

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

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

Tuesday 25 March 2025

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Mr James Frith; Damian Hinds; Dr Rupa Huq; Liz Jarvis; Jo Platt, Tom Rutland; Paul Waugh.

Questions 53 - 105

Witnesses

[I](#): Sarah Kaye, Chief Executive, Sported; Andy Taylor, Chief Executive, Active Partnerships; and Lisa Wainwright MBE, Chief Executive, Sport and Recreation Alliance.

[II](#): Stephanie Hilborne OBE, Chief Executive, Women in Sport; Mark Lawrie, Chief Executive, StreetGames; Emily Robinson, Chief Executive, London Sport; and Anna Scott-Marshall, Director of Communications and Social Impact, ParalympicsGB.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sarah Kaye, Andy Taylor and Lisa Wainwright MBE.

Q53 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. Our first panel this morning will look at solutions to some of the key challenges facing community and grassroots clubs, including the decline in facilities, funding distribution, the workforce and links with schools. We welcome Sarah Kaye, the chief executive of Sported; Andy Taylor, the chief executive of Active Partnerships; and Lisa Wainwright MBE, the chief executive of the Sport and Recreation Alliance. Thank you all for joining us this morning.

Before we begin, I remind members to declare any interests at the point that they ask their questions. I will kick off with a question to all of you, starting with Sarah. The funding landscape for community support is very fragmented. It is quite difficult to navigate. Are there better ways of doing this? Is there a way that funds can be distributed more effectively?

Sarah Kaye: Certainly. It is important to emphasise that I will be giving the perspective of the community groups that Sported support across the UK. To give you a bit of insight, we support around 5,000 community groups across all regions and nations in the UK. In turn, they reach up to 1 million young people in some of the most deprived and underserved communities.

It is important to emphasise the profile of the types of groups that we work with. Within the sporting network work, two thirds are entirely volunteer-led, a third have an income of less than £10,000, and most of these groups, it is fair to say, sit outside traditional structures. What I mean by that is that 60% do not work with sporting councils, and 40% do not work with NGBs.

These are organisations who use sport intentionally to deliver social outcomes, not purely sport for participation. They have a significant impact in the communities they serve, but these are the organisations that are often overlooked. They are a great example of game-changing community organisations in the heart of the most deprived communities.

The challenge that our groups have is the way that the funding mechanisms work, and funding is structured. As funding often goes to the same, more established groups—I am not saying they do not need the funding, but they are more sustainable—it is not reaching those that need it the most: the small volunteer-led groups we are talking about who use sport as a key intervention. They are often overlooked by the system. It is really about emphasising the point that the model does not reach all, and these small volunteer-led community organisations need and deserve the recognition.

When we run surveys with these groups, over 90% of them want us to encourage funders to make applications easier. There are two really



important considerations to highlight. We need to ensure that we are using the right networks and mechanisms in the funding model so that these community groups are not overlooked. How do we bridge the gap between funders and the target audiences? But just as importantly—I think it is fair to say this for the broad funding landscape—how do we reduce the complexity of the funding process? There is a real need to reduce the administrative burden and simplify the process, and to have lower barriers to funding opportunities for these types of community groups.

Let me bring that to life a bit. The organisations that we work with are often overlooked because of one of two reasons: they find it difficult to articulate the phenomenal work that they do, or they may not have the necessary governance in place—or a combination of the two. How do we bring a lighter-touch approach to funding applications? One example would be—we are not the only advocates of this—bringing in video applications for funds, which, better than a clinical form, will really personalise the phenomenal work of these community groups.

A great example of this would be what happened in the summer with the race riots, when there was a need to get funding out at pace to the groups most affected. An example is the partnership with Sported and the London Marathon Foundation, where at pace, we recognised the need and, through our collective networks, we targeted the groups most affected by this. We took a very light-touch approach to reaching those groups. So it is about ensuring that the funding is used for the purposes for which it is intended while at the same time taking a really light-touch approach to ensure that those who have the greatest need are essentially being reached.

Q54 Chair: Thank you. Andy, how do you think the application process could be improved?

Andy Taylor: Building on what Sarah just raised, during covid there was the Together fund. That was developed at pace with communities on the ground. The Active Partnerships network, as well as other partners in the room today, played a critical role in supporting those community groups and organisations to apply for funding. The data and statistics show that community groups who did not normally apply had access to that funding, which were for the areas of inequalities that needed it most.

It is important to say that this is not just about the amount of funding; it is about how we join up funding and ensure that the communities who need it the most gain access to it. We took away all the bureaucracy and a lot of the processes at a time when we needed to. How we ensure that we take that learning and the strengths from that to build for the future is absolutely critical.

There are a couple of other areas to mention as well, including the place investment that is taking place at the moment through Sport England. Around £250 million is going into communities. That is a new approach. It



is looking at the whole system and at place-based working. We have been given the time and space—through the Active Partnerships network and partners, local authorities and others—to work with communities to develop the solutions. There is not one solution for all. It is not, “This is what you have; this is top-down”. It is bottom-up. The sector is very much aligning with that. We now need the investment processes to enable that youth voice and community engagement and then we can maximise the impact.

The other bit you touched on was the fragmentation, and I would agree. It is about understanding what the vision is that we are working towards. There are times across Government and other Departments where funding streams will come out and then something else will follow two weeks later, or a little bit longer. How do we pull that together more coherently with a common purpose? It will enable us to be really efficient and effective. We understand that it is a challenging fiscal environment, so we need to have maximum impact with the funding that goes into communities and then take away as much of the bureaucracy as possible.

Q55 Chair: Lisa, what is the best way of making sure that the funding streams are made as simple and accessible as possible?

Lisa Wainwright: Similar to Sarah’s comments, I think we need to think about the end user. We are talking in this debate about local community clubs run by volunteers. They are very busy and have challenges post-covid in terms of the reduction in the number of volunteers at a local level. We know that a third dropped out and there are 2 million less volunteers in the sector over the last six years, notwithstanding the fact that it costs them to contribute towards their local community clubs in all your constituencies.

In terms of the funding landscape, it is easy when you are in it to understand it. It is very difficult when you are out of it to understand it. You will know that within the funding that is available, there is Exchequer and lottery funding to the tune of £250 million a year. Local authorities contribute about £1 billion. In relation to the voluntary code of conduct and broadcast, the governing bodies contribute £198 million back into their sports. You may also be aware of the community amateur sports club scheme, which started in 2002. That is about supporting local grassroots clubs who are serving their community but reducing burdens on them. That contributes around £40 million a year to grassroot clubs, which is about £5,000 per local community club.

So to answer your question, it is about getting back to the end user. How do we utilise a language that they understand in their community? Sport England recently consolidated all its awards into a movement fund, but the word “movement” may not speak to a local basketball club, a netball club, a table tennis club or Sported. It is about how we communicate in a way that is not threatening or divisive for those community groups. As Sarah said, perhaps that is about video applications. One scheme that has worked incredibly well with a private company is where—this is



slightly different, because it is not Government funding—a private company will visit local community clubs, and if it sees the whites of the eyes of that community club, it will look to fund it because it believes that the volunteers are there to do the right thing, which the majority of volunteers are definitely there to do.

There are obviously not as many risks and regulations on private funding compared with Government funding, but that system has worked incredibly well with a close relationship between a private organisation and local community sports—that is around Leicestershire, Manchester and Cornwall.

So I agree that the funding landscape is complicated and we need a clearer system of communication right down to the 100,000-plus grassroots sports clubs in all our communities.

Q56 Chair: On getting that private funding in, Sarah, you have experience involving businesses in funding sports initiatives. How can the Government attract and encourage more investors into these sectors?

Sarah Kaye: The challenges and solutions are twofold. One is awareness and the other is creating the right incentives. We know that we are often competing for a finite amount of money that is available within the sector, and we have a collective responsibility to leverage funding from outside the sector. An interesting, scary statistic we have identified is that if you think about the billions of pounds-worth of private sector investment that is going into sport sponsorship, it is enormous, and yet, sadly, only 0.5% of CSR investment is going into sport for development. We do not believe that is because they don't care. I think they are not making the connection to community support.

I spent 20-odd years in the private sector, and moved recently into the third sector. For me coming in, I think the extent of the deprivation and poverty in the volunteer-led community groups that are supporting these communities is definitely not well understood. If it was, I think there would be a greater appetite to invest more. There is an awareness piece collectively for the Government and the sector: how do we do a better job of advocating for the role of community sport in driving social change? But it is also then about then having the right incentives in place to invest more.

There are well-known tax incentives for social investment, but they need to go beyond the CASC scheme, which is essentially business relief for community groups. What we would need to do now is directly incentivise the private sector through tax relief, through match funding, to incentivise them when they have big budgets and to channel more of that into CSR.

The Barclays community football fund that we run is a great example of that. It is run by their sponsorship team and it started as an initiative to connect the brand to the heart of communities. That has evolved into a



major social impact programme where they essentially get a double return. They are delivering their sponsorship objectives but also delivering against their CSR objectives. How do we incentivise more of that investment and build the awareness?

Q57 Chair: What was the clinching point for that deal?

Sarah Kaye: I think that there were motivations early on, like the demise of the high street. How do Barclays do something meaningful to connect its brand to the heart of communities? We have the 5,000 community groups that are based across all regions of England, so we have the mechanism and the reach to enable them to do that.

They appreciated my point earlier around the lack of awareness about the scale of poverty and deprivation and the role that these community groups play. As the partnership evolved, they recognised the power that that partnership could have in doing more—so rather than simply having access grants to keep the door open, it is about having deep impact grants focused on getting more young people with disabilities involved in football, more people from ethnically diverse communities, and particularly girls who had never participated in football. It opened their eyes to a completely different world and that partnership has evolved into something with a much stronger social impact lens. We have been on a journey with them. How do we do a better job at essentially promoting that type of programme to the wider private sector?

Q58 Paul Waugh: We just mentioned funding, but just as important is the lack of adequate facilities and access to adequate facilities. There are lots of challenges for the sector, from facility management to council budgets and council procedures. To each of you in turn: what do you think the solutions to some of those challenges are?

Sarah, you mentioned how important the small grassroots groups are. In my Rochdale constituency, a group called the Bangladeshi Arts and Sports Association does fantastic work doing exactly what you say, getting those disadvantaged groups—those under-represented groups—into things like football, yet it faces lots of barriers in terms of facilities. What do you think would be the best solutions?

Sarah Kaye: I am probably stating the obvious when I say that the issues are twofold: one is availability and the other is affordability. In the surveys that we run with our groups, there are challenges that have evolved through covid, but the two that are top of the list are always funding and facilities, which are often directly interlinked. Fifty-seven per cent of our groups say that they need more school facilities to be available and at a more affordable rate.

The issue is how we—through various mechanisms at local authority level—entice schools that have the facilities to be open after school hours. As I understand it, there are about 50% of secondary schools that don't utilise their facilities after hours, but where they are being utilised, there is a massive competition for inventory. Often the better-financed



venues—generally football—are securing those venues at the expense of those putting vital provisions for the deprived and underserved communities.

Where the provisions are being utilised, we would hope that local authorities could find a way of managing the demand. Essentially, a solution to that could be subsidising schools and leisure facilities to prevent the facilities from always going to the highest bidder. There is a fundamental difference between a football club that can more than afford a rate of £50 an hour versus the community groups we serve who charge no membership fee to the community groups that they serve, and their provisions are life-changing.

