



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Game On: Community and School Sport, HC 593

Wednesday 16 July 2025

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

Education Committee Member present: Mark Sowards.

Questions 220 - 272

Witnesses

[I](#): Stephanie Peacock MP, Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth; Catherine McKinnell MP, Minister for School Standards; Adam Conant, Deputy Director, Head of Sport at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Matthew Hopkinson, Deputy Director leading the Life Skills Division at the Department for Education.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Stephanie Peacock MP, Catherine McKinnell MP, Matthew Hopkinson, and Adam Conant.

Q220 **Chair:** Welcome to this morning's meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. Today is the last day of our "Game On" inquiry into school and community sports. You will all be aware that the final minutes of football matches statistically have the most goals, so we are hoping for an equally exciting finale to this inquiry. To deliver that for us, I am very keen to welcome to our panel this morning the very brilliant mixed doubles pairings of Stephanie Peacock MP, the Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth and Adam Conant, the Head of Sport at DCMS; and Catherine McKinnell MP, Minister for School Standards, and Matthew Hopkinson, Deputy Director, leading the Life Skills Division at the Department for Education. You are all very welcome. Thank you so much for joining us.

Before we begin, I would also like to welcome Mark Sowards, who has joined us from the Education Committee following Damian Hinds' transfer to the Education Committee last week. We are now taking Mark back on an exchange. Welcome, Mark. Thank you for joining us today.

I remind Members to declare any interests before they ask their questions.

I will start with you, Minister Peacock. The Government have announced £500 million for major sports events and £400 million for grassroots sports. How did you decide upon that figure and how it was to be balanced?

Stephanie Peacock: I think we have a fantastic story in this country. We are a nation of sports people, and we can look at our performance in major sporting events, not just performing in them but hosting them—in 1996, we had one gold medal. Look at where we have transformed that to. We know that Team GB, both Olympic and Paralympic, do brilliantly, but what they really do, as well as performing fantastically for the country, is inspire the next generation. We saw that this summer—75% of the population were inspired by them, and 40% got active. It is great for people to be inspired, but there needs to be facilities for them to go to and take part in whatever sport they want to. That is why we were really pleased on 19 June to announce £400 million of grassroots funding. Obviously, there will be £100 million this year as well. We can roll out, in every part of the country, the facilities that those communities need.

Q221 **Chair:** Fantastic. We know that sports, particularly community sports, can have phenomenal impacts on people's health and wellbeing, and the social and economic benefits for a community. What assessment was made about why an equal amount was spent on events as was spent on the grassroots?

Stephanie Peacock: Just look at the huge economic benefit of Paralympic and Olympic sport to the economy—£25 billion—as well as the huge inspiration. We absolutely do need those facilities there and think



that £400 million is a really good settlement in a tight fiscal environment. What we also want to be really clear about is that that money needs to be well spent, and we want to move to a place-based, community-led focus on how that money is spent.

Q222 Chair: How is it going to be spent, and how will you decide who gets it?

Stephanie Peacock: I had the five big national governing bodies in the Department yesterday to talk to them. We are obviously thinking about business planning and exactly how we allocate that money. We are really clear that place-based, community decision making is absolutely the way to go. You only have to take the example of the 12 Sport England pilots that happened. I speak about Active Essex quite a lot, and I think that is hugely inspirational. In just a year, 365 people reduced their attendance at GP surgeries through Active Essex, and that is about co-locating leisure, activity and sports facilities.

Q223 Chair: There is some fear in the sector that whenever there is any community sports funding available, it all just goes on football pitches. How can you reassure people? We have taken evidence as a Committee over the last few months from really big, growing and quite innovative sports like cheerleading, which is retaining a huge group of adolescent girls in sport at a time when they might be dropping out, padel tennis, which keeps people active for longer, and bowling, which is great for mental health and wellbeing for an older community. How do you make sure that that money gets spread evenly and is not just focused on football?

Stephanie Peacock: That is a good question. I listened to the evidence that you took from the Football Foundation. They obviously have plans up and down the country for every local authority. They are refreshing that at 40% multi-sport, and they encourage other sports to get involved in those facilities. However, there is absolutely an argument, and this is what I talked to the national governing bodies about yesterday, about perhaps widening that and making sure that all sports are included in those plans.

I will share an example. I met with one of the MPs in Bradford. I know you took evidence, and you heard about some of the investment in Bradford. He said to me, "We have had some really good funding in cricket and football, but what my community really wants is boxing. I am really struggling to get that. I am going to pop into the APPG later on to see them". I think different communities will know what their communities want in terms of sport. We do absolutely want those plans and that funding to reflect them.

Q224 Chair: Do you have any idea of what the split will be between building new facilities and maintaining old ones? We have met with and heard evidence from a lot of organisations, particularly swimming pools, that say that their facilities need a huge amount of modernisation.

Stephanie Peacock: I can answer that in two parts. In terms of the new build, I think currently in multi-sport programmes across the UK, there



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are 1,600 projects this year, of which 200 are brand new, 200 are renovations, and the rest are everything from goalposts to new pitches. There is a real range. The Secretary of State has talked about the balance between new build and renovation, and that we should not just be building things for the sake of it. That is important. Remind me of the second part of the question.

Q225 **Chair:** How are you going to divvy up the funding between maintaining existing facilities and building new ones?

Stephanie Peacock: That goes back to the point around place-based community decision making. We want to talk to local communities and hear what they have to say, rather than it being piecemeal by sport.

Q226 **Chair:** I like what you said about how events inspire the next generation into certain sports, maybe sports that they never thought of trying before. In the world of cricket, we have a number of huge global events coming up: in 2026 the Women's T20 World Cup; in 2030, the Men's T20 World Cup; the 2028 Olympics in LA have cricket for the very first time as an Olympic sport. There are going to be a huge number of young people inspired into cricket by that combination of global events. The previous Government announced £35 million for cricket domes, which were due to be in some of our biggest and, in some cases, most deprived cities around the UK. That funding aimed to help get more than 900,000 kids playing our national summer sport, but it is over a year now into the current Government, and we still have not heard what will happen now. Can you give us any good news about that?

Stephanie Peacock: We continue to talk to the ECB. I spoke to them again yesterday. I was at Edgbaston a few weeks ago and had conversations with them there. Chance to Shine is a fantastic programme. I saw it first-hand in my own constituency in a school in Worsbrough, and they came down with the same kids for their 20th anniversary. I absolutely pay tribute to that. We are, of course, working out how we allocate that money. That £35 million was unfunded by the previous Government, and that is a very difficult inheritance to have. That is not to say we are not going to fund cricket at all, but we are working out how we do that allocation.

Q227 **Chair:** When will we know, Minister? The 2026 Women's T20 World Cup is just around the corner now. These things do not get built overnight. When will we have some sort of certainty about how much money is going to be allocated to this?

Stephanie Peacock: We are working through that over the summer and hope to make an announcement by the autumn.

Q228 **Chair:** September? We know that in government terms, autumn can be anything up until February.

Stephanie Peacock: I do acknowledge that, and that is why I had the five governing bodies in yesterday to the Department because we want to move at pace and we are going to make those decisions over the summer.



Q229 **Chair:** September?

Stephanie Peacock: Hopefully so, yes.

Q230 **Chair:** Okay, that is helpful to know. One last thing. Do the Government have plans to publish a deliverable, measurable sports strategy?

Stephanie Peacock: That is an interesting question, but I think if you look at what we have been doing, it is embedded across a number of strategies in Government. We have the 10-year health strategy. There is activity in the DWP. We are here with the schools Minister. Our priorities are very clear in terms of reducing the levels of inactivity, prioritising women and girls and making sure there are good grassroots facilities.

Q231 **Chair:** Do you not think that what gets measured gets managed, right? And what gets reported publicly seems to get managed even better. If you set it out in a clear, measurable strategy that has deliverable goals, that gives us—I am not being lazy, but that gives us something to hold you to account for—it actually gives the public some form of narrative and people can see your vision.

