

# Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

## Oral evidence: Sport in our communities, HC 45

Tuesday 18 May 2021

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Members present: Julian Knight (Chair); Kevin Brennan; Alex Davies-Jones; Clive Efford; Damian Green; Damian Hinds; John Nicolson; Giles Watling.

Questions 464 - 489

### Witnesses

**I:** Stewart Harris, Chief Executive, Sport Scotland; and Tim Hollingsworth OBE, Chief Executive, Sport England.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Stewart Harris and Tim Hollingsworth

Q464 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and this is our third panel of the day, but we are moving on in our inquiry to sport in our communities. This is a bonus session, if you like. We are joined by Stewart Harris, chief executive of Sport Scotland, and Tim Hollingsworth OBE, chief executive of Sport England. Stewart and Tim, good morning and thank you for joining us.

Tim, to you first, where you surprised by the drop-off in participation in sport in England in the recent Active Lives survey?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** No. Good morning and thank you again for inviting me to this very important session. I know you have been looking at this for some time. No, I was not surprised. We were not surprised because we had been through the most extraordinary year because of the impact of the pandemic. Our sector, like every other sector in the country, had taken a very significant hit from the lockdowns and the impact on available opportunities and also the financial circumstances of many of the organisations.

The reduction that we did see—and the latest figures is through to November last year so it does not take into account the period earlier this year of further lockdown. The reduction that we did see, which was about a 1.9% reduction, was expected and perhaps if anything was not as deep and was not as profound as we might have feared. I hope that that is in part due to some of the very real actions that we took as an organisation. It is certainly due to the efforts of those involved in the sector on the ground at grassroots.

So, no, not surprised. Probably more than anything, and I am sure we will go on to talk about this, I am very conscious when you look beyond that figure at some of the detail and what it told us about the way people engage with sport, the way they see their lives and how available it is to various parts of our community.

Q465 **Chair:** From your perspective, what were the key takeaways from the report about participation on sport? Also, was there sufficient bounce-back between lockdown one and lockdown two?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** There are a couple of important takeaways from our point of view. One is that while we saw an overall reduction, we saw more entrenched reductions in those parts of the community that had previously felt less well served by sport and activity even before the pandemic. There are lessons and real pointers for change in how we need to invest differently and how we as a sector need to change in making sure that parts of our community who want to access sport, who want to be active in their lives but do not find it as easy as others, are given that opportunity.



Secondly, we learnt some fantastic positive lessons about two things. First, the real value that people attach to their involvement in community sport, the way it was quite patently missed when it was not possible, when the clubs were shut, and the way people have engaged and the bounce-back that we did see once the return to play was possible and sports and clubs could return. The other is that in that period we understood very clearly how important to our physical and mental wellbeing and to the fabric of this nation activity is, and finding ways to be active, more informally, perhaps, in the home, making things available to people just by emphasising the benefit of a run, a walk or a swim or a cycle or doing some exercise in the home. This is helping us now to think very differently as a nation about our relationship with our own individual health and, more importantly, our relationship as a nation with the role that sport and activity can play.

Q466 **Chair:** Has the divide got wider between the haves and have-nots in sport?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** It is in danger of doing so unless both we ourselves and as a sector take action to address it. Partly it is to do with economic circumstance. It is about availability of facilities and clubs. It also is about making sure that different parts of our community feel that what is being offered is for them.

I am deeply proud to be part of Sport England and part of the sport sector. It is an enormously powerful force for good in this country, but there is evidence to show that it does not necessarily provide the same experience for everybody. If you look at some of the historic figures around, for example, the difference between the involvement of men and women and boys and girls in sport and the work that we have been doing throughout—This Girl Can campaign, for example, to try to address that—or if you look historically at socioeconomic circumstance and the geographic spread of activity, you realise that it is quite entrenched and we need to take disproportionate action now to try to support those communities as we return from the pandemic.

Q467 **Chair:** Stewart Harris, good morning. How is your experience different or similar to that you have seen in England?

**Stewart Harris:** It is very similar. A little bit of context for your members, inasmuch as in Scotland we have a policy called the Active Scotland Framework, which has an aim and an ambition to get the nation more active. It demands collaboration between public health, sport, education, transport, nature, among other departments. We have just completed, through the pandemic, a robust partnership agreement with Public Health Scotland and I think that will help in the future drive those ambitions.

From a sport perspective, our data, which is slightly different from Tim's, relies on two government surveys, the household survey and the health survey, which pre-Covid were very stable from that perspective. The



single data release that we had in August showed a drop, so obviously the impact of the pandemic in August had an effect. It is interesting that a number of sports and governing bodies saw participation and engagement drop. Ironically, because golf and tennis were broadly in Scotland able to continue through the pandemic with only very small gaps, we have seen participation increase. It is an interesting phenomenon and will be one for us to look at very carefully.

