

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: The impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors: Recommencement of sport, HC 291

Tuesday 30 June 2020

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[Watch the meeting](#)

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

Questions 393 - 535

Witnesses

[I:](#) Richard Masters, Chief Executive, Premier League

[II:](#) Scott Lloyd, Chief Executive, LTA

[III:](#) Ali Donnelly, Executive Director of Digital, Marketing and Communications, Sport England, and Marketing Director, This Girl Can



Examination of Witness

Witness: Richard Masters.

Q393 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, and it is a special hearing into the reopening of sport after Covid-19. Today we are going to be joined by Richard Masters, the Chief Executive of the Premier League, Scott Lloyd, the Chief Executive of the Lawn Tennis Association and Ali Donnelly, This Girl Can Campaign and Executive Director of Digital, Marketing and Communications for Sport England.

First of all, I am going to go around the Committee to see whether any of them wishes to raise interests. I will do so first to say that within the last 12 months, I have received hospitality from the Premier League. Does anyone else wish to declare an interest?

Giles Watling: I am patron of Clacton Football Club, very proudly. Thank you.

Chair: "The mighty Clacton Football Club", you should say.

Giles Watling: "Mighty", yes.

Steve Brine: I have, probably in the last Parliament, attended hospitality for the mighty Tottenham Hotspur. I am also Vice President of Winchester City Football Club.

Q394 **Chair:** Does anyone else wish to raise an interest? No. Thank you. We will proceed with our first witness, Richard Masters, the Chief Executive of the Premier League. Good morning, Mr Masters, and thank you for joining us today. It is greatly appreciated. We have been trying to avoid the words "kick off". Can you give us a brief overview of exactly what your experience has been with the restarting of Premier League Football? What are the lessons learned? What are the things that other sports can draw out of this?

Richard Masters: We are 27 matches into completing the 92 we need to complete the 2019-20 season. So far, so good. It has been a positive experience. There was a huge amount of hard work done in the lead-up to restarting the competition and that work involved collaboration with multiple stakeholders, DCMS and Public Health England. I would like to thank all of those people for the assistance they have given sport, and football in particular, to get back up and running.

Some of the things we have put in place are different to the normal running of Premier League matches and it works. All of the protocols around training and getting matches behind closed doors are seemingly working at an operational level. The messages we put out to fans to stay away and avoid the public order issues have worked. The free-to-air matches, all 92, are televised and we are pleased to see that people are watching at home safely and supporting their clubs. I think it has been a



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good start to the kick-off, if you like, and we are happy with the progress that has been made.

The learnings over the past three months have been enormous, and I think that we will continue to learn as the weeks progress. As we look forward, we have a number of issues to address: the restart of 2021, the safe return of football spectators to stadiums. All those things are looming large on our agenda. So far, so good, Chairman.

Q395 **Chair:** Thank you. You mentioned that football in particular had been brought back early. Many people within Government suggested to me that the main idea behind allowing a contact sport like Premier League Football to reopen before other professional sports was so that you would be able to divert money to the lower leagues, where we have 10 to 15 clubs facing the possibility of going out of business. What is the Premier League going to do now to help these lower league clubs?

Richard Masters: We have received help from Government, but all sport was allowed to come back after 1 June. We were able to do so on 17 June and the Championship followed quickly thereafter.

At the moment, if I could put a frame around it, the EFL itself has had to make some tough decisions. It has curtailed League One and League Two and decided to press on with playoffs. The Championship is hoping it is going to complete after our season at the end of July, and I think those are tough but the right decisions, the obvious choices to make. As a group and a collective, it is looking at how it can restructure its business. It is looking at cost controls and squad salary caps because the wage-to-turnover ratios in the EFL are quite high.

The most important factor for the football economy to return to normal is the return of spectators, and both myself and the Football League are encouraged by the conversations that are happening at DCMS level with other sports. We have participants in the cross-sport working group.

I will explain to the Committee what Premier League does for solidarity with the EFL in particular and other parts of football. We provide around £200 million worth of funding annually and we have made that good in 2019-20. In fact, it was all paid prior to Covid happening: £110 million in solidarity funding, £60 million in academy funding and £30 million in community funding. Our current plan is to make good all of that, despite the significant losses of the Premier League and its clubs, with continued financial and economic uncertainty looking into the future. We want to continue with that. We think that is the right and appropriate thing to do.

