with a number of directors of sports and headteachers from independent schools. The conversation that we have been having is, "Yes, there is this opportunity around your facilities but also it is your workforce." Sometimes getting children from a state school to the independent school to access its facilities is a step too far; either the school does not have transport or it costs too much.

There is also a degree of how that makes young people feel sometimes, stepping across the threshold to somewhere way more resourced. It sometimes has an unintended consequence, whereas personnel in independent schools, the workforce, the often dedicated sports coaches coming out and working alongside coaches and teachers in the state sector and providing additional capacity would be much more easily done. To come back to your question, I don't know whether the VAT on private schools is likely to inhibit that.



Q31 Zoë Franklin: I had a question to follow up on facilities on state schools. I was speaking to a number of schools in my constituency of Guildford. They are very keen to enable young people to do year-round sport. Part of that has been wanting to develop more multi use games areas—MUGAs. They have hit some interesting challenges on the funding side of things—how do they fund it and what does that mean for community access to help pay back—and on the planning side. Is that anything that you are aware of, and do you have any thoughts on that?

Ali Oliver: From a Youth Sport Trust perspective, it is not my speciality area and it is not something that I have a great deal of expertise on.

One point that I would like to raise about MUGAs, which picks up on Alistair's point, is that quite a lot of community sport and grassroots sport is sport-specific. We don't have a tradition of multisport provision. Coming back to your point, Natasha, about school-to-community links, one of the reasons why lots of young people drop off between school and community is because they don't want to go and play one sport; they want to play lots of sports and there is not an environment where you can go and play lots of sports. We don't have multisport clubs, and MUGAs are a great way of creating, as Alistair said, a play facility where lots of different sports can be played. However, I don't have any particular expertise on the point about planning.

Q32 Jo Platt: I will follow on from that, because this is a real bugbear of mine. Where we have some of our more challenging areas locally and funding is supplied to provide provision, I feel it is a missed opportunity if, say, there is six weeks of funding for an activity and then it goes. For me, that is not good enough. What are your thoughts on producing more of a lasting legacy with that element of funded sports?

Ali Oliver: We have just had, and you referred to it, the opening schools facilities fund, which was £57 million over three years and demonstrated some huge shifts in opening school sites, but unfortunately the funding was concluded, so the opportunities to continue that provision were limited. This is where we need to move from provision to transformation. Everything has to move so that we are building capacity, building capability, changing attitudes and perceptions, changing the way that the school and community relate so that the funding is used to stimulate the change, but once the change is made everybody's attitudes and behaviours have a better chance of being maintained even if the funding were removed.

I will give you a brilliant example; it is not quite the same. The Youth Sport Trust's first programme was the Tops programme, where we gave schools training, a big blue bag of equipment and a set of resource cards to help with remembering what they had done in the training. Once we started the programme, we soon realised that people wanted to come to the training to get the big blue bag of equipment, but it was the training that transformed their practice. We saw the blue bags all over the place, not being used any more, because they had learnt how to adapt and



make sport equipment. We somehow have to create a change in people's mindsets.

Q33 Dr Rupa Huq: My question is for the three athletes. It is interesting that everyone seems to have had a big swerve in what they were doing. You were going to be a sprinter, now you do bobsleigh; you went out then in; and you were going to be QPR and now you are a very famous Paralympian. Sorry, you were a Gladiator as well—all these different changes.

Sir Mo Farah is on record as asking how to break down systemic barriers, the cultural change that is needed. It sounds like you three are all happy accidents, almost. Are there systemic things that stop certain groups participating in sport as a whole or certain sports? You said that there is the status of the subject of PE and maybe there is the status of certain sports as well. We had Azeem Rafiq speak to this Committee—it was very moving—about cricket, and Yorkshire had a lot of problems after that, so things like ethnicity, gender, disability, socioeconomic background. Sorry, there are a lot of questions there.

Montell Douglas: Thank you for bringing that to light and recognising that. We were talking about sport in education and sport in general. When you mentioned the happy accident thing, I have used those words particularly talking about my own story. To me it is just a happenstance. People are quite shocked by that, but for me that is the power of sport that has been able to provide for my life. And coming from a background with very, very young parents, we were just working class and that is why I didn't want to be—we didn't have the athletic background. What I did have was the space and security to be able to try new things and go and do that. That is not always the case. When we talk about changing attitudes, it is not just about how sport is a lifelong thing and how not everyone wants to be an Olympian. I didn't, and it can happen but it might not.