Andy Taylor: I am going to go upstream slightly more. One of the biggest challenges in your area of Rochdale is that we will not know right now the full facility stock, usage and availability. This is what I mean when I talk about “full facility stock”. There are local facility football plans, so the Football Foundation would understand what facilities are available there, and what the deficit is. There are playing pitch strategies—some that are live, some that are up to date across the country, and some that aren’t. But have we got the public-private sector, the gyms, the leisure facilities, the education facilities in a really hyper-local area? If we go down even to a neighbourhood level, that is where our interventions need to take place, but we need to understand what the full facility stock is.

I spoke recently with GM Moving, the Active Partnership in your area, about the need to be able to co-ordinate and connect that as much as possible. That means that when interventions come down, we can be really aligned and strategic with where investment goes and work to tackle inequalities. That is at the heart of what I believe is needed. It is going to be those communities and individuals, who either are inactive or are those community sports groups that cannot afford to pay, that need access to these other facilities. We then need to wrap around the funding question and the facilities stock to be able to put a tangible solution in place to support them.

Q59 **Paul Waugh:** Lisa, we will talk in more detail about schools, but what are the other solutions in terms of availability of facilities and the fact that they are inadequate at the moment?

Lisa Wainwright: We know from local authorities that they are struggling with developing essential leisure services. We know from our research at the Sport and Recreation Alliance that three quarters of clubs need more access to public facilities. We are talking about badminton, netball and table tennis, which use sports hall facilities. Two thirds of them are stating that they need more access to school facilities, which we had heard from Sarah, and I am sure we will come on to that. We also know from the ONS in 2024 that where there are facilities—surprise, surprise—more people take part in sports. It is a very simple correlation.



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In terms of solutions, we are very much aware of the fiscal measures at this time, but we would really want to protect the Exchequer funding for facility provision—so capital funding for build across the sector. As for what we could use in terms of future solutions, a lot of our members are larger governing bodies. You heard about football, but the ECB has used a fantastic scheme up in Bradford in relation to an inside dome. The intention was to try to generate the local community to utilise the facility in all its means—it is very innovative—and drive 10,000 people through. In the first year, 20,000 people went through that facility, and that was through investment from the ECB and the local authority. We need to see more schemes that utilise some of the bigger sports—and don't get me wrong, some of the smaller sports could do this as well with investment. But the model exists in terms of driving from a community level, building a different type of facility for that community and getting the rewards.

One of the other key things in relation to increasing participation is that you need more facilities, and we are deeply concerned about the potential removal of Sport England as a statutory consultee for planning. That could jeopardise existing and future sporting provision in all our local communities. It goes without saying that if we can minimise tax and regulatory burdens, it will be easier for our members' national governing bodies to be able to invest some of their income into developing and supporting communities. However, we have to recognise that NGBs can contribute towards that. That might well be Skateboard England—it is a different model—as well as, as I say, some of the bigger sports. What is critical is that where there are affordable and accessible facilities, they are used with the right motivators driving people towards them.

Q60 Paul Waugh: To follow up on the planning point, Andy, do you have any views on whether a council should have a statutory responsibility not to release land necessarily for housing, but to protect it for sporting facilities?

Andy Taylor: Yes, we need to protect locally—so yes, there needs to be some statutory responsibility in the system. I will just add my weight to Lisa's comments. We have real concerns across our network about that potential decision making. We know there is a consultation process, and we hope to be engaged with that, as other partners do. How do we create a system that has accountability and ensures that we protect? If we lose those green spaces, we will have huge issues.

Just to add one other thing, this is also about new sites. We talked about schools and new school sites—how do we ensure that we work with the Housing Minister and other Departments to ensure that new sites that are built cater for sport and physical activity? That is a real opportunity that we must grab; otherwise, if we do not include it in the policy, we are going to have an issue.

Q61 Paul Waugh: You have all talked about schools. The last Government had the opening school facilities fund. Andy, how has Active Partnerships handled that? What worked about that programme, what perhaps didn't



work, and what you would like to see changed?

Andy Taylor: That covers a couple of the questions we discussed before about funding and facilities and what works to be successful. It was a consortia partnership with the then 43 Active Partnerships working locally with partners such as StreetGames, who you will talk with today. We have over-delivered on the numbers that were set out from Government and the contract. Over 300,000 young people have been connected through the initiative.

Where we have really seen the success is when the school has been part of the community and we have been able to ensure, through local capacity building, that there is a whole community approach to the role that the school plays. We have seen new cricket nets put up, which have then been accessed by local cricket clubs. We have seen a lot of SEND programmes, which has probably told us where the needs are in schools at this time.

There have been challenges. We had three months to roll out the first year, which was a challenge. We had to recruit 1,500 schools and submit that many plans in six weeks. If we want to embed youth voice, as we talked about earlier on funding, we need to create the conditions to enable that youth voice, so that there is local decision making. We were hoping to work with Government to evolve opening school facilities to be part of what we talked about today, of that wider community facility stock.

How do we ensure that we join things up and ensure that schools are sustainably open? There is the appetite, which is what we hear from schools. We see a lot of trust partnerships working now, having an external view as well as an internal view, but, unfortunately, that capacity disappears in the next couple of weeks—it is taken away. I expect in the future that this will come out again, and we will need another initiative that rolls out for community schools because it is an obvious one and an obvious gap.

It is a bit frustrating that we were not able to evolve it. There have been a lot of learnings from it, and I hope that those learnings can be used in the future in terms of what school sport provision looks like.

Q62 **Paul Waugh:** On the appetite of schools, lots of us have schools in our areas that are effectively shutting off their facilities—their publicly funded facilities—to the community, yet we understand that schools face their own pressures. You have managed to set out under the OSF programme some answers to those schools who have worries. There are worries about costs and about what happens if it is a PFI school, yet you have found some answers. You have PFI schools that take part, and you have schools that don't charge the earth and work with not-for-profits. Do you think that the learnings from those could be put to Government to say, "We need a new form of scheme for this"?



Andy Taylor: Yes. What was critical was local capacity, because if you have local capacity that works with schools and works with communities, you are doing a lot of the legwork for them and then you are connecting the sports clubs to that school.

There is the appetite. We worked with 1,600 schools, in higher areas of deprivation, purposely targeted through the investment across the whole of the country, and we want hopefully to evolve that further. The appetite is 100% there from schools. We have not really had any schools that we have approached about opening school facilities that have turned around and said, "We don't want our school to be open for our community." I do not think that is true. They want the support, but we need to recognise the time of the staff is not there as it was. They don't have the capacity, so we need to provide efficient capacity that can look at the community as a whole to provide those solutions.

Q63 Paul Waugh: This question is for the other two witnesses: have you seen any solutions over the last couple of years that you think really work? I am talking about persuading schools that if they want to be at the heart of your community, making sure their sports facilities are opened up to the community is an essential part of what they are about. It is often seen as an add-on for a school—a secondary purpose, and the main purpose is education—but should it be a central purpose for schools to share the community facilities?

Lisa Wainwright: Completely. It is appalling that 45% of state schools will not open their facilities to the community—I just find that a shocking stat, frankly—when they are there to serve the community, because the children in those schools come from those communities. So absolutely—I think the challenge has always been the worry of what does that mean, as you talked about, around PFI? What are the risks for us as a school?

There are some examples I can bring to you. We know that over the last few years, 500 swimming pools have closed. If we are going to get young people to be able to swim, live and survive in a pool, as well as compete and enjoy that time, we have to change that. A number of school pools have closed because of maintenance costs, being not fit for purpose and so on.

In terms of working with schools—a number would want to do this, from a primary feeder through to secondary provision and community in totality— it is about where we can model this over the longer term. There is an example in Northamptonshire, where a school is about to close its pool, and the investment into that pool in the longer term has been looked at. A fully refurbished pool in one secondary school that can service all those needs—this is a full refurb—costs just under £4 million, which, over a 25-year period, with a group of 1,800 girls in that community who want to learn to swim and enjoy swimming, is not a significant investment or risk for that school. The governors may feel differently.



That is the kind of model that we need to work through and then use as a good case study with Swim England, who are doing a huge amount of work. Over 80% of the learning in school pools is through Swim England—not through the teachers, because of the technical abilities of them.

Sarah Kaye: I think there is an educational piece around this, just to emphasise to schoolteachers and those who are managing the school facilities the benefits and merits of opening up the facilities to the wider community. Again, there is a similar sentiment to the discussion on the corporate piece—do they truly recognise the value that that will add within the local community?

Q64 **Mr James Frith:** On the point about the underserved and using capacity that is dormant but not used, is a lot of that the challenge of the school, and the requirement for a critical mass of interest from outside school to justify opening hours, to justify the cost? Do some of the costs that you cover include the man hours required to open up a school facility? Is that more common? Did that used to be the case, and could it be again?

Andy Taylor: When we are working with primary schools especially, the cost does not come in as a huge conversation. Initially, there is the appetite to work with communities, but the schools now don't necessarily have someone from a sporting perspective—so that is their remit—and they need the support to understand: what is the art of possible? How do we engage with local clubs and communities? The school is such a safe place outside of school hours. It often is for those children and those parents to say, "Actually, we can open the schools for a couple more hours." Usually, those schools are open for after-school clubs anyway, so it is not necessarily about opening it again. There are volunteers who can use school sites for local community football clubs and cricket clubs, depending on what the facilities are.

The feedback we are getting has not necessarily been about the cost driver. In terms of what the opening school facilities programme has done, it is about initial costs to get the facility fit for purpose—whether that is a booking system, a lock on the door, or whatever it is to help—which then means they are going to engage with the communities.

But it is about that broader picture—where do we want to be long term? We want schools to be part of communities, so it has to be a long-term plan, and there is not one golden bullet that suddenly means they get there. But actually, if we embed the school in the community—that is what we are seeing through the place-based work that we are working through with communities—you have all the partners around the table. So they are talking to health and to transport, and we are looking at the whole system rather than just looking at it from a school perspective, and then the resource will often follow, even from a local perspective, to add that value.

Q65 **Chair:** On facilities more broadly—not just specifically in schools, but



going back to the additional challenges we discussed—the Government announced on Friday £100 million in additional funding for the multi-sport grassroots facilities programme. Is that the cavalry coming over the hill? Is that going to solve the problems that you have articulated, Lisa?

Lisa Wainwright: Any additional investment into facility provision is great. The Premier League Football Foundation's contribution of £100 million is super, but there is more to be done. As for that means for the sector, you talked about the complexity of funding models. This is another announcement of another funding stream. What we need is a financial framework across it all, so we understand from a strategic point of view what the long-term investment is across revenue and capital for sport, recreation and physical activity.

We really welcome the investment. A number of our members would say that that is specifically around football. I know 40% is around multi-sport, but there are a number of other sports that would want to get involved in developing their facilities. I mentioned a few of the bigger sports earlier.

So yes, that is welcome, but I don't believe it is the cavalry, because we might need to face some bigger issues, in relation to absolutely local facilities that are much broader. That might be in relation to our green spaces, which we talked about earlier, and also our blue spaces. You will know, in terms of water quality, that the Clean Water Sports Alliance have been driving the campaign forward to say that 16% of waterways are only rated as good or above good. That is not good enough for a number of our water sports and local clubs. So it is a great investment, Chair, but it needs to be within a framework that we can understand across the totality of sport, leisure and physical activity.