Stephanie Peacock: That is a very fair point, but I think we have been very clear in what we want to achieve in terms of reducing inactivity rates that have been stubbornly too high, supporting women and girls and improving grassroots. It has been in our actions throughout a number of government strategies, but I think, yes, the next step is perhaps to bring it together in a clear plan.

Q232 **Chair:** No plans for a sports strategy at the moment?

Stephanie Peacock: No, but if you look at the number of strategies—and I think some of the evidence you have taken is about cross-Government working—it is really important that it is cross-Government and through a number of the different Government strategies.

Q233 **Tom Rutland:** I refer to my register of interests as having attended an event at the invitation of the LTA and the Paralympics at the invitation of Channel 4.

Minister Peacock, coming back to the point around where the £400 million will go and be distributed, and the variety of sports eligible to receive funding, will this be distributed beyond the existing multi-sport grassroots facilities programme? I know that the Football Foundation's facilities can be used by multiple sports, but that is not true for court-based sports such as tennis and padel, which the Committee has heard a lot of evidence about.

Stephanie Peacock: Yes, and as I said in my previous answer, I do think there is an argument for widening it out. The Football Foundation has done fantastic work. Several MPs have come to me to talk about facilities in their local area, and they are always really encouraged to go and look at those plans that are being refreshed. They have done fantastic work, and there is no doubt that football does get people through the door in the context of getting them active, but I completely appreciate that it does not work for every sport, and that is something



that all five big sporting bodies spoke about yesterday. We are absolutely open to new and creative ideas.

Q234 Tom Rutland: Would that include funding beyond multi-use facilities at present?

Stephanie Peacock: We are open to looking at how we do the funding. We do think that multi-sport works, but I think there is an argument to look at the multi-sport plans and exactly how they work, and to make sure. Returning to the point around community-based, place-based funding, we want to know what local communities want. If your local community does want tennis, or boxing, or cricket, then those plans should work for those communities.

Q235 Tom Rutland: Brilliant. Coming back to tennis, and it feels ridiculous to say this given we are in the second heatwave in as many weeks, but we have 150 days of rain or so in the UK. British weather can be a barrier to participation in some sports, and we have a serious lack of indoor or covered facilities in this country. France has five times the number of indoor tennis courts as the UK. What is DCMS doing to address this lack of covered and indoor facilities?

Stephanie Peacock: I went out to visit the LTA a few months ago—it is probably longer ago now than I realise; it was probably six months ago—and I was delighted to be at Wimbledon last week. I know the whole nation would have been inspired by that, but to my earlier point, we do want the facilities for people to be able to go and take part. I know that the tennis courts programme under the last Government was hugely successful. We had Andy Murray promoting that again a few weeks ago with the Department. That is something we will look at as part of the allocation of the £400 million.

Q236 Tom Rutland: Would you be interested in the lower cost of covering courts, rather than building internal ones, such as canopy covers?

Stephanie Peacock: Of course, and if you go back to the cricket domes, where there are cricket domes, we will be covering tennis courts. I know there are fairly affordable ways to do that, but it will be part of our business planning and part of the £400 million allocation.

Tom Rutland: Thank you.

Q237 Liz Jarvis: Minister Peacock, what is the Department doing to develop an attractive environment to encourage private investment into the sector?

Stephanie Peacock: That is a good question. You mentioned leisure and taking leisure as an example. It does not fall in my Department, it obviously falls to local government, but it is a huge part of getting people active, and we are very keen to look at creative solutions as to how we can tackle that. I am also the Minister for the Impact Economy, and you will know the announcement that the Secretary of State and the Chancellor made a few days ago. We are very open to looking at any and all creative funding options. If you look at the Football Foundation, it obviously works on match funding, where Government money comes in



and is matched by, in particular, the Premier League. The more money that we can attract from outside, the more we can achieve.

Q238 **Liz Jarvis:** Will you be actively doing that?

Stephanie Peacock: We are actively looking at all options. I don't know if Adam Conant wants to come in on some of the work that we are doing.

Adam Conant: I am very happy to, Minister. Particularly on leisure, we have done quite a long period of work with Sport England to understand what different sources of investment could look like. I think you have heard in evidence that there are alternatives—pension funds and other private investment—that could fit a leisure model because you are looking for a guaranteed return and so on. We have probably done six to nine months of work on that. We have then been out across the country to understand what is and is not working in local leisure centres, and particularly speaking to some of the operators to see what sorts of investment they might need. Then, as the Minister says, the programme over the summer is to work out if this could work and what do we need to do as Government with the experience we have on impact investment and social investment to start to bring some of those organisations together and find out what government funding needs to go alongside it and how that can support our leisure centres.

Q239 **Liz Jarvis:** Minister Peacock, the spending review resulted in a real-terms cut for the Department over the next three years. What areas are you looking to cut to facilitate any future increase in funding for sports and activity?

Stephanie Peacock: We have a positive story to tell. Half a billion pounds across sport and school sport is going in this year alone, and if you look at the funding settlement, it is £400 million on grassroots, half a billion on major events, £344 million on Olympic and Paralympic, and £250 million for Sport England. But I think the questions we should be asking are about how that money is spent and how we can spend it more effectively. Money has gone in over the last few years, but inactivity levels remain stubbornly high—in my own constituency, they are 35%; it is one of the more deprived constituencies, and often money is not allocated fairly in a geographical sense. Some areas have had lots; some areas have had less, but there is too much of a gap between the most active area, which I think is Mole Valley, and the most inactive area, which I think is Blackpool. We need to close that gap, so we need to think about how we can spend that money more effectively.

Q240 **Liz Jarvis:** Minister McKinnell, what impact will the spending review have on your Department's ability to fund sport and physical activity in schools?

Catherine McKinnell: Would you mind if I just very quickly said thank you for having me here? It is great to have the opportunity to talk about PE, sport and enrichment, and it is obviously a big part of what we want to achieve in terms of unlocking opportunities for children and young people. It is good to recognise the cross-Government work that we are



doing and to have the opportunity to talk about that because clearly we need to work with a number of Government Departments to deliver on our vision and ambition. Committees like this one and the work that you are doing are really valuable, and the opportunity to contribute today is much appreciated.

We are very focused on supporting schools to protect their PE time in school, and supporting schools not only to deliver the quantity of PE, sport and physical activity that we want children to be able to experience and every child to have the opportunity to do—and that does mean breaking down barriers to opportunity on several fronts, which I am sure we will get into more detail about—but to be able to do that within the context of the school day and activities around it. We are looking at the curriculum as part of that; that is an ongoing review, and I have to have a certain limit on the extent to which I can pre-empt the outcome of that because it is an independent review. We are also working with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, working with the national governing bodies on all the activity that can happen nationally, and making sure that we have that in a really co-ordinated way across schools.

This year, we have confirmed the PE premium, which we know is highly valuable in supporting primary schools to deliver a strong PE offer, and we have confirmed that for 2025-26, so that schools have certainty about what they can provide. Going forward, we are looking at bringing in a new approach to PE and sport in school, through a partnership approach. We will be working on the details of that and will set it out in the autumn of 2026.

Q241 **Chair:** Will that be bringing back the school sport partnerships?

Catherine McKinnell: We are looking at harnessing the partnership. There are currently pockets of very good partnership activity going on around the country. We want to make sure that is much more universal, accessible and transparent, and that every part of the country can benefit from the power that comes from working together collaboratively to harness all the capacity that is in the system, to make sure it does reach all the children and breaks down the barriers to accessing sport, physical activity and PE.

Q242 **Chair:** Is that a long way of saying yes, that we are bringing back school sport partnerships?

Catherine McKinnell: We are working on the details of how it will look, but the principles behind it are fundamentally about working in partnership, harnessing all the added value of building on existing capacity and making sure that we maximise opportunities to contribute.

Chair: A couple of members want to come in on the back of that.

Q243 **Mr James Frith:** Good morning, everybody. Minister Peacock, on the private investment and the fact that there is a reduction over three years from the spending review, is the ambition to try to encourage private investment to make up the shortfall from the spending review, and are



there obvious areas in the sector that in your assessment are more attractive for private investment, where you think there are opportunities for private investment to step in? If so, what would they be?

