

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Sports in our communities, HC 869

Tuesday 13 April 2021

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Members present: Julian Knight (Chair); Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Alex Davies-Jones; Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Damian Green; Damian Hinds; John Nicolson; Giles Watling; Mrs Heather Wheeler.

Questions 359 - 463

Witnesses

I: Ollie Dudfield, Executive Director, Sport for Development Coalition; and Lisa Wainwright, Chief Executive, Sport and Recreation Alliance.

II: Joanna Coates, Chief Executive, UK Athletics; Jane Nickerson, Chief Executive Officer, Swim England; and David Pond, Chief Executive, GB Wheelchair Rugby.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ollie Dudfield and Lisa Wainwright.

Q359 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and this is our latest hearing into sports in our communities. We have two panels. Our first panel consists of Lisa Wainwright, Chief Executive, Sport and Recreation Alliance, and Ollie Dudfield, Executive Director, Sport for Development Coalition.

Lisa and Ollie, good morning and thank you for joining us. Before we go to Alex to put our first question, I want to see whether any members have any interests to declare. Giles Watling? Clive Efford?

Clive Efford: I am chair of the trustees of Samuel Montagu Youth Club, which is a sports and youth club in my constituency.

Chair: Yes, I know it very well. Our first questions come from Alex Davies-Jones.

Alex Davies-Jones: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, both. Thank you for joining us today. How has the last 12 months impacted the work of your members?

Lisa Wainwright: Good morning, Committee, and thank you, Alex. Chair, I would be remiss if I did not mention the previous chairman of the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the Duke of Edinburgh. He served us from 1951 to 2009 for 58 fabulous years. His passion, his dedication and his work has seen us today still here as the Sport and Recreation Alliance. I hope you do not mind if I send our regards to the royal family and to Her Majesty the Queen.

Alex, it has been an interesting 12 months across the whole of society but in particular for our members. Many of you will know a lot of our members; for example, the Rugby Football Union, the ECB, the FA, the big governing bodies of sports that many of you I know will watch avidly on TV and such. We also have a number of other members that are unfunded. We have about 220 unfunded members: for example, Girl Guiding UK, Pride Sports, Greenhouse Sports and the Caravan and Camping Club. We have a broad reach of over 300 members from unfunded all the way to the professional sports level.

It has been challenging for a whole host of them. Yesterday was a huge relief for a number of them moving to step two very quickly and the release of indoor sports.

We have seen a lot of resilience from the sector and a variety of ways they have adapted. A lot of our movement and dance members, for example, adapted by going online. The Alliance purchased 28 different Zoom licences to ensure those voluntary organisations could maintain contact with their members and continue classes online. Those are some of the things we have done.



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We commissioned some research with Sheffield Hallam University during January and February. Some of the key things coming through on the impact on grassroots sports are around the membership levels. We have seen from this research of over 1,400 clubs that there has been a 60% reduction in membership levels during the pandemic. That is to be really understood because services were not being delivered and a lot of people, if they are not receiving services, may not want to pay their membership. With the anticipated release of restrictions, the prediction is that those clubs will see an increase back to 75% of their members. Hopefully, as more restrictions are released and social distancing restrictions are released, that will increase further. There has been a particular challenge around membership.

There has also, as you would expect, been a significant reduction of 99% in participation across the membership because the sector was closed, but there is prediction from those members that that will return to 90%.

Alex, some of the key issues coming through are around the workforce. There has been a 25% to 30% drop in coaches—paid coaches, sole traders and others—and that is significant when you think of people coming back to quality experiences, which we want. Also, at a high level, there has been a significant issue around coming back to access to facilities, particularly public facilities, which I will come on to later if asked.

Q360 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Of course. Thanks, Lisa. Ollie, do you have anything further to add on what your members are telling you some of the biggest challenges have been over the last 12 months?

Ollie Dudfield: Thanks for the question and thanks to the Committee for the invitation this morning. The network that makes up the Sport for Development Coalition is primarily focused on the wider outcomes that community sports can deliver. As you can imagine, over the last year the focus has primarily been on the impact of the various restrictions and lockdowns on the sector and some of these wider outcomes, whether it be supporting those furthest away from employment into the job market or supporting those at risk of exclusion from education or indeed supporting connectivity within communities.

Much has been made and promoted around the 7% drop in physical activity levels among adults and the 3% drop among young people. Less has been made of the shifts in those activities. We have seen about 1 million fewer children and young people being involved in swimming and team sports and about half the usual number of adults. I make that point because of this element of the organised community aspect that exists. The types of interventions of the 180 members of the Sport for Development Coalition network, which overarch thousands of community groups and programmes, do have that additional element of organisational methodology that aims towards those wider outcomes.



I am sure the Committee has heard on previous occasions the projection that community sport offers around £85 billion in returns in social and economic value. Over the last year the real focus across the Coalition has been the impact not on specifically the reduction in activity levels and memberships but on those wider outcomes and the wider value that the sector can deliver. Similar to Lisa, in response to that, across the Coalition there has been a strong focus on three thematic areas: what the adaptations have needed to be, based on that what support the Coalition and the broader sector can deliver over this period, and then the response as we recover and rebuild. That has been the mantra for the Coalition network over the last year. If people are interested, yes, there has been a hashtag #adaptsupportandrespond. That has been the context as the wider Coalition has seen it with a focus on wider outcomes and the impact that the past year has had on those wider outcomes that we know community sport can contribute to.

Q361 Alex Davies-Jones: Lisa, you mentioned that your organisation represents governing bodies for sport and recreation and a whole host of different activities. Has one particular group suffered more than the rest over the last 12 months in your opinion? Has one particular activity been overwhelmingly impacted?

Lisa Wainwright: Purely due to the nature of some of our sports, close-contact sports like boxing, judo, taekwondo, have naturally had serious restrictions on them and access to facilities has been limited. Likewise, indoor team sports like netball, volleyball and basketball are allowed to start but it is still within the rule of six for the majority unless they are people with disabilities or young people. Some sports have had bigger challenges than some other sports.

Some sports like British Cycling and British Canoeing have flourished because you could paddle and cycle during the first lockdown, thankfully, because the Government allowed one hour of activity, which we were very grateful for. There have been some positives.

For combat sports and indoor team sports in particular, there have been some really serious challenges from the lack of activity they could take part in.

Q362 Alex Davies-Jones: I have to agree with you. I should declare that I am the co-chair of the all-party group for wrestling. They have been massively impacted because they have not been able to train and get back in the ring, for example.

You also mentioned that you have been supporting organisations by acquiring Zoom links. What else has your organisation been doing to try to help these activities and these sports during this time?

Lisa Wainwright: We have done quite a huge amount. We at the Alliance thankfully were agile enough. We were working very flexibly prior to lockdown and started to move to virtual meetings and things. We originally started with chairs' meetings. The chairs of all our members



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were brought together on a weekly basis: at the same time, we are the secretariat to the CEO forum of national governing bodies. We are bringing those together fortnightly.

I also co-ordinated a gathering of the equivalent organisations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland so that when regulations were changing, particularly for British sports, we were trying to get an understanding of what that meant for our members.

Alongside that, we were providing a significant amount of support with DCMS and Sport England in the early days and writing the guidance alongside the Government for outdoor activities and then latterly the return to play. A huge amount of work went in from our policy team to help our governing bodies because of the differences and nuances of all the different sports to get those return to play plans approved by the Government so that activities could restart. All those plans are on our website so that the public can see it is safe to return to those sports and Covid measures are in place. We provided a huge amount of sport as well as seminars throughout the year, workshops and conferences that we continued to promote for our members. We had a significant increase in activity across our membership.

We have had great support from our APPG for Sport with Ben Bradley MP as chair, with more APPGs than we have ever had and more attendees at APPGs, which is really welcome.

Q363 Alex Davies-Jones: That is good to hear. Ollie, you mentioned that your organisation has been trying to adapt support and respond to the situation we have all found ourselves in. How has this change in tack affected your day-to-day work as an organisation? How do you foresee that impact having long-term consequences going forward?

Ollie Dudfield: First of all, it is important to give the context of the Coalition being a network of organisations that work collectively. I will speak more about the coalition than the back-end support team.

One key adaption has been to pivot to hybrid delivery combining face-to-face when available and digital delivery. We have had the School of Hard Knocks, which uses rugby and boxing methodology to support people back into employment. They moved an eight-week two-day programme to a five-day intensive online programme. Get Set and Go is a partnership of local Minds across the country with primarily EFL clubs and community club organisations, which has set up a range of diverse digital components for delivery, not just Zoom but closed social media groups and WhatsApp for reaching out. That was based on evidence that a lot of the benefits for mental health and wellbeing include that social connection component that organised physical activity and sport can bring. They are two examples from across the Coalition of that adaption.

One challenge has been the digital divide across the country. There are different levels of access to online and digital connectivity certainly across



the organisations, community groups and charities that work in lower socioeconomic communities. Disengaged or under-represented communities in the sector have seen that as a barrier to some of the adaptations. Early on there was a panacea approach that we can move online. We saw a spike in searches about online activity. The digital divide has been a challenge that the Coalition organisations had to overcome through various approaches.

There are two other elements that I would underscore about collecting data from across our Coalition and the network. Latterly we did a data collection exercise in December, at a “Spotlight on 2021” initiative. One area that came through quite strongly was the need for some additional capacity building across the network in responding to the changes when activity resumes. That is not just around, of course, returning to activity within the parameters of the guidelines that have been outlined but also the capacity that the workforce, professional or volunteer, needs to deliver a hybrid type of approach. What are the additional safeguarding considerations if we are utilising online delivery or a hybrid approach? As much as that support and investment in maintaining the sustainability of organisations—and some of them certainly have had challenges over the past year—what are going to be the requirements moving forward for additional capacity building? That has been on our radar.

The final point would be also significant support and collaboration across the network in measuring the impacts of community sport and utilising validated questions and measures from outside the sector. That probably comes from a forward projection that six to 18 months is going to be a significantly challenging period again for a number of the charities, community groups and organisations that are involved in the Coalition and the wider sector in being able to underscore the purpose and those wider outcomes for community sport and sport for development. For example, we are supporting some of the organisations to use the wellbeing measures from the Office of National Statistics within the programme monitoring and evaluation of impact, some of the questions from the community life surveys and so on. That measurement piece to underscore the value and the wider outcomes that can be delivered has been a final part of additional support both based on the last year and looking forward.

Chair: You have lots of really interesting information but I would caution witnesses, if you could, to be a little bit briefer in your answers, if that is okay. We have relatively limited time. Alex?

