

# Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

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

Tuesday 25 May 2021

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

Questions 490 - 525

### Witnesses

**I:** Nigel Huddleston MP, Minister for Sport and Tourism, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; and Ben Dean, Director, Sport, Gambling and Ceremonials, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.



## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Nigel Huddleston MP and Ben Dean.

Q490 **Chair:** Now we move on to round two, so to speak, which is on sport in our communities. Again we are joined by Nigel Huddleston, the Minister, and Ben Dean. You would have seen the figures, Minister, in terms of the drop-off in activity during lockdown 1. Obviously we are not completely through lockdown 2, or is it 3—2.5, I think—so we do not know the drop-off there. What is your response to that drop-off in activity?

**Nigel Huddleston:** It absolutely concerns me because, as Government, we have a strategy and a goal for increasing activity levels, because we all know the physical and mental health benefits of it. The November-to-November decline in Active Lives was about 1.9% overall. In some ways some people might be surprised that it was not a lot more than that. I was concerned before I saw the numbers that it might be a lot more than that.

If you delve into some of the details, that headline figure shows a mix of positive and negative. Men's activity levels declined more than women's activity levels but I am hearing, and we had a meeting last week—I have started a Women in Sport Group—that women's activity levels are more slowly recovering from that drop-off, which is concerning. Also there were some pockets of positivity: 1.2 million more people cycling, more people walking, nearly 1 million more people running. In some activity levels where it did not require going to a location—going to a gym, the communal activities, the group sports and so on, those were particularly inhibited—in those areas where you could conduct sport independently, we saw an increase. What I want to do is make sure that that continues as well.

I would say any decrease in activity levels alarms me and worries me, and we have to make sure that we get back up to those levels and beyond, but it probably was not as bad as I had feared, which I know is a weird thing to say. That was probably a feeling among many in the sporting arena.

Q491 **Chair:** No, it was not as bad as we were first told, because we were told originally it was going to be a 6% drop and it was 1.9% in total. We can definitely see it with cycling, but it was just about the only thing you could do—in lockdown 1 anyway. Try to get a new bicycle these days and you cannot get one. You mentioned men and women and the drop-off between the genders. What about ethnicity? What are your concerns there?

**Nigel Huddleston:** Ethnicity and age was also a factor in this. For young people the drop-off was also greater, and for many ethnic minorities. With the exception of Chinese, there were some differences among the—that speaks to some bigger issues and problems, and I know we will go on to talk about facilities. That would suggest there is a difference between the countryside and the urban areas and the availability, therefore, and access to activities. Mobility to be able to conduct



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activities. It is a lot easier to get on your bike and go into a nice piece of countryside around me than necessarily in London, for example.

Some of those figures were concerning but you can see why they were. It then speaks to what further action needs to be taken.

**Q492 Damian Hinds:** I want to talk about children in particular, both from the sports perspective and exercise more generally. Obviously multiple Government Departments have an interest in that. There is your Department, the Department for Education, the Department of Health, possibly others as well. Who is in charge?

**Nigel Huddleston:** For young people, behind school gates it is very clearly the responsibility of the Department for Education, but we have a strong interest. We are working closely together with the Department for Education in a whole variety of areas. You will be particularly aware that it is often said that 40% of all sporting and leisure facilities in the country are behind school gates, and they are not used at all to the extent that they should be used. That is one of the goals that I personally have, and we are starting some initiatives to try to open them up more. The Covid period is not a great time to try to do that, obviously, but that is a goal we have.

We are working closely with the Department for Education. Obviously there are curriculum aspects here, but schools play a pivotal role in getting that 60 minutes' activity per day. Beyond the school gates there are broader responsibilities of Government and local government in terms of local authority facilities. Let's not forget the role of parents as well and the individual to take some personal responsibility and family responsibility to get kids active and get out and about and do things as well. You are right, there are multiple responsibilities plus, of course, the overall strategy for physical and mental health wellbeing at the Department of Health. There are multiple Government Departments involved. I would not underestimate the role of the Department for Education here, because they have control over the timetable and, of course, the facilities.

**Q493 Damian Hinds:** Just a point of information then, they do not have control over the timetable in schools. That is an important but technical point. In the Active Lives children and young people survey, which came out in January, as you were saying for the overall picture with adults, the drop was less than feared. On the other hand, it confirmed that more than half of children still do not reach the CMO recommended level of activity, which, as you mentioned, is 60 minutes. The expectation is that 60 minutes is half in school and half out of school. We have the school sport and activity plan. When we hear from sports' governing bodies and sports clubs at all levels there seems to be the will to make a material difference in children's participation. What is missing? What is going to get us there?

**Nigel Huddleston:** A good question, and one I know you would have been struggling with in your previous role. There is no easy answer here,



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but some of it does go to priorities, facilities and encouragement. We will be refreshing the school sport and activity action plan. We will be doing that by the end of the year, working closely with the Department for Education. The Secretary of State at DCMS and the Secretary of State at the Department for Education have had multiple meetings already about what we can do immediately on the immediate recovery.

Tactically there are a few things going on to try to make sure that we increase activity levels, including over the summer holidays. There is an active recovery hub on the school games website, which has had a 3,000% increase in hits. There is a lot of advice and activities that can be done. We have been working closely with governing bodies of various sports as well who are feeding into that, to try to make sure that we get more activity going in schools, at a time when many of them have been hit pretty hard.

