



Select Committee on a National Plan for Sport and Recreation

Corrected oral evidence: National Plan for Sport and Recreation

Wednesday 27 January 2021

3.30 pm

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Members present: Lord Willis of Knaresborough (The Chair); Lord Addington; Baroness Blower; Baroness Brady; Baroness Grey-Thompson Lord Hayward; Lord Knight of Weymouth; Lord Krebs; Baroness Morris of Yardley; Lord Moynihan; Baroness Sater; Lord Snape.

Evidence Session No. 9

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 63 - 69

Witnesses

[I:](#) Robert Sullivan, CEO, Football Foundation; Chrissie Wellington, Global Head of Health and Wellbeing, parkrun; Yusra Uney, Engagement Lead, GoodGym.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of Witnesses

Robert Sullivan, Chrissie Wellington and Yusra Uney.

Q63 The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the House of Lords Select Committee on a National Plan for Sport and Recreation, and this interesting evidence session. Our first witnesses are experts in their own fields: Robert Sullivan, CEO of the Football Foundation, Yusra Uney, engagement lead in GoodGym, and Chrissie Wellington, global head of health and well-being, parkrun. We welcome all of you to the committee and thank you very much indeed. We are always short on time so the brevity of your answers would be very helpful, but their intensity and quality will be always noted. We will make a transcript of the meeting, and if there is anything on the website that you are unhappy with we are quite happy to change that.

We began our inquiry by looking at the Government's existing plan through Sporting Future, about sport and recreation generally in this country. How do you rate the Government's efforts to get more people engaged, particularly in community sport and recreation, and leading a more active lifestyle? Is that plan working? Could Sport England, the main deliverer, work more effectively to support organisations, such as yours, that deliver sport and recreation opportunities in local communities? In other words, is Towards an Active Nation doing what it says on the tin?

Robert Sullivan: Thank you to you and your committee for inviting me. It is a really important inquiry, which could not happen at a more vital moment, with everything we are going through as a nation. By way of context, the Football Foundation is the UK's largest sports charity. We take funds from the Premier League, the FA and central government through Sport England, and we reinvest that into football facilities and multi-sport community facilities up and down the country. Over the last 20 years we have successfully delivered £1.5 billion of projects. That is taking £280 million of public money and turning it into £1.5 billion of total project value. We believe that, as a way of matching and leveraging public money to invest in community facilities, we are at the vanguard of delivering great facilities into communities.

We have been an important part of that sports strategy that you asked me about. Over the last few years, that strategy has set a very clear framework for what outcomes sports bodies such as ours are attempting to achieve. That is by targeting those social and demographic groups that we want to see getting more active, playing more sport and participating in recreation.

At the Football Foundation, we believe that great places to play and great facilities are fundamental to that. They are the bedrock of everything that strategy is seeking to do. In what we saw yesterday from Sport England and its new strategy, which is a really positive evolution of DCMS's previous sport strategy, we have a good policy framework and vision by which the Football Foundation, in its work in investing in places to play,

and other organisations, such as the programmes delivered by my colleagues on the panel, will be able to achieve that.

We have a really, really positive partnership with Sport England. We find it a good partner both nationally, where it sets very clear direction of what it wants to see us achieve with its investment through new facilities, and locally. For example, when I have talked to local authorities about how to deliver projects and plans in their area, I have often had Sport England representatives with me to bring to life the broader physical, mental, well-being, personal and social outcomes from what those projects can deliver. The strategy and Sport England's work, from when it was set up to as recently as yesterday, with the new plans that we all saw, have been positive.

Yusra Uney: Thank you for inviting GoodGym. Before I answer your question, I would like to give a brief background. GoodGym began about 10 years ago by trying to use running to help older people. The intention behind it was to get fit and do good. Since then, GoodGym has grown organically. We now offer four operation strands in many cities. The four operation strands are working with older people; doing one-off tasks for them; doing group runs with community projects; and doing community projects on their own. We have continued to focus on using exercise to help people and community projects, and building communities at the same time.

To your question, the Government's interest in the impact of sport, physical well-being, mental well-being, individual development and so forth connects very strongly with our own beliefs. We strongly believe in the ability of sport and how it impacts on the many aspects of life. That context of being physically active is more important than the actual activity. We believe that the government policy has led to more interest in our work from central and local government, which has enabled us to grow.

