



Select Committee on a National Plan for Sport and Recreation

Corrected oral evidence: National plan for sport and recreation

Wednesday 24 March 2021

3.30 pm

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

Evidence Session No. 17

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 130 - 135

Witnesses

I: Barry Horne, Chief Executive, Activity Alliance; Matthew Maguire, National Sport Manager, Mencap; Martin McElhatton OBE, Chief Executive, WheelPower.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Barry Horne, Matthew Maguire and Martin McElhatton.

Q130 **The Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to this meeting of the House of Lords Select Committee on a National Plan for Sport and Recreation. I extend a particular welcome to our three witnesses this afternoon: Barry Horne, chief executive of Activity Alliance; Matthew Maguire, national sport manager of Mencap; and, last but by no means least, Martin McElhatton OBE, chief executive of WheelPower. Martin, we were just discussing you with Tanni before we began. We gather that you have known each other for a few years. Welcome to all of you.

I want to start with you, Barry. The idea is that we do not have a terribly formal conversation this afternoon, but we would like to know exactly what you think. Sometimes thinking outside the box is what this committee needs, too. If someone has said something, please do not repeat it.

Barry, how would you rate the Government's efforts over the last five to 10 years, particularly since the Olympics and certainly before Covid, in getting more disabled people and those with long-term health conditions to lead a more active and healthier lifestyle?

Barry Horne: Thank you for the opportunity. The first thing to say is that in recent times we have made better progress because we have been focusing on some of the right things. In the three years before Covid we were starting to see the gap between disabled and non-disabled people's activity improve.

As for the previous national strategy, Sport England provided a positive context, and I definitely think that the commitments to equality set out in the new strategy are right, but the challenges that remain are in the alignment of the focus on other aspects in national policy and perhaps local working. I think the challenge is joining up complementary agendas. There has certainly been increased recognition in the various worlds of health, if you like, that activity is an important priority, but I do not think we are quite there in making sure that physical activity in sport is seen as a key intervention.

Other departments' agendas are important as well, whether it is transport or looking at the community-based role of local government and others. From my experience, going all the way back to the 1980s as a community worker, the joining up of partners and agencies on the ground, with a central understanding of sport and activity, is a key answer. Even with the positive commitments over the past five to 10 years, I do not think we have reached that level of commitment. In part, that is why I think it has been only in the past three years that we have started to see some improvement.

The Chair: To stop you there, a lot of our witnesses have not said quite the same thing but are on the same lines as you, that we need greater joining up. Who should be doing that?

Barry Horne: I think the strategy of the previous Government was positive in that it was not just a DCMS strategy, but in reality, from where I was sitting, I could not see the extent to which that was co-ordinated and progress was monitored in terms of the various commitments that departments beyond DCMS were making. I do think there is a co-ordinating role, if I may say so, for Cabinet.

I was recently in a conversation with the Minister for Disabled People, Justin Tomlinson. We talked about the committee of Ministers that he chairs, which looks at how different departments support disabled people. If physical activity in sport was one of its regular agenda items, you could check and challenge how well things were going.

The Chair: Dominic, do you want to come in with Barry?

Lord Addington: Do you think it would be easier if one department, possibly one with a bit of muscle—I think health would be a key one—had responsibility to drive this? I have been of the opinion that you need somebody with real power to drive it. Sport is a smaller bit of DCMS now than it was originally because of all the digital responsibility. Do you think it requires somebody with bigger teeth to get out there and cause some trouble?

Barry Horne: There is a parallel in how we organise ourselves outside the world of government. My short answer is that it is important to have a strong driver, but I do not think you can ever own all the elements that will facilitate sport and activity within one department. Probably everybody argues that it therefore needs to be Cabinet Office or Cabinet, but, if it is a department, its role should not be to try to do it all but to be genuinely empowered with co-ordination. I think that operates outside as well.

Matthew Maguire: It will certainly be a challenge not to repeat anything Barry said, for sure, but our strong point over the past three years that I have been working at Mencap has been the transition in the funding relationship with Sport England, a greater partnership and more freedom to work in a fairly localised way, which really suits Mencap to the ground. We have 345 affiliated network partners who are experts in their communities, and they are engaging disabled people and people with learning disabilities within those communities. We have been able to provide a role in convening organisations locally and sharing best practice and assets, and using resources better and smarter in those localities, to remarkable effect, which has been a real positive. We have had the flexibility to work that way from the funding we have received from Sport England. I have been really encouraged by that over the past three years.

Martin McElhatton: I would echo what has been said, certainly in terms of support from Sport England for national disabilities sports organisations to have that level of impairment-specific knowledge and expertise to share and pass on to other sector partners, like active

partnerships and so on. It is really important that this cross-departmental partnership working is really effective for disabled people.

It starts with the education of disabled children and physical activity as part of their opportunities. We are still getting anecdotal evidence of disabled children being sent to the library instead of taking part in sport. It is very difficult for us to find these disabled children, so it is about how we network that into the mix.

Health is crucial because, if we have seen anything in the past year, as opposed to the period before that, when things were improving, it is that disabled people have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and need our support in the next few years to get out and be active.

The Chair: Let us talk about the next couple of years. We know from government research that twice as many disabled people felt during Covid that the pandemic had hugely reduced their ability to do sport or physical activity. Twice as many people made that comment in the Government's survey than non-disabled people. What should the Government's post-Covid-19 focus be? Do you think that the £20 million allocated by Sport England under the tackling inequalities fund is sufficient to repair the damage done during Covid and, indeed, to move us forward? I ask all three witnesses to answer that, but can I start with Martin?

