



HOUSE OF COMMONS

# Culture, Media and Sport Committee

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

Tuesday 22 April 2025

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Damian Hinds; Dr Rupa Huq; Natasha Irons; Tom Rutland; Paul Waugh.

Questions 106 - 164

### Witnesses

[I](#): Paige Cronje, Board Director, SportCheer England; Stewart Kellett, Chief Executive, Basketball England; Scott Lloyd, Chief Executive, Lawn Tennis Association.

[II](#): Jon Cockcroft, Chief Executive, Bowls England; Jordan Letts, Chief Executive, Northampton Saints Foundation; Kate Stephens, Chief Executive, Chance to Shine.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Paige Cronje, Stewart Kellett and Scott Lloyd.

Q106 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. Our first panel today will look at growth sports that have seen a rise in participation over the last few years, such as padel, cheerleading and basketball. We are going to explore the reasons behind the success of these sports and discuss what other sports can learn from them in order to have the maximum reach.

To talk us through all these things, I welcome Paige Cronje, board director of SportCheer England, Stewart Kellett, chief executive of Basketball England, and Scott Lloyd, chief executive of the Lawn Tennis Association. Welcome to you all. I remind Members to declare any interests before they ask their questions.

Paige, what is it about your sport that people find so attractive?

**Paige Cronje:** Cheerleading is a high-impact, high-performance sport that engages people of all ages: there are children as young as three all the way up to adults who are middle-aged and above. Everyone can be involved and engaged; cheerleading does not differentiate by size or ability. There is a mutually beneficial interest in having people within teams who are of different sizes. Because everybody plays a separate role within the team, it is one of the only sports where everybody on the team gets to play together every single time they perform. That makes it highly attractive for participants.

Q107 **Chair:** Scott, what do you think has helped fuel participation in your sport?

**Scott Lloyd:** In respect of padel, there are similar characteristics. It is a very simple game to play, with a very sociable format. Physically, the court is of a relatively small scale, and it is surrounded by transparent walls, which means that it is much easier to keep the ball in play. In terms of attracting new, diverse audiences to pick up a bat and a ball and hit that ball over the net, it is one of the simplest things to pick up, whether you are young or old. My partner and I have four kids, aged nine through 15, but they can play a game together, competitively or otherwise, which they might not be able to do at tennis, say, which is a much harder technical sport.

Q108 **Chair:** It sounds as if both of your sports and activities are tapping into a wide range of demographics, which may be the secret of your success. Is it the same with basketball, Stewart?

**Stewart Kellett:** Very much so. This might be a surprising statistic, but basketball is the second biggest team sport in the country. We might not get the profile of some of the bigger sports, but at a community level it is thriving. It is a very diverse sport, probably the most diverse in the country. That has a huge impact on participation, because people who perhaps would not see themselves in the sport can see themselves playing: people like them play that sport.



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The stress ball I am holding up is a basketball—it has passed security, by the way. This applies to a lot of ball sports, so we are in good company here: at its most basic, if you think about a family situation with an infant or a toddler in the room, and as a parent, carer or grandparent you have rolled the ball to them for the first time, the reaction from the child would be to grab it, reach for it and move for it. The desire to move and have fun with the ball is immense.

Basketball, at its simplest, is a ball and a space. The people in the game, the clubs and the governing body have seen that you do not have to have a formal environment. You do not have to have extreme elite environments. You can have a ball and a space in a garden, a street, a park, an open space, a school playground or a village hall. It does not matter what the dimensions are; people can play ball and you can construct the basics of basketball in that space.

There are a few things to back up how powerful it is. We have looked at all those movement skills and have worked with Sheffield Hallam and the education sector. We have just created a curriculum that replicates the fun of playing basketball—playing ball in an open space. It is called slam jam, and it is curriculum compliant. It is all about physical movement, hand-eye co-ordination, having fun with the ball and all the things that go with moving, chasing, bouncing and throwing the ball. That would be an amazing physical literacy programme to boost the sport even further. The participation rates are growing and it is good, but we can take that physical literacy to another level with a simple game called basketball in a school or community environment.

The other thing with the game is the structure of it. You do not just stop playing when you complete a game. The game is in four quarters—there is also a new form of the game called 3x3, which perhaps we will talk about this afternoon—so there are breaks for fan engagement. There are time-outs that provide more breaks for fan engagement. Young people can get involved and do some practice on the courts in between sessions. There is music, and it is linked with fashion. It is a lifestyle sport, and people see other people play and dress in a certain way. There is a big American influence. It is just so cool to associate with basketball, not just playing but as a fan and follower.

Another really interesting phenomenon is the online engagement from young people. It is a predominantly a young sport: four fifths of the people who play are under 16. Their online engagement and their ability to extract and share clips that clubs can then accentuate, is massive. We have locked on to that by elevating those clips and those community games, even though it is at a local level.

I think this is really important for the Government and this Committee to think about: our prediction is that in five years' time, even at a local club level, if young people cannot extract parts of the game, see themselves in it and share the joy of playing, competing, winning and losing, they will choose not to play that sport or will choose other things. We think that technology, the social connection with digital and the accessibility of



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basketball all fuse with fashion to make an amazing sport. That is why it is growing.

Q109 **Chair:** You are a very good salesman for it—I like it.

Scott, you talked about padel in particular having a wide appeal. Is there a specific demographic that you are seeing padel appeal to?

**Scott Lloyd:** As I am sure you are familiar with, tennis is one of the most gender-balanced sports that you can play. At a young age, it tends to be about 51% boys and 49% girls, so it is entirely balanced. Through the sport of tennis, and then through padel, you tend to see a slight migration towards about 60% male and 40% female at older ages. You see that through all demographics, particularly those that might not originally have perceived tennis to be for them.

Padel is seeing enormous interest, but it is still at the very early stages of development. The private commercial sector has done a good job of developing facilities, alongside the LTA, but one of the most important things now is to consider how we can grow high-quality, accessible community facilities. We have something like 800 courts in Britain now, versus 16,000 or so in Spain; we have 400,000 people playing, versus some 6 million in Spain. There is a huge growth opportunity in padel in this country.

Q110 **Chair:** Novak Djokovic has warned that club tennis is endangered by the rise of padel. Do you agree? How you are balancing the needs of tennis, preserving the core of your traditional game while growing the huge potential of padel?

**Scott Lloyd:** We have seen huge growth in tennis participation over the last seven or eight years. In fact, since 2019, we have grown from some 3.9 million adults playing tennis to 5.6 million, on top of the 400,000 I referred to in padel. We have 3.8 million children playing tennis each year, which is some 40% of the population.

That has been achieved through having a whole sport strategy, a vision and a line of one through the sport. It concentrates first and foremost on the supply side: access to high-quality community facilities and growing the workforce, whether that be coach, activator or volunteer-led, as well as ultimately the programmes that give opportunities to play.

On the demand side, it is very much about growing the visibility of the sport, which includes investing in our major events and the inspirational moments that our elite players at the top of the game are providing for the fanbase. It is also about the communication and the digital tools, which are very similar to what has been described in basketball. Helping the public to find a court, book a court and find someone to play with—it is the simplest things that are helping to drive that volume of activity and that growth.

Q111 **Damian Hinds:** Hello, everybody, and thank you for joining this Committee today. You have had a lot of growth in your sports. Could each of you say what is holding you back? What are the barriers to further



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growth? Bear in mind that this is a Committee of Parliament, so we are in the business of making recommendations to the Government. Is there anything that you would like us to recommend that you think could unlock further growth?

**Paige Cronje:** I will go first. The key thing for SportCheer England is that cheerleading was only recognised as a sport last month in the UK. That means that the sport has been hindered. In addition, until SportCheer England is the recognised national governing body for cheerleading in the UK, ultimately there will be a big gap and barrier in the funding that is available for the sport. The majority of clubs are self-funded or volunteer-led, which means that we are hindering the growth and the development of the sport by not investing in the people. By its very nature, a sport relies on people's good nature to grow.

Additionally, access to facilities is insufficient at the moment. There are a number of clubs in the country that operate out of shared spaces and facilities. There are a handful of clubs that also have what we would call gyms or cheer gyms, which are essentially warehouses that have been converted into a specialised training space and equipped with mats, sprung flooring and safety equipment. However, rent is extremely high in the south of England, and finding a landlord who will allow that to happen in a warehouse that they could operate commercially in a different way is a significant challenge. That means that there is a disparity between the north of England and the south of England.

Access to funding and capital grants for clubs will definitely improve access to those spaces, because we will be able to create more dedicated spaces. Partnerships or having access to funding for schools and universities could enable satellite clubs. Utilising those venues outside traditional hours will also support that.

The key thing for the growth of the sport is that 96% of participants in cheerleading are female, and the majority of them are below the age of 18. I myself own a cheerleading club within the UK. We have a partnership with the Radcliffe school in Milton Keynes, and we have used cheerleading to help improve the behaviour and wellbeing of students. There are 82 students who participate in the after-school club in the secondary school. It is the largest after-school club the school has, which is very surprising considering that it has a variety of traditional sports, and it has a female club, which is the largest in the school.

That is a very simple example that shows that when children are given access to a sport that they enjoy, we can improve their behaviour and wellbeing. A number of those children might not be able to afford to access the sport outside school. If you take that scenario and roll it out across the country in pilots, that is a scheme that could be accessible to people.

Additionally, we have worked with the school to create a junior leadership programme. A number of those students have also gone through additional training to support them. The teachers in the school have



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undergone additional training. That means that the sport is sustainable within the programme, and it helps our club to create connections between local clubs and schools. There is still some work to do, because we have to bridge the gap between being an after-school club and an outside-school activity, but ultimately it helps to improve and actively engage more people in it. We are seeing that those numbers will grow this September when there is a new intake of students.

**Damian Hinds:** Thank you, Paige. Scott, I think the Chair would want me to ask that we keep things moving at a clip.

**Scott Lloyd:** I will do my very best. I want to focus on two things. First, we have enjoyed an investment through the UK Government and the LTA Tennis Foundation in transforming park tennis courts across the country, which has led to some £30 million for the refurbishment of just over 3,000 courts across Britain. That investment is swiftly followed up with activation programmes such as Barclays big tennis weekends, local tennis leagues and free park tennis. That is driving exceptional results.