Probably as a result of the government policy, I am now working with Sport England to increase participation in physical activity by women finishing education, and looking at ways to keep them engaged through GoodGym activities. Sport England campaigns such as This Girl Can and more recently We Are Undefeatable, as well as the strategy it announced yesterday, place a very clear emphasis on making engagement in physical activities easier for the nation, which is a really positive move. We welcome that community connection aspect of Sport England's strategy announced yesterday and its commitment to tackling inequality.

Interestingly, growth in sport in recent years has largely come from functional fitness. People want to use sport to achieve other things such as getting to work, seeing a friend or helping someone. These motivations are relatable for people and hugely important. I would like to see more people make use of physical activity as a way of achieving them.

Equally, at GoodGym we understand that people want to be active, want to fit it into their busy lives, and want it to be flexible, social and fun. From my own experience before I joined GoodGym, I did not run. It did not appeal to me. However, I wanted to get fit. I always wanted to get involved with communities and have an incentive, but without having to put too much time aside for it. Overall, that is the key thing with these new strategies. GoodGym fits into that expectation. Despite that, there is still a long way to go in maximising the outcomes for sport, and we want to invite more people and everyone who can benefit from it.

The Chair: Are you not simply talking to the people who are already motivated? People in those socioeconomic groups, who are going to the gym and doing the sorts of things that you offer, would do so anyhow.

Yusra Uney: That is a really good question.

The Chair: It always is.

Yusra Uney: The answer is no, actually. We appeal to people who are not already involved and motivated. That is because we have the community aspect to it. We have the angle of finding community initiatives and working in outdoor spaces, which gives people the incentive to become more active through actions that are quite natural: for example, going to a community project and digging a bit of soil to plant some trees or bushes, or helping a care home to upcycle its furniture. These are natural, everyday activities that people can relate to, which makes it easier for people to come to GoodGym and get involved by being physically active, without thinking it is a sport or an activity that they have to make an effort for.

The Chair: Chrissie, we are delighted to have you.

Chrissie Wellington: It is great to be here and to share this platform with Yusra and Robert. We work closely with GoodGym. How do we, as parkrun, rate the Government's efforts? Thinking first about definitions, historically the Government's focus has been on encouraging people to do 30 minutes of moderate or vigorous exercise every day, but bizarrely this meant that, if someone managed to complete a 5k in under 30 minutes, it simply would not count as a bout of exercise.

Thankfully there has been a shift in recent years, which began with Sporting Future and Towards an Active Nation. It is front and centre of the Sport England strategy launched yesterday, which takes a much broader and more nuanced view of activity, and embraces movement in its widest sense, which, as Yusra said, is really, really important. This is much more in line with parkrun's philosophy and model, which encourages people to come together in the fresh air and move in whatever manner suits them, whether they walk, run, volunteer, come along and watch, or feed the ducks. That is far more important than whether someone hits a 30-minute minimum threshold.

Looking at the data, Covid aside, the Active Lives survey over the past few years has indicated some improvements in physical activity levels, but the entrenched inequalities remain, whether that is by age, ethnicity, gender, disability, deprivation status and so forth. We need to look beyond activity levels as the only metric, and judge the Government's success by whether they are delivering against their physical and mental health and well-being outcomes, as they stated in Sporting Future.

When I was an elite athlete, I might have been really physically fit but still been lonely and isolated, or struggled with poor mental health. We all know that being active alone is not enough. The data, for example in *The Marmot Review 10 Years On*, shows that life expectancy is declining, but more importantly our overall health expectancy is declining and health inequalities are increasing. All this, grouped together, suggests that the Government have a long way to go and a successor to Sporting Future might be an important first next step. We do not believe that it can be done alone and in silo by one government department. Looking to the future, we would like to see a much stronger cross-party and cross-departmental collaboration, especially with health and social care and with education.

Time will not permit me to detail all the ways in which we work very, very strongly with Sport England. To your question about how it can work more effectively with organisations, there are three ways. Encouraging and supporting innovative and sometimes small-scale ideas and initiatives, while giving organisations a space to take risks and learn through trial and error, is really important. That was emphasised in the new strategy, which was great.

They can also act as a critical friend to organisations such as parkrun, by looking beyond all the impressive headlines, and questioning whether our impact is sustained and meaningful. For example, as part of a project with them, we have set up 34 parkrun events in areas of deprivation. Yes, we could shout from the rooftops about that, but the real measure of success is whether people from those communities take part regularly. They can help challenge us on those type of metrics, looking beyond activity to help build and share understanding about what forms of movement and what environments generate the biggest gains in health creation, and then investing and supporting organisations that can provide such opportunities.