Martin McElhatton: I have been paralysed for a long time; I have played sport; I am very confident; and I work for a living. Even I have been impacted by the pandemic. You are not as confident as you would be going out and about. If that has had an impact on someone like me, what will it be like for less confident, disabled people out there? We need a plan. The Sport England strategy is a longer-term plan and it is very welcome. The fact that it includes tackling inequalities is really important, because disabled people are not only impacted because of their disability; they also fit into the other disadvantaged categories of gender, ethnic diversity and the lower socioeconomic sector.

It is important not to forget that disabled people might have factors other than their disability that stop them being active. We can help them with things other than just money; we need to help them to be active members of society and provide opportunities for education and jobs. All those other things will help them to be more confident to come out and be more active.

The Chair: Barry, do you think the £20 million from the Sport England fund will be sufficient to achieve the sort of vision Martin has for disabled people? To me, it is a paltry sum.

Barry Horne: That cannot be a sum that gives us what we need. I would reinforce Martin's point that so much needs to be done to prioritise, particularly after the impact of Covid, the participation of disabled people in sport and activity. By the way, I think Sport England is talking about the total investment in all sport and activity, not the specific, shorter-

term intervention that is trying to fix a particular problem at the moment with that £20 million.

The whole investment across all sport and activity from government should consistently come with an expectation that every penny is spent in a way that helps rather than hinders everybody's inclusion, including that of disabled people. That investment criterion has not necessarily always been there. We are focusing more on entry level participation and grass-roots activity. There is a distinction to be made in elite sport investment and what benefits that might bring.

My point is that the £20 million is helpful, but that is not where our focus should be. It should be on the spending of every other penny.

Matthew Maguire: It is really difficult. From a lot of the feedback we have received and the research we have done, people are incredibly anxious about just returning to normal, let alone improving on what they had pre-pandemic. We know that confidence in disabled people is really low.

On the flip-side, we also know from the stats for learning disabilities that 64% of care workers worked over 50 hours or more a week—that figure is increasing—and that 60% of carers do not feel that people with learning disabilities are getting enough support. It will be an incredible challenge just to overcome that and get back to where we were, let alone driving forward and making progress in the future.

We have had some very good success with the tackling inequalities fund, but it is just keeping people afloat and essentially paying the wages of people who are caring. That money will go very quickly. Some really good and interesting projects have come out of it. One thing I would stress—I keep mentioning it—is that some innovative and creative ideas in engaging people have come out of the pandemic. We are accessing people who were not active before and we were not able to get active before.

I can see a challenge coming. Essentially, we have two strands of delivery coming up. One is how we keep those people active without just forgetting about them so they go back to regular activity. The second one is going back to the beginning and building the confidence of people to go out and become active in their communities, because that is just not there. It is going to be really difficult. We will have to have completely different strands and techniques to do both, which is quite an unusual situation. To answer the question directly, it will cost a fair bit.

Q131 **Lord Snape:** Aside from Covid, what do you see as the barriers to engaging more disabled people in sport? What about some suggestions to the committee as to how to overcome them? Barry, perhaps you could lead on that, but I would like to hear from all three witnesses.

Barry Horne: We have done a lot of research into barriers. We realise that that is the key thing that we have to address collectively. We have to try to remove barriers. Physical barriers are significant for disabled

people. There have been some historical approaches to tackling those: access to leisure centres and other things.

The second big barriers are logistical barriers. How do I get there? What is the transport like? What support can I have? Matthew referred to personal assistants and carers. We need to think about those barriers.

In our survey work, consistently, by far the biggest barriers disabled people talk about are the psychological ones. They are the things on which we need to focus on particularly. As Martin and Matt have just been describing, part of the confidence of disabled people themselves particularly hit by Covid is the psychological barrier. Can I do this thing? Quite often, having gone through the educational system, a lot of people have probably been told they cannot do things. That is quite a big psychological barrier to get through.

In our new strategy we are focusing a lot on looking at changes in attitude and society, generally thinking differently about disabled people in sport and activity, but specifically for sport and activity providers to think much more positively about engaging disabled people. All of our organisations are giving quite a lot of support to that.

My headline would be that the psychological barriers are the greatest and we should focus collectively on how we can shift attitudes to help overcome them.

Matthew Maguire: We have started to use what is called the COM-B model. I am sure people are aware of it, but it is all about capability, opportunity and motivation, and how those interlink to change behaviour. One of the things we keep coming back to is motivation and how we can drive up motivation for people to do things.

This is a big piece of work. We have commissioned some research for the next two years to look at that. It is interesting because psychology is a massive part of it. The lack of confidence and self-stigma that come with having a learning disability impacts motivation. That means motivation decreases and that impacts your capability to go out. It is just a vicious circle. We want to home in on motivation and, as Barry just said, look at what motivates people and inspires them to do sport, because that will drive up individual intrinsic motivation to overcome those barriers. I think it is really important.

Lord Snape: Martin, you had to overcome some barriers yourself after your accident back in 1979. Is your experience typical? How can you take that forward to help people who are perhaps in the same situation?

Martin McElhatton: Children born with a disability have a whole set of barriers throughout their lives. For people who acquire a disability later in life there is perhaps a different set of challenges, but for both there are challenges and barriers that they all face. Sometimes they are financial. Those financial challenges come in lots of different forms. It could be the

cost of a sports wheelchair for someone who wants to play wheelchair sport; it could be a running blade for an amputee.

Like many other disability organisations, we moved a lot of our offer online during the pandemic and simply provided a set of resistance bands to nearly 500 people. By doing that, not only did they feel connected and supported; they got a piece of relatively cheap kit that enabled them to stay fit and active and join with others in some of the provision.