But the real benefit—and I don't want to speak for all of us—for what sport has been able to do is what Ali has mentioned: the transformation. The barriers always exist and we are forever learning and growing, as we are forever growing now. I was 31 before I was even asked to do bobsleigh, and did that. But, to be a 31-year-old and to be able to do it when no one within that facility— Bobsleigh was not my world. No one looked like me and they didn't come from where I came from; that was very clear to me, but sport was able to give me the courage and the confidence to be able to just say, "Why not?" and try that. You mentioned those things, and that is what sport has been able to give me—that lifelong ambition and wellbeing to be able to do those things.

The challenges really do exist. I mentioned it before in the previous question. Changing attitudes is a massive thing, with teachers, with schools, with parents and with kids. Attitudes towards what sport and physical education can do for you and how you can prioritise it in your life are really, really important, but it is different for everyone. We have layers to it; we really do have intersectionality. Like I said to you, I am a



black female athlete. When I was 10 years old, football was my initial sport. I was in an all-boys football team at 10 years old because there weren't any girls there. I was in an all-boys basketball team at 14 years old because there were not any girls clubs there. I was able to do those things because I had a supportive network. My Mum and Dad loved sport. My mum coached me in netball and my dad coached me in the football team. I had that support, and when it is not there—and you do systemically have the backgrounds. You have finance and resources but you also have perceptions around what could be better and what a priority it is.

That will be the biggest challenge and that is something that everyone has an accountability to change, because young people spend a lot of time in school. A lot of the things that you are getting are obviously from home, but when you go to school and your friends are around you, you have the impacts and challenges and the changes that you can have within yourself. It is for everyone to work together, but also to be singing from the same page. Reaching out to communities is an impactful way to do that, because communities look very different, depending on where you are. That is where you will see similar people doing very different sports who are like you, who speak like you, where you can feel more secure and safe in doing so. You never know where that will lead after that.

Q34 **Dr Rupa Huq:** You had supportive parents who can drive you around the country or whatever. A lot of my constituents are very time-poor and have multiple jobs. Those things help. What else would help?

Montell Douglas: Definitely that would help. I didn't actually have that. I had supportive parents who said that if I wanted to go and try basketball, fine. I know a lot of young people who cannot do athletics, for example, because they are not allowed to go to the track between 4.30 pm and 5.30 pm but no one can take them until 6.30 pm. I had volunteers, my first coach, because my school was right there. I had people within my club. I was the same. I went to school two hours from where I lived. I lived in south London and went to school in Bromley in Kent. It was a two-hour bus ride back home and my parents worked, so I would go to a friend's house down the road in Keston. I would stay there, they would feed me, we would play, we would hang out, and then they would drive me to training. If I did not have that community spirit where my coach would then drive us home or there were people who could drive me home or I would get the bus back, I would never have been able to do my sport.

Not everyone has that and I did not have that. What I did have was the emotional security to be able to try lots of different sports, which is also another barrier. I have worked a lot in the Somali community, for example, and the barriers for them to perform and to go to do different sports and try different things were not just cultural; they were religious, political and it spans a lot of things. You are breaking down generational barriers, but the children within that space are also—it is filtered down. We are very aware of it, and awareness is the first step to know that



those things exist, and that we cannot paint everyone with the same brush.

Q35 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Research shows that 70% of women—as Jo said—drop out in the end because of various things. It might be body-image concerns or they would rather be in all-girls training. Georgia Bell is another of these happy accidents. Her dad is my constituent and he texted and said that all day at school she talked about beating the boys, so she loved it at school. Then over-training in the USA sucked the life out of her and she was retired for a while. You mentioned covid, Montell, and she got into it in covid when you were allowed one hour a day to do sport. I just wondered what you think of the gender aspect.

Anna Hopkin: I dropped out of sport at 13 as well. I was part of multiple different sports when I was younger, saw a potential in swimming to progress in that sport, got moved up very, very quickly and felt a lot of pressure to stop all other sports and focus purely on swimming. I am still small, but at that point I was very small for my age—quite a late developer. At age 12 I had probably the development of a 10-year-old training with 18-year-olds, expected to make swimming my life. If you want to go to the Olympics, that is what you have to do. I didn't feel like that was my dream; that was the dream of the programme. There was not enough education and support on how I was going to change through development within the sport.