Stephanie Peacock: There is absolutely a role to attract private investment and indeed we already do that with a lot of our match funding. The Football Foundation with the Premier League is the most obvious example, but to take the example of public leisure, of course that is quite challenging because it falls to local authorities. Peter Mason gave evidence to the Committee, and I thought he very clearly outlined the challenges that local authorities have. He did that very articulately. As sports Ministers, we want to get people active, and it is a challenge. Often, leisure centres will be the closest and will fill a gap in the market left by private providers, but they will also do something else. They will be close to where people live, they will provide wraparound things, activities as well as sports, and we can co-locate as with the example I gave of Active Essex, but the real challenge then is with funding. While this Government is giving an increase to local authorities, we know about the huge cuts they have had. My own authority of Barnsley has had funding cut by 40% in the last 15 years. That cannot be transformed overnight, and that is an area I am keen to look at. I am aware of the problem and I am keen to look at creative solutions.

Q244 **Mr James Frith:** What does encouraging private investment look like in the next few years in terms of them stepping into new areas or new opportunities?

Stephanie Peacock: It depends on what part of the sector you are talking about. Leisure is an obvious example but there may be other areas and we are open to all suggestions. I don't know if you want to come in on that, Adam?

Adam Conant: Yes. First, I think it is important to clarify the shortfall point. The headline figure around the Department's position is a kind of reduction, but on the capital investment we are talking about in grassroots facilities, it is not being reduced. It is £98 million this year. We have talked about a figure of at least £400 million over the next four years, £100 million a year, so there is no reduction there. The reason I think that is important goes exactly to your question about how we leverage that to go further.

I talked a bit about some of the investments we are looking at around pension funds and so on for leisure, but to the Minister's point, we have seen a very successful match funding programme from tennis on the park tennis court programme; cricket has offered up match funding as well, and there is the kind of traditional model of the Football Foundation with both the FA and the Premier League. The challenge that we put to the sports bodies yesterday was that we need to go further on all of this, and on how we can bring more private investment to the table in a way that helps to counter inactivity and supports women and girls to get active so that that money stays consistent but goes further and has the impact we want.



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Q245 Mr James Frith: The risk is that if capital is maintained and revenues are going to be shrinking, it affects the run rate of funding to local authority areas, which as you rightly say, Minister, we have seen impacted by the removal of that funding. We are going to see a situation where we are expecting private investment to step in to run my local leisure centre because the local authority cannot afford to do it.

Adam Conant: There are a few things there. The private investment piece on the leisure side is about how we look at it creatively, because the scale of the challenges is big. I know you will all feel that in your own constituencies. We have to try to get ahead of that, and we are having conversations about that. However, how do we maximise the use of those facilities?

The Minister talked about our place-based approach. We have good evidence that when you act in that way, it can outperform what we were doing previously; it is two and a half percentage points better on inactivity than otherwise. Therefore, we have to align everything properly for the first time so that when government investment is going into a facility, the programmes are coming in so that individuals who otherwise would not have thought it was for them have a way to come and use the facility so we are having the impact we want on inactivity rather than just building it for the sake of building it.

Q246 Mr James Frith: So you could expect a scenario where a local authority will see additional funding because they are being given a greater share that might otherwise have gone through a third party or elsewhere.

Adam Conant: Sport England, which delivers most of the funding on our behalf, announced £250 million of place-based investment. That money will be going to local authorities, active partnerships and so on. That is additional money compared to previously. With the facilities investments that we are looking at, leisure centres are in scope, so, yes, you could well see that.

Q247 Mark Sowards: I think James Frith has made most of my points about private investments, so I will limit myself to one question, although Minister McKinnell, I will just say that if you want to see good practice of how teachers and local organisations work together to deliver sport in a city, you can do no worse than look at Leeds Schools Sports Association in my city. I will speak to you afterwards about that. It is a great example.

On the private investment point, I can give you an example from my constituency. There was a football pitch called Wortley's Wembley where Leeds United legends used to play decades ago. It had become derelict. Residents wanted to revive it, and after a six-year campaign, which I was pleased to be a part of, I found that Leeds United were willing to buy the ground. They have agreed to do so and put their own money into the site and essentially regenerate it and make it Wortley's Wembley once again. I found that I was pushing at an open door with Leeds United. Where I wasn't pushing at an open door was with the local council. The council was just not willing to consider this campaign or this investment. This



would be cost-neutral for the Government. I think if there were direction from the Government saying councils should actively pursue partnerships like this, which do not cost them anything, that would have made a six-year campaign a one-year campaign. Are you looking at things like that?

Stephanie Peacock: That is a good example. I am really pleased to hear you had a successful campaign. Through our active partnerships, we absolutely want to bring together everyone in the local area—local councils, sports clubs, schools and so on. I do appreciate the pressure that councils have been under and refer back to the evidence you took from Peter Mason and my own experience. I also appreciate that circumstances are tough and it may be that councils simply feel too pushed, but where local authorities can be supportive, and particularly at limited cost, we absolutely think they should. I think of an example in my own area. The head teacher of a local primary school used to work in sport, and he is very enthusiastic about it. He does the daily mile. They had a school playing field that was completely overgrown; they could not use it, and he partnered up with a local grassroots football club, which now maintains the field so that they can play on it at the weekend and the kids can use it during the week. It costs limited money, but the grassroots club has been able to do that. Where we can find creative partnerships, we absolutely should do it.

Q248 **Mark Swards:** That is correct. You would encourage local councils to look at these things?

Stephanie Peacock: Indeed, yes, and perhaps they will take that away. We are very keen to work closely across government. I have spoken to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on a number of occasions about a number of different issues, and that is perhaps something I can take away and follow up with them.

Mark Swards: Brilliant. Thank you.

Q249 **Damian Hinds:** I have a question for the schools Minister. The existing aim is to have two hours of quality PE a week and equal opportunity for all to access and enjoy it. That has been the case for some time. You rightly said that you could not pre-empt the curriculum review being undertaken by Professor Francis. However, the Prime Minister appeared to do so on 19 June when he talked about a new framework with a clear focus on two hours of PE a week and equal access and opportunity for all. Given that was already the aim, the expectation arises that two hours of PE is going to become mandatory. Is that correct?

Catherine McKinnell: We made it clear in our manifesto that we want to protect PE time. We have always been very clear about that. There is obviously a range of means by which we can support schools and ensure they do that. One way is through the curriculum and assessment review, making sure that we have a holistic school approach that gives schools both the capacity and the time to offer school sport and PE. It is currently a requirement in the national curriculum anyway, but we know that participation rates drop off at the older end, the key stage 4 end, as the focus is on GCSEs, but we do know how important it is for participation to



continue. However, we are also looking at an enrichment framework to make sure that all schools have a clear sense of what good looks like when it comes to clearing barriers for children and young people, whatever they might be within school. You will know from your experience that those barriers can vary and be specific to particular communities, schools and localities. We are taking a holistic approach, looking at how we make sure that children do get that access to the two hours of PE and also that their activity levels are increased in general. We will be keeping a very close eye on the data that is collected on that and also looking at what good practice already exists in the system, and then building on it with the partnership approach to make sure that we have a more consistent offer across the country. We will keep an eye on how that is bearing out in terms of the data and what it shows for children's activity levels in school and outside of the school day as well.

Q250 Damian Hinds: It is a holistic approach. Could you say anything more specific?

Catherine McKinnell: I can be more specific. About what?

Q251 Damian Hinds: You listed a number of things. To be fair, we do know about them and they have been known for some time. I don't think they are new, and the Department has issued guidance in the past on all the things you mentioned, reducing barriers, what good looks like, sharing best practice and so on, and particularly issues around participation at key stage 4 and particularly for girls. All these things are very important. There is already an ambition to have two hours of high-quality PE a week, and that sits alongside the CMO's recommendations on 60 minutes a day activity, 30 minutes of it in school. All of this is very important and already in place as aims; I am not saying those things are all achieved. The PM talks about a new framework. What is new about the new framework?