With regard to equalities—I am sure this will be a theme right though this conversation—I think the gap will be getting bigger. However, I believe both at a national level through the Active Scotland Framework and the collaboration possible there, and our work as Sport Scotland working with local partners, particularly local authorities and trusts and other partners, including the third sector, we can do a lot more in working to those local plans and needs in areas of social need.

**Q468 Chair:** You just referenced golf and tennis. Obviously a different approach was taken in Scotland during the most recent lockdown in relation to those sports and they were able to continue. You referred to participation. Understandably, if it is the only game in town, so to speak, you are going to go to it and there are going to be more people who are going to take part. Is there any way you think that is something that is going to be embedded, that is going to continue; that people are going to have a taste for those particular sports and they may a very long-term benefit from this period?

**Stewart Harris:** Perhaps. All of us are pleased now that we are heading through and out of this pandemic. We have strong partnerships with all 32 local authorities in Scotland. We have strong partnerships with up to 58 governing bodies of sport. When you take those two key partners and put others around, for me the collaborative impact of us working together will determine whether that happens or not, if I am being very honest.

This afternoon I am meeting with a group of governing bodies to talk about how we work together in areas of social deprivation in Scotland as a focal point to drive recovery, not ourselves but with local partners. Our job is to add some value to that and it is an important piece. It is something that we can bring to the effort, which is as a national agency to work to bring people together, to act as a facilitator, as a leader and deploy resources that way. It is going to be interesting. It is a very good question, but I believe that both at the Active Scotland level and also within sport itself, the more we collaborate the more chance we have of answering your question positively.

**Q469 Damian Hinds:** We talked a moment ago about inequalities. Can you say how the demographic inequalities pattern is in Scotland? Do you benchmark within the four home nations how those patterns vary or are they essentially the same?



**Stewart Harris:** The criteria will be similar if not the same, but we use SIMD data in Scotland. It highlights almost to ward level where there are deep areas of deprivation.

The focus for us is looking at infrastructure. You cannot sustain activity and support communities if there are not the people and the facilities, and that could be outside as well as indoors, to do that. As sport we have not managed, I do not think, to have a sustained collaborative effort in those communities. There has been a lot of great work, do not get me wrong, but a sustained collaborative effort nationally and locally offers some good opportunity.

But it will take a focus. As a national agency, as part of recovery, our plan will see us narrow the number of things we are doing and the areas of focus into which we will put as much of our support as we can. We are still working with all 32 geographies in Scotland, because it is important that we see progress and engagement in all areas. Given the period we have just been through—one of the most difficult societal periods certainly in my lifetime and probably beyond that—we need to try something different.

Q470 **Damian Hinds:** Tim, turning to you, it was almost exactly a year ago, I think, when we met. You told us that closing the gender activity gap was a priority and had been even before the coronavirus. In your most recent “Active Lives”, although the activity level seemed to drop, not by a huge amount but for both genders more or less in parallel, you concluded that more support might be required particularly for some women to get women’s sport and activity back to pre-Covid levels. Can you give us an update on progress to date or, probably more likely, plans for the near future on how to make that happen?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** Yes, absolutely. You are quite right; I remember that session and that conversation well. It had been a focus prior to the pandemic for some time to seek to drive change because there had been a long-term trend of women and girls being less involved.

Some of that has been about our immediate response. In thinking about our Covid response, we have been disproportionately ambitious to work with organisations, whether that is governing bodies or other sports clubs, that can demonstrate that they are making their opportunities available to women and girls. We have been thinking very much about the age groups concerned as well. For example, the pandemic has shown us the opportunity, particularly during the lockdown, for younger girls to consider activity more informally in the home, where there is less judgment, where there is less expectation, where it could be very much on their own terms. That saw a positive increase in the numbers of people engaging.

There is a definite lesson there that I think we can involve more on terms that make sense for the majority of those people, activities that can support them. For example, we will be investing now in school-age girls



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in a programme called Studio You, which is going into schools to support in a Netflix-style platform PE and sports teachers to consider how to make activity that will engage all girls at that age more effective and more positive.

At the other end of the spectrum, we are very conscious of older women and their activity levels and the need for them to maintain them; for example, we have been thinking about organised and structured investment into walking groups, running groups and other areas as well.

On the whole, it is still through the prism of the understanding of the challenge, which is that the sector historically has made more women and girls feel that sport wasn't for them, often through the judgment and the set-ups and the structures. The This Girl Can campaign remains very central for us as a way of trying to bust some of those myths and to make sure that all women and girls realise that movement, being physically active, and playing sport can be a critical part of their lives.

**Q471 Damian Hinds:** I want to come back to children in particular in a moment, Tim, but, Stewart, can I turn to you first? Do you have a similar pattern on the gender gap in Scotland? What is your approach? What are your plans to address it?

**Stewart Harris:** Yes, it is similar. In the latest data that came out around activity in August past, it was 51 male/42 female in meeting the guidelines. There is still a gap in participation terms for all the reasons that Tim was talking about. There are still issues with attracting young girls into activity.