When I got to about 12 and seeing everyone else who I was competing with were much bigger, much taller and much stronger than me, my performances were declining and I felt like I no longer had a place in the sport to grow, because everyone was beating me. To me that sent a message of, "You have reached your potential." There was no education on, "You all catch up at the end. You are all going to develop at different times."

Luckily for me, five years later, positive experiences with swimming and other sports got me back into swimming and competing and ultimately took me to an Olympic level and an Olympic gold medal, but it could so easily have not gone that way and I could have never gone into the sport again. There are so many other girls in exactly the same position and it makes me think how many girls are being lost, not just the ones that have potential to perform at the highest level but the ones who just want to do it recreationally.

A lot of that can be body image. Especially with a sport like swimming, you are on show and it is quite hard sometimes when you see your body changing. It can completely alter the way that you can perform in your sport if your body changes to a certain extent. The language used about body image is often awful in certain sports. That is a lack of education for coaches and peers as well. Sometimes the comments that boys make, not realising that they can be hurtful—one comment could completely ruin a girl's relationship with sport. That is probably not talked about enough and there is not enough support there to tackle those issues.



Q36 Dr Rupa Huq: Alistair, do you have anything to add, and on the disability point as well?

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: I am very lucky, very fortunate. Growing up, the biggest barrier I ever had to wanting to be a footballer was that my parents sent me to a private school. My dad was a barrister and my mum was an Oxford graduate and they had wanted me to be an academic. It was only on the pathway of being in a private school that I realised that I had to be accountable for myself. A lot of the time working with the Youth Sport Trust, when we look at developing the young voice and the student voice, it is always, "If I want it enough I can make it happen."

Luckily for me, I had a headmaster and a PE teacher who fully believed in me not just to be good at football or a very good footballer, but that I could be good at anything I wanted in life. Even after my first initial professional career I went on to train as a quantity surveyor also. That was purely based on, "Let's not waste any time. I am here and I can achieve and strive for more." They supported me through the sporting elements and the academic elements. Then it went down to personal accountability because I had to stop looking around at everyone else, thinking, "Who is going to do this?" No, I could do it for myself. That was always my path.

On the barriers that I had, it was only ever myself being the barrier if I didn't want to do something. If my friends didn't want to do it, "Great, that means you don't do it and it's going to be easier for me to do it." That was always one of the things that I thought I was able to do. If I could grow my own voice and if they say that they don't want to do it, let me try to help them to do it and come along with me. That has been a big thing for me now—growing the student voice.

Q37 Dr Rupa Huq: On the football point, I have heard locally, anecdotally, Ealing hockey club, where I represent, are finding fewer places where they can play because the FA are putting lots of money into local facilities and they are replacing it all with astroturf, which doesn't work for hockey. You mentioned football being not a private school thing. Hockey is considered a snobby one and we had it at my school. But I think really posh schools had lacrosse. There is a hierarchy of how posh the sports are that you get into. What I hear is that football is taking over and all these other things—the Ealing hockey club claims that it gets non-elitist people into that sport, but if all the pitches don't allow it, there is less and less scope for them to play.

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: Yes. As I say, my school was a tiny school and it literally meant that PE lessons were spent half an hour walking to the nearest park and playing football, half an hour walking to the other park to do cross-country. We were exposed to so much and given the opportunity to do it.

Chair: Rupa, can I move you on?

Q38 Dr Rupa Huq: I have a last question for Ali. There are several organisations delivering the same objectives to the same hard-to-reach



audiences—LYG, London Sport, London Youth Trust, Access Sports, StreetGames. There is a whole list of them: Chance to Shine, AC Cricket, and RFU has a thing as well. Are they all fishing from the same pond? Does this dilute the idea of broadening access to people from different groups if everyone is at it? Would it be more unified if there was one?

Ali Oliver: The Sport England Uniting the Movement strategy has helped a lot. There are numerous organisations, which in one way is brilliant because we have a big problem to solve, but we do need clear roles and responsibilities and lanes to work in so that we can be all together and make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. That is what Uniting the Movement is enabling us to do—giving a number of those organisations a status and a responsibility for a particular part of the sporting ecosystem, whether it is education, deep community sports, grassroots sports and so on.