Q396 **Chair:** How much of the cash given to the EFL is new money, though, and how much of it is simply money that was already in the pipeline that has been brought forward?

Richard Masters: It is the same amount of money and that money is being made available early.



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Q397 **Chair:** Yes, so it is not new money. There is no extra help. It is just money that has been brought forward. That is clear, is it?

Richard Masters: No. To be fair, we have not had a specific approach from the EFL about a particular size of problem or a specific instrument that might need to be looked at. If that approach were to come, clearly, we would sit down with the EFL and have a discussion with it and look at our circumstances and its circumstances at the time.

Q398 **Chair:** A specific approach? Has there been any approach? Have you been having discussions with the EFL behind the scenes in order to discuss exactly what sort of rescue package it will need to prevent potentially 10 or 15 clubs going out of business?

Richard Masters: We meet with the EFL every week and it has not been a topic of discussion. What it is doing is the right thing. It is talking to its own clubs about how it can fix some of the issues that exist within its league, and I think it is right and appropriate that it does so. We are aware of the economic issues in its league and we are aware of the economic issues in our own league. We are not oblivious to that. It has not been a topic of recent conversation.

Q399 **Chair:** Your view is that it needs to put its house in order before it comes to you for any extra help; is that right?

Richard Masters: I think that is what it is doing. It does not take instructions from the Premier League. It is its own organisation. It has strong leadership, and that is what it is doing as part of the collective. That is its approach.

Q400 **Chair:** What should be attached if it came to you asking for extra cash, such as, for example, the ending of the Football League Cup or potentially curtailing of that competition?

Richard Masters: The Carabao Cup, in this year, it is played out in full. One of the issues we face—and this is a collective issue across the Premier League, the EFL and the FA—is that the current season is finishing late. We have only just been made aware of the arrangements for European competitions and the international round in which England participates.

We are in the situation where we have an already congested fixture calendar becoming even more truncated. There is a challenge for all of us to come together and to find a solution to be able to play out our competitions in the way they were originally envisaged. It is not easy because there is less time and space. Football has two raw materials—a calendar and player availability. When those things become scarce, we have to have discussions.

I don't think there is any suggestion at the moment that the League Cup will not take place next season, but that is something we are in dialogue



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with the EFL and the FA about and those conversations now have to intensify.

Q401 **Chair:** The cup's future is in doubt because you were just saying there, effectively, that you are discussing the fact that you may need to put it aside in order to allow you to get the fixtures you need to get away next season.

Richard Masters: I am not suggesting that. All I am saying is that the normal number of weekends and mid-weeks that accommodate all of our domestic competitions and European club competitions are not available to us. Therefore, we have to come up with a whole-game solution.

Q402 **Chair:** Will the Premier League stand by while potentially 10 to 15 EFL clubs go to the wall, or will you do anything in order to ensure that these vital grass roots of the game are sustained and kept alive?

Richard Masters: Of course. We are big supporters of the pyramid. We need a strong pyramid to support the Premier League. Of course, it is not clear what is going to happen yet, and those conversations need to take place. The Football League has faced financial aftershocks in the past. I started at the Football League as the ITV digital crisis was happening and there were predictions of lots of insolvencies. In the end, football is a very robust business. Football clubs are very robust, and I hope that they will be able to see their way through and the Premier League will play its part.

Q403 **Chair:** Has there been much talk of a reset of football—you hinted at it yourself—involving the form of things like salary caps and transparency of finances? There are also parachute payments, which are genuinely believed to have distorted the economics of the Championship. What do you think of this? What do you think football will be like in five years as a result of this pandemic?

Richard Masters: It is very difficult to say. There is so much uncertainty around at the moment. I know there has been talk of reset. At the moment, I think we are in rescue mode. We are trying to finish the season. That is the prize we have at the moment. Then we will turn our minds to next season, but obviously we are still at the mercy of the course of the virus. There is the threat of a second wave and the overriding economic conditions. All of football faces economic uncertainty.

What emerges in the post-Covid environment is a topic that will have to be addressed at some point. I don't believe that is now. Covid may be used as a means to address some of the issues that exist in certain parts of football, but the wider structures of competitions and relationships between leagues are for a future date.