If we are looking at support for disabled people, it needs to be comprehensive in looking at all the barriers they face, not just those that will affect them financially. How do we rebuild that confidence for them and with them, and listen to what they need? We have talked to disabled people during the pandemic. They want to be involved in the solutions.

If I can say anything, it is to make sure that we are listening to disabled people when we create programmes and support packages so that they meet their needs and do not threaten their lifestyles. For example, some people feel that if they become more active they may lose benefits, and that prevents them from being active. On the one hand, you want them to be more active but by being more active they lose benefits. That will stop them because they live very close to the line if they need their benefits. We just need to understand that for disabled people it is quite a complex situation and not one size fits all.

Lord Snape: That is a side of it that had not struck me before. Is it a common fear among disabled people that if they show themselves to be too active it may result in a loss of their benefits?

Martin McElhatton: There has certainly been some research. The Dwarf Sports Association did some research with Activity Alliance specifically on loss of benefits.¹ It was a real fear for many disabled people. I am sure that is replicated across different impairment groups. I do not know whether Barry has information about that.

Barry Horne: To reinforce that, the survey showed that the fear of loss of benefit as well as actual loss of benefit on occasion was significant. There are also issues about the rigidity of the benefits system. If there was choice, more disabled people might be able to use elements of their benefit to have some activity—for example, lunch with a friend or supporter—rather than needing to take a local service to go to a lunch club. There is rigidity but also a genuine fear of the impact it might have on people's income. As Martin said, when people are disproportionately on low incomes that is a big barrier.

Matthew Maguire: Martin and Barry have covered it; they are certainly in a better position to answer that.

¹ Note by witness: Dwarf Sports Association UK, Activity Alliance and FlexMR, *The Activity Trap: Disabled people's fear of being active* (October 2018): http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/002/433/Activity_Alliance_-_The_Activity_Trap_full_report_Accessible_PDF_FINAL_original.pdf?1538668349

Lord Snape: Before we move away from this topic, perhaps you could let the committee know just how widespread loss of benefits is. If you have particular instances, I am sure we would find it valuable to see just how widespread this problem is.

Barry Horne: We can certainly submit that specific piece of research, which was done just a couple of years ago but is still highly relevant.² We will follow it up if people have additional questions.

The Chair: Barry, what would also help us is how we resolve that problem. Rather than taking benefit away, it may be that quite the reverse would be an incentive to get more people to participate, if there was access to an increased benefit for those who would become more active, because ultimately health and everything else benefits from that. Perhaps you would think about that when you are sending a response.

Lord Addington: I speak as a dyslexic who has done lots of work with neurodiverse groups, which probably are not covered by you at all, but it is about the width of the groups we are talking about. I know there were complaints at the time of the London Paragames. Certain disability groups said, "We don't like this because everybody thinks we can all do wonderful things". I am just wondering whether you are addressing that type of fear or anything else, or anywhere we should look to get evidence on it. It is a very odd one. When I first heard that I was very shocked by it. I just wonder whether you know where we should look or go on that one because it is something most people will not have come across. I was very surprised when I did.

Barry Horne: I am nervous to step into territory that Baroness Grey-Thompson will know really well.

Lord Addington: As am I.

Barry Horne: There is a misconception that elite sport motivates entry level activity. In our surveys, disabled people say that fewer than 2% are motivated by images of inspirational sport, but there is also a big policy agenda that is a bit outside my organisation's focus. We do not focus on elite sport, except that it is sometimes worth registering that an elite sport investment programme that focuses exclusively on the Paralympics is important and good, but we need to be conscious that it does miss out a lot of impairment groups and conditions. Elite deaf sport is not funded through the Paralympics. Some learning disabled sport is funded through the Paralympics but only some. As for other impairment groups, Ellie Simmonds was the poster woman for 2012. There are only three Paralympic sports available for people with restricted growth or dwarfism.

² Note by witness: Dwarf Sports Association UK, Activity Alliance and FlexMR, *The Activity Trap: Disabled people's fear of being active* (October 2018): http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/002/433/Activity_Alliance_-_The_Activity_Trap_full_report_Accessible_PDF_FINAL_original.pdf?1538668349

Lord Addington's point about the relevance for people with other long-term health conditions or impairments is also important. Even if we do think people are inspired—I love elite sport, by the way—it is about the connection and whether it motivates people to act. For a lot of people, first, it is not relevant, and, secondly, they do not recognise themselves in those sports people because they do not share their condition.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Barry. We have had similar comments from other witnesses down the line, particularly last week when we heard from people on the ground. I am going to move on to Baroness Brady.

Q132 **Baroness Brady:** Good afternoon, everyone. The committee has had a number of different reports that disabled people's engagement in sport and physical activity is well below the national average and that four in five disabled people want to be more active. Presumably, you can overcome some of the barriers and facility issues that you have discussed. You then need to create a safe and supportive environment for disabled people to work. Are the duty of care and safeguarding requirements fit for purpose in the context of disability sport and recreation? I would like to start with Matthew.

Matthew Maguire: It is very tricky. Currently, with some very high-profile incidents in recent years there is low confidence in the policies and systems within sport. We do know that people with disabilities, particularly multiple ones, are at high risk of abuse and neglect. There would be a real challenge if, magically, all those barriers did not exist and everybody was suddenly active. We would certainly be in a situation that would be a little concerning, if I am honest. There are plenty of specific multidisciplinary organisations that people can talk to. As we have been saying, we want more multidisciplinary organisations to connect to each other to share practice with each other.