I don't think that there are too many, but the thing that is missing for us all is what are we all aiming for. What is the North Star? There is no singular call to arms here for all of us of which groups of young people, how many minutes of physical activity a day, what sorts of outcomes. The best that we have is the Active Lives survey and the CMO guidance of 60 active minutes, but if all we measure, everything that we have been talking about today, is minutes of movement, we miss some of the important measures that will determine whether we have a healthy and successful nation, such as attitudes. Have people's attitudes to participation and being active changed? That is a huge part of it.

I know that this is not the question that you asked, but you asked about barriers, and I want to say one thing. The workforce for sport is not diverse. It does not represent—

Chair: We are about to move on to workforce, so hold your fire.

Q39 **Mr James Frith:** Thanks very much for your contributions. Anna, I was very taken by that account of your falling in and out of love with swimming. It makes your achievements that much more impressive that you had so much time out from it all. Were you active elsewhere in between? Did you go off and pursue other sports? Were you naturally very athletic? My very limited experience at amateur level is the need to exercise all the time, and absence of it. Did your body expect a level of activity and exercise when you were not competing as a swimmer?

Anna Hopkin: As I said earlier, my mum was very, very proactive in introducing me to lots of different sports. That was always part of my upbringing. Swimming became the one that it seemed like I had the most potential with, and it did feel like my hand was forced a little bit in stopping a lot of other sports to prioritise swimming.

Q40 **Mr James Frith:** What were those other sports?

Anna Hopkin: Initially cross-country, cheerleading, trampolining, gymnastics—all sorts of different sports. When I eventually left swimming, it was almost a bit of resentment to the sport of swimming for



making me stop those other sports too early. I did pick up pretty much every other sport apart from swimming after that point.

- Q41 **Mr James Frith:** Why did you have to give up the others? Was it simply a time constraint with how long you are expected to be in the pool and therefore there is no time or energy to do other sports, or was it a predetermined expectation that it is all eyes on swimming?

Anna Hopkin: It was about the development progression. At age 10 or 11 I was doing five sessions a week swimming, which allowed me a bit of time to do other sports. When I turned 12 that went up to seven sessions of swimming a week plus some land training around the sides as well as competitions at weekends, so it was very much the time aspects. However, it was also made quite clear to me that if I didn't commit to those seven sessions I would not be able to remain in that group because that was the expectation of the group. Therefore, it did feel like my hand was forced. It was either commit to that and stay within swimming or quit.

- Q42 **Mr James Frith:** Do you think that that could be changed as a model? You make the point about your own team's expectations of availability, and team sport relies on the collective commitment of the individual members. Could you see a shift or a change that could be adopted to perhaps recognise the value in playing other sports as one of those seven or five sessions that you are expected to do?

Anna Hopkin: Yes. I am a huge advocate of staying part of as many sports as possible for as long as you enjoy them and want to. I don't think that anyone should feel like they need to specialise into a sport at age 12. As I said before, your body is still developing and changing and it might be that by the time you are fully developed you are better at a different sport and you prefer a different sport, so why would you commit to one sport at such a young age? Also I took five years out of competitive swimming from the age of 13 to 17 and still managed to come back to it. A huge part of that was the fact that I was running a lot so I was really fit. I was doing gymnastics so I had flexibility and agility. I had different areas of sport that were pinpointing different skills that I was progressing in, as well as building my confidence and self-esteem in different sports.

That is why I think that within school it is important to have a big variety of sports to choose from, because each sport can offer different skill development. Specialising too early limits your ability to grow and build in different areas. Given my journey where I could have that variety and still come back to swimming and be really successful in it, you could go all the way to 16 doing multiple different sports and then commit to a sport if that is what you want to do. I think that clubs can work together a bit more to understand the benefits that the different sports bring. Clubs can be quite protective sometimes with keeping their members and being scared of losing their members to other sports, but you are all working to the same goal of making this person the best athlete or



person that they can possibly be. There just needs to be a bit more understanding of individual needs and preferences.

Q43 Mr James Frith: On the issue of workforce development for the athletes, what role do teachers and volunteers and coaches have, and what did they play in your own development and the relationship that you had with each of your sports? Anna, if you want to finish your contribution and let Alistair and Montell come in after.