Catherine McKinnell: We have not announced the details of the new framework. As you rightly identify, these aims and aspirations and recognition of how we fall short of them as a system and as a country have been in place for some time, which is why we want to take a different approach to tackling the stubbornly low levels of children's activity, the persistent inequalities that we know affect girls, special educational needs, disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. I am very much looking forward to hearing the example of Leeds, and I have met with Birmingham to understand how their sports partnership works. Minister Peacock has a big interest in making sure that we work together on a clear framework, better strategic and planning and co-ordination of local resources and assets and having partnerships with the national governing bodies to make sure that we are tapping into the opportunities that they can provide at a grassroots level as well and where that can feed into the broader school infrastructure, bringing and co-ordinating that approach. We want to see a significant shift in improving those outcomes, figures and data and I think that is different from what has happened to date.



Stephanie Peacock: We had a roundtable—we call them round; they are never roundtables, are they?—where we had the main governing bodies in to the Department for Education probably about six months ago and we had a conversation about how sport and schools can work more closely together. I think there has been a missed opportunity, but there is a real opportunity now. There is some fabulous work going on. We talked about Chance to Shine, there is the Kicks programme—there are all sorts of programmes taking place and not just about getting kids active. There are opportunities for continued professional development for teachers. I was a secondary school history teacher in a previous life and I am struck by the fact that a primary teacher will get very limited training in PE. I can take you back to that example from my constituency—

Q252 **Damian Hinds:** Are we going to change the content of initial teacher training?

Stephanie Peacock: Can I take you back to the school in my constituency? I was struck by the fact that the head teacher worked in sport, so he was focused on it with the daily miles and sorting out the playing field. I can go to a different school and find that the teachers lack the training and therefore the confidence. In the sport that we have, in the national governing bodies and the different organisations, there is a real opportunity for training and activity levels.

Q253 **Damian Hinds:** Without doubt and for the avoidance of doubt, I think some of those programmes from the NGBs that you mentioned, compared with when we were at school, are like night and day. Some of them are absolutely fantastic. I have enjoyed taking part in a number of those types of roundtables in the past. Would it be fair to say, Minister, that it remains to be seen what is new in the new framework?

Catherine McKinnell: We are working on the details of that.

To come to your earlier point, we are not actually waiting either. We are getting on already. We have met with the governing bodies. We have also launched Inclusion 2028. In answer to your earlier question about how we support teachers to provide high-quality teaching, physical activity, sport and competitive sport to children and young people, we are already investing in a new approach. It is regionalised, providing information and support for schools to provide inclusive PE and sport opportunities. It is part of the reforms that we are looking to bring in more broadly on special educational needs and disabilities. We see sport as an important place to start, making sure that we genuinely have inclusion and inclusive activity for children and young people. One of the things that children with special education needs and disabilities have said to me is that they want to know that they can take part in those activities at school. We have already put in the programme that is going to make sure of that. The programme is not delivering the sport; it is supporting teachers and schools to deliver sport in an inclusive way. Sometimes, that does just come down to training, support, information and access to resources as well. We are already taking action on that front.

Q254 **Damian Hinds:** Can I ask about the PE and sport premium? You



mentioned that it is safe at least for the year 2025-26 and that there will be a partnership approach. All four of you on the panel will be familiar with the phrase “tucking it under”, which is not a phrase known to or in general use among the public but it is a favourite phrase of HM Treasury, which is where you make one large budget look like it is growing but you take another budget and say that the large budget now has to include the smaller budget. For example, you take the large schools grant and you make the PE and sport premium simply a part of it. Is the PE and sport premium safe?

Catherine McKinnell: It is ringfenced for the 2025-26 academic year. As you will know, but I will say it for the purpose of the Committee hearing it, it is a combination of funding from the Department for Education and the Department for Health and Social Care, and that is in recognition of the value not just of the quality of education in sport that we are obviously very determined to improve but also the health benefits to children more broadly. We wanted the confirmation of that funding because we know how important it is for schools to be able to deliver their activities, but we also know that it is not delivering the step change that we would like to see and that you set out yourself in terms of the stubborn data that shows that activity levels are not increasing despite great efforts from schools.

We know about the identification of how to create sustainable models within schools so that you can grow participation and the quality of provision from various reports. You will be familiar with an Ofsted report under the previous Government. It is patchy, it is not upskilling staff, so it is not creating sustainable change. It relies quite heavily on bringing in external resource and provision, often from fantastic grassroots clubs, but whether that is a model that we want to continue is something we are rightly looking at very closely. We are looking at a different approach. I cannot confirm what the funding will be for the new approach because, first, we do not have the details of the new approach yet. I appreciate that it is frustrating for the Committee but we are working it out, and rightly so, with a whole range of partners because we want to get it really right for the long-term future. We cannot confirm the precise funding or how it will be made.

Q255 **Damian Hinds:** It sounds as if you are saying you will be taking decisions about how to use sport funding away from schools. Is that correct?

Catherine McKinnell: It is all in discussion. We do appreciate that each school has particular circumstances that they need to meet and address as part of their PE and sport offer but I also know schools would welcome a more co-ordinated approach and support and bolstering of capacity within the school to be able to provide in-school as well as intra-school and community-wide activities whether within the school day or out-of-school in breakfast clubs and after-school clubs. You will know that all those things often involve sports and sport activity. We are looking at all the provisions that we have and we want to make sure that we have a targeted and co-ordinated approach so that we can maximise the impact



for all children. The bit that bothers me mostly is the patchy nature of the provision. We have some amazing examples of where this is being done brilliantly, but if it is not being done brilliantly everywhere, then it is not job done.

Chair: May I interrupt? We have quite a lot to get through and I want to get you out of here on time, so can we keep our answers as pithy and short as possible?

Q256 **Damian Hinds:** I have a final question. Minister, you will have heard many calls, and I would not be surprised if they included calls from your colleague to your right, to make PE a core subject in school. Will you agree to do that?

Catherine McKinnell: I am not going to pre-empt the outcome of the curriculum and assessment review.

Q257 **Chair:** One more subject—the school games organiser network and a report that was published this month showing remarkable outcomes, for instance that 88% of schools surveyed said that the provisions of sport and physical activity provision would decline without it and that 93% of schools believe that it has had a positive impact on their least active pupils. That funding is due to end in 2026. Have you had any thoughts about continuing that funding?

Stephanie Peacock: You are right that the school games organiser network's outcomes are phenomenal and they do much more than one might assume, creating massive sporting opportunities, the schools' Olympics. However, at best, I think some of them deal with 19 schools and at worst, I think it is 150. To the Minister's earlier point, coverage is quite patchy. Of course, we will work through it. We cannot anticipate next year's funding, but I absolutely recognise the value of the network and it is really important in the context of the work we talk about, bringing the two Departments together.

Q258 **Paul Waugh:** Minister Peacock, for years, local communities have seen their playing fields gobbled up by development, a problem that stretches right back to the Thatcher and Major Governments in particular. What the Government are proposing now is to remove Sport England from the list of statutory planning consultees. How do you think that will impact access to local facilities?

Stephanie Peacock: That is a very important and very fair question. I was interested to hear your evidence session with from the Football Foundation, where you spoke about how the planning system is often too slow. People expect their applications to come back in 13 weeks, but often are waiting for 22 weeks. I will not repeat the evidence that you already heard from them. As constituency MPs, we all know that the planning system is far too slow and often is not working. It obviously falls outside my Department, but while the Government are looking at reforms to stimulate economic growth, that should not be at the expense of playing fields or sports facilities.

Q259 **Paul Waugh:** Sport England tell us that they respond to 98% of



applications within 21 days, that they do not object in 70% of cases, so this is not a bunch of blockers from development; these are people who are only going to object where there is a real risk of a community asset being lost. Do you think that the MHCLG should think again about removing Sport England as a statutory consultee? Have you told the Department that on behalf of the DCMS?