Q66 **Chair:** That is very helpful. Andy, do you want to add to that?

Andy Taylor: We are involved in this with the Football Foundation, Sport England and the FA, and our part is always to ensure community engagement. It is a real credit to the Football Foundation and partners around that that this isn't a top-down application process; it ensures that community engagement is embedded from the outset. Active Partnerships will work locally with those community grassroots clubs and organisations to ensure that that is in place, and to ensure that multi-sport is not just an add-on, but is part and parcel of those plans, which is needed.

We are very fortunate to have a number of football bodies that come together, looking now at how there is investment in communities. On the way the Football Foundation are investing, there are play zones that are now taking place across the country, which are at the heart of communities. That is a real step; it is not just about a full-size 3G pitch with floodlights that ends up in the suburbs and outside of cities. This can be at the heart of the cities, which is exactly what we need.



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Going back to my earlier point, you are right—that will deliver one part of the facility stock, but what about those community groups and those swimming pools? Let us try to get that holistic view of what is available.

Q67 Jo Platt: I represent the best rugby league town in the country, with the mighty Leigh Leopards, and I know how important it is for that to filter down to our grassroots clubs. We have some amazing facilities, and the strength of that is obviously its workforce and volunteers. Across the board and across all our sporting sectors, we know that this is a problem; Sport England data stated that volunteer numbers are going down and, Lisa, you alluded to that earlier. What initiatives or campaigns could help to increase the level of volunteers and coaches entering and staying in the sector?

Lisa Wainwright: It is fantastic that you have the best club in the country. As I mentioned, we have had 2 million less volunteers in the last six years. That is not surprising, given covid and the cost of living. That is one of the barriers—people’s time is precious, they found other things to do, and it is expensive to volunteer. From our research at the alliance, we have seen an increase of 25% in the amount of admin for volunteers—so for the local secretary or president of the rugby league clubs and others. But that is not translated into a 25% increase in participation.

It is important today to talk about the regulation and legislation around local clubs. We are very supportive of and positive about the introduction of Martyn’s law, and we have worked very hard on developing that to ensure that the burdens on volunteers are proportionate, particularly around the standard tier moving from 100 to 200 people and having some exclusions around some of the activities—outdoor activities—that it might include.

Likewise, around the mandatory reporting, with the Crime and Policing Bill, we want to ensure that the implications of that being implemented—again, we absolutely agree with its protections—do not become another burden, another piece of work, another legal responsibility for Jo as the volunteer running that rugby club. That is what worries volunteers as they take on more responsibility—“I will have to report this to the local authority; I will have to report it to the police; I am accountable for this.”

The solution should be that, wherever we are looking to bring in proposed legislation or regulation, we are seen absolutely as a consultee on the point relating to volunteers. I am delighted that we have been involved in Martyn’s law, and we would welcome more involvement with the Home Office on mandatory reporting.

On reducing those burdens, the other thing is to ensure that when legislation or regulation comes in, there is an annual or regular review of it. As it comes through, we might find that there are absolutely no implications for volunteers, or we might find that it is holding their hands behind their backs in terms of moving forward. That would be the legislation or regulation side of things.



Volunteers don't have a huge amount of time, and they have lives to lead. We have to remember that any guidance that we produce for and with volunteers needs to be clear, consistent and simple to apply. Too many times, we have allowed many of our 100,000 sports clubs to write their policies, and it is time to have a consistent suite of examples of where that can come in. It worked incredibly well with the introduction of GDPR a few years back, where we had a consistent suite of support. I think that is where we can do a much better job of supporting the 98% of volunteers who are out there running community sport.

Q68 Jo Platt: I will ask the same question to Sarah—on campaigns so that we could keep our volunteer base—but also then as well, as a separate question, what else could Government do?

Sarah Kaye: Just to emphasise Lisa's point, a bit like the funding landscape, make volunteering easier. There is a massive requirement to ease the administrative burden, whether for volunteers at board level or volunteers on the frontline putting on provision. They are well intended but extremely time-poor. From research with our groups, 40% of groups say that they want to work with Government on social issues, but nine out of 10 exclude themselves because of the admin burden. So reduced bureaucracy will directly lead to an increase in capacity.

As for other areas, I think Government can play a role in enhancing the value of volunteering, particularly for young people. It is just as valuable as doing work experience but not necessarily recognised in the same way. We feel Government can play a bigger role in promoting the benefits of career development, personal development and creating forms of accreditation, for example. I think there is an opportunity to do more—almost a double benefit of investing more in funded programmes into community groups that benefit young people and also inspire them to become volunteers.

There is something that we have done effectively with some of our corporate partnerships. One of the big areas that our community groups focus on, given that they are focusing on young people in deprived areas, is providing them with life skills and the wealth of benefits that come with that, to essentially go on into full-time employment. We run our young leaders' programmes that serve that purpose, but what they are also doing is recruiting young people who are the beneficiaries of the work that these community groups do, who then stay on for a period of time, or in some cases almost permanently, as volunteers within the local communities, doing that vital work in the long term.

There is also the opportunity, thinking about investment pots, to say, "Where are there gaps?" Coaching is a good example. There is a shortage of coaches everywhere, across all regions and nations. An example relating to the Barclays community football fund is that one of the biggest barriers to getting young girls in sport is not having enough female coaches. One of the programmes that we have launched, identifying this need, is about attracting females, giving them the confidence but also the



level 1 accreditation to become coaches. In contrast to many volunteers who are very time-poor, many of the coaches that we have given accreditation to are mums who are not time-poor, who would never historically have thought about or entertained volunteering, but who now have the confidence and motivation to do the accreditation and get involved. Again, it is the double benefit of utilising funded programmes to attract that talent pool and bringing them in.

Lisa Wainwright: As a reflection, in 2005—a while back now—the Home Office had the Year of the Volunteer, and for each month of the year, there was a focus on a particular technical area, whether it be caring or sport, and so on. It was a fantastic campaign, and it may be worth re-looking at some of the outcomes from that campaign. What it did was elevate the level of a volunteer and it brought the voluntary sector and sport together. It has always been seen a bit separately—“We are coaches”, “We are referees”, “We are technical officials.” It brought both the voluntary sector and sport together, so it might be re-looking at some of the outcomes from that.

The other thing that made it even better was there was investment into national governing bodies with volunteer leads, and those volunteer leads led recruitment programmes through all the sports. There were 35 sports involved. Forgive me, it is a while back but there are stats from that particular campaign that worked really well.

Q69 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Related to that—I think you have answered this a bit—you said that all the research shows that the number of volunteers is shrinking, but also that they are a narrow category of people anyway, from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Sarah, you said it was very un-diverse. Do you have any other ideas for getting in a wider range of people? The research has mentioned a lack of role models, language barriers, and a lack of IT skills to find out what is going on.

Sarah Kaye: The priority with recruitment should be, particularly when you are talking about community groups in the heart of the community groups that we serve, to recruit people with lived experience from those local communities. That should be their priority, because in theory it is easier recruitment, the retention levels will be higher, and they are better qualified than anybody to understand the challenges within communities.

Andy Taylor: One of the challenges we have seen straight away from the place investment roll-out, which is happening in 80 places across the country at the moment—especially the hyper-local places—is a lack of capacity locally with community groups and organisations. I am talking about local neighbourhoods and local communities. Part of the work we are doing is about working from a bottom-up approach. Rather than dropping in an activity, it is about working to build up with community groups and identify who are the leaders in the future, who can build the capacity. That is because we know that in certain parts of the community, you need those role models, you need people from that community, and that is what becomes sustainable. I think that that is what we see now up



and down the country—there is a better understanding of that—but it will take time.

What I will say is that I think the sector is starting to do that. It is really well placed, it recognises that, and it understands the conditions that are needed locally to really move the dial, both in moving from inactivity to becoming active and in looking through an inequalities lens, whatever that inequalities lens is—whether it is participation or workforce.

Q70 Dr Rupa Huq: Is it different for different sports? We have Trailfinders rugby in Ealing, and they have had difficulties going up a league because their facilities are not good enough. However, they also think that people perceive rugby to be a bit of an elitist public school thing. Could different sports do stuff because everything is word-of-mouth and then it just replicates?

Lisa Wainwright: The RFU have an absolutely fantastic programme called rugby school managers. There are 40 managers doing outreach into different schools and communities and their ambition over four years is to have 100 of those, because you are right: if you are in an environment with a rugby club that has outreach work, you are fine, but if you are not, that is what has been missing.

As for getting more people from the local community with lived experience into the different roles, I know the next session is particularly on sport for development charities, and Sported is one of them. They have really done a superb job—Coach Corps being one of them, Sported being another one—in terms of modelling, building confidence, building teamwork and so on. It is the skills for life that will build the next community volunteers. It then comes through a protected system.

You do not want to put somebody into the position of secretary of a club, as an example, with all the risks on that. But it is starting to build those skills within young people, within their communities. A little bit like football—and we talked about rugby—you have an affinity with your local area or your club. That will build that affinity and it will give back, because you will be part of it moving forward. For the next session, it might be worth while just pulling some examples from there.

Q71 Damian Hinds: Can we come back to working with schools? It is probably worth saying—I do not know if you agree—that some of the national governing body programmes are 10 times better than they used to be when I was growing up. It is like night and day. Some work better than others, and I am interested in your thoughts on the success factors. Perhaps Andy can start on that, but maybe we can then go to Sarah to talk about the success factors for individual local groups and local clubs being able to work with schools. Schools often say that they are dying to work with clubs in the community but, for some reason, the connection just does not happen.

Any of the three of you can comment on any of those aspects, but I am



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thinking particularly about the recommendations we could make to the Government and, to some extent, to the larger organisations for actual policy change. Andy, do you want to start?

Andy Taylor: Yes, and thank you, Damian—we sat on the taskforce together and we talked about this topic quite a lot. Our network will often look at this through two lenses. This is not the whole lens, because progressing through sport is absolutely critical, but we often look at it from an inequalities, whole-school approach to tackling physical activity. If we look at children who are inactive, we know that to start with, it needs to be about movement. It needs to be about walking to school, playing in the playground and an active school day. How do we embed that through policy and leadership naturally into sport? Once children are more active, they may step into sport, but sport is not necessarily the starting point for many.

And then, when people are active and wanting to play sport, you are right—we have national governing bodies that have moved a long way and are working locally more and more. Some cannot work as locally—they do not have the infrastructures—so how do we work with other partners and other organisations to really listen to young people? Genuinely listening to young people is critical. We have done it before, when we have one conversation— “All right. That is the result. That is the answer.” It is about sitting down with young people, letting them understand the art of the possible, and recognising that for some children it may be different.

We have some great examples in Bradford. The local delivery pilot there, JU:MP, has been funded since 2018. It has 15 workstreams across the community—one being a creating active schools framework. That uses physical activity as a driver and sport and PE wrap around that. It then brings partners into that joined-up system to create solutions. That is bucking the trend from the Active Lives data because it is joined up. It is about understanding how all these various parts interconnect.

One challenge around schools—you will know this more than anyone—is that we talk about PE, school sport and physical activity in one conversation. The challenge is that the solutions are different for each area. All are absolutely critical, and they all have to interconnect, but we need to recognise that they are different. An example in Bradford again is that the word “sport” will put off a lot of young Asian girls in schools. How do we engage them with something different? It needs to be just the girls on their own in a certain environment. If we build their confidence, they are ready to step into wider sport because sport provides those wider societal outcomes.