Then other areas, things like making sure that we do everything we can to protect local authority leisure centres. We had the £100 million fund earlier this year, all of which has now been distributed; pretty much every local authority got something. There will always be questions about whether it is enough, but a lot of this goes back to facilities and the availability of facilities.

Interestingly, we saw that massive increase in both adults and children in some of the activities that do not require significant facilities: the walking, the cycling, the running. That is interesting because we need to keep the momentum behind that and keep it going.

**Q494 Damian Hinds:** For those facilities that are behind school gates, which as you rightly said is a very large amount of it, what is stopping those gates being opened, in your estimation?

**Nigel Huddleston:** Some of it is, if they are open, risk assessment, security, some of the basics, physical security, and then this issue of who would be responsible and where is the duty of care and all of those kind of things? We can overcome some of those because the governing bodies of many sports would volunteer and happily take over them.

One of the problems I have been hearing about with women's football is the availability of football pitches. Women's teams struggle because, by the time they get to book them, it is all booked out by the men's teams. Yet right behind them, behind the school gate, there is a facility completely available.

Opening up not just to children and not just through school activities, but opening up to a sport to make them more community facilities, which happens in many other countries. I have lived and worked in America, and the schools are the heart of their communities. They are not just used for school sports; they are used for multiple other purposes as well. There is an interesting model there.

Also with schools there are questions about extending and requiring more extracurricular activities in the school day. I know this is always a



controversial issue. It seems to have a lot of support from teachers and others, and of course parents as well. There is that mixture between using them more for extracurricular activities within the school agenda but also involving and engaging governing bodies to make sure they open up.

It will require some investment. It will require some money. As soon as facilities are open, something is needed, but not necessarily a huge amount to make a big impact. We can have a big bang for our buck here because the facilities are already there.

**Q495 Damian Hinds:** In terms of the drive to participate, there is a particular pattern, as you know, with girls in particular who reach a certain age and participation having been at quite a reasonable level then drops off. There have been some great programmes, probably one or two that you are about to mention. It still remains at quite a low level in upper secondary school for girls. What is the plan specifically to help support girls to maintain their sport and exercise participation?

**Nigel Huddleston:** You probably heard from Tim at Sport England on some of these programmes. Of course, we had huge success with the This Girl Can campaign, which has been reinvigorated. That was a real learning point because it did have an impact, it resonated. It struck the right notes and is something we need to learn from and double down on.

You are absolutely right, though. There is something about engaging girls at school, and then young women, in sports that they actually enjoy and want to participate in. Therefore, are we pushing them into sports where they will want to continue a lifelong interest? School is a fantastic time to engage in all sports and try all sorts of sports. This is one of the great things about being at school. You do not have to be good at something to enjoy it and get benefit from it, even if later in life you perhaps become a fan and watch the sport rather than necessarily always participate in it. There are all sorts of benefits from it. School is a foundation because it is your only time in life where you get the opportunity to get exposed to multiple sports.

There is something about whether we are focusing on the sports that girls like or whether we are forcing them into things that they are probably not so interested in.

**Q496 Damian Hinds:** We talked with Tim Hollingsworth about the new sex, relationships and health curriculum in schools and the opportunity it gives for physical sports and mental health literacy, but also the need to have a top-down messaging going with that. He remarked on the success of the five-a-day messaging. What is the role for a mass communications campaign around the 60-minutes-a-day exercise with a similar level of ambition as five-a-day fruit and vegetables?

**Nigel Huddleston:** You raise a good point. I have spoken to Tim about this as well, so I am not surprised he raised it there. There absolutely is. We want to make sure that the 60-minutes-a-day message is as prevalent and as well-known as the five-a-day. There is marketing,



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promotion and activities that can go with that. The governing bodies are pretty much signed up to this as well, which is important.

We are in the process of doing the recovery of sport from coronavirus, so the sector has been hit very hard. Its finances have been hit, coaches and so on. We are having to recover from the ashes here. There has been great interest, and we prioritised physical activity, both throughout the lockdowns and since as the first things to reopen. That itself is an important message. You see my Twitter feed, young people in particular are desperately keen to get out and about again, conducting physical activity. That has helped.

We need to push this message. The overall Government message on prevention instead of cure, from an overall health angle, is an important one. You know it is a priority of the Prime Minister. He has gone through his own experience, obviously coming out of hospital after his coronavirus incident saying we want to prioritise physical activity. We will continue to focus on that area.

Sport England obviously has a key responsibility to deliver there. We finance it to the tune of about £300 million a year through lottery and Government support. It is my job to make sure that continues or grows.

**Q497 Damian Green:** The stark contrast between elite sport and grassroots sport has never been higher than at the moment. We have seen crowds coming back to football and other sports. Clive Efford has just pointed out the amount of money that is pouring into Premier League clubs at the moment. Yet at the grassroots level it looks like a lot of people are saying long-term viability is at stake here in some sports. Do you share those concerns? Do you think we are in a very precarious position for some grassroot sports?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I am always keen to make sure that we have facilities and that there is more participation and activity levels. I probably do not share the doom and gloom picture that some present. We also have to be careful, just because elite sport is successful it is not necessarily a bad thing for the grassroots because there is trickle down and it does help with facilities and it helps with economic activity. For the Olympic sports alone, there was a recent research report from UK Sport that shows they contributed £25 billion to the UK economy. The Premier League is a global export.