It is important that the focus is on what is good and safe practice and having a duty of care over the athletes. For anybody who is coming to a session, obviously policy is important, but if coaches just follow policies rather than have a safe environment and encourage people to enjoy that, which is the real key, that is missing at the moment. A lot of that is because coaches and athletes do not confidence and we need to do a lot to improve that in the system.

Baroness Brady: What can we do? What should we do? What must be done?

Matthew Maguire: I think engaging with athletes and disabled people in discussions and getting people's lived experience would be a really good start, as well as looking at how we create those safe environments and engage leaders. You hear all the time that it is a top-down approach. A top-down approach is all well and good, but it is the people on the ground—the coaches—who need to be brought into that, with a whole organisational shift in how that environment is deemed safe and is created. Putting disabled people at the heart of those discussions is key

for me. People want to be engaged in that. I know we have a lot of athletes who have a lot to say about safeguarding and duty of care.

Baroness Brady: Barry, do you have anything to add to that?

Barry Horne: Not a tremendous amount. Our evidence is that disabled children are at greater risk of abuse and in need of protection. Not to sound discordant, there have been really positive moves in the past few years. With Matthew's addition, I suggest that the frameworks ought to be adequate if we just make sure that they are embedded and used. A lot of good work has been done recently across sport to put the frameworks in place.

I sound one note of caution. Sometimes we might overemphasise the safeguarding issues in relation to disabled people's participation. That occasionally drifts into additional barriers. With the right input, as Matthew said, we want a system that works for disabled people, but not one that disproportionately makes it difficult to support and engage them. If it is a good system that works, we suggest that it will work for disabled people.

Baroness Brady: Barry, who do you think should come up with this system?

Barry Horne: In fairness, there has been a good amount of work done recently to develop an improved approach to safeguarding. Most sports are now taking ownership of how they apply some fairly standardised approaches. I sit on the LTA council. The shift in that organisation in having individuals with responsibility and clear policy frameworks, all drawing on good national guidance, which are owned down to the ground and implemented, is typically happening right across sport. Therefore, it is a good framework but owned by the individual sports. However, let us not lose sight of the other environments not necessarily owned by sports and make sure that that is adopted as well.

Baroness Brady: Martin, do you have anything to add?

Martin McElhatton: I would say do not forget parents in the design of safeguarding for their children. They have all the knowledge and expertise about what their disabled children need on a daily basis. I think disabled children's parents can play an active part in keeping them safe.

The only other thing I would add is about people's mental health. It is not only physical safeguarding; in this context we also need to think about the mental health and well-being of disabled people. A big part of that would be to do with people who may have been involved at a higher level coming out of sport. I know Tanni did a report on duty of care for ex-Paralympians or Paralympians finishing their career, because often there is a big void for people when they finish competing at a high level. We need to think about that duty of care as part of the mix in terms of disabled people. It might not be huge numbers, but everyone is important.

The Chair: Baroness Brady, do you want to come back?

Baroness Brady: No. I just make the point that the great work that Tanni put together in her duty of care report has been sidelined at the moment. I am sure she will have something to say about that.

The Chair: As if on cue, Baroness Grey-Thompson is going to come in.

Q133 **Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Could I add to my declaration of interests? From 2011 to 2012 I was interim chair of the English Federation of Disability Sport, which then became Activity Alliance. That was previously missed off, so I apologise for that.

Martin talked about the voice of disabled people and other panellists have referred to it in different ways. I am interested in your assessment of how we can get more disabled people into decision-making roles in national governing bodies of sport and other organisations in the sport and recreation sector. Perhaps we could start with Martin and then go to Barry and Matt.

Martin McElhatton: It is all about opportunities. Unless we create the opportunities, disabled people will not be in those positions. I am a paraplegic, someone in a wheelchair, who has worked in disability sport for over 30 years and has been chief executive of WheelPower for 22 years. I have probably had an unusual opportunity to be a leader within the sport sector. I have also been involved in committees for wheelchair tennis at national and international level, so I am an exception rather than the rule.

It is how we create more opportunities. I think it starts with opportunities for young people with disabilities and building those confidence levels at every opportunity throughout their lives, whether they were born with disabilities or acquired them, so they get the chances to be leaders at whatever level so that eventually there is a bigger pool of people who can have the confidence to be board members and apply for jobs in sport at a higher level. There is an assumption that every ex-athlete wants to be a coach. How can we train people in our sector to have the confidence and instil in them that desire to be involved on committees that design sport for disabled people in the future?

Barry Horne: The first thing is to reinforce why it matters. Decision-makers draw from their own experience. I do think that has traditionally distorted the priorities within sport and activity, so it really does matter. We have been remiss as an organisation because we have not necessarily made this one of our top priorities, but we are doing more so now. If you look at other sports organisations like Sporting Equals, which focus on ethnically diverse communities, they have looked at leadership for a few years, as has Women in Sport.

We will put greater focus on that. At the moment the numbers are appalling. I think one of the answers is to try to make the presumption, which is really healthy, that leadership bodies, boards and executives should be reflective of society. In the past, when we have looked at

women or BAME representatives, we have not necessarily thought about the voice of disabled people in that, so making it a priority is important.

In my organisation 50% of the staff and board are disabled people. When I retire, relatively soon, it will be quite important that the next person who leads the organisation is a disabled person. We need to look at how that runs across other organisations as well. I thought I was mentioning retirement to a small group. I have just realised that there might be one or two others watching, so I need to retract that comment and be careful.