Stephanie Peacock: I am very aware of the statistics and I have spoken to Sport England about it. I am familiar with their work. I have spoken to the Minister about the issue as a whole and the Department will be opening a consultation very shortly. I do encourage people to contribute to that consultation and make those views heard.

Q260 **Paul Waugh:** What has your advice been to the MHCLG? Have you urged the Department to think again?

Stephanie Peacock: Taking a step back, I do appreciate that the planning system simply is not working and I could share many examples from my own constituents of that. I think the evidence you heard from the Football Foundation is clear. It is far too slow, so I do think there is an issue here. I cannot speak for Bill as a whole, but that is why they are taking the action they are taking. They have put this proposition forward, there will be a consultation, and I do encourage people to feed into it.

Q261 **Paul Waugh:** Have you expressed your concerns in any way to the MHCLG?

Stephanie Peacock: I am the sports Minister. Of course, I do not want to see facilities taken away. We have spent a lot of time with the Committee talking about how we need to improve and invest in facilities. It is in absolutely no one's interest to give with one hand and take away with the other.

Q262 **Paul Waugh:** Minister McKinnell, sports and leisure facilities have been first in line for cuts, as we have known, throughout the austerity years. We have heard evidence from the Local Government Association, from Peter Mason in particular, that without a statutory duty on councils to provide those facilities and funding, too, we are going to see a continued decline in the number of facilities we have, including closures. What is your view on making a statutory protection for leisure facilities on behalf of local councils?

Catherine McKinnell: I am not sure that is a question for the Department for Education. I do appreciate the challenge you raise to school playing fields, for example. I think it is important that very clear criteria are followed in the case of a change of use of any sports playing facilities. We know that where they are on designated education land, there must be very specific consents to use them for a different purpose. That is important and is set out in primary legislation.

In the wider context of community facilities, we recognise some of the challenges, for example, with compliance with the requirements for children to learn to swim and learn water safety. The Department is already doing what it can.



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The relationship, sex and health education guidance that was set out yesterday has water safety within it for the first time, which is very much welcomed by campaigning organisations on this issue. The broader challenge of making sure that all children have access to the facilities that enable them to learn to swim is clearly important as well. I recognise the challenge and it is one that as a Government we need to factor in across Departments.

Q263 Paul Waugh: Minister Peacock, do you have a view on whether there should be a statutory requirement on councils to provide these sports facilities as recommended by the LGA?

Stephanie Peacock: I think the point that the LGA made was that the funding has to follow that. While I think there has been a generous funding settlement from the Government Department, clearly there have been significant cuts in the last 15 years. I give again the example of my own area: 40%, some of the worst cuts in the country. They have done their very best to keep services going. We want to work together with local authorities and with Sport England as a Government to make sure that local areas can have the facilities that they need. That is why we are focused on this place-based, community-led funding model.

Q264 Paul Waugh: The statutory requirement is not something either of you are particularly keen on. Is that fair?

Stephanie Peacock: It is not being considered, no.

Q265 Chair: Can I take you back to the statutory consultee status of Sport England? There are currently 25 statutory consultees that MHCLG has to chat to whenever any local authorities or anyone is doing any planning. There are three that are currently being reviewed, and they are Sport England, the Theatres Trust and the Gardens Trust. They all come under the DCMS banner. Do you feel a bit picked on?

Stephanie Peacock: I refer to the earlier answer. I recognise the challenge in our planning system. I spoke about it when I was on the Back Benches. I had a number of local challenges with the planning system, so I understand its aspiration to improve it and to make it better. However, I would encourage people to respond to that consultation.

Q266 Chair: If it were me in your shoes, I would feel that they should be looking at maybe one of the other 25 statutory consultees and not be focusing on three that come under the banner of my Government Department. I would be fighting quite hard to ensure that the voices of theatres, the voices of garden trusts and the voices of sports facilities across the country are not ignored. Are you not doing that? You are encouraging other people to take part in the consultation but what are you doing to stand up for your Department?

Stephanie Peacock: As I said earlier, I have spoken to the relevant Minister in the Department. I have had conversations with them. I respect that they are taking their consultation through, but I have certainly had conversations and will continue to do so.

Q267 Mr James Frith: Minister McKinnell, the ending of the opening schools

facilities fund without a replacement threatens to exacerbate the facilities crisis that we have been speaking about. This will likely disproportionately affect women and girls. What plans do you have to address this?

Catherine McKinnell: Clearly, I agree that school sports facilities are vital assets for pupils and local communities, not only because they offer those great facilities, but they are also quite a familiar environment for a lot of people, and there is real value in that. We have taken lessons from the three years that the scheme was in place. What is it that schools need to be able to open up their facilities? What barriers are in place? It was a relatively limited scheme. It did not reach all schools. We are basically taking the lessons from that and we are going to apply them to our partnership model that we are working on. We will announce the details in due course.

Q268 **Mr James Frith:** Am I right in thinking that the motivation for this originally was to try to get past the gatekeeping of multi-academy trusts not wanting to open up? I have to come to you, Matthew, with the face that you have just pulled.

Catherine McKinnell: It was a scheme of the previous Government, so I think that Matthew will be well placed to answer your question.

Mr James Frith: I think he has with his facial expression.

Matthew Hopkinson: Sorry, I should keep more of a straight face. The truth is that there are genuine challenges to schools in terms of opening up facilities. You have to invest in doing it. There are complicated things to do with safeguarding, insurance and other things you have put in place. One of the things that the programme did was to show how schools could be supported to do that, to get over the hump, basically, of the things that get in the way.

Q269 **Mr James Frith:** Will those challenges not just return now the fund closes, or is it a knowledge transfer now we know? Minister McKinnell, what are those lessons? What is that knowledge that now requires no funding?

Catherine McKinnell: I appreciate that you have directed this specifically at me, but could Matthew just finish what he was saying?

Matthew Hopkinson: The things that we have in particular in year 2 of the programme and the lessons that we were getting out of it were that it was the quality of engagement. There is that knowledge in the system and it is about spreading it out there, working out how to do it and giving the support to schools, which has the potential to go forward into future partnership arrangements, something my team is leading on, working with DCMS and DHSC, so that it works for schools.

The lessons we got out of it were that it is about helping people find the right person in the school who has the time to do things and giving them the information. It is about getting that collaboration, so you have somebody in the middle who can join up the clubs with the schools to



make sure that you are not wasting time trying to find out who to talk to. Interestingly, one of the things was the importance of involving children and young people themselves, getting young leaders in place and getting into what facilities they want and how they are going to use them and informing the way forward. All those are lessons we can take and put into the design of what we are doing with partnerships on a larger scale.

Q270 Mr James Frith: What was the fund funding specifically that it no longer needs to fund?

Matthew Hopkinson: It was funding people who went out and did that support, who worked to build those links and made sure that people were able to talk to each other, and provided the practical support and advice to open that up. That is the sort of thing. We want to make partnerships and develop them as a practical thing that works for schools. That is the knowledge, expertise and time saving that we can build into the design.

Q271 Mr James Frith: On the point, Minister, of the disproportionate effect on women and girls, how do we mitigate that?

Catherine McKinnell: Is that based on a report on the opening schools facilities programme?

Mr James Frith: On the impact of the opening schools facilities fund and the broader point that access to facilities is already under significant pressure, not just from the prevalence of football and other sports, but access for girls and women to those facilities.

Catherine McKinnell: Clearly, that is part of the focus that we have generally in our approach that we need to take. We are very conscious of the gendered challenge when it comes to participation in sport and the socioeconomic challenge of communities that have less resource and therefore fewer facilities. We know that schools on a much wider level can have significant challenges for communities that have less resource within them. We need to make sure that our partnership approach does address those challenges because we are not going to see a shift in the data until we have a much more co-ordinated and sustainable approach to unlocking those opportunities.

I think that is the key here. This was a three-year programme of the previous Government that clearly had an impact, and we can learn the lessons from that. However, in terms of a sustainable approach going forward, we want to make sure that is built into the system and the partnership model that we are building. We will learn all the lessons from it and make sure that we can maximise access to facilities, whether that is on a community basis or a school basis. I think the co-ordinated cross-Government approach will add significant value to what was a very targeted DFE approach on its own.