The reason that parachute payments exist is to support clubs coming into the Premier League in the knowledge that they can invest and be competitive. If parachute payments did not exist, if clubs came up without the knowledge they have a safety net to fall back into, they



would not invest and, therefore, they would not be competitive. The data show that clubs that come up are more successful at staying in the Premier League than they are returning to the Premier League from relegated. While they are necessary, there is always the debate to be had about the size of parachute payments and so on, but they are necessary and part of the system. Every three years, the Premier League and the EFL sign up to a new solidarity agreement, which includes mechanisms to deal with parachute payments. The last one was signed less than 18 months ago, so we are committed for at least the next three seasons to the current system.

Q404 Steve Brine: Good morning, Richard. Thanks for joining us. Going back to the discussions before the restart, which obviously you were at the heart of, who was pushing hardest of all the clubs for the Premier League to restart and who was less keen?

Richard Masters: I do not want to start talking about individual clubs, but we were in unprecedented times. There was a mixture of views about what were the right things to do and that is totally understandable. In the end, it was by working hard and talking together. I know we had 12 shareholder meetings in three months. We normally have five a year, so we did two and a half years of big club meetings in three months. It was a very intensive period. Over time, we came together as a collective and decided the best thing to do, having worked with Government and having decided it was safe and appropriate to do so, was to restart the league. The turning point was getting players back on the training pitch and getting those stage 1 protocols signed off, and things flowed from there. People felt safe in the environment that football had created for them.

Q405 Steve Brine: In this Committee, when we have conversations, there are people who lead on different things, people who feel most passionate about different subjects that we should discuss as a Committee. There is always somebody who leads on a discussion in a room. When you first sat down with the chairmen and managers of the different clubs in the Premier League, who was pushing for a restart and who was holding back?

Richard Masters: From the outset, everybody wanted to complete the season. That was the key message and that came through in every one of those 12 club meetings that we had—how to do it, when to do it. Steve, I don't want to not answer your question, but I simply cannot recall who in particular was the keenest to start it, because it was pretty unanimous across the board. Where there was difference between them was about how and when, and that was resolved by working through in detail.

Q406 Steve Brine: What was the strongest argument to restart and what was the strongest not to? What had to be got over? What had to be overcome?



Richard Masters: There were clearly a lot of discussions about sporting integrity issues. Finishing the competition on the pitch is obviously the best way of settling places 1 to 20, but we were developing a very different model to play out the season behind closed doors. In the early point, there was talk of some matches not being able to play home and away. We managed to work with the authorities to get through that.

In the end, we came up with a package that satisfied the sporting integrity issues satisfactorily, but also there are obvious economic arguments to finishing the season and the impact that will have not only on clubs but on the wider pyramid. There was a number of factors driving the discussions, shall we call them. In the end, we are only able to do what we are allowed to do by Government, so the most important discussions were the ones we had with DCMS through the cross-sport working group.

Q407 **Steve Brine:** Who had those discussions? You mentioned the term “a second wave”. Did you have a conversation about what if there is a localised spike? Let’s say it could be in Leicester. What would happen then? You must have produced a risk register as to what will happen in a city that has an outbreak. Leicester is now under lockdown again. What is going to happen in Leicester and was that pre-thought through and discussed with Ministers? Did Ministers ask you to consider this?

Richard Masters: I am not sure Ministers asked us to consider that, but just about every eventuality has been discussed between our officials and DCMS officials at some point. We have had a huge dialogue with the authorities about the concept of neutral venues. If what is happening in Leicester—we are waiting to hear—does affect the club’s ability to host home games, either the match on Saturday against Crystal Palace at 3 pm or subsequent matches, we have the opportunity to put those matches elsewhere or postpone them until a date when it is safe to do so. Of course, contingency plans are discussed and part of our overall planning.

Thinking about next season, we have broken the back of the operating model of playing football matches behind closed doors in a situation where the whole country, the whole economy, is affected by Covid. That has been the hardest part. Not all of it has been done, but all the work in for starting next season needs to be completed as well.

Q408 **Steve Brine:** On contingency planning and discussions, when you saw the scenes in Liverpool at the end of last week and over the early part of the weekend, which led the Mayor of Liverpool, Joe Anderson, to say, “These events have brought Liverpool Football Club and the city of Liverpool into disrepute”—we should say Liverpool has been the best team. It thoroughly deserved to win the league. I have lived in the city for many years. They are passionate fans; they are thoroughly decent people; and they thoroughly deserve it after 30 years.