I make one other comment on Martin's point about routes into and experience in sports. We have just appointed—we will do a lot more of this—a wonderful graduate trainee, Alex, who is himself a power-chair user. He is 31, and this is his first job. That is not unusual among disabled people.

Matthew Maguire: If we go right down to just employment, at Mencap we have a huge national employment service that works with over 2,000 people, but only 6% of people with a learning disability are known by their local authorities to be in paid work. We are putting a lot of work and resource into giving people the skills to get jobs, but then those jobs are not appearing. We know there is huge stigma and discrimination. There was a research piece that said 32% of people thought disabled people were less productive at work³, which is a staggering number of people. I can understand why that degree of stigma and discrimination would reduce a person's confidence in going into employment. We have a lot of work to do in employment.

A big part of our Sport England funding project, Round the World Challenge, is about getting people employed at the end of it. We know that sport helps to develop all those character skills that are so important for employers: timekeeping, commitment, discipline and everything like that. We put a lot of focus on that. Working with governing bodies and grass-roots clubs to create a culture where those individuals can progress into employment and then into higher decision-making roles has been a real challenge.

We need to look at broad societal impacts and keep going to get more people into those roles to highlight disability. It requires a lot of resource. We are having conversations with them. I always come back to the example of a tennis coach in Bristol. I have used him as an example for about a year because it is such a great story about a local Mencap group's employment coach. Bristol Bears, the rugby club, a tennis club and the LTA are all coming together to help this young man to achieve his level 1 coaching qualification and become embedded within that club. He has just done his level 2.

³ Note by witness: Simon Dixon, Ceri Smith & Anel Touchet for Scope, *The disability perception gap* (May 2018): <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/disability-perception-gap/>

It is such a great story, but it is one example in my job over three and a half years. I always come back to it. Everybody agrees that it is great, but it is such a challenge. We just do not get the resource from grass-roots clubs to be able to place somebody in a coaching capacity. There is loads to be done. We have these employment services and people being trained; they just need to transition into work.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: I am interested in the employment and pay gap of coaches and the lack of disabled people on governing bodies, performance structures and boards. It is probably quite a short answer. Do you think it would help if targets were included in the governance codes that exist for other protected characteristics from UK Sport and Sport England? Would that help to change it? It is a combination of pathway, talent and other things, but what would make it shift? It has not shifted in a really long time. The fact is that I do not need two hands to count the number of disabled people on sports governing bodies.

Barry Horne: It would help. We have seen that it has helped in terms of women in leadership roles and on boards in sports, because that was a funding requirement. That is why I use the term "reflective of society". Those targets should be proportionate to representation in society. The target for women should not be 20%; it should be 50%. The target for disabled people could and should be 20%.

Martin McElhatton: In order to get to those levels of representation, it needs to be a much fairer system all the way through so that people can feel confident in fulfilling those roles, but it is also making sure that the people who are on boards have the skills and experience that those boards need. That is not the case at the moment because disabled people have not necessarily had the opportunities throughout their lives to feel confident enough to go on to a board, but we need to drive that. Unfortunately, unless there are targets and requirements, organisations tend to continue to do what they have always done, which is to appoint men and not look at the diversity of people who are available. As we know, diverse boards create good decision-making because they are thinking much wider than just their own experience.

The Chair: Martin, would you tie that into funding?

Martin McElhatton: I am hesitant to say yes, because it is not always easy to fill vacancies on boards, despite initiatives that have been undertaken. There needs to be perhaps some funding to help train disabled people to feel confident. Sport England did a piece of work with Perrett Laver around ethnic diversity to try to get more people on boards. A similar piece of work connected with disabled people might see a bigger pool of people from which boards in sport could draw.

Matthew Maguire: I would probably disagree that a target would be a silver bullet. The resource probably needs to go into diversifying all the processes to get people into those positions. I do not think that simply putting a target on it would really change anything in the future. People who are already part of the system would still be recruited in the

traditional way. The resource probably needs to look at more accessible information about how we recruit people. Simply sending in a CV probably is not a key solution for the people that we support. We know that a lot of people do not have access to computers and the internet and digital literacy.

So how do we recruit people who are missing all those characteristics? I think a target would be quite a simplistic way of recruiting people who are already either in employment or very close to it, and it does not solve many of the issues where people are not able to access work in the first place. Funding would certainly help for entry into employment as a whole, and looking at how we operate within the workplace would be a key facet of that.

Q134 Lord Moynihan: I would like to go into a somewhat wider but more complex area, which is the relationship between national disability sports organisations and other bodies that deliver sport and recreation for disabled people, which includes local authorities and many bodies that come into that category, and finally the national sport governing bodies themselves. Martin can possibly address this from his international as well as national experience; Matthew could focus very much on the national picture, which would help given the extent of the experience he has had; and Barry could deal with the importance of embedding inclusive practice. How much progress are we making, for example, in embedding inclusive practice into local authority clubs and local authority provision?

Martin, maybe you could start. Just to go into the background, in the build-up to Tokyo, for the first time in my lifetime that I can remember we now see that the Playbooks, which are the essential guides for all athletes covering when they can turn up in Tokyo, how long they can stay, what they can do and what the facilities are for them, are completely inclusive as between Paralympians and Olympians. It is the same book for every athlete who is going to Tokyo for the Games this summer.

Do you see the international progress that has been made between the IPC and the IOC reflected in other international federations? Could you focus on that to begin with and then perhaps move down to the UK?