The next stage of that programme is the ability for us to invest in very simple, cost-effective, covered community tennis, padel and multi-sport hubs. We have the turnkey solutions available. We have the team in place. We have demonstrated it over the last two years in respect of the parks project, and the opportunity to do that and continue to grow multi-sport and community hubs through tennis and padel is there.

The second thing is LTA Youth Schools. Over the last four years, we have trained 27,000 teachers, and not just PE teachers, in the school environment to deliver what we are referring to as the national curriculum for tennis. It is all based on physical literacy: skills for tennis, rather than tennis skills, that are just as replicable in and relevant to other sports. That is delivering outstanding results, whether it is in respect of pupils' confidence, their aspirations or academic application.

The platform is there for delivery at scale. We work through school games organisers, which works very well, but additional Government support and a greater level of investment that enables local engagement and collaboration to co-ordinate school activity both in and outside the school and the links into local facilities can drive outstanding results. We have the data to demonstrate that.

**Stewart Kellett:** I echo what has been said in the last two or three minutes about infrastructure, local support and multi-sport environments.

If you talk to our massive club network, the community organisations involved in basketball and the parents of the young players, they will say the same thing. It is about access to facilities, affordability and the ability of clubs to be more resourceful. Ten years ago, you could be an amateur or voluntary sports club and get by. Now, you have to be very creative. There is something about supporting a club network on a different level that the Government could think about. That is really important.



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Access to facilities is particularly acute in basketball because 99% of basketball clubs do not own a facility. They have to pay out every time. They have to pay for hiring a sports hall, school facility or college facility. We are very dependent on the education sector: 70% of that 99% is in a school environment.

I am sure you have heard this before in evidence hearings. This is not the same across the country—there are some very positive environments in schools and colleges—but there is a definite trend that needs to be reversed, or at least checked, around letting agents. The financial pressures on schools mean that they are not quite as connected on the whole. I am generalising here, but—I think you have heard this before—the connection into the club environment, the community and the very pupils who these clubs serve starts to suffer, because there is a view about not necessarily letting out the facility to the local clubs that support the local community. If they do, the costs are going up. The clubs report every year in our surveys that that is becoming a bigger problem, so something to reverse that would be really helpful.

There are lots of things the Government could do that will not necessarily cost a ton of money. Community asset transfer has been around for a long while, but it is pretty tricky to negotiate. We are advising a number of clubs at the moment. One club, the Croydon Cougars, is looking at some sort of transfer of ownership at the moment so that the club can have the keys, a summer maintenance agreement and some way of responding to a regular, accessible and affordable environment. That is happening all over the country with a number of basketball clubs at the moment. That could be simplified and incentivised so we can do a lot more of it. It would mean that you would not have to build new; it would be about refurbishing or releasing existing facilities. That would be huge.

Another thing is about clubs getting support at a local level and having routes into schools. Over the past decade, if you look at a community sports club, people have had different views of it. Some people might think that it is an elite club or that it is not for people who are disadvantaged or need help. In basketball, that could not be further from the truth. The value of a club needs to be re-emphasised. It is free labour. Clubs do amazing things beyond their sport; they are very resourceful and they hold the hand of a young person on a lifetime journey through their experience in basketball. The same applies to other sports. There is something about resourcing the sports club.

I have mentioned the evolution of the outdoor courts, but I think there is a revolution for Government to stimulate. We have examples now of 50 court refurbishments that have cost anything from a few thousand pounds to £50,000, where you have glorious spaces that have become safe and really attractive for local people to play in.

**Q112 Damian Hinds:** Fantastic—thank you. Scott, can I ask you specifically about padel? The LTA has taken the decision to have the same governing body for your primary sport, tennis, and its No. 1 competitor, padel. What pros and cons of that decision did you consider at the time?



**Scott Lloyd:** I would not say that padel is necessarily a competitor; in fact, I would say that they are entirely complementary. For example, we see use cases of padel courts enabling lapsed tennis players—people who played tennis a long time ago but have not played for a while—to come back into venues that sit alongside tennis venues, pick up a racquet and ball and play again. Often, those uses are complementary, so they will also pick up tennis again. We need to ensure that those venues are financially sustainable and can continue to reinvest in their own facilities and to grow their infrastructure and programmes.

We are seeing that padel can attract both new and diverse audiences who perhaps would never have had the courage to pick up a tennis racquet, or would not have thought that that format of the sport was for them. It is also enabling those who are in tennis to stay in tennis for longer, particularly as perhaps their mobility or their movement starts to become hampered as they get older. Those two formats of the sport fit in a very complementary fashion and allow us to use our scale, infrastructure and expertise to penetrate all those different segments—demographical or age—to grow activity overall.

Q113 **Damian Hinds:** The point about being able to play it later in life, compared with tennis, is quite important. I am not sure it is that well understood widely. People who are in tennis already probably understand it, but what marketing is going on to reach people who have not been playing active sport for some time?

**Scott Lloyd:** Because it is at such an early stage of development, the first thing we had to do was concentrate on the supply side, so building up the number of courts available for players to play on. We have gone from 50 or so courts just five years ago, to some 850 now, broadly speaking. The next stage is to develop a workforce, particularly a coach workforce, which allows players to enter into the game and learn their skills. Now, it is very much about the programming and investing in the visibility and marketing of the sport, and trying to make sure that we have the publicly accessible facilities to allow anyone to pick up a bat and try to play padel.

Q114 **Damian Hinds:** Is there not still a shortage of indoor tennis courts in this country? I do not know what the numbers are, but it feels that way, compared with other European countries and elsewhere. I know that in 2019, the LTA had a big, ambitious programme to build a lot more, but I am not sure how many have been built. It is not something we hear a lot about at the moment, because all the talk is about padel. Is there still a shortage, and is there a danger that all the capex goes into padel courts rather than into indoor tennis courts, which we still need more of?

**Scott Lloyd:** You are absolutely right. In 2019, we did a top-down assessment of all the covered tennis court provision in Britain. We identified that there were 96 locations in which you could not access indoor or covered tennis on a pay-as-you-play basis within a 20 or 30-minute drive of where you live; that is 20 minutes in an urban location, and 30 in a rural area, to allow for the extra drive time. Of those locations, 72 were in England, 12 were in Scotland and 12 were in Wales. Then covid



hit, and our focus pivoted towards protecting the existing indoor court stock that we had, which is around 54 community indoor tennis centres. We invested then into the park facilities programme, which has been delivered at pace and with outstanding results. The next part of our plan is to go back to those known gaps in covered provision. We have used the time to establish this low-cost, scalable canopy facility to cover tennis, padel and multi-sport courts in one span—in one structure—on a highly replicable basis over existing facilities. That is where I believe we can have the biggest impact quickest in terms of both covered tennis and community-accessible padel courts.

**Q115 Paul Waugh:** One of the beauties of each of the sports we have talked about, whether it is padel, cheerleading or basketball, is that they are grassroots, have grown organically and have come from the people, yet each of you have talked about the importance of reflecting that in schools in a more formal way. Can we drill down a little bit further? Scott, you said that the LTA has 50% reach into schools. What more could Government do to make sure you got into the 50% you are not reaching at the moment?

**Scott Lloyd:** What we would love to work with Government on and see happen is reform of PE, so that we could guarantee for each child, with equal access, two hours of sport and PE across the week. That links with investment in the local workforce, whether through the old school sport partnership model or the SGO structure that exists right now. That would allow engagement and collaboration at the local level to be amplified, and if you use it correctly, it works, but it is too inconsistent across the country. That is where I believe we could have the biggest impact in the shortest possible timeframe. The national governing bodies have the wherewithal within that structure to drive activity, but it needs the support of the workforce.

**Q116 Paul Waugh:** Stewart, let me ask you the same question. Have you seen any specific examples in basketball of where a school has really engaged with the local popularity of the sport, and put it at the centre of what it does in PE?

**Stewart Kellett:** I agree; everything that Scott has just said from a tennis perspective translates to basketball. The difference is that we do not have the same capacity as tennis, so any help that the governing body could get to improve our capacity and reach would be brilliant. The impact that we could make is huge.

One of the things that we would love to do, and get support in, is extend our junior NBA. The NBA is the biggest basketball organisation in the world. We have a brilliant partnership with them. We work with 720 schools; each school adopts an NBA team, and the NBA sponsors that team in terms of giving the school all the playing kit. We have some basic lesson programmes that go with it, and we inspire kids. We fill them full of joy relating to what is going on in America with their NBA team. They translate that into a lesson. They play locally at their school and in their local club, if they have a local club. Then we have a district competition, and they all come together and celebrate basketball. If we could extend



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that, that would inspire kids with very little hope to become individuals who can dream about what is possible.

That is just one example. The other thing that I mentioned at the opening of this hearing was the idea of physical literacy. We are happy to be very unselfish; it is a brilliant programme that could be put through all primary schools. You do not have to be an expert coach; it is very basic physical literacy. It would be brilliant for basketball, but it would help all kids to move, get confident and have fun getting movement skills. That would be a good basis for developing PE.

On the PE front, it is still a mystery, with the emergence in the last 10 years of things like autism, other learning difficulties and neurodiversity, that you hear of teachers putting coping skills and a scaffold around learning. If you brought PE into the foreground and gave people all those physical activity opportunities and all that learning, that would be part of the solution for all the other learning elements that are difficult. It is bemusing that that has not come to the fore before now. That is something that the Government should really think about.

**Q117 Paul Waugh:** Paige, cheerleading in particular is really unique in capturing and retaining girls' interest in sport, just at the age when a lot of them fall out of love with sport. In my area, there is a local dance troupe, the K Stars. They do morris dancing, but have elements of cheerleading and are very popular as a result. What more can we do specifically in schools to help with cheerleading?

**Paige Cronje:** The key thing is that we need to give schools and clubs the funding needed to create partnerships. Something as simple as giving SportCheer England the capacity and facility to connect clubs with schools in their area on a programme will very much enhance things, and that could happen very quickly. We have clubs that want to do it and want to grow participation, and we have schools that want to do it.