They also have a really important role, not only as an investor but as a facilitator, bringing together physical activity organisations as well as those in other sectors, in our case parkrun, the Royal College of General Practitioners¹ and others working in public health, to amplify what we are all trying to achieve, getting less active people active and maximising health outcomes.²

¹ **Note by witness:** Separately, both parkrun and RCGP benefit from Sport England investment but we would call on Sport England to convene a meeting that brought us all around the table to discuss shared goals and how we can streamline resources to ensure maximum impact.

The Chair: Thank you for that. It was a great start.

Q64 **Lord Addington:** What are the key ingredients of building a successful and sustainable community sport and recreation offer? What is the best component of getting an individual active and joining in more group activities, whether it be a club or something else?

Chrissie Wellington: We at parkrun are still learning. Reflecting back on the last 16 years, the golden thread underpinning our success is that we have always challenged ourselves. We have not been afraid to innovate or take risks, and have been prepared to work closely with other organisations to achieve our shared objectives.

We have also been incredibly patient. It has taken 16 years to grow parkrun to a place where we could support the delivery of over 2,200 events globally, and our definition of success has become more polymorphic and multilayered over this time. Initially, success for us lay in delivering one weekly event free of charge. Then it was overseeing hundreds of events, and now we measure success by our ability to improve health and well-being for all. This shift is reflected in our mission, really importantly, which changed from having a parkrun in every community that wants one to creating a healthier and happier planet.

In terms of the nuts and bolts, long-term success has been possible due to our simple, single model of event delivery, which we apply anywhere in the world. On the demand side, this model has been designed to remove as many barriers to participation as possible, whether they be financial, practical, social, cultural or psychological. For example, taking part is free. There is no need for special clothing or equipment. People can walk, run, jog, volunteer, come along and watch, and have a coffee afterwards. We do not exclude certain groups; families, friends and colleagues can take part together. Above all, the events are welcoming, friendly and social, which is key to encouraging sustained involvement. In answer to the second part of your question, socialisation, integration, friendship and community is the bedrock, not only of physical activity, but of holistic health.

It is really important that we do not overlook the supply-side barriers. We need to ensure that opportunities exist for people to be active, yet providers across the UK frequently face barriers in launching and sustaining physical activity opportunities: expensive equipment, the need for personnel, infrastructure or being forced to jump through countless bureaucratic hoops. By nurturing local community assets, whether that is passionate people, areas of open space or local infrastructure, parkrun makes it really simple for communities the world over to deliver our

² **Note by witness:** I would add that change takes time - often years and decades rather than months. For example, in its first five years parkrun recorded 204,000 participants globally, there were a further 7.2 million in the second five-year period, and a further 46.9 million in the third five-year period. Sport England can help facilitate this by providing longer term, multi-year support to organisations like parkrun.

events, in a low cost, replicable and sustainable way. It then enriches and empowers that community.

Our sustained success over the long-term is due to solving the supply side of the equation, as well as removing all those well-known barriers to people participating.

Robert Sullivan: I will try to sum it up in three Ps: places, people and programmes. Great community sport projects or environments have a great place to play. They have people involved who are inspiring, are motivating and create aspiration for young people in particular, and they can offer great programmes. Those programmes may be formal team sports in club and league environments, or they may be, like parkrun, something much more flexible and less bureaucratic. If you get the mix of those three things right, and obviously at the Football Foundation our responsibility is delivering great places for people to play, you are off to a good start.

To give an example, when we put a project together for a new facility, we work with the local community to identify its needs and where that new artificial pitch might be. We then develop a usage plan with the community that includes all the right inclusion groups and types of multisport environment, not just football. We think about what might engage people on the top of that. For example, that is where the brilliant work of Premier League club foundations comes in, because they give that bit of aspirational feel to the community environment and the sense that they are part of something bigger, as well as their local football club or whatever it might be. You get that nice blend on the site.

Yusra Uney: Alongside what Chrissie was saying, we at GoodGym feel the same. Part of our success, alongside being local and being free, is the timing and flexibility of what we offer: our GoodGym sessions. That has contributed to the success and growth of GoodGym, regardless of the pandemic. There is also a sense of identity. At our sessions, people have these red T-shirts, and it gives them a sense of belonging. Pre Covid, when we were doing our group runs, it was almost like a flash mob running to go and do this community project with a purpose, completing it and then doing a fitness session. Everybody went home happy.