Alex Davies-Jones: Thank you, Chair. No more questions from me. That was very succinct. Thank you.

Q364 **Chair:** I am now going to ask you a question. I will probably get a yes/no answer just to emphasise the point and to be sure.

I was listening to the “Today” programme this morning and they were saying that half of 11-year-olds in socioeconomically deprived areas in



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the United Kingdom are defined as obese. You may have certain issues over how we define obesity—I certainly do when it comes to BMI, for instance—but there is no doubt that we have quite serious issues in this country when it comes to child obesity. I noticed that you were in the Australia and New Zealand coaching systems and you were dealing with young people in those parts of the world.

What are we doing wrong in this country? What are a couple of key lessons that you have taken from your experience in other countries and could think about bringing into the UK?

Ollie Dudfield: Thank you for the question. I will try to be as succinct as possible. There are two points.

One would be the structural element and how much participation is a commercial activity versus a public service. We know that about 20% of public sport and leisure stock is in public local government hands versus more commercial ends. I spoke before about the £85 billion return on community sport and physical activity. With the inputs into that return, only about 11% comes from the public sector.

There is this challenge of the barrier of affordability. It is not so much a market issue because there have been some initiatives where voucher schemes and support schemes for people have enabled access either to programmes or to facilities if commercial rates become a barrier. There is that element around looking at affordability of both programme access and venue access.

The second area is the critical importance of the education system and community links. We have seen recently announcements supporting, for example, the opening of school facilities to be utilised by community groups. That interface of education, sport and physical activity is absolutely essential. That has been thrown under the lens of the Coalition.

They are the two areas that come to mind—having access to facilities and programme access implications.

Q365 **Chair:** Basically, it is too expensive and, secondly, there are not enough activities using school sporting facilities. Is that fair?

Ollie Dudfield: There are definitely two elements to that, yes. I would go beyond school sporting facilities to the range of spaces and facilities that are in the community but schools are key among that, yes.

Q366 **Chair:** With your experience in Australia and New Zealand and comparing that particular point about schools, maybe in Australia and New Zealand schools will be open for longer for sporting activities after the end of the school day, whereas in the UK it is less likely to be the case?

Ollie Dudfield: I do not know that the access in the schools is a question of extended school days or anything like that, but putting the frameworks



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in place at a localised level to ensure those community groups and organisations are able to access and utilise those facilities.

Q367 **Chair:** I need to be clearer with my question. Apologies for that. My own experience from many years ago at school was that my school had quite large fields—they are all houses now—with lots of football pitches, rugby pitches and so on. This was a comprehensive school but it was fortunately located. But they were empty. I may have played one game of football after or before school organised by a sports club on those school fields. I was in the school teams for cricket, football and so on. That was a crying shame. Is that experience still being repeated for schoolkids around the country? The facilities can be there but are not used and there is not that hour and a half or two hours after the school day when kids take part in activities.

Ollie Dudfield: It is a diverse challenge and different in different contexts. Someone needs to support the use of those fields and facilities. We very much advocate for an asset-based, place-based approach that is a partnership between education, community and sport to get those facilities and fields used. Yes, it can be a challenge in some contexts but there also needs to be—

Q368 **Chair:** Sorry, to clarify, very briefly, what is the main challenge? What is the main barrier in the way of using those facilities?

Ollie Dudfield: The engagement and support for community organisations and clubs to utilise and access them at a cost-efficient rate. That is the feedback we have had from our Coalition.

Q369 **Chair:** It is the holders of the facilities and their inability to have a fair market that is realistic and also, frankly, to have that communication in place with those organisations. It is question of cost and a telephone call, in many respects.

Ollie Dudfield: We have also seen the school sport and activity plan and some of the work of the Youth Sport Trust and the network it has pulled together. The Active Partnerships network movement is really making advances in this regard.

Q370 **Chair:** Lisa, your organisation is the Sport and Recreation Alliance. Is there too much focus on sport itself? Does there need to be a focus on getting people, for example, flexible to activity, to ensure they can do more in their daily lives by greater flexibility?

Lisa Wainwright: It is a combination of both. Many of you on this Committee were avid football, rugby or cricket players previously and you are very interested in sport. There are many other people who are not. I was a PE teacher many years ago and was very traditional in terms of team sports, but my children now have a whole variety of different sports they take part in and activities. For me, often people start to do movement and activities and then move into sport. It is a great



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recruitment tool. It is not one or the other. There should be a blend of opportunities.

The Join the Movement campaign that Sport England ran during the first lockdown was a fantastic way of demonstrating how to use different tools at home to keep active, to keep flexible and to move. There is a natural blend. If we can get people active—walking, cycling, swimming, for example—and that gives them the confidence then to move into other sports, it is a win-win.

Q371 Chair: Is there an overfocus on elite sport in this country? We had one gold medal in the 1996 Atlanta Games and the yachting team had to sell their kit to fund the flight home. In recent years, we have had a joyous embarrassment of riches when it comes to the medal haul that this country has managed to acquire. Has that been at the cost of the grassroots?

Lisa Wainwright: We should be incredibly proud of the journey of our elite sports system. Many of us were embarrassed by the medal haul. But we are more excited and interested to see the inspiration that the Games and our athletes can provide in our communities. If you followed any athletes and the work they have done during lockdown to inspire people to take the first step towards moving and being flexible, a huge amount have done that. We should be incredibly proud as a nation of the medal haul, but it should not be the only focus. It is the inspiration. It is the links those athletes add to their communities and what they do.

We have started to hear how much HRH the Duke of Edinburgh did in the background that many of us were unaware of. That is pretty similar to a lot of the athletes. We see them competing and we see them in the rowing boat, the canoe or whatever else it may be. We do not see them in their communities. When I was young, I remember Daley Thompson came to my school and inspired me to do athletics. It stays with me today.

There has not been an over-prioritisation of elite sport at all. We need to understand that there is a symbiotic relationship between elite sport and grassroots sport. Many people are asking why elite sport got back on TV first. In terms of broadcast revenues, through the voluntary broadcast code, this year alone £156 million has been brought back into grassroots sport from those broadcast fees. Since 2013, over £1 billion has been reinvested in grassroots sport. It is not as simple as saying there is elite and grassroots. There is a definite relationship between them. I am extremely proud of our members and the medal haul.

Q372 Chair: I am unendingly proud of our elite athletes, but the question is very simple, really. It is not that we should not be focused, but are we overfocused on it? Should we hive off a little bit of the money we pay to the elite into grassroots and community sports?



Lisa Wainwright: There would be an argument to say that if we reduce the investment in elite sport, would we hit the same medal targets? It would be for the Government to decide if that is what we want. Personally, we would want to keep that level of investment but look to how we secure future and further investment, as well as regulatory change to support grassroots sport, for example. It is not just about the amount of extra funding going to UK Sport and Sport England, but there are many other measures we could look to introduce to support grassroots sport in particular, like an extension of the CASC scheme or a reduction of the 5% VAT that went to other sectors but not to the sports sector. It is not just a cut to the elite side. I would look to broaden out the investment and opportunities for grassroots sport.

Q373 **Steve Brine:** The Government have given a lot of money in bailout to grassroots sport with the Sport Winter Survival Package, but the taxpayers' pocket is not endless. Sport England says that financial viability remains at risk, but it does not have endless money and nor do we. Lisa, how effective has Government support been over the last 12 months, without just saying, "We wanted more"?

Lisa Wainwright: Absolutely, Steve. In terms of grassroots sport, Sport England has been incredibly effective with the way it responded so quickly to the majority of funded sports with a carry-over of funding and a relaxing of the monitoring and evaluation of that funding. Most of it was related to participation and participation stopped, so there were changes.

The £210 million Community Emergency Fund was very much welcomed across the whole sector and through the governing bodies. The £16 million Return to Play Fund has also been very much welcomed by the thousands of grassroots clubs that have accessed that. In terms of the total figures, with the National Leisure Recovery Fund, the Sport Winter Survival Package and the Sport Recovery Fund, there has been a significant amount brought into the sector.

In our research with Sheffield Hallam, we spoke to clubs. They have been incredibly resilient. Although income levels have dropped by 50% of pre-pandemic levels because there are not as many activities running, the liabilities have slightly increased and they have used their reserves. Out of those 1,300 clubs, the majority have said they will be able to survive. They may need a small amount of investment—up to £6,000—but if they do not get it, they do believe they will be able to survive and thrive in the next year to two years.

Although, clearly, many elements of the sector would want more, akin to other parts of culture, arts and so on, in the round the money that has been available particularly through Sport England has been very much welcomed and utilised.

Q374 **Steve Brine:** Thanks. Ollie, you have quite an international perspective with the organisations and the background that you have. What more could have been done that has been done elsewhere that could have



been more effective?

Ollie Dudfield: One area to reflect on is the input versus outcome argument and the opportunity to look at the outcomes delivered by community sport—some of them go well beyond the premise of this Department—and the opportunities, whether it be entry into the justice system or whether it be education and the potential for ringfencing of support based on some of the wider outcomes that community sport can deliver. That is certainly one area we have seen in other contexts. Physical activity is a strong one but it certainly goes beyond that.

I would bring that then back to the question and the opportunity to support and resource those elements of the organisations within the sector that have the ability to attract resources from outside the sector. Coalition organisations like Street League and Sport for Life, which use sport to support employment outcomes, have been able to mobilise resources from the third sector and from outside sport based on their ability to continue to support young people furthest from the employment market.

Yes, there is core funding and support, but there are other opportunities to look innovatively and invest in those types of approaches and organisations that have the capacity to mobilise resources for wider outcomes. Some of the specific funds from Sport England—for example, the Tackling Inequalities Fund for inequalities—and some of the innovation funds moved in that direction. Certainly, a number in the Coalition identified that element of the wider outcomes and almost seed types of investment in those parts of the sector and those organisations that can demonstrate an ability to contribute to those wider agendas.

Q375 **Steve Brine:** Thanks. Lisa, you are no stranger to Sport England. How well would you mark its scorecard?

Lisa Wainwright: I am no stranger to being critical of Sport England, Steve.

Steve Brine: That is why I asked.

Lisa Wainwright: This last year has been so impressive in terms of the leadership of the organisation. Sport England has been in the shoes of the governing bodies and that had not been the case for a long time and is a real credit. Within two weeks, it came out saying it was looking to roll over funding so that there was security for national governing bodies.

Not only that, but it provided support and guidance to non-funded partners, which has been critically important for voluntary organisations. The Chief Executive Tim Hollingsworth, Sally Munday from UK Sport and I were on daily calls initially at the start of this and then we were joined by DCMS. Our policy team has worked hand-in-hand to write the guidance and to try to help DCMS, which was under capacity for the amount of requests that were coming in. It has been absolutely exceptional and continues to be.