I talked earlier about a school that was doing cheerleading. It just so happened that I saw on Facebook that they were doing cheerleading in PE, and contacted the school to say, "We want to help you do it properly." We have children who want to do it, and the rise of technology and the internet has made it much more accessible. We need to be able to train teachers from primary to secondary so that they can deliver it as part of their PE curriculum and work alongside clubs to help to grow participation at a very practical level. That programme is something that could be rolled out across the country to get more people engaged in it.

**Q118 Natasha Irons:** Thank you all for attending today. On developing your sports and creating opportunities for young people outside school, we have heard evidence on inter sport competitions being on the decline. What are your thoughts on how that impacts the growth of your sports, and what we could do to drive them again? By inter sport competitions, I mean where you have one school versus another. Stewart was talking about how you are doing that in basketball. How can we do that in other areas as well?



**Paige Cronje:** One of the key pieces to that is, again, the funding. If you think about cheerleading, we could actually partner very easily with basketball; Stewart talked about the breaks in basketball, so we could very much host shared activities. However, until we have the funding and organisations to facilitate that, it is very difficult to do. Asking sports to partner with one another, without the framework and the funding to do so, is quite challenging. Actually, we all want the same thing here: we want to both get more people active and safeguard them by improving the physical and mental wellbeing of our communities. Whether that drives my sport or someone else's, we want to work together collaboratively. If there are opportunities to do that, I would welcome them, and I am sure both Scott and Stewart would say the same.

**Scott Lloyd:** Yes. From a tennis perspective, our inter-school competition format is called Team Challenge. We know that at those young ages, girls and boys are happy to compete together, and it is about creating that team environment—it is much less individual at the younger ages. One of the challenges about inter-school competition is the travel and the logistics of schools organising bodies of children to travel. Being able to create almost festivals of sport, where you can bring girls and boys of different age groups together to play in that team format, is vital. We have actually seen record numbers growth through Team Challenge, but it takes a lot of hard work and infrastructure to help with the practical logistics and to enable and support schools to be able to address those.

**Stewart Kellett:** I echo what has been said, and it would all help basketball as well. There is the emergence of a fairly new three-a-side format called 3x3, which has become very popular in the school environment. The Youth Sport Trust reported that it is emerging as one of the most popular team sports. The nice thing about it—this is before it gets too competitive toward the talent and elite end—is it is at the local school level, and because of the nature of it, you can choose your friends. A lot of people who are hesitant about sport but want to get into it and build their confidence say, "I don't want to compete and play with people I don't know." There is a friendship element to the format that we are promoting, which I think is really paying dividends. People are choosing their friends and enjoying it more, and at a certain level of competition, that is partly what it is also about. There is real evidence that, if you get your format right and you get the environment right, with the correct level of competition and fun, you can make a huge difference, and the Youth Sport Trust is key to that for us.

Q119 **Natasha Irons:** I want to look at how we strengthen the pathways from school clubs to community clubs. You have mentioned a lot about funding and facilities, and we also touched on leasing space as a barrier. What more can we do to strengthen those pathways from not only local clubs but schools, so that there is much more of a flow between community and school space?

**Paige Cronje:** One of the things that a lot of cheerleading clubs do across the country is host school teams in their gyms; I have done that as well. For example, a lot of schools have days off in their timetables, such as



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every half-term. We often invite clubs into our facility, if we have one, and it is important for clubs to have that opportunity to do so. A reason why a number of clubs do not do it comes back to funding. Ultimately, if you do not have the funding to do it, it is quite difficult to do. A number of schools would benefit from being able to take them on an off-site day to a cheerleading facility, particularly if there is specialised training equipment, because that means that they are able to experience and access the sport in a slightly different way to how they would on site at their school.

Again, it leads back to the festival idea. One of the things that we are looking at with a number of schools in Milton Keynes is how we host a schools festival with the other schools in the area. Essentially, at the moment, there is not a cheerleading league at a city level, but with the right framework, that could become quite sustainable, because there is the opportunity for clubs to come together. Without competing, it is more about improving body confidence. We talked about the idea of people wanting to do it with friends, but actually for teenage girls, competing against teenage boys is quite a barrier to them wanting to do it, so we have to do some work first where they are confident and comfortable enough to do that. That does not happen overnight, but with the right guidance and training, as well as the additional support that happens outside the club with mentoring, over the next number of years there is the opportunity and capacity for that to happen.

**Scott Lloyd:** I would mention two things. First, when we train a teacher in a school through LTA Youth Schools, that also comes with a voucher from the LTA Tennis Foundation for £250 to invest in equipment or 10 hours of support from an LTA-accredited coach. That enables the teacher to become more confident in their ability to deliver physical literacy activity in the school environment. It does not require a court, by the way; it can be delivered in any space. It also increases the links between schools and the local venues in which the coaches tend to operate.

Secondly, it is very dependent on workforce, which is why we are investing so significantly in training an activator workforce, which is effectively volunteers supporting programmes like free park tennis, which enables that journey from the school environment into the publicly accessible facilities that we have created in parks to deliver programmes, whether they be competitive based or simply based on picking up a racquet and starting to learn to play.

Lastly, we have a programme called LTA SERVES, which works out of 850 venues across the country, targeted in IMD 1 to 4 locations, targeting underserved and under-represented communities. We work with local trusted organisations to deliver a format of the sport, a format of tennis, in local clubs, youth clubs and faith centres so that, again, the sport becomes a sport for anybody in those local communities. It starts at school, but it is delivered out through parks and other forms of community venue.

**Stewart Kellett:** Where the school-club connection works best is if you have a resident sports club based at that school. Obviously you have



access to facilities, but also you get a relationship between the volunteer base, the coaches and the school staff, and the trust just builds. There are some great examples, such as Ipswich Basketball and Copleston high school. They are resident there and they do many good things for the school and the community base from there. The City of London academy in Southwark does some brilliant work. There is another brilliant example at Whalley Range in Manchester with Manchester Mystics; they are resident and it works because the trust, the connection and the respect from the pupils is very visible. That does not cost the Government much money at all. If we could have a directive that drives the change, that is a very cost-effective option.

The other thing to mention, beyond what has been highlighted already, is maybe more trust in clubs. Maybe the governing bodies should do more here. These are good, accredited clubs with qualified coaches. They have gone through all sorts of safeguarding, screening, training and support. They are very effective operators. They are very good at working with young people and they should be trusted by schools and teachers. Maybe we can do a little bit more and maybe the Government can help from the other end to promote schools to trust clubs that are ready, willing and able to work with schoolchildren.

**Q120 Natasha Irons:** To wrap it up, on that point, how are you promoting that link and making clubs and schools talk to each other? What are you doing to facilitate that conversation between them, if anything? It is not necessarily all on your shoulders, but how are you doing it?

**Stewart Kellett:** One of our most trusted routes is through the Youth Sport Trust because they are totally across the school network, and I had complete respect from that end. We are going to do a lot more through that network because there is so much more ground we can make up. We have a relationship with hundreds of schools through our history and the programmes that we have done, and we are building on that. Breaking new ground is important. That is probably behind your question. I think the idea of promoting accredited, safe and ready clubs is part of that. The whole endorsement and recognition that sports clubs are amazing resources for schools is something we could all do, including the Government.

**Q121 Tom Rutland:** My questions follow on from previous ones around enhancing community provision of growth sports to under-represented groups. Scott and Paige, you both spoke about diversity and growth in your respective sports. There are cost barriers associated with padel and cheer. To what extent does that prevent those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds from enjoying the sport?

**Scott Lloyd:** As I mentioned earlier, given padel's early stage of development, the private sector has taken a great lead in developing facilities, but the watch-out for that is that we need also to ensure that we continue to develop publicly accessible community facilities for padel as well in order to unlock that opportunity.



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One of the key aspects of the park tennis project was that the only condition on local authorities in respect of receiving those moneys for those facilities was to ensure that they were able to maintain a sinking fund for their maintenance. It is about having no or very low-cost facilities but ensuring that they can be maintained over the long term. Exactly the same model can exist for these community covered tennis, padel and multi-sport facilities. It is about making sure that they are as available as possible to under-represented groups as well as to those who have a disability or who need extra support in getting themselves to a court.

We absolutely believe that we can help the Government to drive long-term benefits to physical and mental health and wellbeing, as well as to community cohesion, through the multi-sport hubs. It needs a central strategy from the Government as well as local delivery plans on the ground to help to activate it and to transform communities through sport.

Q122 **Tom Rutland:** Do you think hiring costs are too high for the end user?

**Scott Lloyd:** Not through this model. That is the beauty of the park tennis project as a great case study: it demonstrates how you can have quality local facilities at no or low cost, maintained over the long term and activated through the workforce. It is the same for Free Parks Tennis and the activator-led programmes that I have talked about, and exactly the same model can exist through covered community sports hubs.

**Paige Cronje:** Cheerleading is available from recreational level all the way up to elite pathways and our Team England representatives as well. That means that it is accessible at a variety of price points, depending on what you would like to be involved in. However, the lack of funding for cheerleading is what makes it so expensive. As a gym owner, if you cannot access funding, the only way to generate that funding is from membership fees, and therefore you have to charge higher membership fees to cover that cost. There are a number of gyms that offer scholarships, but the majority of those are self-funded; the gym has members that apply for that. Should cheerleading be recognised by Sport England, we could make cheerleading cheaper, particularly if the Government help us to create more cheerleading spaces.

Those spaces will be shared. University cheerleading is on the rise and is very popular. Groups from a number of universities attend an all-star cheerleading gym. They train within that space and they share coaching facilities to help the university athletes to progress. They also partner with other schools. With extra funding, we could bring the costs down and we could make it more sustainable. If we had additional facilities, we could share those facilities.

To engage under-represented groups, we need to train more staff within that demographic, because generally people who want to participate in sport tend to participate by what they see. If they do not see somebody that looks like them, they can be quite reluctant to want to participate in a sport because it is very difficult if the sport does not look like them. We have a responsibility to make all sports more diverse so that everybody

feels that they can participate in them. By making it more accessible, we have the capacity to do that.

Q123 **Tom Rutland:** I am interested in what you were saying earlier about the costs, particularly in the south-east, of the available space and the use of warehouses. I have met a gymnastics organisation—I represent a constituency on the south coast—and that was a challenge that it highlighted to me. You have talked about the cost of the space, but I presume the fees that you then have to pass on—the membership fees, the club fees—are much higher in the south.