Another key ingredient in the success of GoodGym is that we try to keep our sessions 90 minutes or under. That is because we do not want people to feel as though it is taking a big chunk of time out of their already very busy days. We want people to feel that volunteering is aspirational, exciting and fun, rather than giving up your time or giving back. Because of these community initiatives, people who were initially not very active or could not be bothered have started becoming active, and they have gone on to complete marathons and become amazing runners. It goes to show what an impact it can have.

Like parkrun, we use the Active Lives well-being measurements. People have reported a 93% improvement in their motivation to exercise, which speaks volumes. With the global pandemic and the restrictions that

started in March 2020, you would have thought that people's activity levels would have declined. We looked at our stats, and in 2019 the GoodGym community cumulatively did 987,000 kilometres, but last year, during the pandemic, we did over 1,014,000 kilometres of cumulative running. People had more time to run and wanted to be even more active, because of the emotional benefits, the improvements in mental well-being and the social side. People used running as an opportunity to go out and connect with communities. That has been a really interesting perspective.

Because we cannot go far now, people have reconnected on a local level. They are investing time in finding out how to improve their local areas and green spaces, and what the local areas have to offer. That is a positive that has come out of this pandemic, and it has contributed to our success.

Q65 Baroness Blower: You have all talked about working in different places. How would you describe the state of affairs in the distribution of and access to green spaces, sports clubs, leisure centres and other sport and recreation services and facilities? Some parts of the country are probably better served than others, so that is an issue we will need to look at.

Yusra Uney: GoodGym is very involved in finding opportunities to work outdoors. The main message here is that we support green spaces. We help develop and improve green spaces, and we use this as a type of exercise. We support local authority parks, community gardens, waterways and all kinds of public spaces across the UK, doing planting and maintenance, and using that as an excuse to turn essential maintenance into a workout.

To elaborate further, some GoodGym runners have adapted stretches of canals in London and Birmingham, on which we provide regular maintenance. We have planted trees in cities across the country, from Brighton to Bristol to Newcastle. We were involved in tree-planting schemes with edible forests, where we collect seeds for them to identify and start to grow. We want to do more of this work in more deprived areas, because we know that there are higher numbers of health problems in tree-free areas or those with fewer green spaces. The 2010 Community Green research and the new 2020 access to green space strategy support this comment.

Our runners are generally very passionate. They care a lot about the use of green spaces and actively seek out local projects in which we can support them to contribute to the growth and maintenance of green spaces. As another example, we are currently exploring a new collaboration with an Earthwatch project called Tiny Forests in north London. We are hoping to support the Trees for Streets project, which is looking to plant trees on streets in identified deprived areas. Because we operate across 58 locations around the country, we can provide ample opportunities for our runners to get involved in making this happen.

Robert Sullivan: I will focus my response specifically on football pitches, because it is such an important part of our physical infrastructure when we talk about sport and recreation. We have in the region of 30,000 grass pitches in the country. As you will all know from your many years' experience, that stock has been dwindling and the quality has been deteriorating over a number of years, for a great many reasons. The Football Foundation and our partners, the FA and the Premier League, are determined to address that. That map at the moment speaks to what you suggest in your question about an uneven distribution of quality and quantity. We have set about fixing that.

Over the last two years, we have undertaken a strategic review and planning exercise across 326 local authorities around England. I am really pleased to say that every single local authority now has a local football facility plan. Every council can sit in front of it with the 10 or so projects that are needed to make a significant improvement to football and multisport community facilities. We are now directly engaging with every single one of those local authorities on how we deliver that over the next 10 years.

Just to dwell on that a second, it is a really important moment for us because for the first time we have the shopping list of need. It is needs-based, because those plans were worked up together with local community groups, football clubs and councils. We are really confident that we have the right needs-based shopping list of the projects we need to deliver. We have the funding in place, and we were delighted in 2019 when the Conservative Party committed an extra £550 million to grass-roots sports and community capital projects in its election manifesto. We are looking forward to that coming online soon.

It is a step-change moment. If we the shopping list of projects and we have the funding, we can, for the first time, in a strategic and coherent way, address the uneven distribution that you talked about.

Chrissie Wellington: As with Yusra and Robert, having access to all kinds of open space is crucial for an organisation like parkrun. It is not just that parks, playing fields, woodlands, rivers and beaches exist, but also that we as an organisation have the permission from landowners to use them. Thankfully, we rarely encounter problems in acquiring that permission. We work really closely with all our landowners to nurture the value of natural capital across the UK.