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I look forward to working with Sport England, as does the sector, on Uniting the Movement and moving it forward. There has been excellent work in terms of how it has managed to get that many grants out the door so quickly to the organisations and clubs we represent.

Q376 **Steve Brine:** Very good. They will be pleased to hear that. Tell me about diversity in sports governance. Is Sport England doing enough to promote?

Lisa Wainwright: In terms of Sport England, the Committee will be aware that the sports governance code from 2017 is now being reviewed and I am aware that both the Home Countries Sports Councils and UK Sport have made recommendations to the Government that they are waiting to get confirmed. It was incredibly successful in relation to the number of women on boards moving from 30% to 40%, although there is still not gender balance across all the organisations they fund. They are very aware of it in terms of the diversity of boards.

In June, following the Black Lives Matter riots, a number of our members asked if we would release a statement and we did with over 100 members alongside some research we did across our members. Sadly, only 1% of paid coaches were black from this research, 2% of volunteers, 2% of employees and only 10% of board members.

In relation to what they have done previously around diversity, we have all learned we need to do a lot more. Over the last few years we have supported them on a scheme to develop future non-executive directors to come onto boards so they are in decision-making positions and the work with Perrett Laver that we have supported. A number of those individuals are now on boards, I am delighted to say. Likewise, Sporting Equals is a charity that really champions this area with their leader board and youth leader board that Sport England has supported to build a pipeline, a support system and a network for these individuals to come into those positions on boards.

It is only the start. There is a huge amount to do. It will be important to see what comes from that sports governance code and the targets that may well be in there around ethnically diverse boards and also around people with disabilities, which has been incredibly disappointing as well with those positions on boards.

Q377 **Steve Brine:** Thanks very much. Ollie, in your written evidence you said, "Inequalities and discrimination in the sector mirror broader societal inequalities", which is true. Everything that happens in the secure prison estate mirrors what happens in society, just with a bit of a lag. It is no great surprise that sporting bodies mirror society. Are they doing enough?

Ollie Dudfield: I would focus on the shift towards a place-based and asset-based investment. The focus and level of investment in that approach will be key to answering your question about whether they are



doing enough. Certainly with Uniting the Movement we have seen a strong move away from centralised to place-based and asset-based investment, bringing together at a community level and ensuring there is resource at a community level. We have certainly seen some positive outcomes from that type of approach. The fact that it is embedded alongside tackling inequalities within Uniting the Movement has certainly been well received by the Coalition we represent. With the publication and the focus of Uniting the Movement, there are positive moves in that direction towards real place-based and asset-based investment.

Q378 **Steve Brine:** Maybe it is just me, but I feel we are in danger of disappearing somewhere dark. I literally have no idea what "asset-based and place-based development" means.

Ollie Dudfield: It means bringing together the communities and the leaders of communities to design and deliver the interventions and programmes like youth groups, community groups and sports clubs, as opposed to a more directive approach. To give you an example, Laureus Sport for Good is working with Nike, bringing together a coalition of community groups that govern and then deliver on the resource and funding they receive to get people more active. Even over the lockdown, that approach of a coalition of community groups designing and delivering as per the need they have identified has led to almost 20% increases in the individuals they have engaged. Their coalitions in the different local areas they work are engaging different VCSE organisations to support sport and physical activity delivery. A local-based approach is how I would describe it. Apologies for some of the jargon and terminology.

Q379 **Chair:** Lisa, I have two different bits of information here about your funding. One says that it is membership driven and the other piece of information says that the majority is from Sport England, which is the body you were praising earlier in your answer. Which is it?

Lisa Wainwright: It is an interesting question. Many years ago when Sport England was formed, the Central Council of Physical Recreation of the day handed the assets of the national sports centres to Sport England. In return, there is a contract in perpetuity for our funding. We are funded but it is very different to the national governing bodies' funding. We are funded in perpetuity by Sport England and a percentage of our funding comes from our members as well.

Q380 **Chair:** That percentage of funding from Sport England is guaranteed and can never be adjusted. Is that right? Is it ringfenced?

Lisa Wainwright: Yes, it is ringfenced to deliver the core objectives of the Sport and Recreation Alliance.

Q381 **Chair:** To clarify, they have no say over your funding, effectively? It is there in place due to this gift?

Lisa Wainwright: It is, but it is negotiated every four years.



Chair: Thank you.

Q382 **Giles Watling:** Ollie, your Sport and Development Coalition written evidence said that 40% of BAME participants experience negative customer service compared to 14% of white British. Why?

Ollie Dudfield: I will need to turn that one over to Lisa to an extent because that is research conducted by the SRA.

Giles Watling: It was sector-led research.

Ollie Dudfield: There was a lot of attention on governance, but there was an element of the diversity of the workforce across the sector that can of course be strengthened. That would support some of the negative experiences that people have had in the sector.

Q383 **Giles Watling:** Do you have an example of those negative experiences?

Ollie Dudfield: Talking from across the sector, there may be cultural practices not being respected. There may be no opportunity to have coaches or activity leaders from the communities of individuals who are looking to participate in sports and physical activities. That was quantitative research and the reporting on that was quantitative so that specific research is not unpacked in that regard, but these are some of the responses from across the Coalition to support on that issue that I just spoke to.

Q384 **Giles Watling:** Before we move on to what needs to be done, Lisa, do you have any comments on that?

Lisa Wainwright: Yes. There is an adage that if you cannot see it, you cannot be it. A significant number of local coaches and volunteers are not from the communities that they should be. That is the issue, realistically. We need to ensure that there is a welcoming environment for anybody who wants to take part and contribute towards sport and physical activity. We have maybe not had that in the past. It is about the visibility, the access and understanding the needs of different communities. We need to do that a hell of a lot better than we have in the past.

Q385 **Giles Watling:** You would say it is a PR exercise and we need to get the comms right?

Lisa Wainwright: It is not just a PR exercise if a young person sees all white coaches, for example, when they might be from a diverse community and not being able to see those leaders and not being able to see those roles that they could fulfil. It is important that their aspirations are the same as everyone else's in being able to transition through that.

Q386 **Giles Watling:** I apologise for interrupting but I want to drill down a little further. How do we attract those coaches? How do we get those people in those positions? What do we do?

Lisa Wainwright: It is about specific interventions within those communities and work within the communities. For example, I worked in



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Peterborough with a Muslim community and we held closed netball sessions with coaches from that community and competitions that allowed them to wear the clothing they wanted to wear. They did not have to wear bibs and skirts. It is about ensuring that there are rules and regulations that can be changed, that there is investment and support and that those communities can access facilities that maybe they have not been able to access before. They are some of the targeted interventions that we should start to invest in like the Tackling Inequalities Fund that Sport England is currently running.

Q387 Giles Watling: That should come from Sport England?

Lisa Wainwright: It could come from Sport England or lots of other areas, but local community trusts are incredibly important. I am a trustee of one in Leicestershire as well. We fund over 100 schemes specifically for this to get young people from diverse communities into sport and recreation. It is not just from Sport England. There are much wider community funds and trusts that could do that.

Q388 Giles Watling: It is going back to the point that was raised when Steve Brine was asking the question. It is more bottom-up than top-down?

Lisa Wainwright: Absolutely.

Q389 Giles Watling: Thank you. Ollie, did you have anything to add on that?

Ollie Dudfield: There is one additional point I would make about balancing the volunteer and the paid workforce and ensuring that there is capacity there for the sector to be able to access the strong focus of the current Government on skills as part of the Build Back Better scheme. We know there has been success for the community club organisations like the Football League one. An organisation called Coach Core specifically supports apprenticeships and skill development for young people from diverse communities and enables a pathway into the workforce, be it coaches, be it managerial, be it within the administration side of the workforce from a far greater and broader diversity of organisations. That balancing is important between the volunteer and the paid workforce.

Giles Watling: Thank you. Before I go, I should declare my interest. I am a patron of Clacton Football Club.

Q390 Julie Elliott: Lisa, I welcomed you talking earlier about movement and not just organised sport. We are all a bit guilty of just talking about organised sport. Not everybody wants to take part in organised activities. They want to do sport but in their own way. I welcomed that in evidence.

There have been huge cuts in local government financing over the last number of years and that has massively impacted the number of sports facilities available, access to pitches and so on in the area. Has that had a big impact or is the issue wider than that as to why people from perhaps less diverse backgrounds and less economically comfortable backgrounds are getting involved in sport at the grass roots?



Lisa Wainwright: It is complex but it is also very simple. From the research we had done with Sheffield Hallam, 77% of the clubs said the biggest limiting factor for people taking part is access to public leisure facilities. Hugh Edwards gave evidence from UK Active that over the lockdown period, 400 public leisure facilities closed and have been lost. If you do not have a facility available to you, it is going to be pretty difficult to take part in a whole host of different sports and activities. It is critical. Access to funding could potentially pay for a contribution towards coaching, although many sports are not particularly expensive, some are. There has to be a change in relation to the provision of public leisure facilities. I cannot see how we can get young people from diverse communities into sport and recreation without a change in that policy at all.

Q391 **Julie Elliott:** Widening that out, if clubs cannot afford to buy their own facilities, what solutions are there? Could you go a bit further on those solutions? Clearly, it is a problem.

Lisa Wainwright: Yes, sure. We are aware that the Community Ownership Fund from the Government is due to be launched in June, but a number of clubs may not be able to go down that route of owning the assets. We talked earlier about access. There are facilities. There is a huge stock of facilities in our schools. Our research said that 72% of people said they lacked access to school facilities. If we have facilities available, how are we supporting the people who manage those facilities to open access out of hours?

A great scheme that the GLA ran out of school hours during the summer absolutely supported those young people who needed it most with activity over the six weeks of the summer break. That is not a difficult scheme to run. People are on the doorstep and there is access to facilities of decent quality. They can start to build that habit of movement and activity that we want to build.

It is about ensuring that the facilities that are available are accessed and opened more. Where there are not facilities or facilities are maybe looking to be lost, we need to find different solutions from the community to access them, basically.

Q392 **Julie Elliott:** Thank you. Ollie, would you like to comment on that?

Ollie Dudfield: Briefly, there is a balance between places, which includes the facilities, the people and the programming methodology of the programmes. Lisa spoke about the Community Ownership Fund and the importance of the opportunity for asset transfer has been welcomed by our network, but they are different outcomes from being able to watch and participate in community sport in that way and access to the facilities, which of course enables people to actively participate. That is one key area we are interested in looking at as the prospectus for that fund comes out.