These things are good, and if we have sport talked about a lot, if it is on our television screens, if it is in our newspapers, if it is on social media, and if we have icons and people we can put on a pedestal, it does help inspire young people to get involved and get active. Of course, we have the Commonwealth Games next year as well. I know I am talking about a million things here, but the elite level being successful is not bad for grassroots. We need to make sure we invest in grassroots and we invest in schools, as we just talked about, and sport and physical activity in schools.



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Also there has been a bit of a mischaracterisation in terms of Government spend and Government focus. If you look at the spend from UK Sport, for example, versus Sport England, Sport England funding is over £300 million a year, whereas UK Sport, for elite sport from Government funding and the lottery, is a fraction of that. It is just over £100 million a year. That shows the focus is there. Also, the various measures we have had during coronavirus as well. Yes, elite sport has benefited from it, but so has grassroots out of necessity. We have focused and we try to focus the money there.

You raise a perfectly valid question about whether elite sport is investing enough in grassroots and local communities. It has done a pretty good job largely, particularly during coronavirus. We have seen sports clubs—including elite sports clubs—invest in their communities in all sorts of ways, and also helping with the recovery and activity levels, but they could always do more.

**Q498 Damian Green:** I was going to make that point. You talk about “trickle down,” and this is one of the responsibilities of elite sport. You get the demonstrated effect that people watch a sport on television think, “Yes, that would be interesting. Let me go and take it up,” and find there are no facilities in their local area. Therefore, they get frustrated and go and do something less healthy. That is clearly very important but, in practical terms, what are you getting? Your written evidence said you were continuing to work with organisations and clubs to understand what more support they need. What are they telling you that they need urgently now, as we come out of the pandemic?

**Nigel Huddleston:** First and foremost, they needed to open up, which I would not underestimate or take for granted. Sport and physical activity was one of the first or the first to open up, particularly the big push on 29 March, for example. They desperately needed to open up. Whether that is local authority facilities or provision or activities, the grassroots or privately provided gyms, and so on. We have been working with UK Active and all the sports bodies in both the private and public sector in terms of assessing their needs. Opening up and prioritising sport and physical activity was one of the biggest asks.

Of course, the financial needs are paramount. Again, depending on which facilities and whether they are private or publicly provided, we provided a significant amount of support. About six or eight months ago I said it was £1.5 billion, it is now probably multiples of that in total when you add in all the support measures that we have conducted.

I am worried about local authority leisure facilities. We had the £100 million fund, which helped. There was other funding as well from local authorities for those that were completely owned and operated. I am hearing concerns about the viability of local authority-provided facilities. Of course, this is a central and a local government issue, and local government also needs to decide how it prioritises sport and physical activity, and I certainly encourage them to make sure it is a top priority as well.



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**Q499 Damian Green:** Is there any possibility of further central Government funding specifically to support grassroots sport, or have they had everything they are going to get?

**Nigel Huddleston:** It is a perfectly valid question, and one I cannot give an answer to because none of us has a crystal ball, but you have seen DCMS bang the drum for sport, with a fairly positive response from the Treasury when we have done so. None of us knows what the circumstances will be from 21 June and thereafter, but the key thing is getting sport open and standing on its own two feet again.

If, for whatever reason, that does not happen, of course conversations with the Treasury will take place. They have been fairly responsive so far, but I hope we do not go there.

**Q500 Kevin Brennan:** I cycled through one of the parks in my constituency on Sunday morning on my 35-year-old Raleigh bicycle, which I refurbished during the pandemic. It is not a Chopper but a lightweight Tora. It was an absolutely lovely sight to behold: all the young kids out in organised activities, playing mini rugby, hundreds of them out there in the parks locally. Quite an extraordinary thing to behold, seeing them practise mauling and so on, and it is an unusual sight these days. It is wonderful to see that flourishing.

Of course, the current funding model for grassroots sport discourages small community sports organisations from accumulating reserves. Do you think the financial impact of the pandemic might have been felt less drastically by the grassroots if that was not the case, if they were allowed to have more reserves?

**Nigel Huddleston:** It is interesting that you say it discourages reserves. We were all hit to a surprising level. As in so many other sectors of the economy, the thing that hit sport was the length of time that there was so little, if any, money coming in. Those reserves are there for often short-term hits, but many still have not had revenues of any sort, whether it is subs or additional revenue from holding weddings at a local sporting venue or something. That has gone on for a much longer time than anticipated.

You are right that we have to learn the lessons of this in terms of the constraints we put on sports. But then, to a very large degree, many of them are self-organising, self-funding and have a fair degree of freedom and discretion. It is not all what the Government tells them to do here. In terms of the total volume—

**Q501 Kevin Brennan:** Agreed, it is not all that but, as Minister for Sport, have you thought about what lessons there might be for funding models coming out of this great shock to the system? Do you have any insights you might want to share with the Committee?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I am not going to say anything at this moment in time in terms of huge insights, other than we will learn the lessons and we will take your opinion on this as well.



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**Kevin Brennan:** First little thoughts rather than huge insights, do you have any of those?