I will come back to what we are going to do in a second, but it is more important now—and you might hear me say this a couple of times—that Government, ourselves as key agencies and local authorities need to put health and wellbeing at the centre of the future. The experience we have just gone through has been pretty challenging in physical and mental health and on our immune system resilience. The benefits of physical activity are clear in all of those areas, so there is food for thought for all of us.

We have a major programme in Scotland called Active Schools, Damian, which is now 16 years old. As an investor, this has been a partnership between ourselves and the 32 authorities, which sees a co-ordinator touch every single school. We have almost 400 co-ordinators in Scotland. Through this vehicle we have had some success in trying to narrow that gap, but I think that we need to take it to another level. The school environment, working around the school with a hub in each of those communities, is a way to try to do that.

I am probably sounding like a broken record. We need people to work together to do this. Sport Scotland does very little on its own. We have to work with local and national partners with a clear, agreed plan to try to make inroads into some of these issues.



Women and girls for me is a focus for Active Schools, and the other key programme we have is community sport hubs. We now have over 200 community hubs, for which I think there is the potential now to attach, again as Tim said, running and walking groups, which are very much about activity as opposed to competitive sport. It can all work together.

**Q472 Damian Hinds:** Thank you. Tim, the "Active Lives" children's survey that came out in January showed a fall in the number of children meeting the CMO 60 minutes a day guideline, although, to be fair, probably a smaller fall, I suspect, than many of us would have expected or feared. On the other hand, it still showed more than half of children and young people are not reaching that benchmark. What are we going to do to make a material difference to the number of kids getting 60 minutes a day, with half of those in school?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** You have highlighted well one of the principal areas of focus, not just for Sport England but for us as a nation. The activity levels of our children and young people should be front and centre in all of our thinking. There are a number of ways in the very short term we are helping to seek to address that. In investment terms, one of the most successful things that we can and continue to do is to provide opportunities in the school day, which you will know better than most on this Committee is the responsibility of the Department for Education. Some of the actions that were in the school sport and activity action plan that came in while you were still Secretary of State remain fundamental to getting a successful programme of activity in schools.

It is not only about the formal sports lessons and PE; it is also about activity during the school day that matters. We have seen the success of the Daily Mile. That sense that every day there is some activity built into young people's lives alongside their lessons is critical. For me, that is how at primary level we are investing as a nation in our young people. It must be more focused on their overall physical literacy. That will probably be the biggest single change that we can make in driving the overall activity through their childhood and then into their adult lives.

At the moment, we should be keenly focused on our youngest people, in primary schools, not necessarily specialising in sports too soon or too early, but understanding basic competence, basic confidence and, most importantly, having a fun and enjoyable experience. We should be thinking much more about that at this stage as a key factor.

As you get into secondary school, actual team sports and the availability of games to be played at a more structured and traditional level is important, too. One of the great interventions that we have seen going into the summer term and we hope over the summer holidays is the creation of a fantastic hub that we have helped to support, the governing bodies have helped put together, and the Youth Sport Trust has been central to delivering, where there is now a huge suite of opportunities, information and guidance to teachers about what is possible in school, what is possible under social distance guidelines and, more importantly,



how they can re-engage kids in sports. We have seen nearly 5,000 schools take that activity hub up since it was launched, combined with some of the other areas of investment: our continued investment in training for secondary school PE teachers so that they can understand better the expectations of the children, getting a generally more inclusive environment together, definitely the role of school games and definitely the opening up that the Department for Education is currently funding through Sport England of school facilities after hours.

There are a number of practical ways that we can do it, but if we can build physical literacy in our youngest children, if we can create genuinely inclusive environments in secondary schools, and then perhaps finally if we can move to the current Government's manifesto commitment in 2019 to put wellbeing more centrally in the Ofsted measurement, thinking very clearly about what that means for the whole school day but particularly school PE and school sport, then I think that those three structural measures would probably be transformational to what is, as you rightly point out, a very significant challenge.

**Q473 Damian Hinds:** Tim, you mentioned physical literacy and that is incredibly important. Of course, it also links very strongly to mental health. We now have the new relationships, sex and health education curriculum in school, which can help to support that and hopefully can leverage the concerns that I think a lot of people rightly have around children and young people's mental health to encourage more physical activity.

The last question from me is again to Tim, although Stewart may want to chip in as well. One action from the school sport and activity action plan was to get this message out about the 60 minutes a day and to put it on a par with five a day, which everybody knows, and really ram it home to our whole society, our whole community. Short of a multimillion-pound TV campaign—or maybe these days it has to be an online influencer campaign—what can we do to get this message out there, to normalise it, to make it part of daily life for our whole nation?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** I personally would welcome a look from Government and the Department for Education at that sort of campaign to see whether or not we can make the message more central. You are absolutely right, the average of 60 minutes a day from the chief medical officer guidelines is a crucial benchmark for how children are going to then benefit, not only physically but, as you say, very much in their mental health and consequently their attainment in school. The evidence is emerging. We have a particularly close relationship in the city of Bradford through one of our local delivery pilots, and the unequivocal evidence emerging there is where young people in Bradford are more physically active, they are benefiting not only in their mental health but in their attainment in school. We have such a positive opportunity here.