If we look at the people and the programming piece, it is equally critical. Committee members will be aware there has been significant investment in the Holiday Activities Fund from the Government of £220 million. A Holiday Activity Alliance has just been formed, which includes two organisations from our Coalition, Street Games and Active Partnerships. It is about ensuring that the people, places and programming is addressing some of that holiday gap, is good quality, is inclusive and is diverse and that the workforce that delivers that programme is able to do so in a way that helps to challenge some of the inequalities in the system. The places and facilities are critical, but the people and the programme methodology we know is as essential in challenging inequalities and also delivering those wider outcomes I have been speaking about. They really show that purpose and wider value of community sport, physical activity and movement.

Q393 Mrs Wheeler: Lisa, thank you for telling us about the Duke of Edinburgh's huge amount of interest and involvement in this. It is another nice story to hear in this sad week.

I am interested in the recently announced Community Ownership Fund, too. Looking at grassroots sports organisations, do you think the scheme goes far enough? What effect, when it starts to build up, will it have?

Ollie Dudfield: There are two elements that have been earmarked for potential support within that scheme: capacity building and feasibility studies. That cannot be underestimated because we have seen over the past year that some of the community sport organisations and sport development organisations in our network that have had challenges are those that had significant assets and liabilities. We also heard that the need for capacity support has been identified by our network to respond to changes that will happen and are happening as a result of the pandemic. That element of the support for capacity building and the feasibility study is essential rather than assuming that if the facility is transferred it will be sustainable and will be able to operate. It might seem obvious, but that is a critical component of getting a return on that investment.

Q394 Mrs Wheeler: Thank you. Lisa, is this one for you? I am not sure.

Lisa Wainwright: For some of our members and the community clubs—for example, cricket, football and rugby—it would be an interesting option. For others—and I know Jane Nickerson is coming later from Swim England—£250,000 is a drop in the ocean in relation to what we need to maintain our pool stock. It will be seen as positive by some of our members, but for others we can see that will need to be increased to keep the pools open.

Q395 Mrs Wheeler: I am sure the swimmers will agree with the drop in the ocean.

Are NGBs a fit-for-purpose model for funding community sport? Has NGB support for elite sport during the pandemic been prioritised at the



expense of grassroots sport? Is the balance right?

Lisa Wainwright: Back in 2010, the Alliance had the voluntary sports code of good governance and then the Government brought those in in 2017. There have been phenomenal changes across the landscape in relation to good governance. For some sports, there is a British element and an English element. Many sports are both English and British, ie elite and grassroots. When the national governing bodies are writing their plans—and I have worked for a number in basketball, volleyball and netball—they are looking at the totality of the sport. I have seen that when working with the chief executives during the lockdown. They have been desperately trying to look at their expenditure in relation to staffing costs. There have been a huge number of restructures within a whole host of national governing bodies with redundancies being made and staff being on furlough. A lot of that funding is then being released to local clubs and grassroots clubs or their staff have been changing roles to direct funding to locals. For example, England Boxing has managed to secure £7.5 million to their local boxing clubs, many of which are in very deprived communities.

To answer your question around governance, it has improved hugely for both boards and also the processes and procedures that governing bodies go through. There are still some improvements to be made. It will be interesting to hear the outcomes from the gymnastics report and the White review. Also, there are still some lessons to be learned about both safeguarding and inclusive environments, particularly at board level.

I do believe that governing bodies are well placed to govern their sports and they have modernised well through some significant challenges. Many of you will have heard of the table tennis challenges they went through at that time as well as many other governing bodies. They have done some great work in governing themselves much better than previously.

Q396 **Mrs Wheeler:** I am going to ask a question that is a little bit left field. You have told us brilliantly how well the governing bodies are modernising, understanding their marketplace and realising the different groups in society they have to look after and then this balance between the elite sports and the grassroots sports. The governing bodies have been interpreting the Government's rules about allowing elite athletes to travel for competitions abroad. Some elite sports' governing bodies have said, "No, you cannot go. It is inappropriate". Others have said, "Yes, of course, it is all going to be Covid-compliant".

What conversations are you having? It really is quite interesting. The governing bodies have said, "No, we are not sending GB sports abroad", even if they are not paying for it. If the people are paying for it themselves, they are not sanctioning it. How can we sort out that mess?

Lisa Wainwright: I do not want to dodge it but it is going to feel like it. We do not look after the elite side. We are for grassroots organisations. I



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would not be liaising with the governing bodies on the elite side. They would be working with UK Sport and so on if they are funded.

The governing bodies, I am sure, will have taken advice from their chief medics and looked at whether it was feasible to do that but, as an Alliance, we have not worked on the elite side and the guidance with our members on that particular area. Forgive me, I cannot go into what we would do, but I am sure there are reasons in the background as to the risks they considered inappropriate to allow their athletes to travel. I am aware that some sports have done that and some have not.

Q397 Clive Efford: Lisa, is there a definition of grassroots sport?

Lisa Wainwright: I am sure there must be. In my mind, it is community sport in all its glory from recreation and sport. I can't repeat a definition today that I could give you. I could search for one. It is community sport at a local level.

Q398 Clive Efford: We are never going to come across a sport governing body that says, "We do not give a damn about grassroots sport". They are all going to say, "We love grassroots sport. We all want to fund grassroots sport. We are really into grassroots sport". I have heard it for the last 20 or 30 years. If the definition of grassroots sport is different to the next sport—football to tennis to cricket to rugby to hockey or whatever—then we do not know we are talking about when we hear from them that they are doing marvellous work with grassroots sport.

If we do not have a definition of what it is, is that a barrier to doing what we really want to do, which is to get money from Sport England and the Government and get it into those communities that are finding it very difficult to get active and really change that situation?

I have been discussing this for more than a decade. We have not moved on much in those deprived communities. Is it that sport governing bodies are left to their own devices too much in how they use the money they are given?

Lisa Wainwright: There is a difference. Many of the governing bodies will distribute funding and provide support services right down to community grassroots sport. They will be providing the training programmes and safeguarding procedures for the coaches, the technical officials and all the volunteers and they will be providing the competition structure.

What we might be talking about here is non-organised, informal grassroots sport that is not directly connected to governing bodies. That area has grown in the last 10 years or so. The Sport for Development Coalition is very focused on those more informal opportunities that are not necessarily funded nor organised formally through the national governing bodies. There is a balance there between those two opportunities at a local level.



I am not sure if a definition would change that. Some governing bodies in their player development pathways come a lot lower down in terms of grassroots sport. Others do not. It depends on the type of sport and the type of governing body. In terms of Uniting the Movement in the future and for the next 10 years in relation to public funding, there is definitely a view that funding will be coming more to the organisations at a community level that the Sport for Development Coalition look after.

Q399 Clive Efford: Are you saying that tackling inequalities in sport is not the business of sport governing bodies?

Lisa Wainwright: Not at all. It is the business of sport governing bodies, but there are also community groups that may not be connected for sport governing bodies that do a fantastic job in that area as well.

Q400 Clive Efford: Ollie, does the work of organisations like Street Games suggest that we do not fund sport efficiently and we do not get the best bang for our buck and that we should be directing a lot more money into community-based organisations that really can delve into those areas of inactivity, particularly in deprived communities?

Ollie Dudfield: A question to ask is about the outcomes we are working towards. That is not exclusive to governing bodies or organisations like Street Games or youth organisations. We have seen that organisations are working towards these wider outcomes. Yes, we want sport and physical activity but also to support people back into employment and support people into education. That is a very valuable question in defining that pure set of grassroots, community-driven type of approach. There is a real opportunity at the moment to embrace some of the momentum behind that.

I will give you an example. London Youth works with a range of youth groups and youth clubs that have a sport-based programme. In the last year, 40% of the youth groups that have engaged with the sports stream are new, which means that now there is interest from these youth organisations to say, "This is an important tool for us". That of course has a long history, but it gives us a picture.

To your definition question, asking around the wider outcomes, the purpose and the results helps in terms of that core community grassroots delivery.

Q401 Clive Efford: If you were setting up a means of funding sport from both the Government and Sport England, would you set up the structure we have now or would you set up something different?

Ollie Dudfield: The structure we have now is a fairly complex ecosystem with a range of intersecting pieces. I would have some measure. The Committee is probably very familiar with the code for good governance. There is an element of looking at other parameters around guidelines and the wider social impact that helps determine the direction of investment and funding. We see some of that movement with the strong focus on



inequalities and the strong focus—excuse me using the term again—on place-based, locally owned and locally driven approaches that we see in the new strategy from Sport England.

Q402 Clive Efford: In your answer earlier on, you talked about local coalitions, which I very much support. Are there examples where that is working right now? If there are, how do they fund themselves?

Ollie Dudfield: There is a combination. I gave the example of Model City, which Laureus Sport for Good, Nike and the GLA worked together on. Another example that comes to mind is the Active Partnerships network. A great example is Active Burngreave, which has brought together coalitions of different organisations and community groups. Those participating in the programmes delivered through that local coalition approach fully reflect the diversity of the ward data on that.

It is important that the group and the coalition govern how the resource is utilised. There is usually a backbone support organisation and there is some level of an agreed way to measure, but it starts from governance and goes right down to the people, the place and the programmes that are utilised.

This is not exclusive to governing bodies and organised systems because a number of affiliated clubs are part of these local coalitions. They will typically have youth, community groups and so on also involved in those.

Q403 Clive Efford: Do we have a measure of inequality in sport and access to sport that we can use to direct funding and influence outcomes?

Lisa Wainwright: There are some measures within Sport England's Active Lives survey. I am not convinced that in the past we have necessarily used the Active Lives survey and the insights from that to then inform a change in the funding system. We have had a national funding system and we have had a local funding system. Now we have a mixture of both. It is important in the new strategy to ensure that that insight is used and then the programmes and investment structures are changed to run alongside that.

Q404 Clive Efford: The Active Lives stats highlight the inequality quite starkly. Something like 38% of children are active at the required level and it is about 40% for adults. It may be a bit more for adults but it is certainly very low for children. It has been like that for a long time and Sports England's statistics have been showing this inequality in access to sport for quite some time.

Do the sport governing bodies, the Government and Sport England put enough emphasis on breaking through that barrier in the way they measure outcomes and provide resources?

Ollie Dudfield: I have two reflections there. We are in a context where we have also seen in the last 10 years a 70% reduction in local government budgeting for sport and leisure and that key role. We have



the challenge of that removal of resource and that has not changed for a number of years.