**Nigel Huddleston:** The first is the pivotal role of Sport England. The reality is that we have diverted, and Sport England came up with the recommendations. Huge credit to Tim and the team. Sport England is an institutional body that has shown its worth incredibly during coronavirus, because they have been involved in the distribution of funds in all sorts of areas, some more visible than others. Its own funding as well, over £220 million distributed in emergency funding to the grassroots and an extension when it announced the new Uniting the Movement campaign, another £50 million this year. That is money that has saved grassroots sport that otherwise would almost certainly have gone under in many cases.

Instilling the pivotal role of public funding through Sport England is one of the lessons. I know Sport England has sometimes been criticised in the past. It has absolutely shown its value this year. There is also the role of things such as funding through not only the Exchequer but the lottery in these areas as well. That is one key lesson learned.

The other thing is the responsibility and obligations of elite sport to the grassroots level. There are some lessons learned there, and it is one of the reasons we are conducting the fan-led review of football at the moment. There are other sports that have, to varying degrees, shown commitment to grassroots in their communities. Most of them have done a fantastic job, and credit to them. There are lessons learned there as well.

Do Government need to be more instructive and put in requirements? Potentially, but of their own volition many of them have done the right thing.

Q502 **Kevin Brennan:** You talked earlier—I think it was to Damian Hinds—about this issue of using the facilities that are available behind school gates. Again, this is one of those wicked, perennial issues that we come back to year after year in this area. Is one of the problems essentially that Government, and even local government, have no stick in this at all? We have gone down policy routes over many years in relation to school autonomy that ultimately mean it is not going to be a priority for head teachers. Their priority is to run their school. If they are going to use their assets, it is to sweat them to make sure that they can make up any shortfalls they fell they have in their budget.

There is nobody there who can say to a school, “You have to go to the trouble of opening the gates, making sure everybody is safe on site, having the caretaker available,” whatever it is. Rolling the pitch afterwards, digging up the divots, all that. Ultimately, have we seen any progress on the subject in the last decade? Is there any plan to put a bit of grit in the oyster here?

**Nigel Huddleston:** You are making fair points and, as Damian mentioned earlier—I think he was alluding to this as well—there are lots



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of Government Departments with skin in the game here, but who is pulling the lever? As Sports Minister I sometimes feel like I am primarily overseeing sports governance and so on, as opposed to activity levels, because the governance aspect can consume all the time and attention. I need to make sure that I focus more of my time and attention on the activity level side of things, which Sport England has, as an arm's length body, the direct responsibility for, but also it is an area of focus.

I am hopeful that we will make more progress, and we have put money into it. Last February there was an extra £10 million into opening up school gates, and there was a £1.5 million before that with a few pilot programmes, which we will learn from and hopefully expand. But that is small beer in the whole scheme of things and I want to—

**Q503 Kevin Brennan:** As we all know in Government, the trouble with programmes is it is an excuse for not solving the problem many times, isn't it? How many programmes turn into a comprehensive universal approach on a subject?

**Nigel Huddleston:** The more positive thing, though, is sport and physical activity. Getting activity levels up is a Government priority now in a way that it has not been in the past under multiple Governments. We have an imperative to do so, because of obesity levels, the greater focus on mental health and the increasing recognition of the value of sport and physical activity to mental health at all ages.

I would say we have a few things that are hopefully pushing at a more open door than perhaps in the past. There are a few cultural changes.

**Q504 Kevin Brennan:** I accept that. You mentioned the United States earlier, and I would suggest that one of the reasons that is the case in the United States in terms of using school facilities is because, first, they take school sport more seriously and, secondly, they also take girls' sport and girls' activities more seriously. I notice you used the word "sport" a lot in your answer earlier, which is understandable as you are the Minister for Sport, but it is about activity, making sure that any kind of good, healthy activity is encouraged. Thirdly, it is because the schools are controlled. There is local policy making, democratic input, that enables schools in that system to be run that way.

I welcome the fact that the Government are talking a lot more about obesity as a priority and all that. That is very welcome, and it's about time. There was a report written in 2007 by Sir David King, who was the chief scientific adviser at the time, when, as you mentioned earlier, I was Minister with responsibility for school sport. I signed the preface along with the then Minister for Sport, Gerry Sutcliffe, and I think Dawn Primarolo was the Public Health Minister.

I have said this before: it was the most insightful and interesting report I have ever read on the subject and it is as relevant today as then because it identified that obesity, yes, is a complex subject that arises out of society, the way we have designed society and the evolution of human beings even. It is in our nature, when we are provided with abundance,



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to overeat. It is in our nature, when we can, to avoid activity sometimes.

We have to design, right across public policy, reasons why people will become active and why they will eat more healthily. It is worth revisiting that report and looking at it again. It is not written by Ministers; it was written by independent scientific advisers. Sometimes in Government, as we change from one regime to another, we forget very important insights and work that has already been done, and it gathers dust on the shelf over a long period of time.

**Nigel Huddleston:** I will take that advice and read the report. You rightly hassled me earlier for almost getting into party politics. We all know on this Select Committee and in DCMS arenas, but particularly in sport, that party politics does not have much of a role. Learning from previous Governments and other Governments is a valuable experience. There is no point in reinventing the wheel. I am very keen to look at that, and I agree with every point you raise.