We can play a part in improving and protecting the depletion of open space assets, because we have created an entire community that relies on their conservation. As Yusra said, citing research, we know that natural capital is diminishing across the UK, especially for those living in areas of social deprivation. We also know from trying to establish events on the custodial estate that access to open space is limited on many of those sites too. The inequality in access to open space that is appealing and safe makes being active outdoors so, so much harder for many, many people. It is common for those without access to open space to experience other barriers to participation in physical activity, which

creates a perfect storm for the deepening of those existing health inequities.

Really importantly, the inequity in green space assets should not be considered just in the context of organised sport or activity provision. We all need environments that encourage us to move our bodies and connect with others in every area of our lives, whether we are shopping, commuting, working or playing, rather than being increasingly immersed in this bubble that pushes us all down a sedentary and more isolated path for days on end.

To summarise, something needs to be done. We call on the Government to make good its commitment to build back greener and better, and to create and protect safe and accessible areas of open space in which everyone can flourish, not just the privileged few.

Q66 Baroness Sater: Robert, you mentioned working with local authorities. How closely do you work with local authorities, local delivery agencies such as Active Partnerships, sports governing bodies or local sports clubs? How could you work more effectively together? Should the organisations I have just mentioned be better connected and communicate better to deliver more effective local delivery?

Robert Sullivan: There are two parts to that question. First, how do we work together? I mentioned our local football facility plans, which are the starting point to answer that question. In every local authority region, we created a consultation group to help us develop those plans based on the regional need for football and wider multisport community facilities. That was a really positive experience for us. In developing those plans, we found it beneficial to bring people on the ground directly into that conversation, to identify the need and to talk about the existing supply and where it could be improved. Of course, the plans take you only so far. You then need to turn them into active projects and deliver them.

My second part to the answer is that it could always be better. There are really good examples at a local level where we have had great support from a county FA, a local Premier League community foundation or a large, affiliated club or league, working in partnership with the local authority, but by their nature these things can be different depending on where they are. In the best-case scenario, it works excellently and it helps us deliver brilliant projects with great usage plans and inclusive outcomes, but you cannot always ensure that it is the best project.

Yusra Uney: This is core to GoodGym. We work collaboratively; that is what we are all about. It works so well for us because we do not represent a specific cause. It enables us to open up our reach and collaborate with many types of organisations. It allows us to offer a broader range of tasks, which can appeal to more people in the GoodGym community and to those who want to be part of the community. By that, I mean the runners and the people who are interested in joining as volunteers. We have indoor tasks and outdoor tasks. Some people do essential delivery tasks, prescriptions or mutual aid work. Because we are

not specific to a cause, we can tap into a lot of collaborative work. It helps to make running, walking and cycling part of their lifestyle.

A great example is that we work with local multidisciplinary teams. Recently, we had a referral from an occupational therapist at one of the hospitals, asking if one of our runners could help with a hospital discharge, to allow a hospital bed to be placed in the patient's home and do some shopping for essentials.

We help with mutual aid nationally, delivering food parcels to the homeless, vulnerable and socially isolated. With Oxford council, during the pandemic, we have been delivering prescriptions, and as a result we have done over 5,000 deliveries of essential medication to people. We can work with any community partners who have a need. It could be something very simple, such as going to a care home, helping the residents and working with them to reduce their social isolation. This is part of GoodGym operations, day in and day out.

Chrissie Wellington: As Yusra said, collaboration is key to what we do. We work really closely with organisations across every area of our business, including Sport England, Active Partnerships and London Marathon, as well as organisations such as GoodGym.³

I just thought I would mention the importance to parkrun in harnessing the strengths of organisations in other fields, not just staying within the physical activity silo, but reaching out to organisations in health, justice or education sectors. That has been integral to our work of engaging audiences that might otherwise be excluded from what we offer.

We have worked intimately with HMPPS to break new ground and establish parkrun events on the custodial estate. So far, 3,500 people have completed one of the 24 events in prisons and young offender institutions, supported by around 1,100 volunteers. This was made possible because of a collaborative effort, a shared ethos, a shared vision, a respect for each other's way of working, open and honest dialogue, and a willingness to take a risk and do something a little differently.

Another example is where we have collaborated with public health. I mentioned before that we have worked with the Royal College of General Practitioners. In 2018, we launched the parkrun practice initiative, a social prescribing project that encourages GP practices to link with local parkrun events to become certified parkrun practices. The practices then commit to signposting patients to parkrun, as well as the staff taking part themselves.