Martin McElhatton: Internationally, there is quite a diverse picture, in that at the highest level you have co-operation between the IOC and the IPC for the Games and the host city; but you are talking about the elite of the elite there. Obviously, when you come to different countries, some have a National Paralympic Committee that focuses on just elite, and others have a National Paralympic Committee that is responsible for all disability sport, from grass roots to elite. Other countries see more integration, more inclusion of disabled people and disability sport, within governing bodies.

That works to a certain extent, but I think there are limitations, particularly around the expertise and knowledge of disabled people and organisations, in helping to drive up participation levels at a grass-roots

level. If the focus is on only the top level of sport, you risk losing those grass-roots opportunities to get people active that will help with their health, their physical and mental well-being—all the things that we have seen dramatically impacted in the last 12 months and that we talked about earlier.

From a personal point of view, and as chief executive of a national disabilities sports organisation, I would not vote for Christmas if I was a turkey. I am keen to see our expertise transferred and that knowledge transferred to all organisations that want to support disabled people, whether it is local authorities, national governing bodies, or anyone else who wants to support disabled people to be active and live active, healthy lives.

Lord Moynihan: You would not make it a requirement, for example, for funding for all national sports governing bodies to recognise, respect and cater for the disability sports membership in that sport.

Martin McElhatton: I think they can do part of that role, but we have seen in the past year that disability sport and activity for disabled people is much wider than just traditional sports. In the past year we undertook exercise at home programmes. They would not fit into any national governing body, but, through that, we have had 400 to 500 wheelchair users come into our network who were not there previously. It is really important that we have organisations that represent impairment-specific groups that can cater for their needs and share that impairment-specific expertise with others who are creating a pathway for people into regular activities and club activities, and perhaps on to elite and national and international participation.

Lord Moynihan: Thank you very much.

Matthew, you focus more nationally on working with national governing bodies. Tell us about your experience in this context.

Matthew Maguire: I meet with my fellow NDSOs regularly. For example, as Martin mentioned, we meet together with WheelPower to share resources and experiences. It is so useful to meet as a group. We talk about all the things to do with inclusion and what challenges we have. Working for national governing bodies can be challenging, but it is varied in terms of the sports themselves and what stage they are at. A lot are at completely different stages of maturity, particularly in this field. You can really tell, I think, when there is a particular focus coming up, or when they have a particular focus around doing some inclusion work.

It is really interesting. It has changed a lot in the past few years as regards outreach and inreach. We find that all the best work we have done is at a local level within a national framework. I mentioned the Round the World Challenge. That is a participation project, and about 2,500 people are taking part at the moment. That is delivered through local participation hubs, which are in 27 regions across the country. Each hub is made up of between eight and 15 different providers within that

region. That could be anyone from a learning disability charity, to day services, an NGB, a grass-roots club or leisure centre—anyone who wants to be involved. We have found that all the best work has been done with local NGB projects, which have then been upscaled into different regions.

We have gone on a really interesting journey with different sports such as cricket and tennis. Rugby league, in particular, has been really great in that one small project has scaled up across the country and we have so much learning from each location on how they operate, in very specific ways. I think that is really great.

What is also really important and I wanted to flag up is that we tend to look from an NDSO perspective at what value we can offer sport. It always seems that as a group we tend to be a little hard on ourselves and are constantly trying to prove our value to sport, and we do not appreciate what value we can put back into the disability community.

I have had to do a lot of work internally in Mencap. Particularly in the last year because of the pandemic, sport has played a minor part in what people with a learning disability are going through, but it is a challenge to keep that on the agenda. I am relying on sports, and the profile of sports, to keep health and sport and physical activity on the agenda for Mencap, which is great. I think we can take a lot of that into the work we do in those locations.

Lord Moynihan: In your experience, do you think that a disproportionate emphasis—I will not say too much emphasis—is placed by national governing bodies on Paralympic disciplines, as opposed to the other impairment groups, or is your experience that it is pretty equal across the board?

Matthew Maguire: My experience, as Barry alluded to earlier, is that for people with a learning disability the Paralympic pathways are non-existent. There are only three sports that offer a Paralympic opportunity, and within those sports there is a very limited number of events. That is definitely the case as regards investment and performance pathways. Probably because learning disability is such a significant proportion of the country's population, sports are pretty good at putting on learning disability sessions. I think there is somewhat of an attitude that, once those sessions are on and people are coming, "That's it. Job done. We've got people there. We've got people active", and there is no emphasis on what happens next.

Perhaps this comes back to what Baroness Grey-Thompson was talking about as regards transitioning people into other roles. There is an attitude of, "We've got people there. We've got people at a session. We've done our job". Without those performance pathways, that is very much the end goal for NGBs.

Lord Moynihan: Would you look to Sport England to change its policy to rectify that imbalance?

Matthew Maguire: I am not sure rectifying the policy would do that. I think we probably need to be brave as a sector and say, "What happens next?", and emphasise what can happen once people are active. We have people there; we have people at sessions. It is a case of what happens next. Perhaps it is more work that we need to do with NGBs. I am not sure what difference a top-down approach would make. It could work. I do not know.

Lord Moynihan: Many thanks, Matthew.

Barry, this is your opportunity to pursue this, which I know is a heartfelt issue to you. In so doing, could you also help us as a committee and talk a little about the relationship between the national governing bodies, the disabilities sports organisations and the community at large? Do we have a long, long way to travel in this country to make sure that local authorities, with which you were very closely associated for a long time, prioritise the needs for disabled folk when it comes to activities, sport and recreation, and an active lifestyle?

Barry Horne: To reinforce Matt's last point, the pathway work with Sport England investment is not exclusively related to the Paralympic pathways. Its investment, which is at grass roots, should support all pathway development, whatever the impairment, and whatever the end competition is. It is a UK Sport inclusive investment that pulls people towards the Paralympics.