Sarah Kaye: Is the question specific to school facilities?

Damian Hinds: To working with schools, and sometimes that means using school facilities, but sometimes it means getting the kids out of school to come to the club or doing things before and after school,



working in partnership.

Sarah Kaye: One value and benefit of sport for development is, across the multitude of organisations, that we work collaboratively and are truly embedded in the regions. Although you could have one size fits all, the challenges faced at a local level and the solution to those will often vary regionally. It is great that we have feet on the ground that are well connected, and community groups and other organisations are well placed to create the provisions at a local level. The challenge is who forms the conduit between there.

Q72 **Damian Hinds:** Who should? How do you make it happen?

Sarah Kaye: The obvious answer is local authorities and local councils, and having a facilitator or individual who takes that responsibility and is the conduit, so that it gets the dialogue going with the local schools. In any region across the UK, you will never have a shortage of that collaboration, the local knowledge, and the connection with community groups to make it happen. It is about how we take a more formalised and joined-up approach across all regions.

Q73 **Damian Hinds:** Andy, your organisation does some of that. Do you want to unpack that a bit?

Andy Taylor: Yes, very much so. Energise Me in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight often plays that connecting part through the Active Partnership. That is critical—the word “through” is important. The Active Partnerships are not necessarily the gatekeepers in those areas. They work with partners around the table today to bring them and the expertise in, but because they are embedded in that local community, they also work with public health, transport and others so that they look at the whole picture. They will try to bring people together to create the solutions.

There are often blind spots. If you are in a school, there are blind spots—“I don’t know that’s there”—and it is the same in the community. How do we take away those blind spots and create the conditions for this to be joined-up, which means that our way of working is efficient? There has been a newer way in the last three years, and we continue as a whole sector, underlined by “Uniting the Movement”, the strategy of Sport England, which has enabled us that to drive that forward. The sector is ready to do that.

It now needs the long-term commitment to understand this approach and see the differences long term. Not investing in sport and physical activity will cost this country a huge amount of money down the line, and I know that is difficult.

Q74 **Damian Hinds:** Can we talk about some of the things that are changing in schools? We have already talked about the opening school facilities fund. It is not the first of its kind; over the years, there have been many attempts to get more schools to open up.



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There are two other things. One is the wraparound programme, which has been a great extension across the school estate, and the other is school breakfasts. There has been the national school breakfast programme but there is about to be a further expansion. I wondered to what extent you see those two things as opportunities, or even drawbacks.

On wraparounds, we talked about opening up facilities, and I cannot remember which of you said that the school is open anyway. Sometimes that is the problem. It is not a help because sometimes the issues are about safeguarding. Can adults be on-site when children are on-site, and there is the same set of facilities or corridors or whatever it might be? Clearly, there are also opportunities because you have kids in school for longer, more after-school clubs and all the rest of it.

And on breakfast clubs, which are about to be extended to more schools, that is a club as well as a breakfast. Are local sports clubs geared up to take maximum advantage of that? What could the Government do to make sure that we get a double-whammy from that, not just on food, but on making sure that kids do more sport and physical activity?

Andy Taylor: Sport has a contribution to make. It is not necessarily the only thing in town, as you just said. There is maturity in our sector now. Sometimes we play a part in a broader picture that a school and a community are trying to achieve. We certainly find that approach helps to enable success and opening up. How do we align a sports club with the breakfast club? HAF is a great example, and you have StreetGames here later today, who will be able to talk about how we are aligning HAF to be part of the contribution to fulfilling children and young people's lives.

Q75 **Damian Hinds:** HAF is the holiday activities and food fund. We should spell that out for the benefit of everybody here.

Andy Taylor: Yes, sorry; I have used my first acronym of the day—it has taken me a while. We contribute to the entire system. We play a part. We recognise that we cannot have things standing alone. If we sell it to the schools—that does happen—it is about the efficiencies. We are all open anyway. We can work alongside each other and have that coherence among a school, but with that vision and common goal. We must move from thinking that sport and physical activity solves things on their own. We are part of that broader picture and, hopefully, the mission-led part can help that, but we certainly need the overarching vision.

Lisa Wainwright: You talked about solutions and, for me, it is simple. Teachers are in school to teach. Volunteers are volunteering. The gap is in the middle. I am trying to be simplistic. We need school-community connectors or motivators, or whatever we want to call them. That is the infrastructure. We need a national, dedicated infrastructure to ensure that a teacher knows that a rugby club is available and that these are the hours. That club can bring in a coach who is qualified and safe and can provide the right experience for the young person at breakfast time.



We do not have that conduit. It sits in the gap in the middle. For me, one big solution to that big gap is around those connectors. I suggest that that is a recommendation to take forward.

Q76 Damian Hinds: I want to come back to an interesting point that we talked about earlier. I think we need to tease it out into a proposal or at least an outline proposal. If you have a 3G astro, that is great and some football clubs can easily afford to pay £50 an hour, but a small community group cannot. The question is what to do about that.

I visited a 3G astro the other day, newly installed with the help of the Football Foundation. It is fantastic. It is at Horndean Tech in my constituency. The capital was okay, but then of course they needed a sinking fund. To get a sinking fund, they will need to charge people to use it and, if they are not able to do that, frankly, they would not have been able to build it.

The point you make is still important. How do you make sure that everybody benefits? How do you bridge that gap? Do you have price controls? I am not advocating that; these are open questions. Do you say councils should subsidise? Should there be some other way to enable all sports and all activities and therefore more people to take part?

Sarah Kaye: There is an element of private sector learning and understanding the supply and demand, which will vary enormously by region. Some areas will not have a requirement, and it is great for the school or leisure facility for it to go to the highest bidder. You would need to do a mapping exercise to look at where there is limited or no provision or facilities for those target audiences—for young people in deprived and underserved communities—where you would need a more disproportionate focus and emphasis. That is easier said than done.

Q77 Damian Hinds: Who is “you”? I suppose that is the question: who does it? Who spots that fact that middle-aged men playing football is fine and will always get funded but kids playing some minority sport will not? There may not be an obvious answer—in which case we can say in our report, “There is not an obvious answer, but this problem has been identified.”

Sarah Kaye: There are some mapping exercises around. There are obvious things you can do. You are looking at high areas of need, IMD 1 to 3, and doing a mapping exercise to identify high areas of deprivation overlaid with provisions in the areas for them. Where there is a need for intervention, to create a number of sessions every week for community groups, I guess the only way to incentivise schools and leisure facilities to do that is to have some form of subsidy. The obvious recommendation would be for that to sit with local authorities and councils.

Andy Taylor: We as a network over the last few years have moved towards inequalities. Yes, there is a universal for an area in terms of what the Active Partnership does, but unapologetically, which areas in that area need the support the most? That is how we play that conduit



connecting role, linking in with local authorities, public health and schools to recognise those gaps. We bring funding into this by going into the communities, clubs and schools that need it most and playing that role. We have seen through the Together fund—again, bringing partners on board with us—the place investment, which is the future direction of travel and where we will need to go. If we want sport and physical activity to be positioned across other areas of government, we need to do that.

There are other pots of funding. There is the multi-sport activity and facilities fund, which we are working with Sport England on now, and that is about mobilising sites. You will go across London and across other areas and see some sites that are not used all the time. It comes down to who then uses it—it is those who can afford it. So how do we ensure that there is capital funding to mobilise those who cannot necessarily afford it? You need local insight to do that.

One challenge that local authorities around the table voice all the time is that their sport development departments are not the size that they were. They are not able to do the work interconnecting it, but how do we maximise their facilities, stock and other parts of that around the right table?

Q78 Mr James Frith: Good morning, and thank you for coming in. Moving on to sport strategy and understanding what a new strategy might contain, the new Government have not yet confirmed whether they intend to continue with the Get Active sports strategy brought in by the last Government. In assessing that, what was effective in the strategy and what changes would you make to it? That is to all of you.

Sarah Kaye: What is essential, when we are talking about social impact and social value, is taking a cross-departmental approach, and health, justice and education being joined up and having a strategy and vision for the long term. I will always unashamedly champion the small, volunteer-led groups that we represent. It is important, through the strategy, that the difference volunteer groups can make is recognised. It is about using sport as a mechanism and the social value it creates. It is so much more than purely driving participation, physical wellbeing and elite sport. They are important, but we need to think beyond that. The framework and the outline of the strategy was good.

What was missing was what the delivery of that strategy looks like, particularly when it comes to tackling inequalities. Let me give an example: nowhere in the strategy was there any formal or strong recognition of these volunteer-led groups, of which there are thousands across the UK. They will play a fundamental role in the delivery and reaching those target audiences. At a high level, the framework of the strategy was great, but how does that translate into reality? What mechanisms, networks and partners will come together to ensure that there is effective delivery, so that it is not simply about numbers, activity levels and participation that will benefit elite sport and broader health and



wellbeing but will not fundamentally address some of society's biggest issues? I am thinking about tackling inequalities—essentially more about the mechanisms and the delivery.

Q79 Mr James Frith: Was your assessment of that strategy that there was enough cross-departmental emphasis, and did you have interaction or sight of the ones you have listed?

Sarah Kaye: Yes, the sentiment was there. I am not sure about the implementation of the strategy. The strategy did not get going. The sentiment was strong. There were big questions and a level of cynicism around the practicalities of this working in practice. The strategy's premise was good. It talked about 75% of investment committed to the areas of lowest activity, with a strong focus on social outcomes, but there is a significant difference between having a vision and translating that into reality. It is about the delivery mechanisms for bringing that to life.

Lisa Wainwright: The strategy has good intent, but the key thing for the sector, through the National Sector Partners Group, which is for the representative bodies across the sector, was around a stronger ambition for our society. We did some comparative analysis of inactivity across Europe, and we are ranked 11th out of 15 comparative nations for inactivity. On a medal table, we are not at the top.

We believe that the ambition should be to be the most active nation in Europe, and we can do that. If we do, we can make significant savings. Forgive me for reading, but I want to get this right. We would make an annual saving in healthcare of £1 billion, £3.5 billion in GDP and £70 billion in wellbeing benefits if we align ourselves to countries like Finland and Denmark, who are at the top of the league table. We can do that. We are doing some more detailed analysis on strategy. What key policy levers enable them to do that? Finland was not at the top 15 years ago. What has it done policy-wise to get there? We are more than willing to share that with you.

So yes, strategy exists. It involves looking down. We as national partners try desperately to work across Government. It has been challenging. The Government are busy. The new strategy, if one is to be developed, should ensure that sport and recreation is at the heart of the Prime Minister and Treasury's business, because we can drive growth, we can drive the economy and we can save the NHS. It is critical for us to be healthy and prosperous as a nation. I would look to the upward moment in terms of any new strategy.

Q80 Mr James Frith: Do you know the cost to drive that final list of outcomes? Is it a net growth outcome as a result, or does it cost as much to achieve?

Lisa Wainwright: Our current investment as the UK Government is 0.4%. Currently, Finland's is 1%, so we would need to increase it, but the savings far outweigh the increase.



Q81 **Mr James Frith:** It clearly speaks to the cross-departmental point that Sarah was making. Andy?