The other piece is that what happens in the secure estate reflects society. There are also measures and approaches used outside of sport. It is about encouraging those official statistics, measures, monitoring and evaluation approaches, that are utilised by the experts, communities and otherwise, in addressing inequalities, to be mainstreamed and embedded within sport. We have seen movement in that regard as well.

Chair: Thank you, Lisa and Ollie, for your evidence today. That concludes our first panel of witnesses.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Joanna Coates, Jane Nickerson and David Pond.

Q405 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee and this is our second panel today on the subject of sport in our communities. We are joined by three witnesses: Jane Nickerson, Chief Executive Officer, Swim England; Joanna Coates, Chief Executive, UK Athletics; and David Pond, Chief Executive, GB Wheelchair Rugby. Thank you very much for joining us today. Our first question will come from Damian Green.

Damian Green: I have a few questions to ask of each of you. I will start with Jane. Over the past year it has been very difficult: what have you cut back on in your organisation, and why did you choose those areas to cut back on?

Jane Nickerson: Our organisation has been impacted massively with the closure of pools throughout lockdown. We have lost 26.8% of our members. We have lost 68 of our clubs. We have had to completely change how we work as an organisation. We have cut our team by 30% of our workforce and have restructured how we now deliver things. We have moved from a sustainable organisation where we had Sport England funding to do specific activities but not to support any of our running costs. We now have to use Sport England funding to support our running costs, because our trading income through award sales, badges and certificates and our income from around teachers and coaching completely stopped overnight when the pools closed.

Q406 **Damian Green:** That is obviously hugely serious. What effects do you think this will have on long-term participation in swimming?

Jane Nickerson: I think long-term participation in swimming will be affected more by facilities rather than what is happening to us as an organisation and from our clubs. We will rebuild our membership; we will rebuild our clubs—that we are absolutely certain of. We will rebuild our trading income as soon as pools open and we will start that transfer again, but facilities is the biggest thing that has been hit for us in the pandemic. Even pre-Covid we expected to lose a large number of swimming pools over the next decade and that has been exacerbated.



Q407 **Damian Green:** Why did you anticipate that anyway?

Jane Nickerson: We have an ageing pool stock in the country and we have not been able to rebuild the pools as quickly as we need to change over from the ageing pool stock. There are plans in place to do that. We are working very closely with Sport England on a recovery plan for pools but the Covid situation has exacerbated it. So the funding has been really helpful, the recovery funding of £100 million has helped 4,000 centres and 1,100 pools to reopen, but with this last lockdown the funding gap between the £100 million and £450 million that was required just got wider and wider.

Q408 **Damian Green:** It is an overused word but it sounds to me what you are saying is that swimming is in real crisis in this country.

Jane Nickerson: Facilities are in crisis absolutely, but it is a fantastic activity that we have to make sure we keep up, 14 million people swim regularly. It is an activity you can do if you have limited land mobility and it saves the NHS and the social care system so much money, so we do have to protect the swimming facilities in this country.

Q409 **Damian Green:** Are there any differences in the four countries of the UK in terms of this facilities crisis, as you call it?

Jane Nickerson: I really focus on England, so I know the English piece very well and that is where we know we have a crisis, but I liaise very closely with my colleagues in Scotland and Wales and we share the strategies, so everyone is concerned across England, Scotland and Wales about the facilities as we move forward.

Q410 **Damian Green:** Moving on to Joanna, similarly for you, what have you had to cut back on and why did you do those particular cuts?

Joanna Coates: Thank you for inviting me to be a witness today. I am obviously here as Chief Executive of UK Athletics but I am also here to represent the thoughts of the home country organisations as well. From a UK Athletics' perspective we obviously have not been able to host any of our major events, which has impacted on our ticket revenue hugely. We have had to also do two restructures and make some staffing cuts, which in the current climate we do not want to lose the talent that is in the current British sporting structures. We have done that, we have lost some staff. Our colleagues in England have lost 30% of their workforce. A lot of those are back office staff but some of them are frontline delivery staff so it has really impacted on the staffing structure that we have within our organisation.

Q411 **Damian Green:** What effect is that going to have on participation in the sport?

Joanna Coates: On participation, the membership numbers again—and I am representing the home countries here, so it is not my area, and when you spoke earlier around grassroots and the definition between grassroots and elite, I very much look after the elite side of it—but if we



talk about grassroots and participation now, it will have an impact. A lot of their funding comes through membership, it comes through the coaching qualifications that they deliver, the education system that they deliver. Some of those staff now will not be in place that are able to deliver some of those more commercially focused areas of their business.

Certainly membership across all home countries, they have seen a 30% to 50% drop in their membership income. We are very hopeful that when sport comes back people do rejoin their membership, but in this year it has been very difficult for them to be able to manage their resources and grow their business, which all sports want to do. We want to grow our businesses. We do not want to be a shrinking sector.

Q412 Damian Green: The logic must be that if you have problems at the grassroots today then in two or three years' time or maybe five years' time there has been a smaller pond, so that will affect the elite aspect of the sport as well. Do you agree with that?

Joanna Coates: I completely and utterly agree. We have just written a new strategy for athletics in the UK, so it is the first time the home countries in the UK have joined forces to write a strategy called "Athletics Unified" and it absolutely makes every area of the sport dependent on the other areas. We will not develop talent and have elite athletes if we do not have a great participation base to pull from. Equally, if we cannot showcase the sport at major events, how do we drive that enthusiasm in young people to get on to the first rungs of a sporting ladder, that low-level grassroots if you like?

Although we have a combined strategy now to move forward, if we do not have people participating, we will not have people coming through the system and you will not see the medals that we have won previously.

Q413 Damian Green: David, moving on to you, you have had specific problems with Olympic funding as well as the pandemic, so what have you had to cut back on?

David Pond: Yes. Thank you. First of all, thank you very much for inviting me and I think we all know that disability sport in particular has been disproportionately impacted by Covid and we need to really understand that.

I guess the real impact for us in terms of being cut back is the fact that we cannot deliver out into our communities. It is more about I have a very small workforce and I am very pleased with Sport England in that it has enabled me to maintain most of that workforce because that workforce was primarily funded by Sport England, although not in total, and we were able from our own resources to maintain the small number of self-funded posts that we have. The real impact is that those individuals have not been able to get out into the communities and out into the clubs to deliver activity. That is the real impact.

Q414 Damian Green: How many people are we talking about? How many



people play your sport?

David Pond: Over a year about 2,000 people have some contact with wheelchair rugby, so that could be through our youth programmes through to the different disciplines in the sport, through right away up to the GB team, but in terms of the quadriplegic community that is around about 450 quadriplegics that play, so most of those will have had spinal injuries of one sort or another.

Q415 **Damian Green:** Has participation been affected or is it a small enough group that you have managed to keep most of them involved?

David Pond: No. We have hardly had any activity at all because of course it is dependent on indoor facilities and it is dependent on creating a safe environment. There are a number of issues for us, not least over 50% of our members were in a shielded group, so that has an impact to start with. If you have a spinal injury although you are not more liable to contract the virus, if you do get the virus the impact for you is potentially significantly greater because most have underlying respiratory issues to do with their paralysis so there has been very little activity at all.

As I sit here today we still do not have clubs back to play. We rely on indoor facilities so the opportunity when doors open to allow sport to be delivered outside, that was not possible for us because of course we are an impact sport, we have wheelchairs, we need outdoor spaces that are safe, surfaces that are safe and all of those are significant factors for us.

Q416 **Damian Green:** Do you fear for the long-term future of wheelchair rugby?

David Pond: I do not fear for the long-term future of wheelchair rugby, to be honest. I think there is something very different about wheelchair rugby and there will be analogies with other disability sports, and that is what we are about, and it has been really interesting listening to the previous session about community, is about building rich wheelchair rugby communities. Our sport is really important, not just in a sporting and physical sense but it is really important for bringing these groups of individuals together who otherwise face incredible isolation. That has been one of the real impacts of Covid for us at the moment in terms of those individuals being completely isolated, and the impact for them not just on their physical welfare but on their mental health.

Q417 **Kevin Brennan:** Welcome to the witnesses. David Pond, what role has Sport England and UK Sport played during the pandemic from your point of view?

David Pond: Sport England has been very helpful in the way that I just described, in the way that they permitted us to roll over funding for this year and have been very flexible with that. I think that has enabled us to have some sort of security and to enable us to deliver a number of services online, which is what we have tried to do.



Going back to my point about individuals being isolated, one thing we have been able to do is to create a virtual community, which has strengthened over the pandemic. We have delivered a lot of online training, for example, for officials and volunteers, we have delivered a lot of governance training for our clubs and we have delivered social events as well online.

Q418 **Kevin Brennan:** Is your sport involved very much with UK Sport?

David Pond: It is now, because we have just become funded again and we were fortunate enough, even though we lost our funding post-Rio, we did gain some aspiration funding that is a small amount of funding that helped me to maintain a GB team, although most of the funding for that GB team we had to go out and raise through fundraising and commercial activity to keep the squad together.

Q419 **Kevin Brennan:** Could they have done anything better during this period, Sport England and UK Sport, from your sport's point of view?

David Pond: From my sport's point of view I think they have done a pretty good job, to be honest.

Q420 **Kevin Brennan:** I have always wondered why it is called wheelchair rugby, because it is nothing like rugby as a sport, other than it being a fairly brutal physical kind of battle.

David Pond: The name really does arise from exactly that, that it is the only physical contact team sport in a disability sense. As you say it is fairly brutal, but I think it is a fair question that other people ask as well. It is important to note that we are very aligned now with rugby. The RFU provide us with office space in the building, the international federation in World Rugby are closely aligned. It was interesting listening to some of the conversations earlier about working in communities. We do a lot of our work with community-based foundations and many of those are associated with able-bodied rugby clubs.

Q421 **Kevin Brennan:** Thank you. I have always wondered. Can I ask Jane Nickerson the same question about Sport England and UK Sport? We may have covered this off a little bit previously but from your point of view have they played an important role in relation to Swim England and swimming and what could they have done better from your point of view?

Jane Nickerson: Sport England is the body I work most closely with and I think this year it has been incredible, not just in a funding sense, which was really important to us. They rolled over our funding for another year. It allowed us to use it more flexibly, but then realised that that had an impact on our talent programme so have supplementally given us some increased funding, starting in April this year, for our talent programme. We are really grateful for that and that has worked really well.

We have also worked really closely with them on the facilities side, on the guidance that we have issued. As an NGB we also work in the wider area



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of swimming, recreational swimming, grassroots swimming and swimming as an activity and as a health and wellbeing tool, so we were the organisation that put the precise guidance together to return to the pool and worked very closely with Sport England and DCMS on that to make sure that it met the requirements of Government. That guidance is really important to us.