From our point of view, it is about the mix of demand and supply, for want of a better way of putting it. It is very easy to think about supply.



Can we open up the facilities more? Yes, we can and some of the investment that is going into that now is really important. Are structures like the school games, whether it is at the local school level through to the national finals, providing a great way for our young people to be engaged? Yes, they are. Are we thinking specifically about the ways that governing bodies and the local club network out of school are engaging young people and allowing them to play sport?

We must not ever lose sight of making sure that young people realise the benefit to them and feel welcomed, feel included and, most of all, feel that being active is fun and enjoyable. I can't stress enough that one of the biggest learnings that we have from all the research that we have done, all the conversations that we have had and the work that all of our partners are doing in this area is for it to be enjoyable, that the PE lesson and the sport lesson in school feels inclusive and engaging, it is not just about the traditional sporty types, and then out of school, whether it is with parents and families or whether it is in clubs, that those involved have the capacity not just to teach a great forward defence—personally, I think that that is very important—or a great backhand or the ability to trap a football but also know how to make that feel like it is fun, something that people want to return to, something that they look forward to and something that they think their friends and themselves are going to enjoy.

That probably is where we as a sector, again talking to Stewart's message about the need for collaboration, need to come together. We need to understand that people making it fun and safe and places that make sense for people to go are going to be critical to the long-term health of the nation because our young people have to sustain that into their adult lives.

**Damian Hinds:** Thank you, Tim. Stewart, did you want to add a word?

**Stewart Harris:** Yes, I will just add a quick word on the messaging piece, Damian, because that to me is the key.

In our partnership with Public Health Scotland, which was a new body only last April—what an introduction it has had to the world—what attracted me, Damian, was the potential. If you add the Chief Medical Officer's Department to Public Health and to sport and you add education, and we have a collaborative, consistent message that goes as far and as wide as we can, then that is powerful. We had some difficult conversations with Public Health Scotland about how we would fit and work together, where physical activity sat alongside diet and healthy weight, but I think that we have resolved that now. It is pretty clear that it is a priority for Public Health Scotland, and I am looking forward to getting those big messages that you are talking about out there in a much wider sense across a range of partners.

Q474 **Giles Watling:** Gentlemen, thank you so much for being here this morning. It is good to see you again.



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I want to touch on something that Tim was talking about just now on facilities. We know that the pandemic has impacted hugely on access to facilities and we have had problems with people being furloughed so some facilities are out of use. Communities are having trouble affording them and it is going to get worse before it gets better. Why is it that so many clubs are now struggling to access affordable, suitable facilities, Tim?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** I think that you are absolutely right about the impact of the pandemic—the fact that it forced all our local sports clubs and all our publicly and privately owned leisure centres and gyms to close. We should look distinctly at the difference between those sports halls, gyms and pools that many communities rely on not only for their own individual activity but for the existence of their clubs. While we can be looking at it from the publicly owned stock, that is a key part of how many people in this country are active. It is using their local leisure centre.

Alongside that, of course, we have the local community clubs that people operate, whether that is their own facility or whether it is the use of more public facilities, church halls or other facilities that they then take for their activities. In all those cases, it is a combination of factors now that we have to think about.

Money and the investment needed for the facilities space is critical, so we are looking very hard at our own resources, and the capital funding that we can put in. We have been very focused on that over the last year. The community emergency fund was to make sure that clubs were able to survive the early stages of the pandemic. Our return to play fund now has a very clear capital investment side to it to enable people to look to what they need to do to make sure that their facility is fit for purpose. Alongside that is supporting the £100 million investment that the Government have made into the national leisure recovery fund, recognising the crucial role that our leisure services play.

There is a combination of understanding the role that these facilities play in people's lives and then understanding the financial situation of local clubs and the national infrastructure of our publicly owned leisure stock.

Q475 **Giles Watling:** I was going to move on to what you are doing to support them to purchase, upgrade or run their own facilities, but I think that you have pretty much covered that. Stewart, what do you say about the access to suitable facilities for the small clubs in Scotland?

**Stewart Harris:** Giles, just adding to what Tim said, the income model around leisure trusts forced many to furlough their staff and close even what facilities were accessible. It has put a question mark around the model for the future and how sustainable that can be. Governments national and local have to look at this.



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My take on it is that it may be that we are looking at sport and physical activity more as a cost rather than an investment. I think that we may have a mindset shift there. We have a sustainable model to find in Scotland around that leisure stock to make sure that it remains accessible. There is an opportunity here, though, where communities can be brought to bear a bit more and be a vibrant partner in managing—not always owning; I can talk a bit more about that if you want—facilities on behalf of local authorities. I see some opportunity there as well as a bit of a challenge. I certainly can't give you the answer today, Giles, about how we are going to get round this because the economic model is pretty chunky, to be honest.