³ **Note by witness:** In terms of Active Partnerships, we share the goal of reducing inactivity, and over the past few years have worked hard to connect directly with the relevant lead within each Partnership to create the opportunity for regular dialogue and the sharing of ideas. We benefit from their in-depth local insight, knowledge and connections, for example in establishing parkrun events in areas of deprivation, creating pathways between schools and junior parkrun events or linking public health and parkrun. Some Active Partnerships have been more reluctant to engage, perhaps due to a misconception that parkrun is only for speedy, white runners and we have needed to work closely with the network to address these concerns.

Importantly, instead of being imposed from the top down, the initiative was the brainchild of clinicians who were already signposting patients to our events. Some practices were going a step further and setting up parkrun events themselves. At the national level, RCGP and parkrun HQ simply collaborated and, together, provided the framework to scale it up. It has to be said that this initiative is being run on a shoestring, with no external support or investment.

Despite that, or maybe because of that, because it inspires creativity, prioritisation and the empowerment of local communities, the initiative has been a huge success. Over 1,500 practices have signed up across the UK. It has been rolled out in Ireland; it is about to be launched in Australia. It has won a number of awards. It is supported by NHS England and Public Health England. It offers a really, really good example of a collaborative partnership between physical activity and public health, from right up at the national level to the very local level. It has enabled both parkrun and RCGP to achieve more together than we could ever do alone.

It is tempting to see a physical activity organisation such as parkrun as only needing to collaborate with others in our sector, and we do. We work very closely with them, but we can amplify our impact by reaching out beyond that sector.

The Chair: This is turning into a very positive session, with lots of good things to say. The committee would agree with that. Lord Hayward, you are not going to be any different.

Q67 **Lord Hayward:** I may be in part. I would like to ask this question particularly to Chrissie—it will become clear why—and Yusra, given her background. How do you promote diversity and inclusion among your workforce, volunteers, coaches and, particularly, participants? What do you see as good practice in this area?

The reason I emphasise participants is that, as I have referred to on a previous occasion, I live in inner south London, just off the Walworth Road. There is a parkrun in Burgess Park every Saturday, and you would think that I lived in one of the whitest areas in London. The participants are overwhelmingly white. I want to know, given my personal local experience, what you do in these circumstances. Yusra, can you identify whether there are cultural barriers that cause these circumstances in such an amazingly multicultural area?

Chrissie Wellington: It is interesting that you mention Burgess Park, because we have a phenomenal group of Ugandans who come down there most weekends. I am surprised you have not seen them or at least heard them. They are very vocal and very musical.

We want parkrun to be for everyone, so inclusivity lies at the heart of everything we do. Like Sport England, we follow the principle of proportionate universalism. Parkrun is universally open to all but also targets those most in need, such as people with chronic health conditions

or disabilities, people from areas of social deprivation, minority ethnic groups, women and girls or those in custody, to name but a few.

How do we operationalise this? I guess that is your question. We have that standardised model of event delivery, which I mentioned before. That removes many of the common barriers that people face and helps promote inclusivity without us needing to do anything specific or proactive to target certain groups. Volunteering has also been mentioned. It is worth noting—and I am sure Yusra will concur—that having a volunteer-led model promotes inclusivity and diversity as it encourages more people to take part, including those who may not want or be able to walk or run five kilometres.

That said, we have taken steps to adapt and amend that model to enhance inclusivity. For example, in 2017 we renamed the “tail runner” volunteer role—this is the person who is at the back who always finishes last—to “tail walker”, which is a seemingly minor but really highly visible and significant marker of our commitment to encouraging those who want to walk. Last year, 142,000 walks were completed at UK parkruns, and this is growing year on year.

We also changed the gender categories on our global registration form, adding “another gender identity” and “prefer not to say” to the existing “male” and “female” options. Since then over 750 people have selected those. Previously our form might have excluded those who did not identify those with that kind of binary male or female classification, but we have now been able to include them.

Linked to this, we need a systemic collection of registration and participation data to help us build a picture and hold ourselves to account with regards to diversity and inclusivity. We need to augment this insight with other well-being research we undertake, either internally or in partnership with the parkrun Research Board, which is chaired by Sheffield Hallam University.

The way in which organisations communicate their message is really important, so that imagery and the written and visual content needs to be in line with the mission of inclusivity.

On top of all this, parkrun can layer specific outreach projects to engage all the groups I mentioned. We work with asylum seekers; we work with those with long-term conditions; we have the parkrun practice initiative; we work with those in custody, for example. Those are more targeted strategies attempting to stimulate demand and address the barriers those people face.