**Ben Dean:** One of the things Sport England has done with its latest Join the Movement strategy—I am sure you heard this from Tim—is to recognise that, while sport has a huge part to play, activity does as well. There are definitely things like exercise classes and yoga that, to the Minister's point, play particularly strongly to young woman.

**Kevin Brennan:** Exactly. Just to break the political consensus for a moment, I have previously been critical because the previous Prime Minister, David Cameron, ridiculed Indian dancing by girls in schools and it caused untold damage, that kind of attitude towards the sorts of activities that the Minister quite rightly said girls might want to do and which are tremendously skilful, athletic and good for physical activity. I am glad we have moved past that, hopefully, and it is not just about competitive sport. It is also about real activity and encouraging that kind of activity. I am on my usual rant, sorry, Chair.

**Chair:** No, it is very nice. It is like the end of an American sitcom. We sum up with the family get together again.

Q505 **Clive Efford:** Minister, can I ask you about the community ownership fund? Is £150 million going to go far enough, and should we be ring-fencing some of it for sporting activities?

**Nigel Huddleston:** It is a fair question of whether it will be enough. We are in the early stages yet. There is £150 million announced. The first applications are coming in next month, and then certain amounts have been allocated over the next few years, so we will see. I suspect and hope that, if it is successful and having the desired impact, we would be able to go back to the Exchequer and ask for more.

Certainly, sport and sports facilities were identified in the prospectus, so it was important it got highlighted. It was not ring-fenced as such. That is probably a good thing, because who knows whether it is going to be more or less than we expected? We will certainly be very closely tracking how it is going to be used and what it is going to be used on. I have a strong interest in how it goes out.



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It is up to £250,000 generally, but it could be up to £1 million in special cases. We all know, when it comes to sportsgrounds, sometimes the demand for housing, for example, means sports facilities can sometimes get to hefty sums of money. We will see how it gets distributed. I am going to keep a close eye on it and, if successful, I will happily lobby the Treasury for more.

**Q506 Clive Efford:** Knowing the nature of some of the sports organisations in our constituencies, they are not heavy on admin and bureaucracy. Is any infrastructure or support going to be put in place to assist them in making bids and handling the money if they are successful?

**Nigel Huddleston:** You are right, there is often a skill to making applications for Government funding of any sort. Some are very good at it and have people who can help, and others not so much. I hope it will not be an onerous process. In the past we have had the community asset process. Pubs and post offices in my constituency, for example, have been taken into community assets, so this is a model that has been tried and tested without too much difficulty from local communities coming together.

You raise a fair point. If we get feedback that it is just too much and too much hassle, and if we see that entities are not applying because of the procedures and processes, we will have to do something about that.

**Q507 Clive Efford:** Too often—I am sure you have seen it as well—the bigger sports that have the infrastructure in place to make bids tend to elbow their way to the front of the queue, and the smaller real grassroots community groups get left behind. I hope the Department will bear that in mind when it is devising the application process. In terms of sports facilities in local communities, lots of them are owned by local authorities.

I heard your exchange with Kevin Brennan just now. What more could the Government do to sustain facilities in the community in the long run? Is it time for more of the joined-up thinking that Kevin was describing between Government Departments? Many of them will be in the ownership of local government, MHCLG, Health obviously has an interest, and Education. We have just heard there are lots of facilities in schools that could be a revenue stream, possibly, for those schools. What can the Government do to make sure these facilities reopen, and to sustain them in the future do we need to start thinking in different ways?

**Nigel Huddleston:** You are asking a huge question, as I am sure you are aware. There are levers we can pull and things we can do. First and foremost, we need to make sure as many existing facilities survive as possible. The National Leisure Recovery Fund has helped in that direction, but as I say—and I will repeat this—there is a role for local government and local government priorities here as well. This is not just a central Government issue, and it extends even to the use of parks and park facilities, and other recreational facilities, not just physical leisure centre types of things.



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We need to encourage models of multiple use as well, which you are alluding to. I have seen some successful leisure centres built with a school, which I think is a model that works really well. Increasingly I am seeing leisure centres also be the health centre, or the rehab hub, and things like that. That seems to work quite well as well.

That often gets a little bit confusing, because we are often talking about GP surgeries, and a mix of public and private, or other things there. I think those kinds of models can work quite well. There is something important about the messaging of Government on physical activity and health. These leisure facilities need to be used. We need to encourage, support, enable and perhaps incentivise the use of leisure facilities. Again, there is a central and local government role in that in terms of pricing and other things. In terms of health outcomes and social prescribing, as well as actual GP prescribing, we are seeing increasing focus on health and activity. I think that is a good thing. There are a whole bunch of areas we need to focus on but, you are absolutely right, this is cross-Government. This is not one individual Government Department that has challenges.

**Q508 Clive Efford:** I can accept that there are challenges, but are you trying to overcome those challenges? Are we seeing cross-Government discussions taking place?

**Nigel Huddleston:** Absolutely. If you are scared or brave enough to look at my diary, you can see that the number of cross-Government meetings we have is immense, probably greater than ever, out of necessity, because of the co-operation required through coronavirus. I think Government Ministers and Departments have learned some valuable lessons here on the huge value of working closely with colleagues in other Government Departments to achieve things. I think that should, and I am sure will, continue. I speak all the time to MHCLG, Department of Health and others. That will continue on both a personal level, but also institutionally.