We will have to be very empathetic with education as well because schools are a huge part of what we use in Scotland. Many of those community sport hubs that I talked about earlier are schools, and we are going to have to take our time and work with our education colleagues, who are focusing on returning to the curriculum, before we look at that community piece. That message about working together to get back into those facilities is important. The investment rather than the cost, though, is an important mindset shift for everyone.

Q476 **Giles Watling:** Can you drill down a bit on that? What exactly do you mean by investment rather than cost?

**Stewart Harris:** In Scotland, and I can only really talk about that, most local authorities were the owners of their leisure stock. They looked at a trust system, which took it one step removed from the authority, and while the authority was still contributing it is an absolute fact that those resources that were being invested became less and less.

From my perspective, a good example on that community piece, Giles, would be that if we look at the investment piece, we would be recognising health and wellbeing and the role that sport as part of that agenda can play in communities across the country. I am really attracted to stock of facilities that may be economically unviable being given to or shared with communities to try to make that happen. I look on that as an investment in that community rather than people pitching up and paying for that service.

It is not the only answer; it is one answer going forward. That partnership between local authorities and communities I think will get stronger in Scotland over time.

Q477 **Giles Watling:** I take that, but you favour local authorities keeping ownership?

**Stewart Harris:** They own most of the facilities just now, Giles. I think that it is going to be difficult to do anything other than that. They have that responsibility.

There is a conversation required in Scotland about how we take this forward. We have put in place a strategic forum. It was a difficult



conversation, but we had local authorities, governing bodies, the Government, trusts, higher and further education, ourselves, and Public Health Scotland around the table to talk about how we make sure that the infrastructure for sport and physical activity is sustainable into the future. That was an interesting conversation, I can assure you. For me that is a plus from Covid. It has forced us to get together across a range of different stakeholders, owners of facilities, users and so on and think about what the future might hold. It is a really interesting conundrum.

**Q478 Giles Watling:** Every cloud has a silver lining, Stewart, yes. That brings me neatly on to the community ownership fund, which was announced in March 2021. It is for community groups. It is matched funding up to £250,000 to take ownership. Do you think that that fund is going to make much difference to grassroots sports organisations? That is to both of you but, Stewart, please go ahead first.

**Stewart Harris:** I think that it will. By the way, we are first in the queue to try to help those local communities, with local partners, to take advantage of that.

There is a reality here, and this is where I believe that local help for communities—it is not just the money; although the money is great—with that focus from ourselves as professionals, the local professionals, can facilitate and support communities to make the transition into owning that facility. In some cases, facilities may have some issues already and it will be difficult for a community to deal with that, but we all have to get in behind it and help those communities to make that shift.

The resources are great. I am not sure how this is going to be available across the UK, but I would be delighted to work with DCMS—I do not have a lot of contact with DCMS, but I am sure it does with the Scottish Government—to find out the most effective way in which we can do this. I am delighted that there is money available.

**Giles Watling:** Yes, sure; £150 million sounds a lot, but in the grand scheme of things it is not much, in my view.

**Stewart Harris:** It helps.

**Giles Watling:** It helps. Every little helps. Tim?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** I should say that I think that it has been brilliant for the last five minutes to link this to what Stewart has been talking to you about. That sense of reinvention of our leisure facilities and the leisure sector is an important focus for now. Stewart is right to say that the challenge, the enormous challenge and the financial challenge, is very real still for many of these facilities. It is demanding some short-term response, and I think that that is absolutely clear, but it is also demanding a real look at the need for it to change. The models that Stewart has identified in Scotland are very similar in England in many ways—the way in which we have to think about the ownership structures and the investment in local communities for facilities. It is not just the



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bricks and mortar; we can be talking also about parks and pitches and courts and all the areas of publicly owned facilities that people rely on.

Giving the opportunity for local communities to feel more engaged with that goes back to the same point I was trying to make in a different way about schools and the sense of involvement and inclusion. When communities feel that the facility is for them, they are far more likely to use it, they are far more likely to sustain it and they are far more likely to support it. We have some great lessons in England that have emerged from our local delivery pilot programme that was very much a core part of our last four or five years. I know that we have spoken to the Committee about that before. In 12 areas of the country we went in-depth to work in local areas and turn the telescope around and try not to be one of those public bodies that comes in with a national solution and a pot of money and says, "This is how you do it, get on with it" and then wonders why it was not sustained. We want to turn that around and say, "What is the challenge? What are you facing? Why isn't it working?" Usually, the choice of the pilots is for many reasons, but levels of inactivity was the fundamental one.