Does the Premier League agree that we are still in a public health crisis



and does the Premier League take responsibility for any impact that those events at the end of last week could have three weeks from now, given the scenes that we saw in St George's square?

Richard Masters: Just to reiterate, part of our commitment to Government was to put all matches on television and to come up with a communication programme to fans, led by clubs in the Premier League, for them to stay away from football matches and to stay home and to stay safe. Those messages have come out from all football clubs and the Premier League. To date, we have had no material public order issues around matches at any event. We take those responsibilities very seriously. Jürgen Klopp in particular has played his part in talking to Liverpool fans about that.

You mentioned the fact that there was a significant gathering in the city the night after Liverpool was crowned Premier League champion, and no one wants to stop Liverpool fans celebrating but the way that it happened—we support what the club said afterwards, which condemned those actions and that they are not in line with what the club has asked Liverpool supporters to do.

Q409 **Steve Brine:** No one wants to stop fans celebrating, but the law of the land does because it is an illegal gathering. Let's try the question a different way. Once the Premier League had restarted, once you had wound that clock and pressed start, it was inevitable that Liverpool was going to win the league because it only needed six more points and it was obviously going to find them from those remaining games.

You say that Jürgen Klopp has shown responsibility, and I saw his open letter in the *Liverpool Echo* yesterday, but then there were Liverpool players in a hotel garden, celebrating, gathering. What message was that sending to the fans who gathered in large numbers to celebrate that win? Is it not an inevitable consequence? Was it a discussion that you had and said, "Yes, okay, if we restart, Liverpool is going to win the league, and the fans are then going to gather to celebrate it"? You cannot entirely blame the fans. Their team has just won the league. That was going to happen. I am asking whether the Premier League bears the responsibility or part of the responsibility for what happened on Thursday and Friday and what could happen in public health terms as a result.

Richard Masters: I have said that what happened that night is regrettable. It was wrong. In the end, we are not in control of individuals' actions, and it is possible to celebrate with social distancing. Maybe lots of those people left their homes that night with the intention of doing very much that. It obviously got out of hand, in the same way we have seen gatherings on beaches, street parties and all these sorts of things going on within wider society. I see it very much as an extension of that, where individuals have to take responsibility for their own actions.

We are in constant dialogue with all of our clubs about these issues, constantly reminding them of everyone's responsibilities. We know they



take those responsibilities very seriously. Given Liverpool's particular position in the city and the sensitivity around the fact that it was so near to winning the league, I think Liverpool has played a strong part in trying to discourage the things that have happened. In the end, individuals have to take responsibility for their actions.

Q410 **Steve Brine:** Great. I always understood the Premier League to have, as a matter of principle, a position that did not condone political campaigning or slogan bearing. You will be aware of Arsenal's Mesut Özil—he is a practising Muslim of Turkish descent—who got into trouble when he posted messages on Instagram in support of a minority Muslim population in China. The club immediately issued a statement saying that Arsenal has always adhered to the principle of not involving itself in public. You then had the US Secretary of State wade into it. You had sanctions in Chinese state TV banning an Arsenal v. Manchester City game. You then had the issue with FIFA, if you remember, banning wearing of the poppy symbol on the home nation shirts. It subsequently backed down from that. Then the Premier League fined Manchester City's Pep Guardiola £20,000 for wearing the yellow ribbon on his label in support of Catalonia's independence from Spain.

Yet this month, for the first round of matches of the Premier League the players carried a slogan on the back of their shirts that said "Black Lives Matter". There is no comment on that campaign; it is a perfectly good campaign and has many things to speak for it. Is the lesson of this that the Premier League should stick to its brand of football and be consistent? How did we get from Özil and Pep to Black Lives Matter? Can the Premier League players and managers now be assured that anything goes if they have a cause they feel strongly about and the Premier League will not take action against them?

Richard Masters: Steve, we are living in unprecedented times and the level of dialogue the Premier League and clubs have had with their players about what is important—I will come back to the Black Lives Matter issue in a second—during the course of the pandemic and getting back to restart was unprecedented. Of course, players are used to being the message boards for other people's messages. On this occasion, they wanted to make two very clear statements as players, supported by the Premier League and by clubs and most if not all of the other football stakeholders, thanking the NHS for its extraordinary commitment during the course of the pandemic and also recognising the issues that are going on around the world and the support of the sentiment of Black Lives Matter, which millions of people around the world have joined in with. They wanted to make those two statements, and we listened and were happy to support them during this particular period. I do not think it sets any particular precedent.