**Q509 Clive Efford:** I will ask about people who have changed their patterns of work. More time will be spent working from home in the future. Has the Department made any assessment of what is likely to change, or is it planning to, in terms of how that will impact on facilities in city centres, for instance?

**Nigel Huddleston:** That is a really good point. I am not aware of us conducting research or forecasts on that directly at the moment. I know that BEIS and MHCLG are also considering these issues in terms of ways of working in the future, and the Department for Transport as well, because there are huge implications there. Again, this is an area where we will see greater cross-departmental working. It is still a little early to tell what the long-term consequences will be. I have been fortunate to go to a few of the events research programmes, and the one thing that has really struck me about that is how quickly people get back to behaving as normal post coronavirus.



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I am not sure and am not convinced that everybody will want to work from home forever and ever. I think we might see more wanting to go back to work in premises where people can interact. We will keep a close eye on this, because nobody really knows yet. There are all sorts of different forecasts. It would be a brave person to say, "I predict X now." We will see. You are raising a valid point with huge public-policy implications in terms of mobility and working behaviours. It is something we really need to keep a close eye on.

**Q510 Clive Efford:** While we have you here, if you do not mind, I will ask you a question about the Euros in the summer at Wembley. Have the Government had any discussions about whether fans from countries on the amber list, or any fans from abroad at all, will be able to attend those matches?

**Nigel Huddleston:** We are in conversations with other countries, as you know. First of all, we hope and expect there will be a decent number of fans allowed into the stadium. In terms of where they come from, we have the rules and regulations around international travel and we will have to abide by them. People on the amber list may be able to come at the moment, but it would be under the existing rules of 10 days of isolation. We will see. We are talking about some of these post-21 June, so we may be in a different world then. The international travel rules and who is on what list are changing every few weeks. Every three weeks that is going to be reviewed. We will cross that bridge as the circumstances allow. I know there is a real interest for tourists and sports fans to come to the UK, but it will have to be within the rules.

**Q511 Giles Watling:** Thank you, Minister, for being here. I want to talk briefly about national governing bodies. There has been criticism that the NGBs are prioritising elite sport at the expense of community programmes. Is that so, in your view?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I have been pretty impressed with the relationship I have had with governing bodies and their awareness of the roles and responsibilities they have to encourage or support, financially and otherwise, community and grassroots sport. In some sports it is a more financial commitment, direct or indirect. The Football Foundation is an interesting model in football, for example, with the commitment of the Premier League and others, as well as Government money. In the light of coronavirus, we have seen there is probably a need to refresh and look again at some of that. I will go back to the point I made earlier, that having highly successful elite sport is no bad thing for grassroots. You cannot spend money you do not have.

**Q512 Giles Watling:** I take that point, but, conversely, elite sport would not be anywhere without the grassroots feeding it. That is where it all comes from in the first place.

**Nigel Huddleston:** Absolutely, both domestically and internationally. You are right, it is a symbiotic relationship. We do not traditionally have a model in the UK of requiring an individual sport to put X percent of money into grassroots. They tend to do so of their own volition through



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direct and indirect means. Other countries have a slightly different model. As it relates to football, at least, the fan-led review is looking at all aspects of governance and financial flows within football. We will see. Some of the elite sports, or some of the governing bodies, sometimes have a lot of criticism of them, as if they are doing nothing to support their grassroots entities. As I travel around the country, I do not see that; I see a lot of work going on, and a lot of effort to help grassroots. It might be a question of whether it is enough, but it is certainly not nothing.

**Q513 Giles Watling:** You touched on local government involvement earlier. I would like to put a little statement to you that we got from the LGA in written evidence. It said the "Government's sport working group, established to support recovery after COVID-19, almost exclusively focuses on elite sport provision. Grassroots activities and supporters' clubs need to be effectively represented in Government and able to engage with DCMS. That is not the case at the moment." Do you agree with that, and if you do, what are you going to do about it?

**Nigel Huddleston:** No, that is not the case. For example, every time I have held one of those working groups, after I have spoken the next person to speak is Tim Hollingsworth from Sport England, focused on grassroots. Either whoever said that was not paying sufficient attention, or maybe there is sometimes a perception of who you listen to. We made a big effort to make sure that the working groups and the overall engagement at DCMS has been spread across a whole variety of sports, and with a relatively limited and small team they have done a fantastic job at both elite and grassroots level.

We try to do what we can, and the doors are always open at DCMS. We have had a lot of engagement with sports at all levels, in particular during coronavirus. The relationship between DCMS and DCMS officials—and maybe you should comment here, Ben, as I am talking about you—has never been stronger or greater. I would like to believe that sports feel they have an open door. Does that mean they always get everything they want? No. Who does? Sometimes people say, "You are not listening to me," when you listened, but you just did not end up doing exactly what they wanted you to do. I think that might be a familiar story to any MP.

**Giles Watling:** I would like to hear from Ben, if at all possible. That was from the Local Government Association, not an individual.