I think the other thing that Sport England has been instrumental in this year is bringing the whole sector together. The sports sector in my mind is closer than it has ever been and we have certainly worked with one voice. The management funding parts, the Leisure Recovery Fund, things like that, the small grants to clubs and things on match funding has been incredibly helpful. It sounds like it is all to do with money, but it is not. It is also that softer support of being there and to lead the sector through this.

Q422 Kevin Brennan: They have a 10-year strategy. Do you have an opinion about that?

Jane Nickerson: Yes. For us it takes a lot of focus on inclusivity and to making sure that everybody has the opportunity to be active, which absolutely resonates for us because our mission is a nation swimming. We want everybody in the swimming pool; it is an absolutely great activity to do, but it also does include the talent piece, where we can support talent going through into British swimming at the elite stage. So for those that really want to focus in on swimming as a sport there is still the opportunity.

Q423 Kevin Brennan: Is your organisation involved at all in this wild swimming phenomenon and what do you make of it?

Jane Nickerson: Open water swimming, wild swimming, is absolutely superb because from a mental health point of view it is even better for you than indoor swimming. There is something about swimming in nature that has been proven to really impact positively on mental health. We have now started a supporters' membership for people who swim in open water so that we can provide advice and guidance and will be working with other partners on lobbying to make sure there is clean water for people to swim in outdoors and access to rigorous and safe venues.

Q424 Kevin Brennan: Joanna Coates, can I ask you the same question about Sport England and UK Sport? From your point of view how have they been and do you have a view about their 10-year strategy for England?

Joanna Coates: Yes. Again I look after the elite side, but I did check with my colleagues at England Athletics and I think we thought that the response from Sport England was really swift, really strong. I agree with Jane on the fact that they have allowed money to be used in areas and been very flexible with the money whereas sometimes previously they have not been flexible with some of the money, which we completely understand. That has really helped England Athletics through this period.



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From a UK Sport point of view, again that is where we get the majority of our funding from and they have been incredibly supportive of us as a sport. They allowed us some funding through the Business Continuity Fund and if we had not received that money we would not have been able to put on our European Indoors, which allowed us to select a team that then went to the Europeans in Poland and we brought back our best ever medal haul from that competition. Without that money we would not have been able to put those events on, because we were not able to sell tickets and those events that we currently put on are commercial events.

Q425 **Kevin Brennan:** Finally, and also possibly Jane, what are your top tips for Olympic success this summer? Do you have any for the Committee?

Joanna Coates: We had some great youngsters come through in the Europeans. It would be wonderful to see them do well.

Q426 **Kevin Brennan:** Can you name some names for us?

Joanna Coates: I am going to leave that down to the selection panel to select the team. We do not even know which team is going yet, so I do not think I can pre-empt that as CEO, but we are very hopeful that we will meet our medal target.

Q427 **Kevin Brennan:** Jane, are you going to be similarly opaque or are you going to give us a name or two?

Jane Nickerson: I am going to be similarly opaque but you can always watch out for Adam Peaty because I think he is always a good bet, and we are quite excited about some of our relay teams.

Q428 **Kevin Brennan:** David, is wheelchair rugby still included in the Paralympics? How are our chances of medals there?

David Pond: Our chances of medals are pretty good. We are in the top four; we are fourth, but if you look at the last Paralympic Games, you look at the world championships in the last two years then all of those games have been within one try of one another. It is incredible; there is so little difference between the top four.

Q429 **Steve Brine:** Those tips, Kev, we will have to work on. Thank you to everyone for joining us. Let us start with Jane. I take your word for it on the outdoor swimming. Good luck with that. What contact have you had with DCMS during the pandemic? How have you found them?

Jane Nickerson: I have had quite a lot of contact with them, because we were writing the specific guidance that allowed pools to reopen. I think in the early stages we were all feeling our way through this, so when Government stood up and announced the initial regulations it took a lot of work to work through what that meant, and how it then transpired into guidance. We had the infamous discussion about six square metres versus three square metres in the swimming pool, because three square metres is fine if you are standing up like that but



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once you do that you need six square metres because suddenly you are closer together.

We got through all of that and I found the Head of Sport, there were two different Heads of Sport and I worked with an interim one during this period were really helpful in taking the questions, patiently trying to get answers, dealing with it, but we were all feeling our way through. I have to say coming out of this lockdown it has been a lot easier because I think we understood the process, I think everybody understood the process and we knew the questions to ask and your guys took the questions away to get the answers to them for us. It is getting easier. Hopefully we will not have another lockdown to do this.

One big issue that we have left, and I know it cannot be resolved, but that is my over-18 swimmers who are not allowed to swim in their club sessions but can buy a ticket and swim in the lane next door, and they really do not understand this, especially with chlorine being such a safe environment against the virus. I struggle every day to explain to my over-18s why they cannot swim in the same lane as their colleagues.

Q430 **Steve Brine:** Yes. The data would suggest that that is a safe thing to do.

Jane Nickerson: Yes, swimming together is because chlorine is very safe. Chlorine absolutely kills the virus. The concern has been that if you are over 18 you go in a group, you socialise and whatever but swimmers do not do that if they are training. They literally walk to the pool, they will be as individual as they need to be, swim that session, get out and if you tell them to go home in their wet swimming costumes and a dry robe that is exactly what they will do. If we tell them to walk on their hands to get in the pool they will do that. This is not about a group of 18 or 19 year-olds going out socialising afterwards. They go to train, they go home to sleep and eat and they turn up the next day to do the same thing again.

Q431 **Steve Brine:** Interesting. Joanna, how do you think DCMS have performed? What could they have done better?

Joanna Coates: Most of the connection we have had with DCMS has come through really Sport England or UK Sport, so we have not had a huge amount of direct contact with DCMS. Again, I think everybody learned through this the first time. It was so difficult because even when the guidance came out to us what happened then was, because that was very public, everybody who participated in athletics, and I am sure across other sports as well, expected us to have the answers to immediately react to that guidance. I think maybe sometimes it would have been a little bit better if we had had a couple of days to allow us to prepare what we were going to then tell our communities. Again, I understand why people wanted to get that guidance out quite quickly. Our connection really was with Sport England and UK Sport.



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There is a mass participation running group that has had a closer relationship with DCMS and that is very much looking towards how you can get groups of people out running and proving again that it is safe to do that, because it is outdoors. That is my only reflection, really, Steve.

Q432 Steve Brine: David, how have your clubs and teams that you talk to managed to get on in accessing the support available from Government?

David Pond: To be honest, as I was explaining earlier, very few of them have been able to go back as yet. In that sense we have secured some support to enable them to, for example, get Covid protection measures in place and those sorts of things, but it has been really quite difficult for them.

One of the real issues for us is the availability of facilities. All of our clubs use either sports halls that they rent, some of them use school facilities, some of them use university-type facilities and of course those facilities have not been available often and even when, as now, facilities are starting to open up, facilities that once existed perhaps do not exist now so it is a matter of trying to find other venues that they can use for those as well.

We are discussing those sorts of issues with Sport England, who have been very helpful in that sense. Our contact with DCMS has again been through Sport England really, not through DCMS direct.

Q433 Steve Brine: That is a perfect bridge to sports governance. Obviously there are a lot of organisations, from Sport England to those we are talking to now, people we had on the panel earlier. Is it quite complex and has that complexity been shown to be a help or a hindrance during the response to this pandemic?

David Pond: I have come into sport from outside of sport, so I find it interesting. I find the whole sports thing really quite interesting and I have been doing this for 10 years now and I am still learning. If you deal with disability and Paralympic sport there is an additional dimension to that as well.

In terms of my contacts Sport England and UK Sport are really important, and not just because they are funders. Obviously that is an important aspect of it but also because they do provide the wealth of knowledge and expertise, they are able to conduct the big sorts of projects, the big sorts of research and data and so forth. In that sense they are quite important. For me those are the two organisations that I deal with most within the sporting landscape.

I deal a lot more with our sport outside of those direct sporting funders, because I am really dealing at local level a lot, so with local community groups, local foundations, local charities, local volunteer groups. They are much more important to me and also trying to get local funding decisions and local support decisions and local outcomes for example around value in kind to help promote and run our sport.



Q434 **Steve Brine:** Joanna, UK Athletics is a big organisation. Do you have any thoughts on the whole governance issue and how easy or otherwise that has made things?

Joanna Coates: I probably feel the same. Our main connection is to UK Sport and that is a very clear connection, so I do not see that it is a difficult environment to navigate our way around. It probably comes more to your own sport where the governance issues start to become slightly more complex and when you are trying to get a sport galvanised and to work in a similar direction it is probably that governance structure that is more difficult than the funding one. I find it quite easy to navigate our way around the funding side of things. UK Sport have different people to deal with different people within your organisation, so you know exactly who to go to, and with Sport England it is really quite key which area of the business they fund. Again, I do not think it is that complex. It is probably more complex in your own sport.

Steve Brine: Thanks very much, Chair. I need to go and look out those swimming trunks. Back to you.

Chair: Yes, thank you for that. I think we can be spared the budgie smugglers.

Q435 **Clive Efford:** I am going to ask questions that are for all three of you, but I will direct it at one, and if you have anything to add just wave or gesticulate and we will bring you in. I will start with Joanna. Do we fund elite sport and put the emphasis on elite sport at the expense of grassroots sport?

Joanna Coates: I absolutely do not believe we do and in my past life I ran a sport where we had both grassroots and elite so I oversaw the whole thing. You cannot have one without the other. One is not successful without the other. I do not think we do overfund elite sport at the expense of grassroots.

Where as a sector we need more support to make the whole sporting landscape better is in things around safeguarding and areas such as that. That to me is where as a sporting sector we are underinvested and we should invest more. I do not think we invest in elite sport at the expense of grassroots. I am a firm believer that when people see people doing extraordinary things in any sport it inspires them to take up a sport and then it is the responsibility of those who provide grassroots sports to make sure that they have the right entry level so that it is very easy for someone to join a sport. I very strongly believe that we do not overspend in elite at the cost of grassroots.

Q436 **Clive Efford:** Jane, does Swim England have a view on that?

Jane Nickerson: Yes, I do not think we do overfund elite sport. I think it is really important to have elite sport and have those role models. We have at the moment 125,000 members. That is far less than we had pre-Covid, but 95,000 of those are swimming members. There will only be a few Adam Peatys, there will only be a few at the top of the tree, but



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every Saturday when those others go out racing and competing they are that Adam Peaty in their mind and they want to do that.