Robert Sullivan: For us, it is about ensuring that every facility project through the assessment phase has the right levels of inclusion and accessibility baked into the assessment of what it is going to achieve. While we are not ultimately responsible for what happens on those sites in the longer term, when projects and community groups are accessing

funds to deliver on those sites, we can hold them to the highest standards of inclusion and accessibility that we wish to see.

Yusra Uney: This is a very interesting topic at the moment. Charities are not very diverse, and neither is running. For some reason, running is seen as a very white activity, if you speak to people from ethnic backgrounds. When I speak to my family members, they say, "We don't do running. It is not really for us. We would rather do other sports, such as basketball". Football, on the other hand, does not have a colour to it, but for some reason running does.

These are two main areas that GoodGym operates in: charity and running. We are actively trying to help improve this by looking at the language in our recruitment policy, first and foremost, and in our comms, as well as the images we use in our marketing. We are aware that the current GoodGym marketing industry is not very representative or diverse.

We are also looking at how we can reach out to communities and new runners. As an organisation, it is our goal to create better-connected communities. We recognise that we cannot do this without involving all types of people in our work. We aim to be representative of the communities in which we operate, and we want to play a part in getting to know those communities as a way to overcome that and allow more cohesion.

One positive way in which we are already doing this is by creating strong local ownership across our 58 areas. We do that in the recruitment process, where we try to recruit local people. We want to recruit someone with strong connections to the community groups in the area, because that is how they are going to make GoodGym really specific to that area and its demographics. Every area has its own feel, its own customs and its own way of doing things. Autonomy in our workforce is really important. It also allows our area activators to put a personal stamp on their areas, and it gives them a sense of ownership and a really strong sense of achievement.

As for diversity and inclusion for our volunteers, we do this by building connections in the community. Our sessions are flexible; they are able to take place in many different venues, community projects and organisations that represent various religions, ethnic groups and age groups. That means that we are frequently introducing our volunteers across these boundaries. From the volunteering perspective, if somebody has never met other ethnic groups, communities or age groups, they can through our activities.

As a whole, GoodGym has a very diverse mix of members, but we still have some groups that are underrepresented. We are working hard to increase participation numbers from those underrepresented groups. We are also working to increase the diversity of the organisation as a whole. Recruitment of staff is difficult. We recognise that we still have a bit of work to do on this, and we are working hard to understand the barriers to

participation at all levels in the organisation and on a local level. We are taking steps in the right direction. We are having those conversations, and that just shows that we will be moving in the right direction.

Q68 Lord Knight of Weymouth: This is a really fascinating, difficult and intractable area, particularly differentiating between the barriers related to poverty and, for example, ethnicity. It probably needs an interlocking approach, and it is fascinating to hear what people are doing.

My observation of parkrun, as an enthusiastic parkrunner myself, in diverse Lewisham is very similar to Lord Hayward's. Yet, when I run around the same parks not on a parkrun, I see a lot of young black men as personal trainers. When I lived in Weymouth, a lot of white working-class boys who went to school with my son ended up as personal trainers. These sorts of people come from the diverse backgrounds we want to target. Should we harness their activity and their role-modelling to engage the communities they have come from? Let us start with you, Yusra. Chrissie, I have mentioned parkrun so I am fascinated in your response too.

Yusra Unez: That is a really valid point; I agree with that. To reach out to those communities, it is really important to tap into the skillsets that are fun for them. If we see that there are more people from black communities who are personal trainers, we should be encouraging them to get involved as a route to making the nation more active. It is not about dictating which sport is right, because there is a sport for everybody that feels right for them. It is about acknowledging, appreciating and valuing those sports and allowing people to put a personal feel to it in engaging their communities, so they can relate to it. Whichever way gets people moving, that is really important.

We feel, for example, that certain communities are bigger on wrestling. Why not? It is getting people moving. Let us promote it as well as running. It would be nice to see people from different sporting background taking an interest in each other's sports and not just theirs. In that way, barriers could be crossed and there would be more outreach.

Just side-tracking a bit, with more money from the Government, we could invest in targeting groups of people to become personal trainers, run coaches or judo instructors. By targeting that at a specific group where there is a need, it would also help overcome that gap in the market.