**Ben Dean:** One of the things I would draw attention to is a good example; our sport survival fund. It is a £600 million fund, and although the primary purpose of the fund has been to support sports that have missed out from the absence of fans—it is geared much more toward elite sport—there have been multiple examples of sports and individual clubs we have supported through that fund that may be an elite rugby club or an elite football club, but they may have up to 50 or more grassroots teams who also use the club's facilities. As the Minister said, there is a huge link between the elite level and the grassroots level where they benefit from each other.



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**Q514 Giles Watling:** It is good to hear that you are aware of that and keeping your eyes on it. I have one final question: do you think the dissemination of information to the grassroots would have been more effective during the pandemic if the sports governance structure in the UK was less densely layered?

**Nigel Huddleston:** That is a PhD question.

**Giles Watling:** Get your degree out.

**Nigel Huddleston:** The governing bodies played a key role in helping distribute information and guidance, and in coming up with the guidance for the individual sports. There are over 100 sports that have a direct relationship with DCMS. The only way we could get guidance, as reopening started to happen, was to allow the governing bodies to come up with their guidance and then to get it checked, as opposed to formally approved by the Government, to make sure it was consistent and aligned with the overall messaging coming from medical officers and others. I would say they did a pretty good job as a whole, making sure that information was spread widely, because they have the distribution networks, the email distribution lists, the multiple websites and social media platforms in order to get those messages across. I thought they did a pretty good job overall.

**Q515 Giles Watling:** Are you saying there are not too many cooks?

**Nigel Huddleston:** We have some big meetings. Thank God for social media, because we would struggle to get everybody in the room for some of them. One of the things that struck me is that there are still some sports in this country where there are multiple entities claiming to be the governing body, or the leader. That causes some problems with some sports, and maybe we need to do something about that.

Then again, it raises this question—as a Conservative, my instincts are not to get involved unless we absolutely need to—of whether these are self-organising, private entities trying to do a thing with private individuals. If they can do so together in an effective manner, and speak with one voice, of their own volition coming together, that is great. However, it causes problems, even with Sport England funding to be a recognised body, unless you are that recognised governing body. There are some challenges with some individual sports that probably need to get their act together, if I can be frank and say that. If they do not, they will struggle to get Sport England funding.

**Giles Watling:** Encouragement rather than intervention. Thank you.

**Q516 Alex Davies-Jones:** We have talked a lot this afternoon about integrating local facilities, bringing them from behind the school gates, making sure they are there long term for our communities. It would be remiss of me if I did not highlight the excellent work of our Welsh Labour Government in developing the 21st Century Schools programme. In my own constituency of Pontypridd our new £44 million super school in Tonyrefail has had a leisure centre incorporated as part of the school for the community and the pupils to use. The PE department is specifically



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located in the leisure centre, the brand new 4G pitch in the park is incorporated for all to use, and the swimming pool, and all these facilities. They are really protected for future use. As the Minister said, there is some fantastic, innovative work going on across the UK. On that point, what discussions has the Minister and DCMS had with our devolved Administrations on how we can best implement and facilitate all these community facilities across the UK?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I meet regularly with my counterparts in the devolved Administrations. I was appointed Minister for Sport in February last year. Since then, as you can imagine, it has pretty much been the coronavirus response in nearly every conversation. As we get towards the recovery, these kinds of “Where do we go?” conversations are going to be much more to the fore.

You are right that the Welsh model is a great one. My school in North Hykeham, Robert Pat Comprehensive, was joined with North Kesteven School and sport centre. That was built in the 1960s or 1970s. This is a model that has been around for a while in different countries, but I really like the fact that it has been prioritised in Wales, as you are saying. You have your fantastic YouTube clip ready to go from your comment there. That worked really well. You are absolutely right to applaud and praise that kind of model. I think it works really well. It might not work everywhere, but we need to think carefully when we are building new facilities about whether it needs to be that entity, or if we could add something else. I am more than happy to have those conversations with the DAs.

Q517 **Alex Davies-Jones:** That is really good to hear. Cross-party working and cross-Government working are exactly what we need to help all these facilities thrive.

Diversity within sports governance is something we have heard a lot about recently, because it has been quite prominent and it is definitely in need of a big overhaul. Why do you think diversity in sports governance is so limited?

**Nigel Huddleston:** It certainly has been historically, and it is still not in the place we want it to be, but we need to recognise and acknowledge that progress has been made. The sports governance code was developed a few years ago, and it really put the pressure on for more representation in sports governing bodies. Now I think 44% of board members in sports that receive Government funding of some form, or through UK Sport and Sport England, are women. That was well below 30% a few years ago; in fact, it was abysmal. Some sports are better than others. We are encouraging, cajoling and supporting sports to be more diverse in a whole variety of categories. It is not always obvious, though. It is not always protected characteristics.

A lot more diversity is needed in sports. Some sports are still quite posh, highly representative of people from private schools, for example, and we need more diversity there. Some sports, by their nature, are able to be more diverse than others in terms of who plays them, and so on, or



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where they are practised in the country. Progress has been made but there is still a long way to go. It will be a focus. We are working with Sport England and UK Sport on the refresh of the governance code. Independent board members is another key area that I think is vitally important, and we need more there. Progress has been made; a lot more to do.

**Q518 Alex Davies-Jones:** I welcome that. You mentioned you are encouraging—and you used the word “cajoling”—Sport England and UK Sport to do more here. Is there anything else that you can actively be doing to facilitate progress?