We are a national organisation as well, but what we are saying increasingly, and you can also see it in the Sport England strategy, is that things happen on the ground, and we have to work out how we can strengthen how the system facilitates sport and activity, and includes disabled people. There are a number of ways that we have been trying to do that. I have seen some improvement. There is guidance, and there are standards and approaches that we put out there. We have the Quest guide for the leisure sector. We have done work on 10 principles that support engagement of disabled people and are embedding those into our work with organisations.

There is training and support, which is really important because it works at a number of levels. For us, that ranges from a lead programme that looks at inclusion right across governing bodies, up to leadership and front-line coaches. It is about inclusive activity programmes that focus on what they do differently to succeed at the point of delivery.

We think, increasingly, that it is about trialling different approaches to locality-based working. People will be aware that Sport England has invested heavily in local pilots. My own organisation is involved in a programme called Get Out Get Active. That was borne out of our research where disabled people said, in the largest numbers, "We just want to be included in other local provision successfully, and here are the things that if they were in place would work for us". That is how our 10 principles came about.

We have embedded that into a programme across the whole of the UK. It has been evaluated and is showing incredibly successful numbers of people feeling happier, more confident, better connected, embedded into their communities, and 70% continue to be active. There is that locality work.

We say we want that programme to be sustainable in three different ways: first, that the people engaged stay active; secondly, that the localities learn what works and start to use those approaches across their other programmes; and, thirdly, that we share and disseminate—and there is a lot of good learning—that experience with other localities.

What we are trying to do is build in good principles for partnership working on the ground, make sure it is inclusive, make sure it works for the participants, but then draw out some powerful lessons that we can share with others. There is quite a lot. Originally, it was funded by Spirit of 2012; now, Sport England and the London Marathon Charitable Trust are funders. A disproportionate amount of the investment has gone into evaluation so that we can genuinely share what works.

Lord Moynihan: Many thanks and thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Just before I bring in Baroness Blower, as we have a little bit of time, would any of the other committee members like to put a question to any of our guests before we come to the final section? Lord Hayward, you had your hand up.

Lord Hayward: Two things, Chair. First, may I make one observation? A word that has come up so often in this session that I have not heard in any other session is “confidence”. The requirement to provide confidence for these groups to participate keeps coming up over and over again. That is just an observation.

To keep it brief, I will ask Martin. My sense is that, to get people to participate, you have to give them confidence and determination, and you referred to youngsters. Can you say whether stadia nowadays are good or bad at catering for disabled people? You do not have to say where the bad ones are. Have they improved? What is the biggest error that people still make on stadia design for you guys?

Martin McElhatton: I have a very good friend who is a mystery shopper for the Premier League. He has a fantastic little side job where he goes to matches and buys a ticket. It is always about the staffing, training and the levels of welcome. Often, people can get over the physical access issues in stadia, but they should be improved. Certainly, they have been improved since I have been in a wheelchair, and I think they are much better. Obviously, a sport such as football has the money to throw at it, but other facilities need to be considered.

One of the issues that will come out of the recovery is the challenge for local facilities to meet the financial pressures to re-open for disadvantaged and disabled groups. The pressures on facilities will be

more around generating finances to replenish losses that have been made during the pandemic. I think all facilities should be physically accessible, but if they are not financially sustainable they will not be viable and able to offer discounts for disabled people, and therefore, that might disadvantage disabled people in coming back to sport and leisure after the pandemic.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: I will put this question to Barry because he said something at the start of the meeting that put it into my mind. When you were describing the barriers to people with disabilities going into sport, you used the term motivation. To be honest, you could have been speaking about anybody who has a barrier to go into sport, whether or not they have a disability.

Lord Moynihan spoke about this in the previous question. My question to Barry is: what connections are there between what you have learned about getting a particular group that does not get involved in sport into sport? Does anyone ever say, "How did you do that?" We could use it with the overweight, the poor, the dispossessed—anybody; presumably, the skill set can be used with anyone. Is that an area where perhaps there is a meeting point for the different groups?

Barry Horne: I think so. Whatever the proportion is, there is a fair bit of inclusion work that will work for all groups that have not previously been as active in sport. The key to it is being more person centred. In some worlds you would just call it good customer care. You would just say what is it that would make it work for that person. In our research, there is a list of motivators—physical health, losing weight, getting fit, making friends—and there is no difference between the motivations for disabled people and non-disabled people.⁴ Statistically, there is very little difference. Disabled people score slightly higher in their desire to become active. A lot of the motivations are common.

The reason we have talked about confidence and attitude is that the sector, for some reason, is not yet ready to do that as proactively and positively as it needs to. Those local lessons are about what things actually worked in a local community centre that got people interested in coming, but kept them there, and kept them coming back. There is quite a lot of learning about that. Most of it is about social contact, making friends and feeling part of something. Most of the lessons we are learning are in that territory.

The Chair: Barry, going back to your local government background, could I ask you this question? Apart from one very short mention, none of you has mentioned the issue of active travel, and how crucial it is to

⁴ Note by witness: Activity Alliance, *Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2020-21* (February 2021) slides 16 and 25: http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/003/731/ADAS_2020-21_Full_report_original.pdf?1612187100 and Activity Alliance and 2CV, *Motivate me* (May 2014): <http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/how-we-help/research/1874-motivate-me-may-2014>

have travel arrangements to allow people with disabilities—not just wheelchair disabilities but all disabilities—to get safely to venues to carry out a sporting activity. Are you aware that the Government are taking into account the whole issue of disability when they are drawing up their active travel proposals?