Anna Hopkin: All teachers, coaches and parents are huge role models for kids. As a kid, there is a limited amount of autonomy for you to just do what you want because you are limited with transport and financially. You need to feel like you have support from the people around you who are advocating for you to be part of different sports and grow in different ways.

Some PE teachers, especially in primary schools, are really into sport, love sport and see the benefits of it. Even though they have limited training, they are very proactive in making sure that it is a good experience for the kids. Then you have other teachers for whom PE is not their speciality and not their priority. The impact that that could have on the kids' experience could affect how they experience sport for the rest of their life.

Having that level of inspiration from whoever is leading your sports is really important, whether that is bringing in sports stars or taking groups of kids from school to, for example, the British championships in swimming to see people who look like them, who they can relate to, achieving at the highest level in different sports. That can unlock a level of inspiration for those kids to try new sports and stay involved and be physically active. Therefore, the role of coaches, teachers and parents is essential.

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: It is massive. Now as a parent myself, I think back to what someone else's parents did for us. As a young child you always took it for granted that every week the goals were going to have the nets put up and everything else—"We will be here at that time and we will be doing this." They were the best days of my life, because all those parents and coaches and volunteers made us feel like superstars at that age, when we were young and we could dream. I still remember to this day my friend's dad showing me the Cruyff turn. It is only when you realise—wow!—when I first learnt it. That was the magic of sport, just playing with my friends.

Q44 Mr James Frith: What do you think makes a good teacher or coach, someone to inspire that?

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: Someone who makes you happy, who spreads the enjoyment and makes you want to be there, ultimately. No matter what it is I had been doing, if that same person who was helping me to play football had said, "We're going to do some maths now," I would probably have sat down and listened to them and done some maths, because they just made me happy. You felt like you wanted to be



there and learn from them and you could have all your friends doing it as well. There was the enthusiasm that they showed. For us, getting enjoyment from playing football, they felt as enthused as we were, so it was just brilliant.

Q45 Mr James Frith: Montell, what makes a good coach and how do we get more of those people involved in volunteering and coaching in our sports?

Montell Douglas: I would say pure love, because prioritising—in a coaching sense, athlete-centred, child-centred, which means that they are the priority of the joy that they are experiencing, not the coach's journey. Often we say to athletes, "If you stopped today, the coach still has to coach someone else tomorrow." It is very much everyone's individual journey, your life and how you experience it. From a lifelong point of view, it is very personal to you. Our perceptions of sport are very personal to us because of those things.

General due care and enthusiasm and the encouragement to do something, because the young person who they are dealing with—it could be confidence, it could be lack of support. I mentioned my parents or teachers. I would not have been able—and many of us are the same—to do my sport, even for the joy of it, remembering that most of my career was always because I loved it, if I had not had that because I did not have parents to drive me around or friends that could offer that. It was purely supporters, the coach, my teacher at school who was saying, "You can go into this" and pushed me into this and showed an encouragement. I would never have known or had access to any of those things.

That is paramount because one thing that we would all say is that we remember those moments, we remember those people. Even reaching this height in our careers, it is not just about the sport that we are doing; it is the people and the connections that we made and the people who helped us.

I always say that my first coach transformed my life. I was with him from 12 to 16 and he handed me over to my coach, who got me to the Olympic games at 16 years old. We mentioned protectiveness. It is very rare for someone to do that, but to me that is true altruism. He said, "I think I have got you as far as I can get you." I was double national sprint champion at 16 and then six years later I was at an Olympic games. He gave me to my coach and said, "This is where I think you should do best." That was because he genuinely cared and he saw something in me and said, "This can change your life and you can do something amazing." If that is at the forefront, you can have an impact on any young person or child's life from that point of view, irrespective of how far they go in sport and education.

Q46 Mr James Frith: Thank you very much. I bet that coach is still talking about you to his friends. It would be an absolute dream for a coach to have such a talent.

Ali, a question on the matter of the Department or Government's efforts. How effective has the Department for Culture, Media and Sport been in



convening organisations and other Departments to ensure that the benefits of sport are being fully leveraged across all government policy?