Going back to the point about political messaging, it might become slightly tortuous, but I think it is perfectly possible to support Black Lives Matter, the sentiment, without being seen to be supporting any political organisation. We are an apolitical organisation. We do not support



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political organisations. We are happy to support the players. We think it is the right moment to do it. For the first time, I feel that players, managers, league and clubs are on the same page on the issue of discrimination, and that feels to me like a positive step.

Q411 **Steve Brine:** What would be your message then to Pep if he wants to wear the Catalonia independence flag? Let's put it into a more parliamentary context. Let's just say there were another independence referendum north of the border in Scotland. Would it be okay then for Scottish Premier League players to wear the lapel of the independence campaign?

Richard Masters: We are drawing a clear distinction between a moral cause and a political movement or agenda. While there may be some difficulty sometimes dividing the two, our position is clear: politics, no; moral causes, yes, when agreed. As I said, we are living in special times at the moment.

Steve Brine: I think the Chair wants to come back in. Thank you very much, Richard.

Q412 **Chair:** On moral causes, I am really interested in the dichotomy here. For example, if a player decided to wear a black armband to commemorate the reported hundreds of workers who die each year through heat stress in Qatar in the building of the World Cup, would that be permissible? Would you allow individual players to wear a black armband? That is not a political statement. That is a moral cause. Is that now something that would be allowed?

Richard Masters: I said, "by agreement". As I said, this is not an individual player. These are all players coming together. We have dialogue with the club captains and we have our own BAME participants' advisory group with current and recently retired players on it, and we have been listening to them. It is not an individual player with an individual cause. It is a firm position from all players. As you know, they come from very culturally diverse backgrounds, and on this occasion, we have decided to support them. That does not mean to say that whenever players, on an individual or collective basis, want to do something the Premier League and clubs will be duty bound or willing to support it, but on this occasion, we have decided to do that.

Q413 **Chair:** Could whoever did that expect to be fined?

Richard Masters: If you do something without permission, you are breaching the regulations or the rules, so you can expect to be punished or fined.

Q414 **Julie Elliott:** Good morning, Richard. I find your last answers quite alarming. I think you are opening up a can of worms by how you have responded to those last questions, I have to say.

I want to move on to the women's game. At a press conference on 17 June, the Secretary of State talked about, "The return of elite sport has



provided a model to follow,” yet the women’s game is yet to reopen. What does this statement say to you about the priority attached to women’s football in the UK?

Richard Masters: Just a little bit of background. While many of our clubs have women’s teams, the Premier League itself is not responsible for the professional game. In the last year, we have had lots of dialogue with the FA and with our own clubs about the Premier League at some point in the future assuming responsibility for the professional game. We decided collectively—that is the Premier League and the FA together and the WSL and Women’s Championship Board—that now was not the right time, but we will return to that topic at some point in the near future.

Q415 **Julie Elliott:** Do you think that will be impacted by the announcement of redundancies yesterday at the Football Association?

Richard Masters: I don’t think that particular decision is going to impact it. What we have been able to do for the women’s game is to help them to the tune of around £1 million to get their testing programme up and running. We have recently made that funding gesture to them, and I believe on that basis they are able to restart their 2020-21 season.

Q416 **Julie Elliott:** I totally accept that you are not responsible for women’s football in the UK, but clearly the women’s game is important. I am sure the Premier League has an opinion. Do you think there are other barriers holding back women’s football being given greater priority by the Government and the Premier League? Are they cultural, logistical, or is it just financial, do you think?

Richard Masters: At the professional end, there are financial issues. All clubs that are involved in putting a women’s team are making financial investments, as is the FA. We obviously want the women’s game to be successful. We do. This is why we are helping them and why we have engaged in those discussions with the FA about assuming responsibility for it.

From a personal perspective, it is something I would like to do in the future, for this organisation not to be just responsible for the top of the pyramid in the men’s game but also the women’s game—I think those two things would work hand in hand very well—and to inspire a generation of young female footballers to get involved in the game at grass roots level. That participation is fast growing. The FA has done a good job in pushing that agenda, and there are some good people running that department who are doing a good job. We are trying to support it as best we can in the environment in which we find ourselves.