Andy Taylor: We were consulted on the existing strategy and engaged in it. I sat on the taskforce, and the taskforce was getting the right people around the table, which was positive. It was cross-government engagement.

The challenge for moving forward with the new strategy is that devolution is taking place. Where is the accountability in the system? That is absolutely critical. I have talked a lot today about place-based working and investing in communities. What is the framework and overarching piece that the Government hold? Where is the accountability within that? Where is that devolved into local decision making and investment into local?

The other bit, as I have mentioned a couple of times, is about where the inactivity sits. One challenge with the strategy is—all of these areas are important; it is not one or the other—that it dealt with sport, high performance, inequalities within sport and the grassroots, but also it was trying to answer inactivity, which is one area that the Department for Health has among its key priorities linked to prevention. So it is about trying to bottom out where that sits, if it has to sit anywhere.

For me, inactivity should be across every strategy across the whole of Government because we all have a responsibility from education through to transport through to housing. We need to tackle inactivity, but it is not just DCMS's responsibility, and it is not just the sport sector's responsibility. It ends up trying to potentially support everyone around that.

Q82 **Mr James Frith:** On the Government's strategy for harder-to-reach communities and the inequality argument, what interventions have proven most successful in this strategy, or in your view before this one?

Andy Taylor: I will touch on Uniting the Movement. This strategy followed the intentions of Uniting the Movement, which was tackling inequalities. It was too early to judge successes around certain parts of that. But even the outcomes of that were going towards local outcomes, aligned with Active Lives, so then you must devolve it into local.

We know that place-based investment is the right approach to that. It is early days now, but that is the opportunity. We see it locally. We go into place-based working. Other departments locally want to come around the table, including the director of public health and transport. Can we mirror that nationally? That is key, because that is the approach to then move that forward.

An example is north Bradford, where a whole system is working together for a common goal. We are seeing local physical activity strategies being developed, commissioned and led. That brings all the partners together because we can create the framework and the conditions. The work



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happens locally. The nuances from a rural or coastal area to an urban area are so different. We need to create the conditions to enable that decision-making to be different and to be comfortable with that.

Q83 Mr James Frith: Can we learn from the legacy of things like parkrun? Is it to let things spring out of nothing, from a distance? A lot of hard work will have gone into it. What can we learn from those more community-based or entrepreneur-based activities that have completely taken over, and brilliantly so? And yet, you could see a scenario where a Government, devolved or otherwise, could attempt a similar thing and crush it by accident.

Andy Taylor: My message would be not to do it top-down. You are right; there is a huge amount of inspiration—there is Just Play, Our Parks, and junior parkrun now. You want to create the conditions for that to take place.

We then need to make sure—parkrun does this now—that that is in communities that need it the most as well. When it started out, from what I understand, it was more in areas where people are already active. We are starting to see that our role must be to empower that innovation. HYROX is a great example. Some of the work that the private leisure facilities, public leisure facilities, local authorities and lawn tennis associations are doing can offer brilliant stuff, if we listen to communities. That is the critical bit. If we do not listen to communities, we will keep going around the cycle of doing something, and doing it again and again. The more we can empower, the better.

Sarah Kaye: Parkrun is also a great example of the challenges that are faced with tackling deep-rooted inequalities. Parkrun has been a phenomenal concept, and the following is phenomenal. It has done an excellent job of increasing participation and addressing broader health and wellbeing.

To what extent has parkrun been effective at attracting inactive people from ethnically diverse backgrounds and from highly deprived areas? You can say that it is free and anyone can go, but are the transport routes free? Are there cultural barriers that get people from certain communities involved? There are a lot of psychological barriers and cost barriers that enable what is a phenomenal concept to reach communities. Therefore, some great learnings can be taken from that. Why is that? What could and should we do differently?

Mr James Frith: I am about to do my first HYROX competition, so it is nice to get a shoutout for HYROX.

Andy Taylor: Good luck.

Q84 Chair: Impressive. Thank you very much. That brings us to the end of the first panel. Before we let you flee, were there any questions that you hoped we would ask you or any points that you hoped to land with us



today?

Andy Taylor: Can I just land one last thing? In the challenging fiscal environment, it is critical that we protect existing funding. There is uncertainty now. Somehow we have maintained existing activity levels, and that is down to a brilliant sector that works tirelessly to do that. If funding reduces, those activity levels will reduce and that will cost this country money. How we protect them and then build on that is critical. It is important to say that with decision making in the coming months.

Sarah Kaye: Building on the point around private sector investment, how do we do more to leverage that and to seriously think about the benefits, value and some form of incentive to the private sector? No matter how tough the economic climate gets, they will stay committed to CSR and ESG. We need to ensure that sport for development and community sport is front of mind when they build their strategies.

Lisa Wainwright: Finally, I reiterate: protect core investments through DCMS and our arm's length bodies and continue to invest in PE and school sport. That is critical for our young people and the future.

Chair: Fantastic. Thanks to all of you for joining us this morning. We will suspend the session briefly to allow our next panel to come forward.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Stephanie Hilborne OBE, Mark Lawrie, Emily Robinson and Anna Scott-Marshall.

Chair: Welcome to our second panel, which is focused on the challenges facing clubs and what can be done to engage under-represented groups such as those from deprived communities, women, girls and disabled people.

We are joined by Stephanie Hilborne OBE, the chief executive of Women in Sport; Emily Robinson, the chief executive of London Sport; Anna Scott-Marshall, the director of communications and social impact at the British Paralympic Association; and by Mark Lawrie, the chief executive of StreetGames. You are all welcome; thank you so much for joining us today.

Q85 **Liz Jarvis:** Good morning to all of you. I recently had the pleasure of attending a football match at one of my local primary schools in my Eastleigh constituency, where the girls were all aspiring to be the next generation of Lionesses. It was wonderful to see them play. According to data from Sport England's "Active Lives Children and Young People" report, girls are less active than boys in every school year. Stephanie, why do girls still miss out on the benefits of school sports? What tangible things can the Government do to address this inequality?

Stephanie Hilborne: That is a big question. The context of this is what matters. If you think of the gendered health inequalities we face, with one in two women suffering from osteoporosis and breaking a bone



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compared with one in nine men, the mental health crisis particularly for late teenage and early young women now being so extreme, and the inequalities in the suffering of autoimmune conditions, which are related to stress and also ameliorated by activity, this matters so much. That is without even thinking about the educational and cognitive development that comes with exercise.

Why is this still happening? Our research shows that societal stereotyping is still alive and well. We tell our little girls from almost the moment they can move to be careful. We tell them that other people's needs matter more than their own and to be kind.

We have done research on boys as well. We instil boys with the sense that their status entirely depends on proof that they are the best at football and that sport is so fundamental to who they are that they must push anyone out of the way, boy or girl, who will stop that happening. They enter school with a skills gap compared with girls. That is not recognised. Boys enter with a fine motor skills gap, which is recognised, so they are being skilled up in writing. We need to train our teachers to understand that girls enter with a sports skills deficit, and they need to be skilled up in sport.

As it happens, as you mentioned, every time I see a little girl trying to be a Lioness, it warms my heart, but there is still a 24% gap in participation in team sport between girls and boys. That is stubborn. It has been there for a long time, even with this incredible change, which is putting women's team sport on the telly at all. It literally was not when I was young. That is not shifting enough.

One major intervention must be the training of teachers, and that is all teachers at primary level, because they are all involved in children's activity, but particularly specialist PE provision, which, as we know, has been dropping. Schools have been bringing in external agencies. It tends to be young blokes who love sport coming in to interact with children. They are not professional educationalists who understand the needs of children.

It is about training the teachers in gender stereotyping and in the physiological differences between girls and boys, which are there before puberty but more extreme after, and then female puberty and how to support girls to manage periods and to use sports bras. Only 13% of schools have sports bras on the kit list. That massively matters because we see 1.3 million girls dropping out of sport after primary age.

The other thing to remember about school sport for girls is that it is the only time 37% of girls ever do any sport, which makes it so much more important. So teacher training is one big thing.

The provision of facilities is the other. We know that there are no single-sex toilets in about 28% of schools now. How will you manage your period if you must wash your hands after changing your tampon, to be



blunt, in front of the boys? You will not do that—you cannot do that. You cannot do sport if you cannot manage your periods. This whole facility factor is big. Letting girls go to school already dressed for sport on days they will play it has proven to be massively effective. There are some simple things where, if we can lift the bureaucracy, it will make it work.

It is then about single-sex opportunities for girls, not only because we know that some well-managed mixed-sex can be good but, if PE is not more central to the school, if we do not recognise its value to cognitive development and to educational attainment, the girls who most love sport—in fact, our research shows that black girls dream the most of sport. Some 60% of Black girls dream of reaching the top compared with 34% of white British girls, but they are the least active. They are under the most pressure for educational attainment. There is not the understanding that sport will help with that. Teachers and parents need to push that messaging out, and the Government could push the messaging out that sport helps educational attainment. That would help.

I have covered quite a lot of ground there, but Canterbury Christ Church University says that 91% of primary school kids understand that activity helps them learn, but it seems that as adults we have lost our way with that.

Q86 Liz Jarvis: Thank you. Anna, you recently launched the Equal Play campaign, which calls upon the Government to address the barriers that prevent disabled children participating in physical education and sports in school. What changes need to happen to ensure that more disabled children are active and enjoying sports at school?

Anna Scott-Marshall: As ParalympicsGB, we work with elite athletes who came second on the medal table in Paris but, shockingly, about 75% of disabled children say they do not take part regularly in sport or PE in school. There is an imbalance. Many Paralympic athletes say they did not take part in sport in school, but a good coach or a parent or somebody spotted them, and they then became the elite athletes they are now. We are talking about 1.5 million children in the school population—about 15%.

We run a schools programme with our Olympic counterparts, TeamGB, so we know where it can work well. It helps to have focused campaigns that all schools can take part in, as well as connecting with community groups, Active Partnerships, StreetGames and others as part of the programme to support schools to deliver good, motivated PE and school sport.

Fundamentally, the biggest issue is a lack of confidence and a lack of understanding from teachers in schools about how to deliver inclusive PE and sport. That is not through lack of wanting to or teachers not believing in it. It is about empowering teachers to have more confidence to deliver good PE and for those groups who come in to provide sport, also, to ensure that they do. That is around tools for existing teachers, like CPD.



There is a real range of stuff out there, but it would be helpful for the Government to be clear about a good CPD programme for existing teachers and for a bit of leadership from schools that this is important and something they believe in.

Also, it is about the lens through which disabled children and their counterparts see the rest of their lives. If it is okay for children to be sitting on the sidelines or sitting in a classroom while everyone else is taking part in sport, it sends a signal that that is what they can expect in the rest of their lives, too. That is a fundamental basis on which disabled young people start their lives.

There is little to no focus within initial teacher training. New teachers do not have any focus on PE for disabled young people. A simple change would be to change that initial teacher training and to embed that within teacher training.

A curriculum review is happening at the moment, and having a better emphasis on curriculum and the importance of sport and PE being inclusive for all is important. The interim review has not mentioned much about sport and PE so far, so it would be good to see the curriculum review address that. That is currently part of the danger. PE is not a core curriculum subject. The curriculum review also focuses on outcomes and attainment, which sport falls outside of. That is what often happens in the school day.