Q272 Mr James Frith: I appreciate that and I guess what I am trying to understand is not every fund that is ever created should automatically be continued forever, of course, but it is whether it was a practical design in that a school can now afford to open its facilities because Matthew has identified who in the school it can be and it can therefore pay them to



stay at school for longer and open the facilities, or whether in fact it is a lesson of knowledge, that if you do the following things you are likely to be able to support extra hours, extracurricular running of your facilities.

Catherine McKinnell: Do you have a response to that?

Matthew Hopkinson: Yes. I think it is more in the knowledge space. There are all sorts of ways in which schools can open up facilities, sometimes free of charge, sometimes for payment. There was something about the hump of time and investment you have to put in to get to a point where you have the things in place and now your facilities can be open. Providing advice on how to get over that in the easiest possible way is the thing that came out, so it is sustainable there.

Just quickly, in relation to the women and girls point, there are a number of factors as to why participation drops off by girls. If I go back to the point about involving children and young people in the design and the things that they want to see and how you want to open it up, helping you address the factors that girls have that cause them to drift away from sport, the sorts of things you want to be able to do, for instance, the ways you set up mixed sports and changing rooms, those are important in making sure you make that impact in that area.

Q273 **Paul Waugh:** Chair, can I follow up just briefly on that one? If we are over this hump that you describe, surely the only real metric is that access for local communities and sports clubs of those local schools and their facilities will be maintained in the next few years. In other words, what we want to be sure of is that now you say that you are withdrawing or not continuing this funding and you think you are over the hump, which means that knowledge has been transferred, surely the only test of that is whether or not the access metrics match it. For us and for many people, certainly in the communities I represent, schools have become walled gardens, where they are not part of their community. They are blocking off local sports clubs from access to these fantastic facilities and they are looking from the outside in. That is unacceptable. What we want to make sure of is that, as you say, we make it sustainable. What I want to know is: are the metrics in place for that?

Catherine McKinnell: That is a fair challenge. The principle of the three-year limited timeframe fund and what it was intended to achieve was to tackle some of that challenge. Although I cannot speak for the previous Government, my understanding is that the intention of the programme was to understand why these facilities are not being made more readily available when they are such valuable assets within communities. What are the challenges for schools in achieving that? We recognise that we ask a lot of our schools and, while this is very important, they clearly have very important key functions to perform as well. We know that in 2023-24, 89% of state secondary schools made their facilities available for community sport-related use, so the data is positive in terms of the number of schools that are opening up in that way. We want to make sure, as part of our partnership approach, that we maximise those opportunities and take the challenge that you set.

Q274 **Paul Waugh:** You are going to keep an eye on it, and if it dips, then you will reconsider, maybe?

Catherine McKinnell: What we want to do is to wrap it into the partnership approach. Schools will be partners in that approach, and national governing associations, local authorities and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, making sure that we have a genuine partnership, all focused on improving access to quality sport, PE and physical activity for children and seeing all those metrics improve.

Q275 **Damian Hinds:** This is a big issue for this Committee because it comes up very regularly, the amount of sport and activity space that comes under schools' domain. You say it was a programme of the last Government, but there is nothing political about it. The Blair Government had multiple programmes to try to open up school facilities, a bit like the wraparound eight until six project, which comes around every few years, whoever is in government.

I just want to give the Minister an opportunity to say, should she be minded to do so—although knowledge transfer clearly is important, I happen to have the note in front of me. This was a £57 million programme. That is a lot of knowledge transfer. In fact, it covered rather more than just knowledge transfer. If the Minister were minded to say, I think it would add clarity for the Committee that there will be things forgone in opening up facilities. It is not always immediately obvious. I used to ask this question myself: how hard can it be? You have a pitch; get people playing on it. However, there are things like how you book it and how you co-ordinate with clubs. There are physical, capital things, particularly with safeguarding: how do I have a site where I have both children and adults mixing, changing, all that stuff? There are costs attached to that. In cancelling the programme, I think it is fair to say—and I would just invite the Minister to give a comment on that—that some of that will be forgone.

Catherine McKinnell: Forgone?

Damian Hinds: It will not happen.

Catherine McKinnell: Oh. Some of the funding went to Active Partnerships, which then co-ordinated the approach in the local area. Some went directly to schools. What we want is a sustainable model that makes sure we are maximising all these assets that we have in our communities.

Q276 **Damian Hinds:** In cutting it, there is stuff that would happen in opening up school facilities that will not now happen in those schools that would have benefited.

Catherine McKinnell: When we have worked out and will announce our new partnership approach, the intention is that we maximise all the community assets that we have available. By taking a co-ordinated, cross-departmental approach—because some of it, yes, is related to the Department for Education. Some is related to MHCLG, communities and local government, as we have seen. Some of these opportunities could be



unlocked with that co-operation and collaboration with the national governing associations and all the fantastic provision they put on for children. I think having a co-ordinated approach is what will create the sustainability of a scheme rather than just a small funding pot approach, which has delivered some outcomes and we want to make sure the lessons are learned from that, but that we create a sustainable model going forward.

Q277 Damian Hinds: I think we are all in favour of co-ordination and co-operation and holisticness and strategic approaches. We also I think, though, believe in the independence of national governing bodies, the freedoms that schools have to make the right choices for their children and so on. If we talk about a co-ordinated approach or—I have forgotten the phrase again, but who is doing that? Who is going to direct what happens?

Catherine McKinnell: If you are talking about the partnership model that we are working on, as a Department, we are very keen to develop school sport partnerships and we will be taking a leading role in that, but it is very much a cross-Government approach. I think that is the difference from what we have seen before.

Damian Hinds: The council will direct it, the local authority.

Catherine McKinnell: Do you want to come in there?

Matthew Hopkinson: This is something that we need to get the design right. We were asked whether we are going back to school sport partnerships. I think we need to look to the future and think about what will work. It is what my team, working with DCMS and with DHSC because of the importance of physical activity, is doing at the moment before we come out and procure a new approach or take the approach we want. It is having those conversations with schools, with the sports sector and with others to make sure that we have something that works so that when we go down the partnership route, we do put the responsibility in the right place and we think about what measures we want partnerships to come back with to show that they are making a difference. It is important that we do that bit of design now so that it works and we put it in the right place, rather than picking something and going, "Right, let's go in that direction".

We have that process in place so we can do that engagement. We can then do whatever necessary procurement things we have to do, and then start to get up and running from September 2026. I think it is right not to go now; we want something that really works and does give that voice to schools, but also gives the voice to local clubs and works for them and provides a framework for the national governing bodies that do loads of good work, to make sure that they are getting it to go in the right place.

Q278 Jo Platt: Still focusing on the co-ordination into communities, we have heard lots of evidence about having a postcode lottery of where it works well. I can say that my constituency has a fantastic school. We have two elite superstars who came out of that school, Keely Hodgkinson and Ella



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Toone, and fantastic clubs that they connect with. That is one school and two separate clubs. My question to Minister McKinnell is: where do you see the opportunity for greater co-ordination between local clubs and schools to provide more wraparound activities for children at the start and at the end of the school day?

Catherine McKinnell: You have identified what the real opportunity is that we have here to make sure that we take all those fantastic examples. We can all think of them in our local area as well, in my local schools, and the children who benefit from them. It is to make sure that that is not dependent on some of the challenges in girls' and boys' participation, other diversities, inclusion of special educational needs and disabilities, and where you might have less resource within a community so you have more socioeconomic challenges, to make sure that none of those barriers prevent that great example and practice from happening and to make sure we have that partnership approach to build those strong connections between schools, local clubs and national governing bodies so it does not depend on the contacts, for example, that a head teacher might have with their local football club. All those are great, but that is not a strategy and a partnership approach that will equitably spread that opportunity across the system. We want to take all those great examples and spread them much more consistently and create an infrastructure that every school and every local community know they can tap into to unlock opportunities for sport and physical activity.