**Paige Cronje:** They are.

Q124 **Tom Rutland:** Does that result in a different income demographic participating in cheerleading in the south?

**Paige Cronje:** Definitely. I have also met a number of directors of gymnastics clubs who have a similar challenge to what we have. If we think about especially the concentration between London and surrounding areas, the fees that are charged within this specific space are significantly higher than what they can charge in the north-east, and people wanting to engage in the sport are disadvantaged by that.

Additionally, there are some areas where, to be honest, even finding a space to do that means that they are paying double the cost to a landlord just to find a space to train. That is not what we want to be able to achieve. We could be utilising alternative spaces. In a new city—for example, I am from Milton Keynes—that is quite difficult, because there are not as many disused spaces. I have met some gym owners in Nottingham, for example, where there are a number of empty buildings they could regenerate.

There are two issues. In some cities, we could regenerate empty buildings which are not being used if the ceiling is high enough. I know some gyms that even train in an old church and have converted that into a cheerleading gym. It is battling with a landlord over a warehouse versus turning a church into a cheerleading gym. We have to be creative and resourceful. There is the capacity to do that, but ultimately across the country there is a significant disparity between the costings being charged. The Government could do something to help with that in particular and to make it more accessible.

Q125 **Tom Rutland:** Briefly, to each of you and maybe to Stewart first, what changes need to happen to unleash the full potential of community provision of your sports, particularly for under-represented groups?

**Stewart Kellett:** I am afraid it is down to affordability. That sounds like raw money, but I think we have given examples today where you can convert access in school, college and educational environments. I think you could do more on letting agencies and maybe think about transferring that to community sports hubs that can be trusted, because I think they can be fabulous assets for the school and community. I think we need centrally driven programmes—I know it is a difficult time to ask



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Government and taxpayers for more money, but if there are going to be funds into sport, there are three or four things in this debate today that all overlap to say, "Focus your money on three or four things that make the biggest difference for access for deprived communities and the rest will start to build around that." That would be focusing on the inequalities and on the evidence we are giving, and narrowing that down for some deeper solutions.

**Scott Lloyd:** I would repeat much of what has been said. I think we as national governing bodies have the power to help to unleash the potential that sport has and to transform communities at a local level. What we really need is a cross-party strategy for sport and greater join-up across Government—not just through DCMS, but through all the various Departments that can help support this end outcome and ambition.

The two things are, first, that central investment into facilities from Government is vital. We believe we have a role to play that can complement the pitch-based investment through the Football Foundation through court-based investment, potentially through the LTA Tennis Foundation, which will help to grow tennis, padel and multi-sport areas. The second is a reform of PE and school sport to help to tackle inactivity among children, because we know the long-term benefits that that can have for our population.

Q126 **Tom Rutland:** Can I ask you one more question? Earlier you said that padel has people playing it who would not consider tennis to be for them. Which demographic groups in particular are taking up padel?

**Scott Lloyd:** We refer to tennis as a long adoption sport. It is quite a technical sport that you have to start at a relatively young age in order to develop your skills—albeit there are a number of disability programmes, all the way through to walking tennis, on which we partner with Age UK and others. Padel is becoming a chosen sport by those who would historically never have had the opportunity to pick up a racquet and play tennis. We are trying to change that in tennis, but padel is providing a simple, social format that is attracting people to play in that easier environment. It is much easier to pick up and to play. It levels the abilities of those who are picking up a racquet for the first time and those who have played many times before. Those are the specific characteristics of padel that are helping to increase attractiveness to perhaps some of those more under-represented groups.

**Paige Cronje:** There are two key things. The first, as I spoke about earlier, is around the facilities and helping to make them accessible. By its very nature, doing that will increase participation and grow the sport significantly. The second really does sit with the schools. If we can train young leaders within schools and teachers from primary to secondary in how to teach cheerleading, that makes PE more accessible for more people. Using more unconventional sports to get people more active has a significant appeal to a variety of people. Training teachers and partnering them with local clubs makes the sport more sustainable in the long term,



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because schools can then become self-sufficient, and they have a resource to help them to grow and develop their knowledge in the long term.

**Scott Lloyd:** There is one thing that I omitted to say; perhaps it is obvious, but I say it for the sake of completeness. Because in padel the private sector has led some of the growth in infrastructure to date, by definition, it has perhaps targeted the wealthier socioeconomic areas. The job, in respect of public, community and accessible facilities, is about going to more underserved communities, perhaps those with a specific weighting towards IMD 1 to 4. That is our responsibility: to try to ensure that padel, as a sport, is a total cross-demographic opportunity.

Q127 **Tom Rutland:** Do you see people picking up padel and then moving on to play tennis as well, perhaps those who would never have considered playing tennis in the first instance?

**Scott Lloyd:** Yes. As I say, they are complementary on multiple levels, whether it is lapsed tennis players picking up padel, or attracting people who would never have played tennis, and then sharing those experiences. Typically, playing any one thing all the time is hard; doing nothing but going for a run all the time is also hard. Giving people the opportunity to pick something up, put it down and try different things is what ultimately drives retention and greater long-term levels of activity.

Q128 **Chair:** Scott, for local tennis clubs that are in less wealthy areas of the country, which would love to install padel facilities but do not have the right finances, do you have a pot of cash that they can bid into for that purpose?

**Scott Lloyd:** No. Our facility investment for the sport is driven through the LTA Tennis Foundation, which is an independent charity and is independent from the LTA. We welcome applications from tennis venues across the country that have plans to increase the infrastructure of tennis or padel. We provide what we refer to as quick-access loans to help to support venues to do that. Those moneys are relatively limited and are targeted more at existing registered venues.

Separate to that, the LTA Tennis Foundation has supported, with its own investment, the UK Government's investment in the parks investment project. There was £22 million committed from the Government and the LTA Tennis Foundation ultimately put in about £14 million, but that project has also helped to unlock approximately a further £10 million of investment from local authorities through—potentially, for example—locked section 106 contributions from other developments. Overall, that has seen an investment in sports facilities in parks of about £45 million. That is an example of how the LTA Tennis Foundation would partner in helping to refurbish or develop sports infrastructure in tennis and padel.

Q129 **Chair:** Before I let you go, Stewart, I would like to ask you one final question. You will be aware that the Sports Minister asked UK Sport to investigate allegations against the British Basketball Federation relating to the operation of a new men's professional league, and the super league basketball clubs opposed that. I am interested to hear your perspective on



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whether and to what extent that dispute might impact the grassroots game.

**Stewart Kellest:** I think that at a grassroots level, it is probably minimal in the short term. We are working with the commercial sector and talking to a number of brands, and thankfully, a lot of those brands are interested in the democratic effect of things such as outdoor provision and local people finding great places to play, and elevating those. There is a big interest from the commercial sector in investing locally in grassroots sport.

However, any dispute in any sport, at a national or international level, puts a little bit of a cloud on the sport. I will be really frank about it: it isn't helpful, but I know there are meetings in the next two weeks to try to bring the parties together to find a route through it. At the end of the day, the pro league needs new investment, and the governing body at the British level is doing its best to leverage new investment for the game.

**Chair:** Thank you all for joining us today. You are great advocates for your sports. We will all go off now to try cheerleading, padel and basketball—at various levels. If there is anything that we did not ask you, or anything that you think of afterwards that you would like to send in to the Committee, please feel free to do so. It has been lovely to meet you all. We will take a quick break while we bring in our second panel and let you guys flee. Thank you.

### Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Jon Cockcroft, Jordan Letts and Kate Stephens.

Q130 **Chair:** Welcome to our second panel, which is focused on the role of sports-specific initiatives that target under-represented groups, and how they can have the maximum impact across our communities. We are joined by Jon Cockcroft, who is the chief executive of Bowls England, Kate Stephens, who is the chief executive of Chance to Shine, and Jordan Letts, the chief executive of the Northampton Saints Foundation, which is for rugby. Thank you all so much for joining us today. I am going to kick off questions, starting with Jon. Older generations experience many social, health and wellbeing benefits from bowls—we all experience that in our own communities—but what challenges are you facing in developing that grassroots sport for older generations?

**Jon Cockcroft:** Absolutely. We are so proud that, as a sport, we add life to years and years to life. We are in a really positive place because, after a generation of decline and the impact of covid, we are seeing growth. Participation has increased by 5% over the last few years, so it is a really positive picture. Fundamentally, we are changing a sport that is intrinsically accessible. It is very doable; anyone can play bowls. It is very cheap; it only costs about 30p an hour to play bowls. There are clubs absolutely everywhere. There are 5,400 clubs, so it is very accessible.



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I guess the key challenge the sport faces is that the funding for sports that older people play is relatively limited. I absolutely understand the importance of getting younger people to play sport, which is critical in terms of developing lifetime habits, but relatively speaking we are underfunded. Bowls plc has £3 million at the governing body level, so effectively we have around £75 for every club across the country, and we can only afford six development officers. One development officer for every 900 clubs is slightly challenging in terms of creating a habit change and a behavioural change among our volunteer workforce. That is a real challenge.

The second one is about visibility. I listened to Scott earlier talking about growing demand in a sport and having Wimbledon as a platform. Unfortunately, bowls is largely invisible outside the Commonwealth games. How can we get more investment into raising the visibility of bowls and shaking some of the perceptions that people might have of bowls? That is really important.

Our volunteer base is largely in their 60s, 70s and 80s. Historically, running a bowls club was about mowing the grass, putting on a few competitions and making sure the bar was fully stocked. Now the complexity of running amateur community sports clubs is significant. Our fantastic volunteer base is wrestling with some of those challenges that are coming on stream, partly because of societal changes. That is a major issue.

Finally, facilities. We have so many bowls clubs up and down the country. We have huge amounts of capacity for growth, but increasingly local authorities are pulling back funding for bowls clubs. A lot of the local authority clubs—we have 60% in lower areas of deprivation—are getting really quite dilapidated. We really need some more support at a local level from local government to make sure that the facilities are not closed and that there are places for people to continue to play.

**Q131 Chair:** Kate, can I move on to you? How do you tailor sports initiatives like Chance to Shine to address some of the specific challenges faced by under-represented groups accessing sports like cricket?