Ali Oliver: Thanks for that. It is hard for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. This is not me trying to soften this; it is a relatively small Department. It would be helpful if the bigger Departments were able to understand the value and the contribution of sport and physical activity. The Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care assist the Youth Sport Trust, closely followed by Communities and Local Government, which is hugely important to have a grasp on the evidence base and what can happen.

I don't believe that it is for lack of trying, but all I can say from where I sit is that we have not seen that commitment from other Departments wanting to invest in pilot projects or take things that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has piloted and roll them out into the bigger programmes in communities or across education or across health. We are still a long way off. We talked about education but even in health we are a very long way off from seeing prevention, and particularly investing in healthy, happy children as a way of reducing some of the challenges for the NHS later down the line.

Q47 **Mr James Frith:** That is interesting. There has been comment in previous panels about the corporate spending review that is ongoing at the moment with joint bids between Departments to the Treasury, not least because money is tight. Presumably you would support a joint bid of Departments as a means to focus the minds on outputs and outcomes for all departmental agendas. It feels to me at the moment as if we have each Department going for their pot of money and then we expect the joining up to be done halfway through. Do you think that it is a good idea to start with the Departments thinking between themselves to bid for one single pot, which might be larger than each they would receive individually but collectively perhaps not quite as expensive as the current model of operating?

Ali Oliver: Yes, 100%. I think that the joining up is left at a local level and it is one of the things that school games organisers are tasked with trying to do, with investment coming down from the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education. Sometimes these things conflict, so not only are they siloed, but they bump into each other and make it difficult to make things work. Between 2002 and 2010, the last time we nationally had a PE in schools sports strategy, it was a DFE/DCMS strategy that later on the Department of Health joined in with too, to the extent that it was led by a senior official with a foot in both Departments, which I think at the time was fairly unique. We had non-political advisers working across Government Departments as well, joining up.

Therefore, yes, 100%, particularly when we are talking about young people, if we can have a holistic approach to something like sport that will deliver outcomes into several Departments. At the moment we have a youth strategy being talked about in DCMS; I think there is a



conversation about PE in school sports strategy; last night there was an event around a play strategy. I can see them all being disconnected rather than a strategy for healthy, happy, successful young people that would combine bits of everything.

Can I say one thing about the workforce question that you asked a second ago? I was starting to say that the workforce lacked diversity. What has happened in the last 20-odd years is that our country has become incredibly diverse in all sorts of wonderful ways. The melting point for that often is in schools, where we see schools with over 100 languages spoken and we have lots more mainstreaming for young people with disabilities.

On the workforce point, teachers and coaches with empathy, even if they don't have lived experience, are so important. Often, as Montell said, the most important thing that we want for the workforce is to have an appreciation of who it is we are working with. Sometimes that is about asking them for their voice to inform what we do and other times it is about education. I know that if Women in Sport were sat along here, to say something here for Stephanie Hilborne on young women and girls—the workforce for teachers and coaches does not have sufficient awareness and understanding of changes in our development, for all children but particularly for young women and girls. A lack of awareness of changes that happen for young women and girls can be hugely influential on a young woman's experience of physical education and sport, but an empathetic PE teacher who understands what is happening for a young woman can make a world of difference, whether we are talking about periods or whether we are talking about phases of development and how successful that young person is in sport.

Q48 **Chair:** Briefly, Ali, going back to what you said about the tendency of Government Departments to work in silos and the need to work more collaboratively and be joined up, at the moment as an organisation do you find yourself having to engage with individual Departments rather than just focusing on DCMS?

Ali Oliver: Yes, absolutely.

Q49 **Chair:** Who do you find the least engaging to work with?

Ali Oliver: Thank you for that question. We are struggling at the moment with the Department of Health and Social Care. We have strong engagement with the Department for Education and DCMS and then we work with other partners, such as StreetGames. We have a great relationship with the criminal justice system. Coming back to the point earlier about a plethora of organisations, we are all connected and we are all trying to lean into our relationships that we respectively have across government, rather than Government joining up and coming to us as a range of organisations.

Chair: Yes, that is the only way to do it. Thank you for being honest with your answer.



Q50 Mr Bayo Alaba: This is a question for the athletes. Do you think that the Government focus too much on elite sports? You are all of elite status but obviously you came through the grassroots system. What is your take on that? There are certain takes on confidence, resilience and networks, all those byproducts that came from your journey early on in your physical activity.