Q279 **Jo Platt:** I will go to Minister Peacock with a separate question. How are you facilitating that greater collaboration within government to ensure that all the different Departments involved in the facilitation of sport and physical activity are making collective decisions? We know about social prescribing, justice, and we obviously have education. Are those conversations taking place?

Stephanie Peacock: There are just under 12 million people who are inactive in this country, and that is not just a story of inactivity; it is a story of inequality. I see it in my own constituency. In Stairfoot, people live for seven years fewer than people on the other side of Barnsley, in the more affluent part of Penistone. That is just one example, and that is replicated across the country too often. If we are going to tackle that, of course we have to work across government. That is why we saw the 10-year NHS plan announced last year. The Health Secretary was in the media yesterday morning talking about the benefits of physical activity. The DWP has a programme with the Premier League for helping people get back into work. The Minister and I can draw on a number of different examples of school sport. I am very keen that we join up across government. It is often easier said than done, but it is crucial if we are going to reduce those numbers.

Q280 **Jo Platt:** Are there plans to introduce social prescribing? Are you having those conversations?

Stephanie Peacock: We speak regularly with the Department of Health and on the Health Secretary's 10-year plan. As I say, he was out and



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about yesterday, along with Joe Wicks, talking about the benefits, particularly to young people but indeed to everyone, of getting physically active. It just shows how important this is, not just to my Department but to the Health Department, for example.

Q281 **Chair:** How many times have you both met over the last year to describe links between community and school sports in a formal way?

Stephanie Peacock: Three times officially, I think. We will double-check that so we do not give inaccurate information. I recall our roundtable, but we do speak regularly in the lobby. I don't know how many times we have done that.

Chair: How much of that is about school sport and community sport?

Stephanie Peacock: Well, that is a very good question. We are both very keen and passionate to work together on this. We recognise that if we are going to make the changes we talk about, then we do have to work together.

Q282 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Hi to you both. We also see each other in the lobby, don't we? We all do.

My question is to both of you. Jo was talking about how we can merge these physically active things with wraparound childcare. On Friday, it will be the end of term. Every parent in the country is panicking about, "Oh my god, what are we going to do until September?" I have seen examples of the HAF programme in my seat, and I have two different boroughs now. It is holiday activities and food. At the moment, I think it is pretty limited in the number of hours a day and the number of weeks. It would chime in with the missions that we have with breakfast clubs and all that. What would you guys think about extending that a little bit more and making it not necessarily PE things? Again, I always used to hide from the PE teacher. That would make my heart sink. One that I went to see was a hip-hop dance thing, so again, more things that Stephanie's Department does in conjunction with Catherine's.

Catherine McKinnell: I will answer that because my heart is with all the parents looking ahead at the six-week break and wanting to make sure that the children have a fulfilling time during the holidays. I share the challenge.

I think that schools do provide lots of opportunities for children and young people to be physically active beyond PE lessons, and extracurricular sports clubs are important for that. Breakfast clubs, which we have rolled out universally, do provide an opportunity. Where a school decides that it can be well used to increase physical activity for children, that is an opportunity that is available to schools. The breakfast club programme is being rolled out and we are taking very careful feedback on how it is being rolled out, how it is working. Breakfast clubs are an opportunity to do that.

There is also active travel and supporting all the efforts in that regard. Then, wraparound childcare, making sure that we have sufficient places



and that we have inclusive provision as well. I know there are a lot of parents of children who have special educational needs and disabilities who should have access to all those opportunities as well, to make sure it is enriching, not just looking after children, but giving them an enriching time at school. That is something I am very focused on across the board, making sure that children achieve in our school system and that they thrive as well. I see the two as very closely linked together.

Q283 Mark Sowards: Minister Peacock, with the short time that we have left, please can you tell us what you plan to do to incentivise the number of volunteers to go up in grassroots sport?

Stephanie Peacock: I think that is a really good question, and particularly topical because I am also the Minister for Civil Society. I should obviously start by paying a huge tribute to volunteers and to volunteering; 10.5 million people gave their time according to the Sport England survey. That is a huge amount and we know that grassroots sports clubs that we have in our constituencies, many of which we have talked about today, simply would not exist without them. Sport England has several different support mechanisms available, which I know it shared with the Committee. It has a platform with a lot of resources. It also has a network.

We also have to recognise this point around geography and postcodes. More deprived areas will struggle to give their time. In my own area, we have so many different volunteers who contribute a huge amount, but the transport network is challenging. We need to make it accessible and make a way in which we can promote the opportunities available.

Q284 Mark Sowards: Absolutely. It is sometimes easy to get a sense that that feeling of community is being lost in some of our constituencies, but where that is not the case, in Leeds South West and Morley, it is with my grassroots sports clubs. They have become the centres of my different communities right across the constituency.

I appreciate the point about transport, and that is a question for a transport Minister, but one of the things that came out of the evidence that this Committee has been collecting is that the administrative burden on grassroots volunteers is far too high, and one way to increase the number of people volunteering is to reduce that. Do you have any plans to do that?

Stephanie Peacock: I think it has to be a balance. In lots of areas, there will sometimes be high-risk sports. They will be working with young people and children, so I do not think it is quite as simple as cutting the red tape, for want of a better description. Of course, we want to make it as straightforward as possible and in a different space—I will not stray off the question—Sport England, for example, simplified its movement fund, and it shared that with you. It is a lot easier to apply for funding. Where things can be made more accessible, that should be the case.

If I could add one further point just on volunteering, we have an honours system in this country that often recognises high-performing athletes,



and it is right that we should, but not enough recognise those grassroots volunteers. We are obviously reliant on the public to nominate, so I would encourage those in the Committee and those watching to think of your local sports club and perhaps put them forward. I was delighted last year to go to the first coaches' reception at Buckingham Palace to celebrate and thank the Olympic coaches. We share our thanks with them, but we can perhaps do more to recognise them.

Chair: Very briefly on that, it is reflected in the evidence that we have taken, especially when you talk about social prescribing and working across government to deliver some of the Government's wider strategies, that 40% of groups say they want to work with the Government on social issues but nine out of 10 exclude themselves because of the admin burden. We have seen the number of volunteers declining. Volunteer time has increased by 25% for just a 3% increase in delivery because of the massive administrative burden of doing it, as Mark said. It is something that I think the Government need to look at. We are asking people to give up so much of their time to do so much amazing work in our constituencies. Let's not bog them down with unnecessary paperwork. We will move on to Tom, please.

Q285 **Tom Rutland:** Minister Peacock, evidence we have received shows that 95% of black adults do not swim. Only a third of disabled children are achieving the daily recommended physical activity levels, and the drop-out rate from sport for girls in their teenage years is two to three times that of boys. I am conscious of the time we have. Briefly, what is your plan to increase participation from these demographics?

Stephanie Peacock: I think that is an important point and something that is at the forefront of my mind. Whether it be ethnic background, whether it be women and girls, whether it be disability or class, I think it is so important. That is why we are moving to a place-based decision-making model because we want to listen to communities and we want to respond to their needs.

Specifically on women and girls, something that is particularly topical with the Lionesses—and I will take this opportunity to wish them good luck tonight; it was a delight to be out there on Sunday cheering them on—is that they inspire so many girls and women but there needs to be the facilities, as we spoke about earlier, for them to take part in it. At an elite level, I set up the women's football taskforce, for example, to improve women's football. We know major events inspire, but we need to make sure that there is the ability for people to get involved.

Adam, did you want to add anything to the broader point?

Adam Conant: Briefly, increasing proportions of our funding are going to the groups that need it more. That is the essential part of what Sport England is doing with its Uniting the Movement strategy. So, 50% of our facilities investment is going to the 30% most deprived areas, nearly half of the movement fund that the Minister talked about earlier is going to the 25% most deprived areas. There is a real trend to target the funding and then overlay that with what the Minister is describing, so that it then



reaches the communities in the local area that really need to have that benefit.

- Q286 **Tom Rutland:** We also had evidence about the importance of having a range of sports for children to play and having fun while they are doing it to encourage activity. Rugby was the sport at my school. I was terrible at it and hated it, but I got to swim and play tennis later on, which I really enjoyed. What role do you see for emerging sports such as cheerleading and padel in helping with this aim?