**Kate Stephens:** Chance to Shine exists as a charity to help all young people play, learn and develop through cricket. We do that primarily through two main programmes. Our primary school programme is a six-week programme in a school, where a child can join as part of their regular PE lesson. That is fully funded by us. We have an expert coach who goes in and delivers that, or it is delivered through our network of county cricket boards, Cricket Scotland and Cricket Wales. It is a really well-thought-out, well-structured and well-run programme.

We also run something called Street, which is our community initiative—Chance to Shine Street, which is about building up a street cricket club in an area where there is otherwise no access to cricket. It is a really important part of what we do. This is not only about allowing a young person in a primary school setting to experience cricket for the first time;



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it is also about having pathways into cricket so that you can continue to play in a non-traditional setting—again, all free.

There is something about how we structure our programmes that means that we are very intentionally allowing people who might be from a less privileged or underserved background to access those programmes, because they are free of charge and because, particularly, both those programmes are deliberately put in places where there is a great need.

For our primary school programme, 74% of our programmes this year are delivered in schools with a higher than average number of children on free school meals. That means that we are in schools where there is not really necessarily a tradition of cricket. They are getting to see it and feel it—to hold a cricket bat for the first time. We think that is really important.

For our Street programme again, we are in IMD areas 1 to 3. It is really targeted. It is all free. It is super-flexible. We put it on wherever we can in terms of facilities and different venues. You don't need any kit, you don't need any clothing, you can turn up and play. It is adapted cricket. We think that has a really important footprint.

Again, it is about that locally inspired understanding of what is going to work in that local community, and then adapting accordingly. We think that is a really important part of allowing a programme to flourish, and for children to feel that they belong. We have heard a lot here about a child thinking, "You know what? I am able to do that. I can pick up a bat. It's for me. I can pick up a ball. I can play." What we exist for at Chance to Shine is that moment when a child has that connection and feels the possibility of being able to do that.

Q132 **Chair:** Jordan, why is it important that elite sports clubs in sports like rugby get involved in their local community?

**Jordan Letts:** Thanks for having us on. The belonging point is echoing across the room. Everyone seems to have the same message, which is lovely.

The big point is about the reach and influence that the clubs have in their local communities. That is not necessarily just rugby—you can also get that from football. It is the transformational support that we all give to our communities, wherever we are based, all over England.

The big part is about how we connect with people. We manage to reach disengaged communities who potentially struggle to do that with statutory services. A lot of young people who look to work with the charitable organisations like the foundation that I work for really want to find that sense of belonging. Many times, pride and motivation comes when it is attached to a badge.

They are also trusted brands and they operate in trusted spaces. We always find ourselves incredibly thankful to the professional club that we work under; it provides us with an opportunity and it opens doors to



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schools and to the families and communities who potentially would not come to our service if they did not have that opportunity to do so.

Speaking on behalf of the Northampton Saints Foundation, we are deeply rooted in our community and we have a lot of heritage in the community that we serve. That is quite obvious in the young people who come to the charity and want to be supported by us. The opportunity we have is vast; we are currently working with 6% of children who are out of education in our county, and the opportunity for us to do more is quite significant. We have a model that is scalable and sustainable and that has an infrastructure behind it, through People and Place, that we can look to grow and develop what that looks like.

Finally, it is about the role models of our sport. In rugby, within the men and the female game, which is further establishing itself now, there are true role models. The young people can come on to our programmes, look up to those players and be inspired by the journey they have taken. If there is a serious message I want to be taken, it is about the power of what sports can be and how elite sports clubs can be used as delivery partners to really make social change for good through the power of sport.

**Q133 Natasha Irons:** Hello, Jon. My name is Natasha and I am an MP in Croydon; we have the Spring Park Shirley Bowling Club in my constituency, which is facing an existential crisis. Its site may be closed down due to council cuts in funding and not being able to maintain the buildings. Similarly, the BBC reported that Leeds council was also considering 30 of its clubs and publicly owned greens. It later revised that plan, but had to double the cost of an annual membership for an adult and turn over the running costs of electricity and water to the clubs themselves. What support can Bowls England provide to those grassroots clubs?

**Jon Cockcroft:** It is a huge challenge for us to provide financial support to those clubs, because we do not have that money available. What we are doing, to get more people playing bowls, is effectively turning a sport that—as I said earlier—is intrinsically accessible into something that is genuinely accessible.

We have not modernised as much as we should have over the generations. We have removed the old-fashioned dress codes; matches have been reduced in length, and we have introduced a product called Bowls Bash, which is effectively a short form of the game, to make it much more accessible for people with busy lives to play bowls; we have introduced a pay and play platform, which is like the Airbnb of bowls, and all our clubs are on that platform; and bowls clubs can work with local authorities to set up pay and play, so that we can use spare capacity.

I would like to work with local authorities much more effectively, with resource in place either for active partnerships or local authority teams, to stimulate much more local demand. The demand is there: we have an ageing population and increasing social isolation. There is a real opportunity to get more people who are either reliant on the care system

or in need of being much more active out there on our bowls greens. We have significant capacity there for them to be used in an effective way.

I am very confident that if the local authority, notwithstanding the huge financial challenges it has, saw many more people on those bowls greens week in, week out there would be less appetite to make those difficult choices and to suggest they might be closed. I would also like to see our playing fields protected. The maintenance of Sport England's statutory right to be consulted on the closure of playing fields is very important for us.

**Q134 Natasha Irons:** We heard earlier from the LTA about its partnership working with local authorities. Obviously, it has taken a lot more money to refurbish tennis courts, but that partnership approach with local authorities has been very successful. Is there any scope for Bowls England to take a similar approach? It might not be on that scale, but are there lessons that can be learned from how the LTA has protected what is an English heritage sport, just as bowls is?

**Jon Cockcroft:** Absolutely. I am sure there are loads of lessons to be learned. The programmes we are putting in place are having a positive impact—as I mentioned earlier, our supporters have increased by 5% because we have modernised the way people perceive bowls, and we are starting to see a much more mixed audience of people playing. The number of women playing bowls has increased from 31% to 36% over the last few years, and we have started to put much more practical initiatives in place to capitalise on the opportunities.

One, for example, is a Bowl for Health scheme, which we are working on in conjunction with Active Partnerships and local government. Effectively, it is an eight-week programme where individuals with chronic illnesses can do an hour of bowls a week and then socialise with their fellow bowlers at the end of that hour. What is really positive about that programme, which we have had about 600 people go through, is that about 80% of people said that it was a really positive experience, and just over 70% have been retained in playing our sport.

We know that if we could expand that Bowl for Health programme nationwide, it could have a really big impact. One of the key things here is social prescribing. The world of GPs is complex, and I am not sure I fully understand it myself, but getting people to do sport before prescribing painkillers, antidepressants or whatever it might be feels like a really fundamental thing that we should be doing. I made an earlier point about the cross-government, strategic approach and how we can create a situation where illness is prevented rather than having the enormous cost of treating it. In my view, that has to be central to the sports strategy moving forward.

**Q135 Natasha Irons:** Do you think the health and social wellbeing benefits that bowls brings to predominantly older demographics are fully understood and appreciated by councils and Government?



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**Jon Cockcroft:** I do not think that they are, and we as a governing body need to do more to articulate that. The data is there to show that people playing our sport feel socially connected and have a more positive social life, which brings mental health benefits. It is difficult; the amount of money that councils are now spending on social care has gone through the roof, and it has to come from somewhere.

Councils are in an incredibly difficult situation and have to make tough choices. Unless they get more support, and unless sport is valued in the way that it should be for its wider societal benefit, the choices will be between cutting a bowls green instead of—in your case—building an NHS centre.

Q136 **Natasha Irons:** No, mine is just a local, community-led bowls club that has been there for a very long time, and the examples you give of things like breaking down loneliness is exactly what it is doing. My final question is: what do you then want to see local councils and Government do to protect bowling greens and bowling clubs going forward?

**Jon Cockcroft:** Invest more and help us work in partnership with Active Partnerships and the local community. I think the sporting and place-based approach is really positive and strong, and local councils need to value bowls as part of that solution. By working together, with the right level of funding, we can see lots more people of that generation playing sport.

Q137 **Damian Hinds:** I am supposed to be asking you about schools, which I will do in a moment. First, Jon, I want to pick up the bowling thing, which I find fascinating in a couple of ways. You said that you had a less visible sport, but I would note that you have about the most visible sport in the country, because every village centre that you go to has a bowling green. I wonder whether you could do more with that to make people notice what is on their doorstep. I am showing my age now, but did Granada not have a lot of bowls on telly? It is strangely engaging. I realise that it is all daytime stuff, but considering the huge numbers of people who do bowling, why does it not have more visibility to people under the age of 65?

**Jon Cockcroft:** You are right; in the '80s there were lots more traditional sports on TV. Over the years, bowls has become more marginalised from a TV perspective. Fundamentally, with the emergence of satellite TV and the vast amounts of money that have come into that, there have been winners and losers, and some sports like bowls have historically not been able to capitalise on that opportunity and reinvent themselves.

Bowls in the Commonwealth games is absolutely mesmerising; we had 10 million people watching bowls across the BBC, but that happens just once in a four-year period. Ultimately, in my view, we need to see more national behaviour change campaigns to try to inspire more people to think that sport as a solution.

I would like the BBC's sports editorial policy to be more sympathetic to the opportunity we have to grow participation in some sports that may be



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slightly less high-octane than sports that are televised much more regularly. Fundamentally, the money that comes from Sport England is much more restricted in terms of marketing. We have an event called Bowls Big Weekend, which is our national open weekend where 800 clubs open their doors at once in the spring bank holiday for free taster sessions.

Q138 **Damian Hinds:** When is that?

**Jon Cockcroft:** At the end of May. You might have received a letter.

**Damian Hinds:** Has anyone had a letter? I want to go!

**Jon Cockcroft:** Lord Walney is very supportive of this and has hopefully sent you all a letter. Bowls England has £10,000 to market that opportunity. While our research tells us that people know where their local bowls club is, it is about getting them over the line and them realising that, contrary to the perceptions they may have, it is a sport that they could be part of and enjoy. If only I had a pound for every time people who try bowls say, "I wish I'd started sooner".