One of the big challenges we have had because of lockdown is they have not been able to compete. We have had to find dry land ways for people to compete in artistic swimming, water polo and diving so that they can have some form of competition. Elite is really important. We need to maximise getting everybody who can win gold medals on the world stage to get there, but they need to be the role model for all the others. Even the ones who just swim up and down recreationally who in their mind could be the next Adam Peaty, it is the right thing to do.

Q437 **Clive Efford:** David, you came fifth in Rio and then lost your funding from UK Sport, so do we put too much emphasis on elite sports and not enough on sports like wheelchair rugby? Is it still called murder ball?

David Pond: It is called murder ball in some parts of the world.

Q438 **Clive Efford:** I went to see it in 2012 and I immediately realised why it was called murder ball. If they were Premier League footballers they would be in hospital for a week.

David Pond: To answer your question, yes, we did lose funding and my issue about losing funding was not so much about the balance between elite and grassroots sport. If I am honest, I am not even sure I have enough knowledge to comment on that in a really considered way. What I would say, and the issue around our loss of funding, is I had a real problem and I still have a real problem with the no compromise, medals for everything philosophy and I did when we were funding and when we lost our funding. I am really pleased to see that that has changed. I think that the direction of travel of UK Sport now where, yes, of course we want to go out there and win and we all play sport not just to enjoy ourselves but to win, but we need to understand that there are other aspects of that as well.

Using sport to address the massive inequalities there are, to me, is an important aspect of it. Whether elite sport is funded too much, I guess my challenge would be do we have the balance right within the elite funding pot as to where that money goes? I think that is more the issue for me.

Q439 **Clive Efford:** This is probably going off the issue a bit, so I will not labour it, but on that issue about funding for elite sports and UK Sport's funding priorities, do you think there is an issue there for team sports? Basketball, for instance, in the past has had issues with the way it has been funded, and it is because there are more participants to support there is an obvious bigger cost. Do you think that team sports get a poor deal?

David Pond: I think it is definitely more challenging for team sports. Where you did a medal count before, obviously you can win one medal if you are a team sport, and although there were some mechanisms to try



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to look at that and address it certainly in the Rio cycle—as I said, I was not part of that cycle—I still think that if you are athletics you can win a lot more medals, if you are a swimmer you can win a lot more medals. I think there are some challenges with team sports.

Q440 Clive Efford: I will come back across to Jane and Joanna as well, but how has the current situation during the past year impacted on your preparation for Tokyo?

David Pond: It has had an enormous impact, for two reasons. First, our training opportunities have been seriously restricted because it took us a while to create a bubble that we were really comfortable with. It is all about risk management and as I suggested before the risk of our athletes with their particular disabilities and conditions is significantly greater. We needed to make sure that we could manage that risk over and above anything else. That is the first thing.

The second thing that is really important is that there has not been the opportunity to compete, so all of those international competitions that would have been preparing us for the games we have lost, and there is a real possibility still that we will be going to Tokyo along with other wheelchair rugby teams across the world, of course, having not played in an international event for 18 months, almost two years.

Q441 Clive Efford: Jane, how has Covid in the last year impacted on preparation for Tokyo?

Jane Nickerson: British swimming, swimmers and divers were able to get some Covid-secure centres set up once the return to training guidelines were issued, so we have had the majority of our top level in the water training. They have not been able to go and do warm weather camps, competitions have been massively restricted, but they have been in the water. For our artistic swimmers that is a different matter. They have been in the water in the latter part. It has been much tougher for them because they only have a little bit of funding. They were off funding but did get a bit from UK Sport on the aspiration funding, and they struggled a lot more. Their qualification tournament for Tokyo has been cancelled several times and it is still unclear whether that qualification tournament will take place. They have to keep training and keep going without knowing when that qualification date will be. For water polo that is interesting. We do not have a team going into the Olympics for water polo but they have suffered like other team sports, going back to the team sport issue, and funding for them—they have just now received some new funding from UK Sport but they are totally unfunded at Sport England level at the moment. Some challenges there for some of our disciplines, for certain.

Q442 Clive Efford: Athletics seems to have flourished with good medal hauls, so how has the pandemic impacted on preparation for Tokyo?

Joanna Coates: We are very fortunate that in Loughborough we have our High Performance Centre, so we were able to create a bubble for



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those athletes on the World Class Performance Programme, which has been massive for us.

Where it has impacted our athletes is definitely when they want to compete overseas, so that preparation competition and there have been some of our athletes who have not been able to compete because they have not allowed British athletes in. It is changing now so that the issue that we have is for our medal hopefuls to have top-level competition from now, because a lot of that competition is in Europe and athletes themselves do not particularly want to travel, but a lot of the competition has been cancelled. It is the same as David and Jane, a lack of competition now for us.

We have also had to change quite a lot of our warm weather training camps, so we have not wanted teams to go out in groups, so we have funded individual athletes to still go out and get some warm weather training. It is these latter months that I think are going to be the most difficult months so we are trying to create more competition in this country so that our athletes can get better preparation.

The worry for us is for some of the athletes—let us not forget we have a Commonwealth Games coming up, a home Commonwealth Games, and a lot of those athletes will have really restricted training opportunities and restricted competition.

Q443 Clive Efford: I am going to move on to facilities and availability of facilities. We have had many years of local government cuts. We have seen facilities disappear and then we have had Covid. What has been the impact of that on the availability of facilities and is there anything that your sports can do themselves to increase the amount of infrastructure that is out there for your sport? I will go to you, Joanna, first if I may.

Joanna Coates: My sport obviously is very varied. If you are involved in road running, hill running, trail running, you are fine. That is okay. You have access to that. Where it becomes a problem is with track and field, so we have a full facilities audit and the facilities in this country at this moment in time for track and field are really quite good. Again the problem through Covid has been access to those facilities. We really need to maintain the level of appropriateness for the facilities around the country, which at the moment we are managing to do. Where there is a bit of a gap for athletics is within stadiums, so enough stadiums in this country where we can host major events or even big domestic competition events, which helps us drive money that we can plough back into the sport.

When you look at the facilities audit across the country athletics has a pretty strong facilities base. A lot of it though is operated by third parties, so we are not asset owners. Again, we are in the hands of leisure providers, and so on, to ensure that really the standards are kept up to the standards that we expect.



Q444 **Clive Efford:** What has been the impact? We have been through stretched resources for more than a decade now. Are you saying that there has been no impact on facilities?

Joanna Coates: There has definitely been some. I have been in post for just over a year, so one of the first things I asked to look at was what our facilities looked like in the audit that we had done on facilities. At the moment it is pretty strong in fact. More investment, obviously. We always want more investment into the sport, but from a club perspective the access to track and field facilities is really quite good.

Q445 **Clive Efford:** What about cost? Local authorities are strapped for cash and they will be one of the main providers of a lot of the facilities as will schools and they will be pushing up their charges. Has that had an impact?

Joanna Coates: It will definitely be an impact and it will definitely have an impact on the club infrastructure especially because they have missed out on membership fees. If they start to put their fees up and clubs have to put their fees up at the same time as membership is diminishing, that is not a great place to be. We are very hopeful that those costs do not go up.

Equally, I think sport has to prove that we have the right level of usage for facilities. Ultimately they do have to make them pay, so that is why our new strategy absolutely joins the elite up to the grassroots to drive affiliation into track and field clubs, which will keep more people going to facilities and that will drive more revenue and more usage. That is how we are looking at trying to combat that area, and I am sure other sports do this as well. Also we work out the number of people in a certain area that want to have access to a facility and we can map all of that and we can plan what that usage might be and prove to local councils that they should invest.

Q446 **Clive Efford:** Jane, facilities are a huge issue for swimming and they are very expensive ones too.

Jane Nickerson: They are, but we are working very closely now with a number of partners and Sport England to look at different technologies to build more affordable swimming pools, more importantly with more affordable revenue costs, so less energy, better energy efficiency so there are lots of solutions out there that we need to work in partnership to get across.

It is also about the usage of them. There are always pinch points. Learn to Swim is a little cash cow for operators so putting in maximum Learn to Swim is great but that means an impact on the club usage. Club water time is going up in cost in many cases now, which is a problem for us. Also it is about having enough water for health and wellbeing and general participation as well. It is pool programming that is as important as the synergy itself, but we know that around one in five local authorities now



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are short of at least one six-lane 25 metre pool for the demand that is within their communities, so we do need to do this.

We know that in water-deprived areas it affects the lower socioeconomic groupings and also black and ethnically diverse communities, so it is about making sure we have the right piece of water in the right place. It is not all about 50 metre pools. It is about teaching pools, it is about training pools and competition pools. It is about the right water in the right place and we are mapping that out now.

Q447 Clive Efford: When you say there are so many local authorities that have those shortages, is that because they have closed the facilities over the last decade or more?

Jane Nickerson: Yes, pools are closing and we are forecasting probably around 40% reduction in the number of available pools by the end of this decade. That would take us from around 4,623 in 2020 down to 2,632 in 2030 and we need to do something about that.

Q448 Clive Efford: Are those local authorities, schools or independent sector, private sector? Where are those pools closing?

Jane Nickerson: They are the public sector mainly, with local authorities. I have to say this probably needs some joined-up thinking, because swimming as an activity has saved the NHS and the social care system a fortune, so we know that on just six medical conditions swimming saves the NHS social care system £357 million every single year. Extrapolate that out to more conditions for health and wellbeing and there is an absolute need to make sure that we have swimming pools available throughout this century. We know that local authorities are short of water space at this moment in time in their communities.

Q449 Clive Efford: David, facilities must be a big issue for you? You are a team sport, you need a hall, a flat surface and it is not something that, given the athletes themselves and the conditions they may have, you can necessarily do in the open all year round certainly. What has been the impact on facilities for wheelchair rugby?

David Pond: To start with, our requirement is simple in a way, as you just said, because it is a hall, but it is much more complex than that for a number of reasons. The first thing is that many of those halls of course are in leisure centres, so we need to rent those leisure centres. Costs are high. You probably only have about eight or 10 wheelchair rugby players accessing that at any one time. They have to foot the bill for that. Most of those will probably be on disability allowances, or certainly on very low ability to pay for any high cost at all. In addition to that they have the cost of their equipment, their wheelchair, which itself is about £3,500 to £4,000 for a sports wheelchair to play, which they need to be able to fund as well. That is an issue.

Another issue is the floor type. Many new leisure centres will not allow wheelchair rugby to be played. They are sprung wooden floors and they



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cannot be utilised. Ironically we are better off trying to find some of the older type halls with the hard wooden floors that we tend to be able to use much more easily, so there are issues around that.