Montell Douglas: My initial reaction to that was no, there is not a special focus. Then I was thinking that this is not the question and I think that it has its positives. It goes back to what I mentioned to James on MPs supporting what they do and community sport, not necessarily elite sport, because it very much often starts there. We are talking about young people and children and elite can happen at any age. Thinking about champion inspirational role models that people can see and reflect in themselves, it is not a generic point of view. We are not looking at it just for health and wellbeing but it doesn't mean that it doesn't necessarily have an impact from that point of view.

What I mean by that is that if I am speaking about my personal journey in elite sport, it does not necessarily mean that a young person will look at me and say, "That is not going to be me because I don't do that." If we champion stories and how inspiration comes in different forms, it might give them the courage to say, "If they have done that, maybe I can try." It definitely crosses barriers between elitism and community sport, for example. Ali talked about using role models, which is super-impactful, which is why we are being athletic mentors. We are not talking to young people about being stars in their sports, and we share with them our experiences around not having those images of ourselves, or in this case maybe from a younger age having that in their mindset. But that doesn't mean that they can't be inspired. For me, for example, as a former national record holder, one of the greatest things that I love, is when that is recognised by my local community in Lewisham and Catford in south London. When that is recognised by the young people there, it is much bigger than it is on a national stage, because for them it is localised. Communities work well with local people; they work with the people around them. So, they can see it as a bit more achievable that they can move into these spaces; and even if it seems completely unachievable, they have the confidence to do so.

The shift in attitudes that you see people like yourselves—like me, who came from an all-boy team because there were no football girls' teams. On Ali's point, if I was 10 again now in 2025 I would probably be working towards being a Lioness because it is hugely impactful. Women's football is the fastest-growing sport that is happening now, but that was not the case then. Had it been, would it have changed my perceptions? Absolutely it would have.

Anna Hopkin: Montell raises some good points and I totally agree with everything you said. It is great to have that elite view if that is, as a child doing sport, what you want to do. We run a lot of swim clinics and we come across a lot of kids whose dreams are to go to the Olympic games. I always think that it is incredible to have that dream at that age, but it is



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also important to make all kids feel like it is not the only option to have a dream like that, because I certainly did not. It should not be the priority in school and community sport, plugging that the whole time. You have to be quite careful with the language you are using. Obviously we have all got where we are because we worked very hard within our sport. It is hard work and you have to make sacrifices, but sometimes you can hammer a lot into it being hard and you have to make loads of sacrifices and it is tough. That kind of language can be quite damaging for a child who might instantly think, "Okay, that's not me; I can't make it."

Focusing on building the individual within the sport, focusing on what they want to achieve within that sport and just individualising what you are offering instead of assuming that every child within that sport must want to get to this level of achievement, and focusing on enjoyment and skill development and all those other aspects of sport that are so impactful for every element of life, is the best place to start. As children grow through different sports and develop, they may find, "Okay, my dreams are developing now and I want to aim for that elite level," but I don't think that that should be the main focus at such a young age.

I also think it is important not to shy away from the competitive side of sport. That has been done a little bit in primary schools. I remember towards the end of my primary school career, sports day became like a points system because they were concerned about kids experiencing failure and getting put off. I understand that point of view, but also, what about all the kids who never get to experience success because everyone is too scared of how they will react to failure? Learning how to deal with success and failure at a young age is really important, so allowing kids the opportunity to experience competition but in a supportive environment is important. It is allowing them to learn those life lessons going forward but doing it in a way that will not damage their relationship with sport. Further down the line, if it is appropriate, having conversations on the elite side of sport is important.

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: This takes us back to one of the very first things that we were talking about—making PE or sport a core subject at school, because at the moment we are seeing elite athletes get elite coaches. How is a young child who has never experienced the best volunteer expected to meet an elite standard? If we had PE as a core subject, that raises accountability and standards. So do we upskill coaches to make them of a better standard to be providing young people with better skill and a better attitude towards the games they are trying to play? Then, when they are thrust into a slightly bigger environment, they do that bit better, so the selection pool of talent becomes larger just from having better-coached young people.

There is definitely a big element of focusing on the elite, because even within sport and the various governing bodies, the elite get X amount of funding to do whatever they want, whereas those who don't bring home so many medals don't get as much funding. Therefore, it is a case of thinking about even at grassroots level how we better upskill our volunteers and our coaches.