Q139 **Damian Hinds:** You mentioned social prescribing. It feels like social prescribing is a huge potential reform. We tend to think of it most for working-age adults who are further away from the workforce—how you get re-engaged, and so on—but for older people, your sport in particular has huge potential for socialising, routine and all that, as well as just the physical activity. Social prescribing is all very devolved, and rightly so, because it has to be reflective of local communities and individuals, but what involvement do you end up actually having? What co-ordination mechanism is there at a national level to identify opportunities such as bowls? Of course, there are dozens of others.

**Jon Cockcroft:** As far as I am aware, in terms of social prescribing, there is not a national level. I may be mistaken there. It is mainly local interventions—working with local surgeries and inspiring people through a very local approach. As part of the Bowl for Health campaign, the programme that we did, we have seen social prescribing in action, but it is very place-based. The programmes have been with various local authorities and in conjunction with their local active partnership. That is what has been stimulating it.

Q140 **Damian Hinds:** Kate, to come to the other end of the age range, a lot of us admire Chance to Shine—the barriers you have overcome and the changes you have made in the attractiveness of cricket, and so on. What has been the secret to that success?

**Kate Stephens:** That is a really good question. I only recently took over at Chance to Shine six months ago. One of the great privileges for me is to come to something that is 20 years old and really well established. The programmes are well researched and founded in data and impact.

For example, 626,836 young people were helped last year. We know that because we count every single one who comes through our service. We want to make sure that they have a positive experience and leave feeling



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that they are more self-confident, more resilient and more able to go on and achieve their potential. There is something about the scale that is important here. We have primary school programmes in every one of your constituencies right now. Cricket is alive and well in primary settings.

The model is really powerful. We work with our delivery partners, which are the county cricket boards, Cricket Scotland and Cricket Wales. The chunk of our funding for primary schools comes from the ECB. We are their primary school delivery partner, and that is incredible. We have long-term funding, which gives us the confidence to be able to plan. It means that we can look ahead.

We are agreeing a three-year deal with them right now to take us through to 2028. That will allow us to have visibility of primary school funding, to be able to think carefully about where best to put our programmes and to make sure that when they are in there, they are taken up by the teachers. To echo some of the points made earlier, one of the things that would have more of an impact is sustainability: being able to leave a teacher to deliver the coaching. Models like that are very much embraced.

That is the other secret sauce bit of the model: it is all paid for by us, but it is free for beneficiaries and schools. The coaches are high quality: they are all trained and able to deliver their sport. They come into the school as an expert—there is someone interesting and new, and it is that same person who delivers it. Then we try to link that to, say, after-school provision. If we do a street club, it might be the same coach who is there. It builds up familiarity. We were talking about role models and how those matter. When you are a young person, your biggest role model is your coach. They build really powerful and strong relationships there, so I think it is a mixture of those things.

I must say as well that “Uniting the Movement” is very important for us as a charity. Sport England gives us long-term funding as one of its system partners to be able to deliver Street. That makes a massive difference. We bring in our own income, and we are quite ambitious in what we try to bring in to supplement, build on and layer up. Having that cornerstone of funding allows us to have the confidence to do so.

Q141 **Damian Hinds:** Do we know much, or enough yet, about how many kids continue with cricket into their adult life, having first experienced it through the programme?

**Kate Stephens:** It is quite a hard number to track, as some of that data sits with clubs, which are themselves hard to track. It would be amazing to be able to demonstrate that. We measure our success by how interested children are in taking up cricket afterwards. We know that two thirds say they want to carry on playing cricket, and part of our primary school delivery programme is all about inspiring links and pathways with local clubs and after-school clubs with our Street provision so that they can see a pathway to carry on playing cricket. That should be an important measure. But I must say that there is also a joy in the provision of the experience as well. We are not a pathway charity; we have had some



amazing women cricketers come through Chance to Shine, but that is not our *raison d'être*; our *raison d'être* is for children to be able to flourish and achieve their potential.

**Q142 Damian Hinds:** There is a curriculum review—a curriculum and assessment review, technically—going on at the moment. What are your hopes for that process, and have you been given any indication of what may be in the outcome?

**Jordan Letts:** I think there has been limited indication, but from my own lived experience, I think education needs quite a large shake-up. It is quite proven that for a number of young people who fall out of the education system, their fate does not tend to go well once they have been removed from education. There is a significant challenge there. We have had that problem for quite a while now, and I am not sure that enough has been done to support those communities of young people who fall out of education and very quickly go into the criminal justice system. We have a number of programmes at the charity that support different levels of that, whether that be children who have already committed crime or children who are potentially on the journey to be doing that into the future.

There needs to be more support for schools as well. At the moment, we very much take our hats off to the schools, which are doing everything within their powers to support these cohorts of young people. The biggest challenge comes down to when you have need that it is not possible to meet in a mainstream setting, but the young person is being made to be in the mainstream setting. That is when charities like us really thrive, because we are able to work with the schools and support the young people who are really struggling within those environments, by taking them out of education and looking at what is going wrong for them, both inside school and outside of school, to make sure that we can either enable them to remain in education or find a setting that suits their needs. Last academic year, we had 248 young people on our Engage programme, which targets exactly those cohorts of children, and we had a 92% succession rate of children being reintegrated back into mainstream settings.

**Damian Hinds:** Thank you. Jon, I am going to let you off this question, just because of the time. Kate?

**Kate Stephens:** You have heard it before, but the more that we can establish PE as a core subject within the curriculum, the more it becomes embedded. It is not just about that subject; it is about having an active approach to a childhood in a school. We see time and again that when programmes really work in a school, children will suddenly be playing cricket at lunchtime and after school—it becomes organic and part of life. We think that making PE a core subject and protecting that time for PE would really help.

**Q143 Damian Hinds:** This question comes up quite a lot—the definition of a core subject. What difference do you think that terminology would make,



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or do you really mean, “We want a minimum of 2 hours a week, and that has to be programmed in. It is not an ambition or something we ask of schools; it is something we require”? What do we really mean?

**Kate Stephens:** I think you sum it up brilliantly. We have to be as simple and clear as we can be about what it does mean. Two hours is very clear and easy to understand—it is a bit more tangible. That would make sense. We are supplementing and coming into school to help with that, but having more of that within the school livelihood would be incredibly important.

Another thing would be looking at teacher training. Especially in the primary school setting, there is not very much PE and sports provision for schoolteachers. We are really proud that when we leave a programme at a school, the teachers tell us that they feel much more confident to run a session by themselves. We use an “I/We/You” model, so that we empower a teacher to do that. Nevertheless, the more formal training could help to empower in a structural way, so that that is more of an accepted thing.

**Jon Cockcroft:** I just wanted to make the point, because bowls is perceived to be an older person’s sport, that anybody can play bowls. Interestingly, out of the 6,000 kids who have played bowls in schools since 2023, 35% are from ethnically diverse backgrounds and 30% are SEND. I think that that proves that not every child wants to play a high-intensity sport. We have started piloting some projects with School Games this year. Hopefully, we will start to see some children taking that on board with the new products that we have put in place.

What is really key for us—you guys know much more about the school space than me—is that schoolteachers feel confident about delivering sport. A sport like bowls is relatively easy to learn to deliver, because it is such a fundamentally simple game. Hopefully, this cross-wired approach and the commitment for teachers to be as accountable for physical literacy as for other things will help bowls contribute to the great work that my colleagues here are doing.

Q144 **Chair:** We could see a nice link between bowls clubs and schools, for the children who do not like running-around sports and prefer something that has a bit more hand-eye co-ordination and skill.

**Jon Cockcroft:** Our volunteers are available during the day. Increasingly, because of dual-income families and single parents, grandparents are looking after their grandchildren more consistently. Bowls has that intergenerational quality.

**Damian Hinds:** Hopefully, your open weekend will introduce more children to it, including mine.

Q145 **Chair:** Before we move on, one of the challenges that cricket faces is that it is often seen as being played predominantly by private schools, and state schools do not get as much of a look-in. The previous Government announced £35 million in funding for more state schools to be able to offer cricket. Have you had an update on whether that funding will continue?



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**Kate Stephens:** We have not, unfortunately. I would like to take the opportunity to step back a tiny bit. This time last year when that funding was announced, the vision was very much to create a moment for cricket ahead of the women's world cup coming next year, the men's world cup in 2030 and the Olympics in '28. Those are big, world-class, international moments when people will be seeing and hearing about cricket. The £35 million was to create capex for infrastructure—that was a big chunk of it.

The part for Chance to Shine—the £10 million, and a little bit extra for kit—was really about each of those areas where the games will be played, to build programmes as well so that a young person has this connected experience. That is so that they are not just walking down the street and hearing or thinking about cricket being over there; as we have been saying, it is actually there in front of them. They get to pick up the bat, they get to experience these things, and they get to feel that they can be part of this story too. That is where we think change comes. That is when you build momentum and movement.

We understand that it is still being looked at. We have been told that capital is easier than revenue. Obviously, as a programme delivery charity, we passionately believe in programmes as a way forward. Equally, we know that the other bits are very important as well. But we have not yet had an update as to what that might look like.

Q146 **Chair:** If you have a message that needs to be passed on to the Government, we are quite a good vehicle for that. What would be your message to pass on to them about the importance of this funding, particularly at this moment in time, given that we have a massive year for cricket coming up?

**Kate Stephens:** It would be that now is the time to invest. This is about creating a moment of change where young people get not only the opportunity to go and play cricket in a facility near their house, but the opportunity to then play and experience it in their school. It is a whole, connected experience that means that cricket will be something that they have experienced and feel part of. We are aware that budgets are incredibly tight and that there is a huge amount of competition for that money. We would just say that this is a moment in time. We really believe that our programmes are scalable and deliverable. We know that young people will benefit from this.

**Chair:** Thank you.

Q147 **Tom Rutland:** I want to ask about the role of national governing bodies. Perhaps Jordan and Kate can answer first; I have a different question for you, Jon. Jordan, how can national governing bodies better support the growth of grassroots sport and initiatives like yours to deliver school and community programmes?

**Jordan Letts:** That is essential. We have two governing bodies—the RFU and Premiership Rugby—and that is quite a complex landscape to understand. The central investment is nowhere near that in the football space, if you compare them. Last year we worked with 5,700 young



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people, with the majority of them in mainstream education. We deliver health and wellbeing, and we teach children how to read and write for the first time. That provides a really good platform for us to do that.