Finally, we have talked a bit about role models in this session, from a range of areas, but very few disabled teachers are in the workforce—about 0.5%. Apart from anything else, that is missing a huge amount of skilled people who could be within the workforce. It is about improving the recruitment of disabled teachers who are part of the workforce, and who can understand disabled young people's needs and change the culture. We experience that even in our organisation. The more people you work with, the better you understand what people need.

Q87 **Damian Hinds:** Can I come back to girls? Stephanie, you mentioned the skills gap even at Year R. What do you do about that?

Stephanie Hilborne: It is a bit like comparing it to writing skills. You need to deliberately skill those girls up—

Damian Hinds: But with writing skills, we have figured out that in the early years foundation stage, we need to have a real focus on writing. It is more about holding the pencil and so on. Is that the issue when we talk about the skills gap, or is it more about stuff at home and cultural things? What is the combination?

Stephanie Hilborne: The home stuff is massive, and the cultural stuff at home. It is a bit of a call-out to dads, because the data shows that dads are critical in supporting girls with the skills stuff but, proportionately, they support their girls less than the boys.



At school, on entry, if there is a recognition that those girls will have gaps in kicking, throwing and catching a ball, for example, and in other aspects that the boys will be skilled up in, it is about not being afraid to specifically work with those girls in the right way to skill them up. It is deliberate intervention and taking that seriously rather than sending them out into the playground to get excluded by the boys, because the boys will be better and tougher and think their whole lives depend on it. That will lead to what the YST has shown is a halving of self-belief in girls by the time they leave primary school.

Girls are not born under-confident. The effect of this saps their self-belief. It is an intervention, and school is a place where that can happen, if we understand that and are prepared to accept it. You will have a mixed class, inevitably, in a normal primary school, but it is about understanding that you might need to take the girls aside and skill them up a bit more while the boys do something else, and then maybe mix them up a bit more. It is about recognising that and seeing that it matters, because nobody thinks it matters.

Q88 **Damian Hinds:** That would be the opposite of what a lot of people would think. That is worth dwelling on. Do you want to say more about why it might be important to separate boys and girls for some of the time?

Stephanie Hilborne: It is complicated. We know we have this societal context of horrendous changes in attitudes towards women. *The Week's* latest poll showed that between 2019 and 2025, the number of young men in this country aged 15 to 24 who think that women are equally capable of leadership roles has dropped from 82% to 51%¹. It is that drastic. How do you address that through sport? Sport is a massive opportunity to either further that or address it.

How you do that in a mixed context in primary schools will be quite sophisticated. There will be times when you have to separate the sexes and times when you need to have them working together. We have guidance on this out to teachers, coaches and parents for how they might do this, which would reward sport for its actual value. It is about rewarding and emphasising the value of good teamwork, the value of leadership and the values that sport is instilling, and not always talking about the outcome and winning or not winning. Give the boy who has shown the best attitude to girls the captain position, not the boy who has been crushing them. Subtle interventions like that will begin to build up respect between the sexes. If you throw them in with this massive skills gap at the start, it will be harder to do that, so you need to work on that at the same time.

Emily Robinson: I was going to add another practical example. We found through the opening school facilities programme we have been running in London that introducing new sports that might not have that

¹ Note by witness: The witness incorrectly referenced 'The Week' as the source of the poll. The poll was a Kantar poll for The Times.



predetermined gap can be successful. We have helped leverage in the NFL Foundation and flag football, which has not existed in this country in quite the same way. Having boys and girls play a sport at the entry level together can be more productive in a mixed setting or in other sports like cricket, where they can play together for longer.

One issue is that football is so dominant in our culture that boys learn to kick as soon as they learn to walk. We find that that gap exists with girls. It has improved because my generation did not get to play football at all, but there is still a significant gap.

The other thing is about coaching and seeing those role models from the sidelines. Only 30% of coaches in London are women. That is a big gap. Bringing in those specialists who understand how to encourage children and develop their love of the sport through seeing women on the sidelines and in the kit playing is also important.

Q89 **Damian Hinds:** You have teed me up for two other questions I was going to ask. It was an interesting question about all these extra sports that are available now that did not used to be. Dodgeball is a big thing for kids at the moment. Also, lots of girls play cricket, football and so on. One big question is to what extent that then delivers a net increase in the amount of sport and to what extent it displaces something else.

I ask that not as a leading or rhetorical question—I don't know, and I don't know if anyone has done any comprehensive work on it. If you do, it would be quite helpful for this inquiry.

Stephanie Hilborne: There is some data on it, is there not, Emily?

Emily Robinson: Overall activity levels have not significantly improved over the last 10 years. It is difficult to say that these new sports have led to a bigger increase across the board.

Stephanie Hilborne: The issue with girls' engagement is that the girls who are jumping into the football gap that we were not allowed into were probably playing netball, hockey and so on. You are right. It is a question about whether we are reaching completely new people.

Mark Lawrie: There is something about the accessible nature of some of these sports. We can think about something like dodgeball. I was up in Salford the other week at a youth club, watching people with no money and no equipment, but they were able to play dodgeball. They did not need shinpads and all the things that you might need to access football. Some of the sports that you describe are easier to access for some of those young people who might suffer from socioeconomic inequalities. Whether it shifts the dial, I do not know about the data, but those kinds of sports perhaps remove barriers differently.

Anna Scott-Marshall: That is it. I do not know if there is conclusive data, but schools have started to focus on opening an understanding of what sport and PE might include, which is much broader than football and



rugby. Therefore, that allows a greater diversity of people to consider taking part in sport and PE or being more enthusiastic about it in a school setting and into the community.

One thing that we see in our schools programme as well are sports or activities that children can take part in with their families—particularly, through our eyes, disabled children, but in general—with that being one of the key drivers that families and children were saying was stopping them taking part in things previously. Having a greater breadth of sports, including with grandparents and a whole range from boccia to other sports that might not need a huge amount of equipment or being physically active, has definitely opened things up.

Q90 Damian Hinds: For my last question, I want to go back to the question about the drop-off in girls' participation in sport. Notwithstanding whatever the gap may be at age five, we know that in the teenage years, there is quite a substantial falloff. Stephanie mentioned concerns about mental health, and so on. These things are becoming more prominent than ever.

From the perspective of trying to make recommendations to the Government, the public sector or large organisations, what more could we do? You mentioned a couple of things, such as girls turning up to school already dressed for sport. What practical things could be done to reduce that drop-off? I should be clear that I am talking about school and more generally, in terms of community participation.

Stephanie Hilborne: Sorry, the excitement about girls means I am probably talking the most, if everyone is all right.

Chair: We will give everyone plenty of opportunity to level the playing field, Stephanie; you will be fine.

Stephanie Hilborne: I will shut up shortly. I mentioned the early years because everyone is aware of the teenage drop-off. It is not sudden; it is because you already do not have the self-belief.

The two issues that then hit are the sexualisation of the stereotyping experience and the horrors of social media, and the horrendous pressure now on girls to look exactly right, which has a massive impact on sport and willingness to participate or time to recover from it and so on, and also the physiological impact of female puberty. Puberty was put on the curriculum only a couple of years ago. It is not taught. Our generation learned about it in rabbits, and everybody understood it because they reabsorb. There is bad education about it and there is poor support for it. We are now as a society normalising conversations about female reproductive issues far more than we ever did, but that is not in the system yet. We need more focus on that.

In the community, one initiative we have worked on with Places Leisure and with some DCMS support is the Big Sister programme, which looks particularly at teenage girls from deprived communities. What happens if



some leisure centres give them free access and put on female-only opportunities with promised female leaders of those group opportunities, swims or whatever it is? What happens when you do that? What happens when you train all the leisure centre staff to understand the needs of teenage girls? The first case, which was a funded programme, also provided free period products. Most importantly, what happens when leisure centre staff go out into communities and into schools to tell the girls that it is there and that they could come and use it? It is hugely impactful. That was an impactful programme, which Places Leisure has now rolled out to all its 100 or so leisure centres. Without Government funding, it is not so easy to put on and they have had to make it a reduced price, not free, for universal credit and so on.

That demonstrates that if girls feel they are invited in and know that it is there, that they are safe and that it is single sex at times, they will come. We need to treat it with the seriousness that it deserves, to some extent. We then need to be respectful about the practical physiological needs of a female going through puberty and the need for clean, safe toilet facilities and so on.

Chair: Sorry to be the nagging old women in the corner but can we speed up our answers a little bit please, chaps?

Emily Robinson: I have one more practical recommendation beyond school sport. We have public sector equality duties on local authorities, and we often see that they are not applied in informal spaces or playgrounds, or the sorts of areas outside houses and buildings where we could do a lot more to encourage women and girls to exercise outside. They are thinking about parks and the provision. If you are building a skate park or a football pitch, you are much more likely to have boys and men using that than girls.

The other thing would be then, thinking about female coaches, how we use existing skills and training money from Government to look at the sports staff workforce.

Q91 **Damian Hinds:** Are there any particular sports the provision of which has shown to reduce the drop-off in schools?

Stephanie Hilborne: Pretty well all affected—

Emily Robinson: The quietness from us suggests that it is not obvious which one.

Stephanie Hilborne: It is because girls' relationship with the whole of sport is affecting it.

Q92 **Mr James Frith:** Stephanie, you mentioned a powerful statistic that I did not manage to write down, so I will invite you to say it again—it was about the perception among boys of a certain age of the capabilities of girls and women to lead. Has there been any research into that? Is that a covid thing? Is it the explosion of smartphones and social media? Is it all



the above? What is your insight, and what is the perceived wisdom on that?

Stephanie Hilborne: It is perceived wisdom probably more than our direct insight. It is against the background of Andrew Tate, the growing rise in misogyny, the division of the sexes over politics and the whole conflict zone out there that affects young boys, which is now the focus of so much work and brilliant programmes on TV. It is terrifying. In Germany, the number of young men who think women's place should be in the home has risen from 5% to 22% since 2021. It is rapid. Only in the last five years have these attitudes been growing in Europe. That is the terrifying backdrop. I raise it because it is that serious. Sport can play a major role in raising respect.

Q93 **Mr James Frith:** This goes not only to your point about girls arriving and needing to be skilled up and separated. I agree with Damian that that would be counterintuitive to some experiences and would possibly even upset parents and children if they were divided up straight away into girls and boys, notwithstanding—and I get the point—that the output is the focus here. It is a scenario where we must be quite explicit in addressing those attitudes with the young boys. It is a boy's problem, not a girl's problem.

Stephanie Hilborne: Yes, absolutely. When I say separated, I do not mean all the time. It is impractical all the time, but just at times.

The research that we did last year was on under-11 boys. We put some guidance up on our site about how to encourage those boys through sport to show more respect and to understand the real value of sport. If they think it is the ultimate end point, of course men are stronger, faster and bigger even before puberty and so they are better, but if they see the value of sport as more complex—about joint endeavour and about these other issues where its real value lies—it shifts their emphasis. We can work with boys on that.

Q94 **Jo Platt:** I want to concentrate on the links between schools and community sport. If we take the disparities for children and young people from low economic backgrounds who are taking part in sports, the numbers are reducing, and similarly, schools in our more challenging or disadvantaged areas are less likely to offer pupils a range of clubs and societies. With the lack of communication between school and community sport, what framework could the Government put in place now to help promote and facilitate these connections? That goes to you, Mark.