What that showed us is that very often the lack of obvious place for people is a key factor, along with that lack of link to the local authority's agenda around public health and all that sort of thing. We have seen in the pilots that when a community feels connected to the place, whether that is a formal facility like a sports centre, they use it. I have very stuck in my memory a pre-pandemic visit to Doncaster. I went to a local estate that was part of our in-depth research area in the community for that pilot. Less than a mile away, over the other side of the road, was this brand spanking new sports centre with a lovely big car park that was full of quite nice cars but bore no attention to the local community. Nobody used it, and I can remember vividly talking to a woman as we walked by it. She said, "That's the closest I've been to that facility in the last year". We can't automatically assume it is just about the supply; it has to be about connection.

That is a very longwinded way of saying that I also agree that community ownership is a strong model here. Whether or not there is enough in that fund is a very good question. It is spread also, of course, over arts and culture and other areas, but we are working very closely with DCMS in providing the insight and the data from our local pilots and providing our evidence and our expertise around what works in local facilities and, more importantly, being hugely supportive of a model where communities get to have more of a stake in the facilities that they are then looking to use. Like Stewart, we will be first in the queue to say, "How can we support you in the programmes that you are looking to deliver and in the engagement of your local communities that you are looking to run?"

**Q479 Giles Watling:** From what you are both saying, and correct me if I am wrong, I also get that this should be something from the bottom up, bespoke, rather than off the peg from the top down?



**Tim Hollingsworth:** I think that genuinely we have learned some lessons in the last five years, which have been absolutely driven home by the pandemic. If you do not create environments that are safe, accessible and inclusive, in a place that makes sense for people, it will only ever continue to engage a certain section of the population. You will never make sport and physical activity available for all.

Q480 **Giles Watling:** Listen to the community's demands. Can I move on finally to governance? There has been a huge amount going on in governance in sport since Sport England launched a code for sports governance in 2016. In Scotland I think that there was a governance framework; the SGB governance framework was launched in 2016. Tim, you wrote to us and you gave evidence that you would give us an update on the review of the code for sports governance in early 2021. How far down the road are you with that?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** Yes, we are down the road with that review. It is done jointly with our colleagues in UK Sport, as you know; you have just had Sally in your previous hearing. We have been consulting widely with the sector. Some of that has been curtailed a little bit by the pandemic. We have been through the process. Both of us now as organisations are looking at the revisions that we want to make to the code. We are considering that with Government and our colleagues in DCMS. We do expect to be able to publish the revised code in a matter of weeks.

Q481 **Giles Watling:** Okay, thank you. That is good to hear. Stewart, you had your governance framework back in 2016. A lot has changed since then. What work are you currently doing to update that?

**Stewart Harris:** We are not doing anything to update it right now, Giles. We are quite happy with it. We are getting feedback about its usage and how we support governing bodies to use it. Governance is about putting systems in place so that you can get the outcomes you are looking for. I think that sometimes people forget about that. We have good feedback. We are in very active communication with governing bodies. If we need to change, they can come and talk with us, but we are pretty happy with the 12-point plan we have there. It offers a good framework for governing bodies.

Q482 **Giles Watling:** But, of course, you will keep it under review, I should imagine?

**Stewart Harris:** Yes, of course.

Q483 **Damian Green:** Good afternoon. I want to talk about the national governing bodies. We have had mixed evidence about their effectiveness, and genuinely mixed. We have had some clubs saying that they have done great things and others less complimentary. Do you think that this is a good structure to use to fund grassroots sport?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** It is not the only structure by any means for funding grassroots sport, and I think that the governing bodies would be



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the first people to acknowledge and accept that. Governing bodies play a very critical role in a couple of areas that we absolutely need to sustain and support. On the whole, the crucial unique role that they have is that in sustaining grassroots and community sport they are the “g” of national governing body. They govern the sport, some of the rules of the sports that people are looking to play, some of the guidance and policies and procedures around that sport. It is critical that they are owned by a single central body and it is critical that that body has that authority. I don’t think that we will ever step away from a universal view of the role of governance and significant support for an activity and a sport that an NGB will play.

We are conscious that they then also can provide for the activities and particularly the competition structures of grassroots and community sport that we can and should be investing in more. We can also look at the ways in which we can use the existing governing body structures. For example, we were talking about women’s sport earlier. If you look at the likes of England Netball or the FA and the way women’s football at grassroots is starting to be a significant priority for it in its own strategy, there are clearly ways forward there.

Certainly, from our strategic position, the idea that governing bodies are the answer regardless of the question when it comes to grassroots and community sport and engagement is not one that we see as likely to be part of the future. Our strategy that we published in January, *Uniting the Movement*, is very clear that there are a whole range of partners and organisations that need to be involved if we are genuinely going to make this an accessible and available opportunity for everyone.

I think that the proportion is right between understanding the role of governing bodies, understanding the role of, for example, local authorities, and understanding the role of the Active Partnership network that we also resource very heavily—the 43 organisations that are in each county of England to support activity at a local level. Critically, who are those organisations and clubs that are supporting community groups to play sport or be active, that do not need that fundamental formal structure but can engage groups effectively? Some of that will be through recognisable charities. You can look at the work that is being done, for example, by a cricket charity like *Chance to Shine*, which is partnering with the governing body, but is not the governing body’s formal organisation, or you can look particularly at those organisations that exist purely because they understand the social development benefit that sport can bring. I know that you have heard from the likes of *StreetGames* and *Sported*, and they will work with myriad organisations outside of the traditional governing body structure. I have absolute certainty that there is an effectiveness in our system if we understand that we need that more holistic view.