I would like us to be looked at as a pilot, because this could be a wider opportunity in terms of scope. Across all the rugby charities in England, we reach 110,000 people a year, and there is a real opportunity for us to take the values that are prevalent in the sport and develop them in young people's lives. We strongly believe that if you embed the values of rugby in a young person's life, they will become good people; regardless of whether they have maths and English qualifications to take forward, they will be good people who commit well to society.

On the point of what governing bodies can do, they can research what our charities are already doing and look at the current operations of all the premiership clubs in the rugby world, and be impressed by what we are already delivering. With a lot of programmes, we will always look for that new thing, that newer item on the agenda, but a lot of good is already being delivered. I speak on behalf of all the rugby charities, and as a collective we want to make a difference in our spaces and communities, and we really feel like we are doing that, but we do not necessarily see the investment from the national governing body of our game.

Q148 **Tom Rutland:** Kate, how about cricket?

**Kate Stephens:** Almost since the beginning of Chance to Shine, we have been long-term partners with the ECB. That has been incredibly important for us. As I have said, having visibility of that income is important. There will always be challenges in aligning priorities, and priorities sometimes shift. For example, the ECB have shared that they will not be able to fund some of our Street programme going forward. We need to look for new funders for that, but we are hopeful that there might be other moneys, or ways that the ECB could fund that and prioritise it within their strategic plans. It is important to have that strategic alignment in terms of what you are trying to deliver on the ground, to stay connected to what that means, and to be clear about what your purpose is as a charity, as opposed to being the governing body. We bring a different voice, and when our voices work together, that can be very powerful.

Q149 **Tom Rutland:** Do you feel well heard by the ECB?

**Kate Stephens:** Yes. We have a really good relationship with them. We talk to them constantly. We are all based at Lords at the moment, so we are there and heard. As we have said, the "Future of Cricket" fund will be jointly delivered between the ECB and Chance to Shine. That is exactly as it should be. Certainly, our primary school programme would not be possible without that kind of long-term support.

As a charity, there is almost always more you want to do; you feel passionate about the different programmes that we run. For us, Street is a really important part of our delivery. We always want to make those connections and make sure that we can give every young person the

chance to play cricket, even if it is in a non-traditional setting, because that kind of community endeavour is really important.

We also work closely in partnership with other charities in the cricket community, such as the MCC Foundation, the Lord's Taverners, ACE and other charities within the ECB stable to make sure that we can, between us, give all young people the opportunity to experience cricket.

Q150 **Tom Rutland:** Jon, what can be done to ensure that smaller national governing bodies with less funding have the capacity to deliver in schools and at a grassroots level?

**Jon Cockcroft:** Simply having more funding. It is very difficult. The sports sector has become incredibly complicated and lots of different organisations are asking Government for money. Maybe governing bodies have traditionally not adapted to the needs of society in the way that they now have. I think that there has been huge progress by governing bodies over recent years around governance, and tackling the inequalities in sports participation.

Perhaps some of the efforts of governing bodies have been slightly maligned in recent years. When great athletes get gold medals, it is about the great athletes; when amazing volunteers do amazing things, it is about the volunteers; but when things go wrong, it is the governing body's fault. Fundamentally, governing bodies are the fabric of the sports industry: they tie everything together. We are the reason why there is £8 billion-worth of volunteer time across the sports landscape. The vast majority of people have developed through a governing body, playing competitive sport, and they want to contribute back.

It is really important, as part of the future strategy, that governing bodies are at the core of the funding. For a sport like bowls, we feel like we can deliver much more and are capable of doing much more than we are able to do with the proportion of the investment that goes into sport that we are currently given. We have now proved that we can deliver results, and we just need somebody to believe in us.

Q151 **Tom Rutland:** Thank you. Some sports clubs are in financially precarious positions and are under pressure to generate revenue, as we have been discussing. How does that impact their ability to drive grassroots and community participation?

**Jon Cockcroft:** Hugely. Because bowls has been in decline for a generation, the membership revenue for clubs is in decline, whereas the cost of maintaining and developing their facilities is going up. That does not work, so we are under quite a lot of strain. Our volunteer base is spending a disproportionate amount of time doing things that are not growing participation, because the pressures on it from a whole array of different things are significant. Some of our volunteers say they work harder now running their local bowls club than they did when they were working.



We would love to see a bit more sympathy towards our volunteer base from the Government, in terms of how legislation impacts us. We want grant applications to be a lot simpler. Most of our volunteers are in their 70s, and to get access to the movement fund—one of Sport England's big funds—they have to wade through 44 pages of the code of governance. Lots of that stuff is great, but unless there is somebody on the ground supporting them and helping them with that practically, it is very difficult. Although we see greater funding success through small grants to our clubs, fewer clubs are applying for them, because it is too much.

**Q152 Tom Rutland:** What did you mean when you talked about the impact of legislation on sports clubs? Is there a particular challenge?

**Jon Cockcroft:** There have been all sorts over the years. They are trying to get their heads around GDPR, and the trust service has been a bit more challenging recently. The responsibility that governing bodies and clubs have for safeguarding has been massive for them: 90% of our clubs now have safeguarding officers, but the journey we have been on, given the demographic of our club volunteers, has been fairly challenging. It has taken a lot of time and has been stressful for those volunteers. The world has got slightly more litigious, and the disciplinary challenges within clubs take loads and loads of time. We are having to navigate through that and support clubs. It has just become a lot more complicated. Consequently, people who are volunteering because they love their sport and are trying to grow it are spending less time actually doing that. Any help that can be directed into reliving that pressure for our volunteers would be welcomed.

**Q153 Tom Rutland:** In my experience, voluntary organisations sometimes have more politics in them than political parties. Kate and Jordan, is there anything that you want to add on the financial pressure to generate revenue and the ability to drive grassroots and community participation?

**Kate Stephens:** It is a hard time to be fundraising right now, but with the right approach there is potentially revenue there. I have talked a bit about our model: we get cornerstone funding from Sport England and the ECB, and our private fundraising is a really important part of what we do. We bring in about 50% of our income from major donors, corporates and our own endeavours, and we are really proud of that. It is a great model of how a charity can work very well with a governing body. You are able to leverage that kind of investment and bring in more. For us, that works very well, and it means that we can have the independence to do some of the things that we need to do. We can put a child at the centre of ensuring that cricket is the thing that can connect them to their potential. That will also allow us to think more long-term about what we want to invest in and how we want to grow.

We think that there is a lot to do. Underlying all of this is the idea that it has been a really hard time for everybody to bring people in. There has been covid and the cost of living crisis—it has been tough. This charity is on a mission to help 1 million young people by 2028. We really think that it could make a material difference if more and more young people could connect to their potential and experience the joy of these programmes—

the fun that comes with them, as well as the benefit. For us, that is an important part of what we are here for.

**Jordan Letts:** I would echo that. A lot of it is that the fundraising landscape is very challenging and very hard to navigate. Our organisation is probably more about delivery on the ground with a lot of these programmes. In one in particular, we have taken more of a steer towards commissioned services, because it is an easier way for us to get the children the support that they need and require. On a number of occasions, our programmes are paid for by the schools—the schools pay for the young people to attend. We have found opportunity in that where we have gone to our local integrated care board or the police, fire and crime commissioner to look at the bigger issue behind this. In my opinion, it is not about short-term wins; it is about long-term, systemic change for young people. It is not about looking at whether there is a pot of money that is left over here and so we should use it towards that; it is about long-term funding arrangements for organisations such as ours to really make that difference for young people.

A lot of the time, the voice of the child is not really listened to, and that is where we are really proud as an organisation that we can sit back and take our hats off to the fact that every single programme that we have has been a development of our initial programme at the start—where we had one, we now have 17. Every single time there has been a gap or an opportunity where a young person has needed something, we have moved in that direction, and we have moved our workforce to be developed and educated within that as well. Yes, the whole part around education also goes to your fundraiser—asking fundraisers how to write commissioning bids; that is very different from writing a grant application—and yes, that is what I would add to what has already been said.

**Chair:** Last but not least, Rupa.

Q154 **Dr Huq:** I have some questions on community, rather than school, sport. I will start with Jordan. You run programmes in prison and targeting those at risk of exclusion. I just wondered what challenges you face, getting those hard-to-reach, under-represented people into your activities.

**Jordan Letts:** In prison it is relatively easy to get people involved, because they are obviously in those settings and can't move away. But I will go back to the start and approach the question from the other direction.

On the prison programme and operation that we run, at the start I suppose, even personally, I was quite reluctant to go into that space, because we are a charity for young people that is trying to prevent children entering the criminal justice system. We will hold our hands up and say that we actually had a young person that that happened to—they came on one of our programmes and ended up in the criminal justice system. Very quickly, when I went into that establishment, I wanted to make a difference for the people and the men that were in that space. I wanted them to have an opportunity to change their lives.



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Many of the people that you see in prison have potentially made a mistake once—a mistake that they will regret for the rest of their life. It became really important, and apparent, for us to create an opportunity where men could be reintegrated back into the community safely, if it were safe to do so. We started a programme with HMP Highpoint, where we take men through a 12-week personal training course. We give men the opportunity that, at the end of their release, we introduce them to an employer and so, hopefully, they can sustain employment in that sector. We are proud that, of the cohort of 56 who have been released, we only have a reoffending rate of 7%. When you look across the sector, that is catastrophically different in comparison with a normal person who is released into the community.

On the Engage part, it is easy to look at the product that we have created, but it comes from a place of lived experience. We are working with young people before they enter the criminal justice system. At the moment, we do a lot of work with Northamptonshire police and the Observatory on the actual data and insights that we have for our young people and the cohorts of children who will potentially go on to show significant crime in the future. Why that is important is that we are now able to see the children who might have grown up in households where violence or issues have arisen in the past, meaning that we not only have early intervention, but can actually reach children before early intervention is needed.

We now have young people as young as four accessing our provision, which is quite horrifying—that four-year-olds need the support that we provide. However, we want to make sure that that is not just a short-term opportunity but is long-term, and that we are here forever to support those cohorts of children.