Mark Lawrie: For context, StreetGames works with local community organisations in the most deprived areas. One crucial thing that needs to happen—this was touched on in the previous panel—is that there needs to be a recognition of the vital role that community sport organisations play. By community sport organisations, I do not necessarily mean just sport clubs. It can be about youth clubs. It can be about those



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community groups that exist in the heart of our most deprived neighbourhoods. They need to be recognised, first, in policy terms.

They then need to be invested in. That is in terms of not just finance, but development of the workforce. The capacity at a local level needs to play a specific, place-based role in making sure that community organisations that can make genuine connections with schools and young people are supported to be in the right places.

The third thing, as well as the recognition and the investment, is about involving them in local decision making. Often, we talk about schools and communities, and if you are honest—I say this having been a primary school teacher—the power sits with the school. The school is the larger body in an area, and you sometimes have a David and Goliath thing going on in local communities.

The capacity that needs to go in at a local level needs to draw on the strengths of both and enable community organisations, which, bearing in mind that children and young people spend 86% of their lives outside of school classrooms, have a huge role to play. Particularly when you talk about areas of deprivation, the 13 weeks of the school holidays for those children and young people who are not in school are potentially an activity desert. The holiday activities and food programmes that were mentioned earlier have helped to bridge some of that. Where that is well implemented in local areas—we are involved in running it in Birmingham, for example—schools and community groups work effectively together around the holidays. It almost feels ironic to me that we have found a space, because nobody owns the holidays, when you can bring schools and communities together.

You can then start to also connect in with other policy agendas. In that kind of work, you can connect to criminal justice and some of the concerns about children and young people being either victims or perpetrators of crime in the holidays. You can connect to the wider mental health and wellbeing agenda and start to think about how early help services all connect in.

I do not know what the shape of it is, to answer your question, but I do know that that is what it needs to do in terms of melding those things together.

Emily Robinson: We already have a model through Active Partnerships. London Sport is an Active Partnership. Andy is from the Active Partnerships Network. There are 42 equivalents of us around the country. Part of our role is to make those connections between schools, community clubs, local authorities and national governing bodies.

The opening school facilities programme, which we are devastated is stopping, was working incredibly well for us to make those connections. Just a small amount of capacity funding can unlock those things. The average grant that was given out by us to a school in London was



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£11,000, which is not that much. When I have spoken to people in the private sector, they are surprised that a school would open its facilities for such a small amount of money, but only a small amount is required to help build that capacity for lettings, bringing coaches in or making those relationships.

The other thing is the role of the Active Partnership in making sense of all these fragmented funding streams that were touched on in the earlier session. We allocate funding from Sport England through places. We work with the Football Foundation on play zones and building those community consortia. We have been running the opening school facilities programme. On top of that, you get funding for School Games, the school sport premium, and then other initiatives that will come from national governing bodies often linked to major events or initiatives that are going on.

This is against a background of increasing lack of resource from local authorities, which have traditionally played that role. In councils now—for example, in Brent—nobody at all in the council has sport in their role or their title. We work with the public health team or the planning team. All the parts of the system that we work with, probably for all of us, have seen massive disinvestment—in parks, leisure centres, youth services and community centres. Increasingly, we are looking at non-traditional spaces because of a lack of facilities, such as car parks, empty shops and libraries.

Last week, we launched a campaign called More Ball Games against the “no ball games” signs. It is about thinking about specific things you can do that do not cost the earth. In London, we estimate that 7,000 signs say “no ball games” on estates. How can we encourage children and young people to be physically active when they are literally being told not to play? We are trying to take those signs down, and local authorities are working with us on it.

That is what we are working within, and those inequalities are quite stark. We know, for example, that less than half of black secondary school children in London can swim compared with 80% of their white counterparts. You are three times less likely to be active if you come from a deprived area. We are all working in different ways on how we tackle those inequalities, and there will be some quite bespoke solutions, but also, we need facilities and funding to keep community groups and clubs going.

Q95 **Jo Platt:** Do you believe that a central person who is in the place could connect the schools to the clubs and to a place?

Emily Robinson: Yes; that is the role we are already playing in partnership. What is challenging it that it is against a backdrop of limited local authority capacity and trying to navigate how we get the best out of these different funding streams, because each funder brings their own conditions. The more flexible the funding, the better, because you can



adapt it locally, which is why the opening school facilities programme has been quite successful. We have had three full-time members of staff serving 200 schools, so it is a very efficient model. We do not want more funding for those 200 schools—they are done—but we have another 2,000 schools in London that are not open after hours, and we could now move on with those three members of staff, but, of course, they will be made redundant, because the programme ends in six days' time.

Q96 Jo Platt: Mark, is that a model that you recognise would work? You are going throughout the country and into some of the deprived areas.

Mark Lawrie: Certainly. We have been involved as one of the four partners in the opening school facilities programme. A large part of what has been successful in London has been really listening to the young people's voices within that and hearing what they want provided after school. We spoke to over 1,000 young people through opening school facilities, and they do not necessarily want the traditional sporting offer. They do not necessarily want skills and drills. It comes back a little bit to the girls' offer. They want something more informal, something they can enjoy with their friends rather than in a competitive group, so that very much connects. If the schools are open and the offer is right, which can often be about who comes in to lead the sessions, then absolutely.

Q97 Tom Rutland: I am going to ask about facilities. We have received evidence on the challenges facing facilities—the availability, accessibility, quality, loss of fields and rising costs through third-party hire. The LGA has found that almost two thirds of UK leisure stock is ageing and past its replacement date, and facilities that have closed for urgent repairs have not always reopened. Similarly, Swim England is predicting that there will be a 40% fall in the number of pools available between 2019 and 2030. What changes from Government are needed to address this?

Emily Robinson: The first thing is to have a clear strategy for facilities locally and nationally. Local authorities often have play and pitch strategies or built facility strategies, but they are not a statutory requirement. We need more capital funding. There is very little you can do with ageing stock unless you renew those facilities. We can probably be more innovative in how we do those, thinking about climate change as well. There are some interesting examples from across the world where people have used data servers to heat swimming pools and gyms that can be connected to the electricity power supply, so while you are cycling you are literally generating electricity.

More than that, they need to make sense to the local area in which they are going to be working and become more flexible and fit for the future. We have a lot of existing guidance—some of it is about the implementation of that guidance—and we are all a bit unclear about what will happen through the planning changes, in terms of whether they are going to be helpful or unhelpful.



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I have quite mixed views on it, because on one hand, I am concerned that if Sport England are no longer a statutory guarantee, we will see more playing fields and more green spaces lost—appreciating the need for housing, because if you are a local authority in London, you can get quite a lot of money for your land, if you can turn it into a luxury block of flats. At the same time, we have situations with providers who would like to build more facilities or put more facilities on, but the planning system is slow, it takes a long time, and on the other side of the fence, the regulations and restrictions prevent things from happening quickly.

If you look at the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre, which is both an elite national centre and also very much serves people locally in Lewisham, Southwark and Lambeth who are from these deprived communities, it has been closed for a long time because it is a grade 2 listed building. Because it is a grade 2 listed building, it costs a lot more and takes a lot longer to renovate. I do not know if the changes will make a difference to that, but we certainly as London Sport and as an active partner are mapping facilities across London, layering on the community clubs.

We know there are 7,000 community clubs. We are looking at the leisure stock and thinking about how we can advocate for more funding, because ultimately, we think these are drivers of growth. So if there is going to be building from the Government—and these are very tangible things that communities enjoy and can benefit from, and we can demonstrate the social value that comes from investing in sport and leisure facilities. The irony is that it is the local authorities who foot the bill for these facilities who are seeing their budgets increasingly reduced, but it is the Department of Health and Social Care and the health service, which stand to benefit the most from improvements in people's health, that do not fund those facilities at the moment.

Mark Lawrie: I would draw out two challenges. First, when you look at the national benchmarking data for areas where we have existing sports facilities, and the user profiles of those facilities, the numbers of users that could be considered from disadvantaged backgrounds is going backwards quite significantly. The best performing leisure centres are only getting 60% of their local population, in terms of users. The worst performing are getting 29%, and that is a real challenge.

A lot of that is economic; it is about the fact that costs are going up, so prices are going up, but if we want to tackle inequalities in access to sport and physical activity, we must do something to challenge that. Some of that, where a lot of leisure facilities are externalised, may be about what is written into leisure contracts and how challenging we are about the inclusion of local communities in leisure contracts.

The second thing—Emily touched on this—is that it is not always about leisure facilities. Sometimes it is about non-traditional facilities that just need a small amount of investment to be better spaces for sport and



physical activity—community centres, provision of games areas—which are safe and designed both for boys and girls. There are many different ways to tackle this, other than building large and expensive new leisure facilities, so thinking creatively becomes almost inevitable, given the context that we are working in at the moment.

Q98 Tom Rutland: That leads to my next area of questioning, on how grassroots sports can be made more engaging and accessible to under-represented groups. We have touched on that a little already. Mark and Emily, you have more of an opportunity to contribute here. More support is needed to drive participation in sport and tackle inequalities. What are the current initiatives targeting less active groups and low-income communities getting wrong, and what do you see as the solution?

Mark Lawrie: The crucial thing we have found over 18 years of focusing on this is that the provision must be on the doorstep of young people, and it must remove the existing barriers to them getting involved. On those barriers, at a simple level, price always comes up, but it is not the only one. It is about place and how close it is to them. We know that young people are unlikely to travel more than a mile. It is about the style of provision and ensuring that it is delivered by leaders, trusted adults.

I thought it was interesting to hear what Gareth Southgate said last week about the importance of trusted adults in developing young people's understanding of who they are through sport and developing that connectedness between young people in a physical space. It is about making sure that the right people are around as part of that, and that it is delivered at the right time. For teenagers, that can sometimes be later than straight away after school. For younger children, it might be that the 4 o'clock to 5 o'clock wraparound childcare slot.

It is not that complicated at the most basic level, but the challenge is to ensure that that provision is there and available for the areas, communities and young people who need it most. There is a deficit of provision. There are not enough sports clubs, and there are not enough youth providers in those areas who can provide that activity. If we design this around the needs and motivations of young people, which is what the locally trusted organisations we work with do, we can tackle those stubborn inequalities, but we need to recognise that there are 3.5 million young people living in our most deprived areas, there are 4.3 million young people living in poverty at the moment in the UK, and we are not perhaps doing enough to design sport around their needs at this stage.

Emily Robinson: I do not think that people are doing things wrong. In some ways, it is staggering that we have been able to keep activity levels about the same, given that we have had covid and an energy crisis and given the cost of living. It has just shown how innovative and creative the community sport sector has been. Similarly to Mark, I think there are structural barriers for why under-represented groups are less active in sport. Some of those are about cost, about economic opportunity. If you



are working two or three jobs in the gig economy, how easy is it for you to be a sports volunteer or to take your child to a certain activity?

There is also transport—particularly thinking about people with disabilities or long-term health conditions. How do you get to those places if they are not close to you? How do you pay for the kit and the membership fees if those things happen? There are also things that we have seen in sport—I think we should acknowledge that there have been some damning reports into sport, where we have seen institutional racism, sexism and classism. That affects community groups, who want to be made to feel welcome.

It is welcome when sports recognise that they have those challenges and seek safer spaces for people to be active in. One of the things we run, which has been funded by Sport England, is a sport welfare officer programme, which again, is across all the active partnerships, working with local community clubs to improve welfare, safeguarding and provision. Equally, echoing what Sarah said, that does mean that it adds burdens on volunteers, but we must manage that, ensuring that the spaces are welcoming and available for everyone.