I am also an ambassador with an autistic football club. One of their coaches is a 16-year-old. He volunteers his time. I spent time giving some things that I had learnt on one of my coaching times. He would never normally get that opportunity, but he has taken it upon himself to give back so much more. What do we do as a society to arm him better to touch more than the 10 he has? The impact he is having on the club that he is working with now, they will then relay to their friends. It is the drop in the ocean that ripples and ripples. We need to be more aware of how or where we invest our focus and our energies.

Q51 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** We have the national youth strategy. How key, how pivotal, how important is sports to that strategic intention?

Montell Douglas: I am preaching to the choir now.

Mr Bayo Alaba: You are right.

Montell Douglas: We are huge advocates of that. I would say primarily—I will always bring it back to the fact that, even 30 years ago, I was not necessarily your average child within the school system. I was heavily academic, and still am even now. I was a lover of sport but I am very aware now, as I have grown older and I work with young people, that it is a completely different experience and not everyone has that. The same way that I felt about history and geography at the time is how they feel about doing netball and football. Do they have the right to have similar experiences and have the opportunity—as Ali said at the very beginning—in PE to excel where they need to?

You do want to see progression; you do want to see development. I want to see as a coach that young people come in and they have the basic physical literacy of being able to catch a ball at a certain age, because why would we not expect someone—the same way as you would expect someone to be able to read something at a certain age, and people can be quite damning if they say that they are not reaching this level in school. Why would we not attribute the same thing to physical literacy and PE in sport?

That is where I sit with it not just being a passion project for your life and wellbeing and the price that we have in health and social care now on a national level of being able to deal with a lot of different things that are happening in our lives, as adults as well, that then filter down to children and the pressures and the resources that get squeezed because of that filtering down to them. We need to start with going down to the basics of if we remove it being about elitism in sport and talk about it being a passion and lifelong skill and things that we can do to transform our own lives—that is the winning formula.

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: I was going to add to the terminology of that and say that sports has a lot to play in it but inclusive sport has a lot to play in it, because we talk about being able to catch a ball. Some people physically may not be able to catch a ball but they can still officiate and take part and be included within that environment. It is very important that we are aware that sport goes beyond just the physicals of kicking,



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throwing and jogging, but that you are part of a movement. It is that sense of belonging that every young person should be exposed to that is pivotal in society.

Ali Oliver: These guys have covered everything that I would have said.

Q52 **Chair:** Thank you all so much for your time today. We have been on quite a journey with you, with loads of questions. As we go on our journey through this subject and start taking more and more evidence and head towards recommendations that we will need to put to the Government, can I put you all on the spot quickly? Can you give me, in one line, what you would love to see as your key recommendation that you think that we should include? I will start with you, Ali, because everyone else has been asked so many questions in the last few minutes, to give them a chance to think.

Ali Oliver: I would want to ask the Government to reflect on the state of young people and childhood today and harness the power of play and sport—within that I mean physical activity and physical education, the whole gamut—to develop better outcomes for young people. I don't need to describe what that looks like as a strategy, but to absolutely think about how we set more young people on a better path through what can be delivered through playing sport.

Anna Hopkin: I would say to invest in the children today to prevent what could come in the future. Invest in facilities, clubs, community and school links to provide more opportunities for children to experience different sports and transfer into club environments so that it will be a lifelong experience of sport that can be passed on for generations and in turn benefit the health of the nation and bring back the societal norms of being physically active and involved in sport.

Chair: A strategic approach.

Anna Hopkin: Building on the club and school links, helping to fund bringing in coaches within specific sports, athletes as inspiration, providing opportunities for schools to take kids to experience elite-level competitions to get that inspiration.

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: I don't want to say too much because it feels like it is just more words and everything can get lost. From every conversation that we have, let's go and do it. Let's go.

Chair: Less talk, more action.

Alistair Patrick-Heselton: Yes, let's go, because the amount of data that we have amassed and the number of words that we use can take years to filter through. Let's go.

Chair: That should be a recommendation in virtually everything we do. Thank you.

Montell Douglas: I am using more words. I agree. Prioritise, champion and offer the chance for healthy, secure PE and sport experiences for all, to harness that lifelong experience for the future to come.



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Chair: Thank you very much, all of you, for your time today.