**Q155 Dr Huq:** Is there anything with Wormwood Scrubs, which has just come into my constituency?

**Jordan Letts:** No, not at the moment.

**Dr Huq:** Or would you like to do something with Wormwood Scrubs?

**Jordan Letts:** In terms of upscaling the offer, we would love to do more. I think that the real focus for us, in terms of the prison setting, is that we have learned that we have to be in the right settings. Prisons are very different in how they operate, and we would love to do more of that work, but on the safety of our staff, and the safety of the programme and the men on the course, and where we can actually introduce them into employment opportunities for the future, the location of the prison is really important.

**Q156 Dr Huq:** How many people who come through your programme keep on with their rugby, in the community, for life?

**Jordan Letts:** It is really easy to see us as a rugby brand, and there are limited times when a rugby ball is picked up in terms of our programmes, but, like I said at the start, we use the values of the sport to really inspire, support and educate young people and vulnerable adults. A lot of the time,



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when we are looking to reintegrate them back into the community, we have done things like fundraising initiatives, where we have taken prisoners who have been released to do the three peaks challenge, or other challenges, to actually fundraise on the charity's behalf. We have enabled men to come to games with their families when they have been released from prison, because, to us, that means more than just a programme that they are having in prison; actually, the offer is there for us to support them for the rest of their lives, where they need us, and it means that we can provide support and wraparound care when they leave the jail.

**Q157 Dr Huq:** Jon, what are you doing to encourage people from under-represented groups to get into bowls?

**Jon Cockcroft:** Our primary focus over recent years is making our sport more accessible to everybody, because of all these barriers that have developed over the last generations, so that is already seeing our core market of over-65s playing more sport and playing more bowls, which is—

**Dr Huq:** You need some influencers to get the youth into it, or something.

**Jon Cockcroft:** Yes, exactly—channel in a bit of that. In that respect, we are seeing more women playing bowls; over the past few years, we have grown from 31% to 36% being women. In terms of participation, we lost more older women than men during that covid period, which was quite interesting. We have recently taken disability bowls under our own auspices, so we are putting in a big programme on the back of the inspiration from the Commonwealth games. We are equal para and able-bodied in the Commonwealth games, so we are putting in place a series of programmes to support the growth of people with disabilities playing bowls. Then, the Bowls for Health scheme is critical in terms of getting people who have chronic illnesses playing sport and playing bowls. Those are some of the programmes that we put in place in recent times.

**Q158 Dr Huq:** We have a bowls club locally, but their issue was mowing the grass. Just the upkeep of the lawn is really costly; it is not just a normal lawn mower, and the lawn has to be manicured.

**Jon Cockcroft:** Absolutely. It costs about £10,000 a year to maintain a bowls green. Largely, it is sort of volunteer-based, and because the age of our volunteers is going slightly up—which is why we are trying to get more 40 and 50-year-olds playing our sport—it becomes a bit more challenging, physically, to maintain the bowls green. That is one of the difficult bits. Fundamentally, we need to get more people playing bowls and continuing that growth, because the more income that comes into a bowls club, the more affordable it is to maintain its facilities in the appropriate way and keep the standard of the greens commensurate with people's expectations, which is fundamental to their enjoyment.

**Q159 Dr Huq:** Kate and Jordan, cricket and rugby are things that people do at school. Do you know how many people continue those into later life, as a community thing?



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**Kate Stephens:** We were just talking about that, actually. We do not have the exact data, but we know the intention. We asked the young people on our primary school programme whether they would still like to play cricket, but we have not yet got the kind of infrastructure to measure who will then go on and join the club, just because it is quite a diffused infrastructure, if you like.

Just to back up a tiny bit, our community offer is Street. That is played in different community settings, and it does appeal across gender and ethnicity as well. We really find that, by offering cricket in a non-traditional setting, we do get people who have not played cricket previously but perhaps want to get involved with it, and they do disproportionately come and play in those settings. That kind of community provision is a really important part of what Chance to Shine exists to deliver.

Then, it is a little bit of a mix: we definitely want people to continue with cricket, but we also want them to have had a positive experience of coming through the programmes, and to feel a strong connection to what it is to move well, to physical literacy, and to all that means. We put the child first. As our founder Lord King often says, it is not about what children can do for cricket; it is about what cricket can do for the children.

**Dr Huq:** A Kennedy-esque thing, isn't it?

**Kate Stephens:** Exactly.

**Jordan Letts:** Again, the same. I am not sure there is data to prove or evidence the journey of our young people who have had a programme going into rugby.

At Northampton Saints, we have a community department which delivers incredible outcomes as well. Last month alone they supported 1,000 young people, a lot who would not be interested in the game and who also enrol at their clubs locally. Our community department runs incredible partnerships with local clubs. It is quite a simple thing, in that you have the Premiership rugby club and then the grassroots clubs that are somewhat the feeders to that opportunity. The community department also base their community camps at local rugby clubs. Rather than always having them at the stadium, they will look to go to the local community to make sure the introduction is happening. It can intrinsically happen as well. If you are going to that venue anyway for a community camp and you are not yet registered at a club, it may be a good introduction into that space for you.

Q160 **Dr Huq:** And maybe demystifies the stuffy images that all three of your sports have, to be honest.

This is my last question. A constituent of mine, Jasmine Hoffman, came to see me the other day. She has had a big page in *The Guardian*, and was also in the *FT* last week, with her anti-"No Ball Games" campaign. She moved into a new build in 2017 because it had landscaped grounds and all looked nice. I think for a few years her kids were playing out happily, but just recently these "No Ball Games" signs have appeared. She is part of a



wider London campaign called More Ball Games. Their demands are to make a national play strategy, which apparently did exist under the last Labour Government. We know that lifestyles are becoming more sedentary and that, maybe because of covid, people are seeing indoors as a more legitimate place to play. Do any of you have thoughts on that? Not all people have back gardens, and not all schools have rolling playing fields, so how do we get around that?

**Kate Stephens:** I love it. It is an important campaign. There should be more people saying yes to activity, not finding reasons to say no. Our Street cricket is really flexible and often takes place in community centres and even in mosques or former churches—spaces where there is room to have a bat and a ball and hit. You don't necessarily need the full nets and you don't need kit or anything like that. We think more spaces like that, which could be used more flexibly to play different formats of the game, are important. They allow people to say yes to things that they would not otherwise. We think this is important. A lot of the primary schools we are in often do not necessarily have great facilities, with 74% in higher-than-average free school meal areas. Neatly we make sure that our programmes can be run on a concrete playground, or even inside. I have been to see programmes where they are in the school hall because it is not nice outside. The programme runs year-round, as does Street. We are trying to create these moments and opportunities to make best use of community facilities so that people, and young people in particular, can play.

Q161 **Dr Huq:** And presumably you could do it with a spongy ball to stop windows being smashed?

**Kate Stephens:** Yes, exactly. We use a tennis ball and use sponge balls for primary school. Street can vary depending on where it is. Again, that is one of its beauties—it must be locally adapted. I went to see one up in Batley in West Yorkshire, where I am originally from, and that was done at 8 pm on a Friday night after mosque. All the boys ran in. That was with tape balls and they knew their tape balls; they had brought them over from Pakistan. They are balls with tape around so that they are harder and go further when you hit them. They exist between a hard ball and a soft ball, really. That was high-octane, high-energy and in a sports hall. So it definitely exists.

Q162 **Dr Huq:** Any more thoughts on More Ball Games, please?

**Jordan Letts:** I fully support it. Sport has the power to make social change in young people. We have seen it more so with our hubs. We used to have young people who were having to travel up to an hour in taxis to get to our provision, so we made the decision four years ago that we would go to them. We have now put hubs in the geographical locations where our young people need them. I suppose that would enable them to play ball games within our spaces when we want them to.

On community centres and community spaces, we try as hard as we can to give back to our community clubs. If we need a new hub, or somewhere to operate our provision from, we will first go to the rugby clubs in that



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area to see how we can give back to grassroots sports. I suppose what is somewhat different is that we also hire venues, spaces and facilities, but we really want to make sure that those spaces are not just a shed, or a horrible space to go to, but that they are really inspiring spaces for our young people to enter, and that when they walk into them they think, “Wow—this is where I go to school,” or “This is where I’m educated.” We would definitely endorse there being more ball game opportunities.

**Jon Cockcroft:** I have just had a week in Devon, and the game on the beach for the Cockcroft household was boules. I think all of us who work in the sports industry would applaud anybody playing sport, regardless of where it is. In terms of the evidence to this Committee, you have heard from many sources about the significant social value of sport—I think it is £107 billion a year, with every £1 invested in sport leading to £4.21 in return. The value is there; it is about how we as a society, led by you as a Government, place sport as a golden thread across all Departments. We can really make a significant difference to people’s lives.

**Chair:** As a Committee, we say, “More ball games!”

Q163 **Paul Waugh:** I just wanted to pick up on something that you said. Did I hear correctly that the ECB is cutting the funding for your Street programme?

**Kate Stephens:** That is their intent, yes. They have been funding us for three years, as incremental funding on top of the funding that we have from Sport England. We back it up with our own private fundraising.

Q164 **Paul Waugh:** I find that quite shocking in many ways. Obviously, this Committee is going to hold the Government to account, but it is also our job to hold various bits of sport to account. It is quite shocking, given that in a constituency like mine, in Rochdale, we have a strong Pakistani/Bangladeshi heritage. All the kids are obsessed—they live and breathe cricket in every single aspect. Yet they do not see themselves represented at elite level, professional level, county level or national level. Your charity is doing a lot of the ECB’s hard work for it in making sure that that representation is corrected. Are you not deeply disappointed about that, and what can we do to help you make them change their minds?

**Kate Stephens:** Thank you. We are hopeful that money is potentially coming through the Hundred into the recreational game. To make a positive point about it, we are hopeful that we might be able to talk to the ECB about potential funding to support us with the future of Street. We want as much money as possible to go into Street, to be able to deliver more Street clubs. It is very clear to us that it is a really strong programme. Some of those other points are probably for the ECB to respond to directly.

**Chair:** We will make sure they do. Thanks very much to all of you for joining us this afternoon, and for being great advocates for your sports. If any other thoughts that come to you after you have left the room, please feel free to share them with us, and we will build them into our thinking when we bring our report together.