Our tackling inequalities fund at the moment is a final point. We have invested £20 million over the last year in that, working with key



organisations, some of them governing bodies—the likes of England Boxing and Basketball England, but others very different, including some disability charities and groups representing particular race and ethnic groups. In those cases, they have reached out to communities that previously were unserved. I am particularly proud of the fact that for our tackling inequalities fund, which is looking to get our resources to groups that needed it most in the past year, over 80% of the end user recipients had never received public money before from Sport England, so we were finding a different way to engage. Indeed, we are doubling that funding and a further £20 million of our tackling inequalities fund is planned for 2021-22.

**Q484 Damian Green:** Do you agree with those broad points that there are clearly things around the edges that go wrong but it is all basically fine, Stewart? Is that your view from Scotland?

**Stewart Harris:** It may be slightly different in Scotland, Damian. Our core investment is about 50:50. It is about £16 million or £17 million to the national governing bodies and the remainder to local partners. The effectiveness piece that Tim mentioned is about how we get those national and local partners to work together. If they work in siloes it is going to be a challenge. Some governing bodies are absolutely brilliant in working locally; others would stick their hands up and say themselves that they have more to do, hence the reason we are talking with them this afternoon to look at how we can collaborate, particularly in some areas of social challenge where infrastructure is poor and weak and access is potentially under threat.

I agree with Tim that it is not a one-size-fits-all approach. We would want to see good plans and if there are good plans we will invest, whether it is a national governing body or a local partner. That intent to try to achieve the aim is what we are looking for.

A point I would add, though, just in case it was missed earlier on, is that it is a long time since we have gone to any local authority and said, "This is the way you should do it". We very much add value now as a national agency and work with them against their plans, which I think is important. Working together it is about 50:50. I think that there is room for improvement across the board, though.

**Q485 Damian Green:** The underlying point is that a lot of people would say, and to some extent in doing this inquiry I would have thought, that there are huge numbers of layers of governance in sport. You feel sport ought to be something that everyone is in favour of, it should all be relatively simple, and it just is not. It is an extraordinarily complex governance structure in this. Would it be better if it were simplified?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** I start with the principle that everything is probably likely to be better if it is simplified, yes. What we have to be clear about is where responsibility lies. I was listening in a bit to the concussion hearing that you had earlier. There is ultimately going to be some



responsibility always in a sport-specific context and there are very good reasons for that. For the nature of sports, the history of sports, the location of sports, there are very different variations. While it is quite tempting to say there can be a single approach, very often you find that it is consistency of application across individual sports that is the key.

Our job as Sport England is to use our investment, advice, insight, support and guidance to help those organisations to understand what they critically need to be delivering. In part, that is about the capacity and the resources to do it, but it is also, as we talked about earlier, the code for sports governance and the requirements of that, the requirements of our funding agreements around equality standards, their standards in child protection, their standards in safety and safeguarding and welfare, all of which we are continuing to look at very carefully as part of our new strategy. I don't see how you can ultimately take it away from the fact that on a sport-specific basis you need some recognition that the circumstances on the ground will differ. That in part is why there is a bit of complexity.

What we have to ensure is that we have some fundamental recognition, to use a phrase that was used earlier, that it is consumer led in this context. It is what people want to do that will drive change. The big challenge for a governing body is the same for Sport England, it is the same for many of us in this sector. We are still reliant on some quite 20th century structures for sport, when we are living in a very 21st century world. The pandemic has emphasised what matters to people, how they spend their time, what resources they have available to themselves and, therefore, how they can apply that to the way they play sport or are active.

**Q486 Damian Green:** Very briefly, as I know that Clive wants to get in, Stewart, do you agree with that broad analysis?

**Stewart Harris:** I have a slightly different take on it. I think that when governance is siloed it gets in the way, but when there is a greater degree of collaboration—apologies for repeating this, but it has been our mantra for a significant amount of time now—and when you take that away and you localise it, as Tim mentioned earlier on, it makes a difference. That requirement is needed by organisations, particularly those in receipt of public funds, but you can get around it. It is localising it and making sure there is a relevance there for that particular outcome. Our sport for life strategy—if you get a chance, have a look—is very simple. It is about engaging those who want to engage, be physically active and involved in sport at whatever level. Again, we think that that is quite a simple outcome that everyone can get in behind.

**Q487 Clive Efford:** Welcome, Tim and Stewart. Can I ask you about the administrative burden of grassroots organisations? Writing bids and accounting for how you use that money can be a huge burden, alongside the core function of running the group. Do we understand enough about the heavy burden that a lot of these small organisations have to bear? I



am afraid I am going to have to rush you because I am supposed to be in the Chamber right now. I am going to have to dive from here into the Chamber.