Chrissie Wellington: Thank you for your question and observations. We agree, as Yusra said, that there is no single panacea. There are lots of ways for people to be active. If those people are active outdoors in their parks, that is fantastic. Whether they are engaged with parkrun is another matter. It is incredibly important that we work with local community groups. We recruit our own volunteer Outreach Ambassadors, who are deeply embedded within those communities. They have the knowledge, insight and expertise of those communities to engage and understand the groups we are trying to relate to.

We have to identify the barriers to participation. What is preventing people at that very local level taking part? Is it a lack of knowledge, a fear of judgment or a fear of fitness? We have to work with local leaders to address those barriers.

As Yusra said, the messaging is so important: the way in which we communicate what we are and what we are about, but also who communicates it. Using local leaders, local voices and local channels that resonate with the populations we are trying to engage is vital⁴.

Q69 Lord Snape: As a general question to end this session, what recommendation would you like to see this committee make to government when we produce our report later this year?

Robert Sullivan: I would request that the importance of places, pitches and facilities is paramount in your recommendations. The committee is exploring lots of interesting ideas around co-ordination and community access, but, as I said earlier in the session, having a great place to participate and play, whatever the sport may be—I am banging the drum particularly for football—is fundamental.

Great community spaces, great pitches and great clubhouses can have not only the physical activity benefit that we want to see, but so much social benefit, in bringing communities together, with all the mental well-being and resilience aspects of that, which are going to be so important to us as a society post pandemic. My first one would definitely be the importance of the pitch and the place.

This is not to detract from brilliant programmes such as parkrun or GoodGym, but I would like to make a personal plea for football. We should not underestimate the fact that football is a mass participation activity. It is one of the six core ways that people are active in this society. It starts at the very youngest ages and, through brilliant things such as walking football, goes all the way to the very oldest age groups.

People love it; people love its social elements and its team elements. I want to see football at the heart of any future government plans. I am delighted by what Sport England produced yesterday, because it recognises the value of team sports such as football and the places in which they need to play as being core to getting the nation moving.

We should celebrate more what we have in England, which is this unbelievable global phenomenon of the Premier League and its clubs. The FA distributes more back to its grass roots than any other national governing body in the world. That is a huge boon to grass-roots football and wider grass-roots sport. What we can take from those funds and

⁴ **Note by witness:** It is worth noting that between March 2019 and March 2020 over 880,000 parkruns were completed by those living in deprived areas of the UK. In the same 12-month period well over half a million parkruns were completed by people active “less than once per week” in the month before they registered with parkrun. These are growing year on year and suggest that we are becoming increasingly successful at engaging those harder to reach groups.

deliver into community projects goes far beyond the narrow purview of football itself.

I would make a shameless plug for football as well as suggesting that we have a real concentration on physical spaces to play.

Yusra Uney: To add to Robert's lovely wish list, I totally agree that football has a lot of importance. From a GoodGym perspective, I have quite a lot of things on my wish list for the committee to recommend to the Government, but obviously I have to choose one. In the context of Sport England's strategy and what GoodGym offers the community, we would like to be able to run, walk and cycle around our cities away from congested roads, completely separated from cars, if possible. It would be nice if the Government could prioritise sustainable transport routes for running, walking and cycling, allowing people to feel safe by having designated areas for that. That would be a little recommendation from GoodGym.

The Chair: Chrissie, you have the final word.

Chrissie Wellington: I had better make it good. Prior to Covid, parkrun delivered events that involved 170,000 people every single weekend, supported by 17,000 volunteers. In the short term, and as soon as feasible, we would recommend that the Government support the resumption of low-risk physical activity interventions, especially those such as parkrun that are undertaken outdoors. That is a really, really important way of healing the deep-rooted physical and mental health scars that are hurting every single sector of society.

More generally and in the longer term, over five years has passed since the publication of Sporting Future. Given that the landscape has changed so fundamentally since then, we would recommend that the Government consider whether that strategy is fit for purpose, and develop a new framework to guide their activities for the years ahead.

To finish off, I will come, full circle, back to the recommendation I made at the start that all future sport and physical activity strategies are fully cross-departmental in scope and in their commitments; recognise and value every single form of movement; and, just as importantly, place meaningful social interaction, socialisation, community, holistic health and improved life expectancy for all at their heart. That is a big wish, but I hope it can be encapsulated in any new strategy going forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Can I, on behalf of the committee, thank Robert Sullivan, Yusra Uney and Chrissie Wellington for an absolutely splendid session? We have enjoyed listening to what you have to say enormously. I am sure we could have continued this conversation for some time. Your wishes are our command, and we will do whatever we can to put them into action. Thank you all very much indeed.