In terms of Covid, a couple of things have happened there. Some of those facilities have not been available. They have been used either for more profitable purposes, so for example we have seen some of the halls taken over and filled with lots of individual weight machines or other sporting equipment so that leisure providers have been able to maximise the space in terms of income.

Other facilities we use, for example schools and colleges, have been closed for us. We have not been able to use them either. It has been a real challenge. We have just started to go back again now with the lifting of measures and at the moment we have four clubs that are trying to seek new venues for them to be able to continue with the game.

Q450 Clive Efford: Last quick question to Jane. I heard your answer earlier on about wild swimming, but there are some alarming reports about illegal discharges of untreated sewage into some of the rivers that are deemed to be safe for wild swimming. Will you be revising your advice in relation to that information about these illegal discharges?

Jane Nickerson: Yes, we are working with a number of agencies on this. Clean water is really important and we are working with agencies about finding clean, safe water and to have an accredited centre so that we can signpost people to places where we know it is safe to swim and where the water quality is good enough. It is a big issue. There needs to be better water quality across this country. I think that is a different matter than for today, but I think it is a matter that has to be dealt with. There is an absolute need for clean water to go wild swimming and outdoor swimming.

Q451 Julie Elliott: Joanna, I want to go back to something you said before where you said you did not think elite sport had been prioritised and given more focus than grassroots sport. The perception in this country among a lot of people is that that is the case. Why do you think the perception is one thing and you are saying the reality is something else?

Joanna Coates: I think maybe because the perception of elite sport is that it is then televised and these people become role models and you see them in the media, so they are probably much more at the forefront of sport, whereas what you see in the outcomes from grassroots is much more at a local level and probably goes unseen in a lot of ways. A lot of the social and mental wellbeing that comes from grassroots sport is not as visible as somebody wearing a gold medal. It is just not. Perhaps we need to showcase everything that grassroots sports do as much as that that elite sport does. I still think we should showcase that elite sport because I am a great believer that if you get it right it drives participation. I fundamentally believe that that is the right thing to do and that does happen if, as I said before, the access level to your sport is



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such that it is easy to access for those that see the stars doing what they do.

Q452 **Julie Elliott:** I could not agree more, from living in the area of the Great North Run and Brendan Foster—many years ago you did not see people running in the streets and then suddenly it is a huge thing. Thank you. Jane, you agreed with Joanna’s comment on that and I have to say that I have a granddaughter who swims in the City of Sunderland club who was so excited to get back in the pool this week. Could you comment why you think the perception is, because you agreed with that comment from Joanna?

Jane Nickerson: I think when we talk about elite sport sometimes people confuse elite sport with the professional sport game of football, cricket and so on. You can have elite for every single sport and I think the public sometimes—and sometimes it is used incorrectly—about elite sport when they mean professional sport, as opposed to the very best in any sport, which is what elite sport really is. It is important to fund the elite in every sport, also the talent pathway, to give those people the opportunity. Especially now it is going to be even more important to make sure that people from less affluent backgrounds have the opportunity to go on that talent pathway, to get into being the best they can be in their sport. It is not a cheap thing to do a sport, whatever sport it is, day in, day out, seven days a week in order to get through there. Funding is really important throughout that pathway to help those who do have the ability to reach their potential.

Q453 **Julie Elliott:** On the back of that, funding at grassroots level in swimming is you need boards, you need goggles, you need a whole range of things. That is not cheap. I can see that it does rule out people who perhaps have potential from getting involved. Is there anything you can think of as a country we can do to try to even out that access at the first stages of getting involved in swimming?

Jane Nickerson: Getting children involved in swimming is via the curriculum, so every child has to learn to swim at school. That is not happening, so the first thing we can do is to make absolutely sure that schools fulfil their curriculum, because it is part of the curriculum, their absolute need for that so that every child learns to swim. Then signposting them into those that want to go into clubs and the pathway, that is really important. The swimming costume, hat and goggles are not the expensive bit, it is the training time and water time. If we can have the right facilities in the right place that are affordable, it has less burden on the parents. At the moment the parents have to fund that water time and the coach and the infrastructure, so I think if we can find some way of making it more accessible or affordable to get the access to the water, that would negate a whole chunk of money that parents have to find at the moment.

Q454 **Giles Watling:** I would like to go back to funding again as we were talking earlier about the new Community Ownership Fund, and I want to



put this first to Joanna. Do you think that is going to make a difference?

Joanna Coates: It is probably one that I would have to pass to my England Athletics colleagues, I am terribly sorry. It will not make a difference to UK Athletics and I think I would probably have to feed back, I apologise, from my home country colleagues.

Q455 **Giles Watling:** We will ask elsewhere. Thank you very much. What do you think, Jane?

Jane Nickerson: The Community Asset Fund?

Giles Watling: It is the Community Ownership Fund, £150 million.

Jane Nickerson: That will not have a lot of impact on us, because individual swimming clubs do not own their own facilities particularly. There are a few community swimming pools around that I know that it would help, but my understanding of it is the award is between £10,001 and £50,000 and that is not a lot of money for a swimming pool.

Q456 **Giles Watling:** I think you can bid for up to £250,000.

Jane Nickerson: Maybe I am talking about the wrong fund, then. I do apologise. I can take that away and find out and come back with other examples.

Q457 **Giles Watling:** The second part of my question then is will you be offering your members support in applying for this funding? Clearly you have not covered this yet.

Jane Nickerson: We support our members in applying for funding that is relevant and appropriate. As non-asset owning, for most of our clubs that is not a pot of money they have been able to apply for, but we have been working really hard with them on the other funds, which clubs can apply for if they are not asset owning. Swimming clubs have done very well out of that. The Sport England administrative fund is available if a club is match-funded, and swimming has had the lion's share out of that fund, to be honest, and I have seen clubs setting fundraisers up so that they could raise their match funding in order to get that funding in place.

Giles Watling: David, I will see if it applies to you.

David Pond: It does not. None of our clubs are asset-funded at all in that sense, so no, it does not.

Q458 **Giles Watling:** We will move very quickly on. Do you then as NGBs support community-led initiatives that seek to improve diversity in sport?

Joanna Coates: Yes, absolutely we support that. Again it is my colleagues in the home countries, in particular England Athletics, who I know work really closely with local communities to ensure that diversity. Athletics is one of those sports that is a really diverse sport. We are very lucky. When you look at those who compete within the sport, it is diverse. I think one area where we need to look at and focus on is those



that support around athletes and those that want to compete or join clubs, because that diversity does not replicate itself when you look at our volunteering structures, particularly through coaches and officials. We do need to work closer with our communities to ensure that we have a more diverse volunteering—

Q459 **Giles Watling:** So you need to improve communications?

Joanna Coates: Yes, I think so. It is very much around the language that you use when you look to engage with volunteers and to have a greater number. You cannot be it if you cannot see it, and that is something we are working very hard on. It is less in the athletics community. It is more in the people that support the community.

Q460 **Giles Watling:** Any comments on that, Jane?

Jane Nickerson: Yes. We are working really closely now with the Black Swimming Association because what we have found is it is really difficult to understand what the barriers are and I cannot sit here and judge what the barriers are to participation. We are now getting a much better understanding of why particularly black people are not coming in and swimming in the pool. We have worked with groups where we have taken a would-be teacher, put them through all the teaching qualifications and then they have taken a group of black children and got them to swim when they are absolutely petrified of it. It is about role models, but it is also about breaking down the reasons that are making them not come to the pool. In talking to the Black Swimming Association, a lot of it was inherent to their upbringing which was “If you go into the water, you will drown”, and they have to get through that barrier. We have to find a way of helping. It is now trying to find out those barriers and working to break them down.

It is also about why children are not coming in through our diverse communities, our ethnic and diverse communities are not coming into our clubs. If you go to certain swimming pools and you see them learning to swim, there is a whole raft of children from all ethnic diverse communities coming into the pool to learn to swim, but we are not getting them through the clubs and again that is probably not having the right role models and working now with the Muslim community to train teachers who can then work with Muslim women in a protected environment. It is just making it the right space for people, but understanding what that space is.

Q461 **Giles Watling:** Is it something to do with perhaps the image of swimming being an elitist sort of thing that does not appeal?

Jane Nickerson: I think there is a whole raft of things and I could sit here, and I have, and ponder the reasons for ages, but what I have learned is I need to ask. I need to ask what the barriers are, not assume I know from my point of view, and that is happening now.

Q462 **Giles Watling:** I look forward to hearing the answers you get. David, can



I ask the same question of you? How do you support community-led initiatives in seeking to improve diversity within wheelchair rugby?

David Pond: This is interesting. This is a really big area for us. This is where having some elite athletes that have some presence and visibility really benefits us as well. What we are very sensitised to is the fact that culturally there are certain groups that struggle with disability. They struggle with the whole idea of disability and the perception of it. We have, for example, one of our GB athletes who is a practising Muslim, who continues to work on some programmes with the Muslim community up in Bolton and with the imams and so on, and that has been really powerful. We use a lot of our athletes out into the communities into schools and groups as well, and projecting some of the positive aspects around disability, and of course they are great role models for how people face up to the many challenges that they face during their lives. We have a really very strong and positive impact into communities in this area.

It is still a challenge to find individuals that are coming in at the leadership levels that you might want in a sport, and so we are trying now to identify young athletes who may have roles in the future within the NGB, not just roles around delivering the sport itself but maybe a role in the future as a national development director, if we can get them involved in community activities early on and we can help them and up skill them and feed them through. We are doing quite a lot of work into that because we see it as quite an important part of this whole business about how we build rich wheelchair rugby communities.

Q463 **Giles Watling:** That is fascinating, so this is work in progress, there is more to do. Are you linking up with other organisations so that you do not reinvent the wheel?

David Pond: Absolutely, yes, we are and that is where again working with a lot of the really good strong sports foundations pays off. If you look at something like Bath Rugby Club, it has a really good, strong sporting foundation. We do some stuff with the Harlequins Foundation as well, so Harlequins Rugby Club is another one. We are also looking very closely at some of the Sport England initiatives, where they are running these big sort of projects where we are looking to see if we can link into some of those as well, in terms of those citywide projects.

I do not think it is about reinventing the wheel, but I think we have something a little different and a little extra to add to the game.

Giles Watling: Marvellous. It is really good to hear from you and I hope other people are listening. Back to you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you, Giles, and thank you to our three witnesses, Jane Nickerson, the Chief Executive Officer for Swim England, Joanna Coates, Chief Executive, UK Athletics, and David Pond, Chief Executive, GB Wheelchair Rugby. Thank you and that concludes our session.



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