There are then individual barriers, as Stephanie has highlighted, or in terms of confidence, where if we have more role models from those particular communities, people will think, “That is for me. That is something I can take part in.”

Q99 Tom Rutland: I guess, Anna and Steph, that participation levels for women and those with disabilities at a local level is still low. What initiative, if there was one, could be introduced to see more individuals taking part in sport?

Anna Scott-Marshall: If I may, I will add to rather than repeat what has been said—24% of the population are disabled, and it is about the only demographic we can all enter at some point. Disabled people are almost twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people, but about 75% say they want to be more active. The desire is there, but clearly there are some barriers.

There are probably two issues. One is that the activities are likely to be further away, and therefore, things like transport and inaccessible facilities come into play. Also, I am not sure that there is enough information out there about what it is possible to take part in; I am talking about inclusive opportunities—so things that people can take part in together—and specialist activities. For example, there are only 2% of the activities on OpenActive data, which is the listings of all sport activities, that are accessible or inclusive.

For us, our Every Body Moves platform aims to point disabled people to those opportunities, but we are hamstrung either by those opportunities not being out there or people not being confident and clear about how their opportunities are inclusive or accessible. That links to the second point, which comes back to the same point around schools—about



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confidence, workforce training and recruitment for people to better understand what disabled people might need. Often, that is about an unfriendly receptionist rather than the facility. It is about the whole workforce experience as well as better planning. If people better understand it, a lot of those things that they already provide will be much better. Obviously, facilities are another area.

Stephanie Hilborne: We are doing a very interesting piece with the Activity Alliance on the Paralympics as an inspiration to disabled young people. What that shows is that there is a huge accentuation of gender stereotyping. For the disabled girl, it is like that is the last problem you are going to have—"How are you going to go dancing with your friends?" If it is a disabled boy, it is like, "You are going to go as fast as David Weir or else", so the pressure is accentuated on boys, but the girls are almost left behind even more.

I will make a couple of other points. Gender budgeting is vital whenever we are talking about facilities and local authorities—any investment in any of these initiatives. If we are not following the money to see if girls and women are benefiting equally, we will continue to make sure they are not. There is a huge investment going into new football facilities and so on. Unless they are built in the right way, with the right design and the right understanding, and with the timetabling constituted correctly, girls and women will continue to lose out.

I want to throw in a point about the high-quality, natural green space. Lisa Wainwright talked earlier high-quality, pure waters, where people can swim naturally. If you do not have money but you have time, and you have something close to you that is beautiful, you are naturally going to move in that space, and there are various projects around the country showing that. There are the Wildlife Trusts projects, where simply having safe adults present in a park means that your little kids straight after primary school will go and play in it, because you are aware of it. It is not rocket science; we as a society are constraining ourselves with system and process.

Finally, we have been looking at 40 years of history of women in sport, and some of the initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s were amazing in allowing women from really poor backgrounds who had tiny babies or who were pregnant to use leisure facilities through the provision of crèches and women-only swimming. There was a massive campaign by the UK men's movement in 1998 to stop that in Nottinghamshire, with threats of legal action that it was sex discrimination. It was also held up by compulsory competitive tendering, meaning that free rooms provided for crèches needed to make money, and it was impeded by the fact that the women who were volunteering their time in the crèches now had to go through a check for criminal records or whatever it was, so they were bottom of the list. It is not that we do not know how to do this; it is about getting back to having the confidence to know that this is the right thing to do.



Chair: Last but not least, Rupa.

Q100 **Dr Rupa Huq:** I think you were all there when I asked this same question to the panel before. Figures from London Sport show that there is a lack of diversity in the volunteer workforce. What changes would you request of Government to get a wider range of people involved in coaching and that kind of thing?

Emily Robinson: One of the things is that sport is often left out of national skills schemes. Quite often in London, we hear that when it comes to providing training or skills to diverse groups, that might be in hospitality, stewarding or security. We very rarely hear about sport and the workforce behind it. It can be quite expensive to become a swimming teacher, and that is exactly the sort of thing where you can have a bursary. We understand that the GLA had bursary schemes to encourage more swimming teachers, particularly from ethnically diverse groups.

Building on one of the things that Steph said, we know that in terms of getting women to swim and getting people from ethnic groups to swim more, that relies on teachers and lifeguards from similar backgrounds to make it women-only. It is amazing how many times women-only swimming has a male lifeguard or does not have female teachers. So I think more could be done. That might be about national or even regional skills and training schemes to think about the sporting workforce on a broader scale—so coaches and volunteers, beyond just the coaching workforce.

There are other schemes for referees and officials, and all the infrastructure that goes behind these things, where, again, the numbers of people from black and Asian communities are incredibly low. It will be important to have things that reach out to those communities. If things can be sited in other places, such as in faith settings, it is much more likely that we would be able to attract people to go to those sessions to learn how to do it. Cost is always a huge factor as well.

Q101 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Yes—if you have nice parents that can drive you all around the country. It is socioeconomic, as well as about ethnicity.

Stephanie Hilborne: It is. There is a gender lens as well, because the data from Sport England shows that it is half and half for women and men volunteering, but when it comes to once a week, that drops down to 37% being women. That is also related to the historical stereotyping—the time that you spend washing up and doing everything at home, which is still far higher. I think we have some very inspiring examples of ethnic minority women who have taken up coaching sports that they never played to ensure that their girl had a chance to play football, because there was not a coach and they loved their football—from south Asian communities, from black communities with rugby for instance.

There are some incredibly driven women who, on top of a full-time job, are doing that to give their girls a chance. I think we are building the



inspiration among those girls and, on the positive side, the fourth year of our “Dream Deficit” survey showed that the percentage of girls who dream of reaching the top of a sport has finally gone up from nearly always around 30% to 38%. If those girls are saying, “We want it,” and those mothers are seeing it is not there, they are stepping in. It is quite inspiring to hear their stories.

Q102 Dr Rupa Huq: Yes. We discussed “Bend It Like Beckham” in the context of film on this Committee. That is a good 20-something years ago. If those people can now coach—

Emily Robinson: Yes. It is that point about trying to help inactive communities. If you do not have a sport or if you have not grown up in a sporty background, it is not obvious how you would become a volunteer or where you would go. It needs to become easier for people who are not thinking in a sport-specific lens, but are just thinking, “I would love to help my kids be more active,” or “I would like to help the community,” rather than, “Oh, I am a tennis player. I am going to go and become a tennis coach.” It is helpful when national governing bodies do things on a more multi-sport basis where you are looking at a skill, rather than how we get the next elite athlete of this generation.

Mark Lawrie: Our experience is that over 90% of the young people who get involved in volunteering in the local organisations we work with do so because the adult they trust in that organisation has asked them. The diversity of the volunteers that are around our locally trusted organisations is very strong, because over 50% of the leaders of the locally trusted organisations we work with are from different ethnic diverse backgrounds. So they see people that they want to be like, which I think we all recognise is really powerful in volunteering.

One of the things that has helped was something that the Government did a good few years ago. They introduced V as a volunteering scheme, where there was an opportunity for the corporate sector to match pound for pound with Government money. There was then an opportunity that we used to train up these local leaders in how to develop young people as volunteers.

They do not just know how to do it intuitively. Some people are very fortunate and they do, but if you are a coach, you maybe do not know how to develop a volunteering pathway for a young person you are working with. Investment in that capacity—so in the diverse leadership of community organisations to grow the future volunteer base—is the way that we have done it. We have worked with over 20,000 young people as volunteers over the last 15 years through those organisations we work with locally. I was away with them at our residential in October, and the diversity is still fantastic, but only because it is the local role models who are doing that work.

Anna Scott-Marshall: Role models are incredibly powerful. I think we see that with athletes and others going into community groups and into



schools. There is no doubt that improving the volunteer workforce in terms of number of disabled people would do that, too. Clearly the solutions to that are around ensuring that there is better understanding and good accessibility—some of those core principles that I have talked about today.

Q103 **Dr Rupa Huq:** A structured training route, that sort of stuff.

Stephanie Hilborne: Coming back to my previous life in the Wildlife Trusts movement, which is a massive volunteer force as well, the people who might volunteer are always out there. It is the culture, the connection and, as you say, the inspiration to go into it—having the capacity often in the voluntary sector to operate, so that those volunteers can be used and valuable to the community, is where the sticking point comes. I think with sport there are still some cultural issues.

With the volunteers that go in, if you go in as a woman you are often expected to make the tea, and not to be on the pitch. We still need to get over some of those things. It is not that the will is not there; I just think we need to make it a more attractive thing to do and make it feel like a positive experience. Investment in the likes of StreetGames and others is a way that we can really build that up, because we do have this incredible voluntary body infrastructure in this country. The voluntary sector is so epic, and if we support it properly, that interface with the individual volunteers is possible.

Q104 **Paul Waugh:** Emily, you have written powerfully about the difference between role models in general and parental role models. For example, your daughters became involved in football not because of the Lionesses, but because you were participating in football for the first time. If we had a Minister before us and we were making a recommendation, what sort of thing can we say to Ministers to ask, “How do we get more mums involved in sport so that then their daughters are going to get involved?”

Emily Robinson: Thinking about myself, I had never played football at all, and then I found myself the chief executive of London Sport and was invited to a staff match, and thought, “Well, I had better have a go.” I had my first go, and I had always been a football fan; I loved watching it. I then played and thought, “I have got it. I understand this,” and found a local club—I have to say, that was quite hard to find, although it did exist only a mile down the road from me—of other like-minded mums and older women who had not always grown up playing football, and I went there. That then inspired, particularly, my six-year-old, who is playing football now. She is not really interested in watching the Lionesses; I have tried to make her, and she is not interested. She wants to play, and she is much more interested in talking about how her mummy plays football. We have started on that journey together.

In speaking to a Government Minister, it is too easy to think that having a big event such as an Olympics or a World cup on its own will inspire people to get up and do things. I had watched the Lionesses; I thought it



was incredibly inspiring and never once thought it was for me. These were not 40-something women who were playing. They were elite athletes, and I did not see any connection there. What it took for me to play was an invitation, for someone to say, "Come and have a go," and for it to be incredibly casual, incredibly local and accessible. It is £1 a session. There are no rules, really—I mean, obviously there are a few rules.

Q105 **Mr James Frith:** Is it cage fighting or football?

Emily Robinson: No one has a whistle, there is no referee, it is self-regulated. People do not keep score, and it is a completely different atmosphere from what you might get from a competitive mixed or men-only five-a-side league. One of the challenges we have is how we get these women on the pitch. There are so few facilities and they are often block-booked by men's leagues. It is extremely hard to start. Those are the sorts of things we need. As Stephanie said, some of this is not rocket science or that hard. It is how we use what we have maybe in a slightly different way.

Stephanie Hilborne: It sounds like it is about joy.

Emily Robinson: It is a lot of fun.

Chair: Thank you all so much for joining us today. Can I ask you all before you go, did we drop the ball at all? Were there any questions that you hoped we would ask you or any points that you wanted to land that you did not manage to get across—no? Everybody is happy. In which case, thank you for your time and for sharing all your insight with us today. We are really grateful to you for sparing us so much of your morning to help us with our inquiry.