**Tim Hollingsworth:** Do we understand it? increasingly so, yes. I am particularly proud of how in the last year we realised that the impact of the pandemic made all of that more urgent and more necessary. For example, in our community emergency fund we managed to get 11,000 applications processed in three months. We understood that we just needed to have basic eligibility for the fund and then the circumstances very simply put out as to what the organisation was facing. We saw that as being sufficient in this case for us to make payments that we knew were urgently needed. We have learned some lessons, therefore, about the simplicity and the effectiveness and the speed of our ability to turn around award investments. Very critically, and Stewart has been making this point brilliantly throughout, the more we trust in collaborative partnership, the more we can further devolve that process so there is even less burden on smaller groups.

I mentioned our tackling inequalities fund. We have had £20 million in the past year and we will have another £20 million through. We are only investing in 70 or so organisations to deliver that. We are then putting in place the protocols and the basic requirements for that fund and then trusting those collaborative partners to understand locally who needs it most. That is another way of lessening that burden on those organisations. I mentioned that 80% of those in receipt last year had never had Sport England funding before.

**Chair:** We did hear about the tackling inequalities fund and it is very worthy. Thank you, Tim, I understand the enthusiasm. Did you want to take Clive's question up, Stewart?

**Stewart Harris:** No, I think that Tim has covered most of it. I know that Clive has time challenges here, but I would not add much to that at all.

**Clive Efford:** I am going to have to go, Chair, so I will leave you to ask the question on the numbers of volunteers. Thank you very much. It is nice to see you both.

Q488 **Chair:** Finally then, give us your thoughts on what you think that you could have done more or better during the pandemic from your positions in sport. Stewart, I will come to you first. By the way, I do not mean personally, I mean as an organisation.

**Stewart Harris:** One of the things that we have benefited from has been longstanding relationships. From my perspective on what we could have done better, we did a lot of things well but we could have done more communication. There was a huge area of work we had to do in Scotland around the guidance materials, which had to be rewritten numerous times. That communication was a wee bit complex in places so we could improve on that. For me, that was a tough task anyway.



To be honest with you, you can always learn new things, Chair, but from my perspective putting health and wellbeing at the centre of the agenda and sport as part of that is something we all have to learn from. It has so many positives for individuals and communities across the UK.

**Tim Hollingsworth:** Similar to Stewart, I feel quite proud of the response that we did put forward in the past year. I know that you have heard from various governing bodies in respect of that; £230 million of our own National Lottery and Exchequer funding was invested over a year, and 60% more investments were made than in the previous year. The scale and the pace of that was quite successful.

It was also, of course, thinking very hard about emergency funding and support and getting that money out of the door and acting very flexibly with our national partners so that they could use the money that they had from us already to help their survival. I am thinking, too, about how from pretty much a standing start we worked over five months or so to support the Government's sport winter survival package and the complexity of the loans and the grants that we had never—

**Chair:** With respect, you are saying what you have done really well.

**Tim Hollingsworth:** What I am saying is that we have learned a huge amount from that. It is more about what we have learned from the past year that we lose at our peril. We have learned some lessons, as we have talked about a lot in the last hour, about sense of place and the connection with communities. We have learned about the flexibility of resources. We have learned about partnership and we have learned about communication and the need to advocate powerfully for the role that sport can play in our communities and in public health, driving the health and the wellbeing of the nation.

While, of course, I could look in more detail at what went on, we absolutely should be an organisation that says, "My goodness me, if we don't learn the lessons of the past year and continue to drive our new strategy with those, then that would be a massive loss".

Q489 **Chair:** All right. I feel as if I just asked that classic interview question there, which is to say, "What are your failings?" and the answer always is, "I am too much of a perfectionist", but thank you for that perspective.

To drill down for one second to recalibrating your future approach, I know that we face certain challenges that are very much Covid related. Is there one takeaway, almost a eureka moment, that during this awful pandemic you have seen, Tim, that you thought, "Okay, this is something we can carry forward"?

**Tim Hollingsworth:** Yes, it is the connection to our public health and wellbeing. It is absolutely the understanding that being active and playing sport and moving in our lives makes us happier, makes us healthier and can help us be more robust in facing the infection that we have all been so worried about over the past year. Therefore, it absolutely needs to be



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connected to a wider public health agenda, whether that is about the long-term obesity of the nation or whether that is about the ability to relieve some of the resource burden on the NHS. That has come through more profoundly and more clearly than anything else, as well as the very important role and the loss that people felt when it wasn't there of community and grassroots sports in our communities, the connecting role that it plays and the sense of fabric that it gives us in our daily lives. If I am allowed two, it is two, but if it is one, it is definitely that connection to public health.

**Chair:** Thank you both for your evidence today, Tim Hollingsworth and Stewart Harris. That concludes this session.