Barry Horne: I have not been closely involved myself. In different localities we have been keen to try to make sure that adjustments to the travel patterns work well and, therefore, are based on consultation with disabled people, whether that is cycle tracks that are wide enough for all cycles to pass through, or whether it is, back in my old world, accessible buses that would mean that there is some active travel either side of a bus journey. I hope that is the case. I am not directly connected to it. I would be interested in that, because this softening of what we mean when we say activity is quite important. It is not just structured sport; it is not just competitive sport. It is all aspects of becoming active, whether it is dance or active travel, and inclusion. Engaging disabled people in the guidance that is produced will be the answer to getting that right.

Martin McElhatton: We are based at Stoke Mandeville stadium and we have been working with Aylesbury on its Garden Town project. It is looking at areas, either within the town centre or the pathways around the town, to try to make sure that they are inclusive for disabled people, so there is that welcome into spaces and the public realm when disabled people go out and about. The first part of getting into sport and physical activity is getting out of the house. That is more difficult if you go into an environment that is not very welcoming.

For me, probably the most exciting point pre-pandemic was when I went to City Thameslink, and it had raised the platform to be level access with the train so that I did not need the ramp. I did not have that risk factor in my mind of, "Is the ramp going to be there or not, or am I going to end up at the next station along?" If, as a confident disabled person, I have those kinds of fears when I go out, what is it like for people who are much less confident? That is why we have focused so much on confidence today. I think it is so important to help disabled people to start that journey into sport and physical activity.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Baroness Blower, you have been very patient. I hope we have not dented your confidence to ask the final question.

Q135 **Baroness Blower:** Not at all, Chair. Thank you very much for all the responses to all the questions. It has been really interesting hearing all this evidence. This is the last question, but other people may want to come in on it.

We are doing this inquiry about whether we need a national plan for sport and recreation, and, of course, we have talked increasingly about a healthy and active lifestyle. Part of that work will be finally to make recommendations. The question to the three of you now is: what do you think the committee should focus on in making recommendations to

government for what this kind of national plan would look like?

Obviously, I want you all to answer, but perhaps, Matt, you would come up first with an answer. I am quite interested in whether you think there are different sorts of recommendations to be made about sport and recreation, and active lifestyle, as obviously connected but slightly different areas of activity.

Matthew Maguire: My main recommendation is probably rather basic, if I am honest, but it is really to make sure that sport, and disability sport in particular, is embedded throughout everything; and it is broader than just a national plan for sport, as you were alluding to just then. Particularly if we are looking through the prism of Mencap, sport underpins health and well-being, friendships and relationships, discrimination and stigma. Those are three of our four priority areas, and sport can feed into each one of them. It is really important that we keep on emphasising the importance of sport, the importance of disability sport, the impact it has on people's lives, and how that can impact change across a number of different agendas.

Baroness Blower: Your recommendation would be that disability sport needs to have a high priority in a national plan; is that what you are saying?

Matthew Maguire: Absolutely. A national plan really needs to ensure that it has its branches through other national plans, if that makes sense. It is about working with plenty of different departments and agendas, and proving that sport can contribute towards a number of different national agendas. It is not just purely about getting more people playing sport. It is about improving the health and well-being of the nation through the national sport plan.

Baroness Blower: Martin?

Martin McElhatton: I would echo that sport and physical activity higher up the agenda would be very welcome. For me, it is that cross-departmental co-operation around supporting disabled people to lead healthy active lives, and to achieve whatever they want in sport, with the same level of opportunity that non-disabled people have. That is particularly so in health. Sport can play a really important part in reducing the number of hospital visits, and it can improve people's physical and mental health and, therefore, their reliance on medication and so on.

Also, it can be a really important tool as part of rehabilitation. After a spinal injury like mine, or perhaps an amputation, or another acquired disability, sport can play a really important part for disabled people. That can be wider for people who have had strokes or other health-related issues. That link between sport, health and education is really important for me.

Baroness Blower: Thank you. And Barry?

Barry Horne: I would reinforce the positioning of sport and activity. We need sport, activity and recreation to be more centrally placed on all agendas, in national policy, but also at the heart of local communities so that it becomes more important. Our evidence would suggest that that will directly help disabled people. It is just giving it more emphasis, which will also directly benefit and help disabled people.

Our specific ambition is that the inactivity gap, as measured by Sport England's Active Lives study, between disabled people and the wider population is closed. That specific policy objective should be built in. Our job at Activity Alliance is done the day on which disabled people are as active as non-disabled people. To put that in the mix would be really helpful. There are various other things that go with that. For me, one of those would be to think about public investment and ask the question every time: does it help or hinder disabled people's inclusion?

The Chair: Baroness Blower, that is a good note on which to finish this session. Thank you to all three witnesses, Barry Horne, Matthew Maguire and Martin McElhatton, for your responses this afternoon, and for the way in which you have engaged with the committee.

I would say specifically to you, Barry, that a transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the committee website. If there is any element that you might want to remove from that, including your resignation, let us know about it, and we will make sure that that is the case. We would not want you to go back to flowers when you get back to the organisation.

Barry Horne: Thank you.

The Chair: Or they might be very unhappy; I do not know. Thank you all very much for that.

I thank the committee not only for this afternoon's session but for all the sessions over the past few weeks. You have been incredibly attentive and very supportive indeed. We do not meet again for another two weeks. On that note, I would like to thank you all and wish you a very happy Easter. We will see you soon. I declare the meeting closed.