**Nigel Huddleston:** As mentioned, UK Sport and Sport England disburse money, and there is always the potential threat that, unless progress is being made, that money may not be forthcoming. That is always a potential threat. It is quite a dangerous tool to use, because it could also lead to some perverse incentives or inappropriate appointments that would not make sense for an individual sport, if you start to be too prescriptive and put certain parameters in place.

Pushing sports to be more diverse is important. It is required. It is what fans and participants expect. They want their voice to be heard and they want their sports to be more representative. There is a societal and cultural change happening that is pushing sports in the right direction, anyway, but we also have the potential stick as well as the carrot to use. If we need to, we always have it there.

**Q519 Julie Elliott:** You say it is more difficult to diversify the governance in some sports. Do I read from that that you think people have to participate in the sport to be on the governing body?

**Nigel Huddleston:** No.

**Q520 Julie Elliott:** Because, if we just look at the people who participate, we are never going to get equality on governing bodies.

**Nigel Huddleston:** No. I agree with you. The point I am making is that in some sports, if we are particularly prescriptive by saying, “You have to have this protected characteristic represented, this protected characteristic represented, and this one,” and then apply it across every sport, there might be a regional sport in a certain area of the country where, instead of appointing the right people with the right mix, you do tokenistic appointments. That is what we want to avoid. We want to make sure we encourage and support diversity. Encouraging applications, whether for the governing body of a sport or a public appointment, is the key thing, as we all know—getting people to apply, and proactively identifying the right pool of talent to get into some of these board levels. That is a huge area of focus.

I want them to be as diverse as possible but, also, I would not want any individual sport to think, “We have reached that target now. Job done. Tick. Finished. Job over.” It could be different for different sports. I think there is a degree of getting the right balance between pushing them in



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the right direction—all sports know they need to be more diverse, they all know they need to increase that diversity—but there is a danger if the Government come in with a really heavy hand and they are too prescriptive.

- Q521 **Chair:** One final point with your tourism hat on, which I know is a subject you are hugely passionate about, I have received a letter from Damien Moore MP, signed by 16 colleagues across the House, concerning Britannia Hotels. I must declare an interest here. I once had the misfortune of staying in one of these hotels by accident. It was in Hull, and when I stayed there 25 years earlier it was quite nice, but Britannia had taken over. I slept over the sheets rather than in the sheets that night. It was absolutely horrendous. The letter states that places like Southport, Scarborough, Bournemouth and Blackpool all have these hotels in them, and they say they basically feel that their economies are blighted. The hospitality and tourism sectors are hugely important to these towns and cities, and they feel their economy is being blighted because this hotel chain gives such a dire experience. It has been the bottom of the *Which?* chart for the last eight years in terms of customer service and customer experience.

Given we are looking to boost regional tourism hugely as we come out of Covid, do you have any suggestions for colleagues on this? Do you think Britannia has a responsibility to these local communities either to up its game or, frankly, to sell up and get out?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I can feel an invitation to come back for another hearing on tourism coming at some point. On this particular issue, I have engaged with some of the individuals you mentioned, and I have also engaged with Britannia, which I believe also owns Pontins, where colleagues have raised concerns in the past along the lines that you have been raising here. At the end of the day, they are a private entity. They offer a service to customers, many of whom enjoy their experience. The concerns you have raised about quality standards—and also in the past some people have raised concerns about treatment of staff, for example—I have raised directly with Britannia, and I would be happy to do so again.

- Q522 **Chair:** What did they say to you, Minister?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I probably cannot reveal too much of what was a private correspondence, but they came back and were able to provide some additional reassurances on some of the accusations or concerns expressed. In other areas, I think it would be fair to say we still have some outstanding concerns. I suspect, following on from that letter, if I receive it as well, I will be following up with Britannia Hotels again.

You are right, our domestic tourism industry is absolutely huge. It is a major employer, often the No. 1 or No. 2 employer in many constituencies, particularly coastal constituencies, around the country. One of the goals we have, and you will be seeing it shortly when we release the tourism recovery plan, is to try to make sure our tourism offering is year-round. That means some of our tourist areas need to



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have a really high-quality proposition that people feel they can go to throughout the year. We need further investment in our tourism offering and the marketing.

Q523 **Chair:** It is an opportunity right now.

**Nigel Huddleston:** It is an opportunity, especially now. Yes.

Q524 **Chair:** Obviously, the glorious British summer is not really helping us at the moment, but there is an opportunity here to emphasise that you should not just think, "I am going to get on Expedia," or, "I am going to go on Booking.com and book a flight overseas." What you think is, "I want to go domestic."

**Nigel Huddleston:** You raise a really important point. One thing we noticed last year—and hopefully again this year—is that people who have not had a domestic holiday, often in years, had a British holiday for the first time in a long time. They had an amazing, positive experience, with really high-quality hotels, accommodation providers, tourist attractions and so on. I would say the experience being highlighted by colleagues in that letter is the exception rather than the rule to the British holiday experience. In English Tourism Week, which is this week, we all need to remember that. Many people have a fantastic, high-quality British holiday, and I encourage them to book one this summer.

Q525 **Chair:** Are you going abroad yourself this year?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I am not. I have just booked a Peak District holiday.

**Chair:** Brilliant. A lovely part of the world. Thank you. That concludes our session.