Stephanie Peacock: I think they are hugely important. I was interested to hear the evidence that you took on it, particularly cheerleading. It is brilliant to see it recognised as a sport. I know they are going through the process of being recognised as a national governing body. Because they are a higher-risk sport, they need to do that to get funding. I was talking to someone yesterday who used to be part of one of the big cheerleading teams in the south and talked to me about just how inspiring it was for her.

We know that the reduction, particularly in women and girls—I attended a roundtable over in Portcullis House a few weeks ago, listening to girls directly about why there is that drop-off. Cheerleading, for example, is something that keeps girls active, so we want to support it. I guess at the slightly other end of the spectrum, bowls, for example, will often encourage the older generation. I have been asked to be a patron of the Darfield bowls club, and I visited a few years ago. Because they wanted to attract more people, they set up their own crazy bowls, which I had a go at. I think it is great when new sports attract people. We want people to get active and we want them to get involved in the sports that they feel passionate about, and as a Government, we want to support that.

- Q287 **Tom Rutland:** I agree, and I am looking forward to visiting one of my local bowls clubs over the summer and having a first go at it. Finally, perhaps more focused on community, not just school here, the biggest health benefits come from encouraging those who are inactive to become a little bit more active. What are you doing specifically to achieve this and ensure you are bringing new people into physical activity rather than displacing already active people into another form?

Stephanie Peacock: That is one of my biggest priorities. As I said, I think the story of inactivity is a story of inequality. I see it very clearly in my own constituency. It is simply not right that someone in Barnsley South lives seven years fewer than people somewhere just five miles down the road. It is important that we do that community-based decision-making so that there are the facilities and the activities that people feel able to get involved in.

To take one of the examples, This Girl Can, 4 million women and girls are more active as a result of that. It can be very straightforward. A few weeks ago, I went to a school in Barnsley that is doing Beat the Street, where they go out as a family, they walk, and they have their little cards. They can get an app, but they are actually very encouraging of the card so that people are not on the phone. They go as parents and families.



They become super competitive. They go around in a nice way, not in a super competitive elite way. What I mean is that it actually motivates people to get out. Walking, we know, is the most accessible, straightforward, easy way to get active, so that is a really good example.

I think we need to make sure that the opportunities are there across the country. You are right, we want to make sure we shift that dial so that it is not just those areas that have already got facilities and are already active that are getting better. We want to bring everyone up.

Tom Rutland: Or even the people within those areas.

Stephanie Peacock: Yes, of course. If you take Mole Valley, which I quoted, I think it is the most active area, but even within that area, there will be parts of that locality that do not fit with the trend. I completely recognise that it is not completely black and white.

Chair: Thanks, Tom. Crazy bowls, I think that is definitely a bit of us as a Committee, isn't it? We are there for that. Finally, last but not least, Rupa Huq, please.

Q288 **Dr Rupa Huq:** I guess this is the mirror image of that last question. If we are looking at the participation demographically of underserved people who are less physically active, Minister McKinnell, what is the Department doing to ensure that teachers are confident in delivering PE lessons inclusively?

Catherine McKinnell: That is a good question. Going back to the issue of swimming, it really does pick up on some of the challenges that Tom outlined in terms of the demographics and the accessibility to sport. Some of the headline education figures indicate that 70% of children in year 7 report they can swim 25 metres, but when you break down those figures, I think the disparity between different groups is quite stark. I think that is what we need to focus on to make sure schools can be supported to create and provide a much more universal offer to make sure all children get those opportunities.

The biggest in-school difference we can make to outcomes for children is our quality teacher training. We are committed to high-quality teaching, and the PE and sport premium is currently used in primary schools. The idea is to support that sustainable offer of teaching, but we found that the impact of that is not consistent enough and that a lot of it is bought in rather than delivered by teachers themselves. Fundamentally, our partnership model is aimed at looking at how we create that much better in-school support for teachers to upskill them, to connect them as well with the wider sporting community, to upskill the teaching workforce and to create that confidence in teachers to provide that quality PE and sport opportunity for children and young people. That is what we are looking at as part of the partnership model.

We are also continuously looking at our teacher training and the early years of a teacher's life, particularly in the context of special educational needs and disabilities and making sure all teachers are equipped to



support all children with a range of abilities. I think there is a real opportunity within that to add in inclusive sport and PE as part of that. That is why we have targeted the funding for Inclusion 2028 to upskill the teaching workforce, to feel confident to not just do perhaps the sports that they might have considered or in a way that they have done previously, but to think about sport in a much more inclusive and innovative way.

Stephanie Peacock: Can I add to that? I think there is a real opportunity, just very briefly. We talked about the big sports and they do fabulous programmes and we have talked about some of them, but there is a real opportunity—we spoke about this when we met and we had the roundtable—of sports going in and being able to help train teachers as well as run the programmes for young people. There is a huge untapped resource there that could certainly contribute.

Dr Rupa Huq: I bet these tables were oblong, weren't they? They are never round, at a roundtable.

Stephanie Peacock: No, indeed, they are not.

Q289 **Dr Rupa Huq:** They never have a circular table but a lot of roundtables. Often at primary schools I go to, it is an additional role dumped on the class teacher rather than them being a PE specialist, so it is encouraging to hear that. Things like hip-hop or whatever, if you diversify and make those more interesting things in your offer, it all sounds good.

Evidence shows that clothing for PE for girls in particular is something off-putting. That is another barrier to their getting more involved. I do not know. As I say, I was always, "What is that?" because of the clothing. I do not know, that was just weediness. I was always hiding. Our high school PE teacher was a 40-a-day person who always popped in a Polo mint before the lesson. I think everyone knew what they were up to and they came in a tracksuit. Anyway, whatever. My question is this: is there advice from the Education Department on inclusive sportswear?

Catherine McKinnell: I think that is a really important question because clearly your outfit should not be the barrier that holds you back from participating in sport. You are right to identify that that can be the challenge. I just want to add to the previous point as well that we have resources from Oak, the online resources that are made available to all schools and teachers on how to provide good quality PE lessons, so there is a range of support available. I forgot to mention that in my previous response.

We are bringing in new requirements on school uniforms as part of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. We want to make sure that no child is disadvantaged in terms of participation in sport or school and that children go to school and be part of the school community and wear a uniform, which we recognise is important for a lot of schools, but that it is not so excessive in cost that it actually makes families struggle to afford it. I think that PE and sport are very much part of that, to make sure that schools can have a branded T-shirt to participate in sport, but are not



required to have branded every item that you could possibly have for every sport that is possibly available, so that it is much more inclusive. As part of that, schools need to think carefully about how they apply that legislation to choose sport attire that unlocks opportunities for all children and young people within their school community and make it as inclusive as possible. There is guidance and support available to achieve that.

Q290 Dr Rupa Huq: At the same time, our country, which has always had a reputation for tolerance and inclusivity, is not going down a French culture wars route, where hijabs or burkinis are banned. We have always allowed people to have turbans at school. I went to a school with a kid in a turban. We are not doing any of that in this country, right?

Catherine McKinnell: We are being quite clear in the legislation on the number of branded items that a school can require children to wear, but in terms of uniform policy, they are decisions that schools need to make in terms of what is appropriate within their school, for their school community. We encourage schools to do what they feel is right for their school community, and schools do have the freedom to do that. The thing that we are legislating on is the number of branded items, because we are very concerned about the cost of school uniforms for families.

Dr Rupa Huq: Yes, I get that. I am just saying that I cannot imagine our country having a universal ban on things like other countries have, and I am pleased with that. Thank you.

Chair: That calls full-time on our evidence session this morning and indeed for our whole inquiry. I particularly thank Ministers and officials for giving us evidence today. I also thank everyone who has taken the time to either come and give evidence to us throughout this inquiry or who have sent us written evidence. Of course, I wish the Lionesses the very best of luck as they take on Sweden tomorrow night. In the meantime, thank you very much.