Q417 **Julie Elliott:** I want to move on to something completely different now, and probably, as a Member of Parliament for Sunderland, asking a question about Newcastle United would be a very rare occurrence in a parliamentary proceeding. However, for the last three months, Newcastle United’s Saudi takeover has been on, it has been off, it has been on, it has been off, and this is very worrying for fans, some of whom are my



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constituents. There has been no communication with fans. What is your view on the way things are going there? The uncertainty that is going on is clearly worrying. Do you think fans should be kept informed and communicated with when something as big as this is going on?

Richard Masters: I do appreciate that uncertainty. Obviously, I cannot comment on the timing or the specifics of any particular takeover, but, in a perfect world, takeovers should happen cleanly, clearly and in a timely fashion. Sometimes things get complicated. This particular—

Q418 **Julie Elliott:** Do you think that fans should be kept informed and communicated with?

Richard Masters: That is very difficult because it is an entirely confidential process that involves all sorts of due diligence and the application of the owners' and directors' tests. We have always said those particular processes need to be entirely confidential, and when they drag on sometimes there is a requirement for information. It is a relatively rare occurrence. I think it is very difficult to keep a constant dialogue with fans about what is an entirely confidential process.

Q419 **Julie Elliott:** I accept a constant dialogue is not possible, but do you think three months of this dragging on with no communication is acceptable?

Richard Masters: As I said, it is difficult to make any comment about something that is confidential. We cannot provide a running commentary on things. I just cannot talk about specifics of this particular process. There are legal requirements in place that need to be observed.

Q420 **Giles Watling:** Thank you, Richard, for being here today. You are very welcome. I want to ask a question—it is an old question, but it is put into sharp focus because of the current pandemic—about the cash flow down the pyramid to the grass roots game. I have the example before me of my local team, Clacton FC, which is really struggling. As the season ends in April, that is when it starts its fundraising for the rest of the year. That has all gone out of the window. Major projects, like its all-weather facility, are going to crash. It generally, because of weather, has about 100 home games postponed a year. It has had the £10,000 grant, which was distributed by the local council, and other tiny grants of a few hundred pounds. What are you doing as the Premier League to support those teams right down at the bottom at the grass roots?

Richard Masters: We have lots of commitments to various foundations, the Football Foundation being the main one, which is about grass roots and facilities. We have made a contribution of around £70 million over three years to the Football Foundation. I believe there is a £2 million pitch emergency fund available to individual clubs. There is money coming down the pyramid to the grass roots game from the Premier League via these various organisations.

Q421 **Giles Watling:** Do you think that is enough? Football is a major, central



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part of British society, and virtually every town and village has a football team. Do you think you are doing enough?

Richard Masters: We do think we are doing enough. We are in a fast-moving situation. We have our own issues to address. As I have said, at the moment, we are fixing our own issues. There is always an argument that more can be done, but we have had no specific requests from that part of the game. We continue to support at all levels despite the financial uncertainty and the losses suffered. We continue to support all of our ongoing commitments.

Q422 **Giles Watling:** I think probably, after today's meeting, you might get a few specific requests. Do you think you have been doing enough to support local community contexts during the pandemic, for instance supporting health services?

Richard Masters: Yes. In terms of the way that our clubs and our players have supported their local communities, all football clubs are deeply rooted in their communities. Some of the examples you have seen of our clubs supporting local health authorities, contacting the vulnerable, supplying meals and various other activities have been commendable. I think that clubs and players have supported local efforts and we have done something similar with the NHS. We have made available a significant amount of money by redirecting from our charitable funds to the NHS to the tune of £20 million.

Q423 **Giles Watling:** Again, I go back to the very grass roots of it all, which is important to me. What do you do to support children and youth football? How are you building the game at grass roots level?

Richard Masters: The grass roots of the game are very important to us. It is part of the FA's remit to support the grass roots of the game. However, if you look at what we do through our charitable arm, it is all about young people. We are providing digital packs through our Primary Stars education programme that we have in over 15,000 primary schools. We are providing information, help for teachers, and we are resourcing all of that. Young people and their development, social inclusion programmes like Kicks, all of those things are part of our agenda and will continue to be funded throughout the pandemic.

Giles Watling: That is good to hear. Thank you very much.

Q424 **Chair:** To clarify a couple of points, first of all you mentioned the £20 million. I think that was announced a couple of months ago. That is not new money, is it? That is coming from your charitable trust that would have gone to other charities but is now going to the NHS; is that correct?

Richard Masters: £15 million of it is not new; £5 million of it is.

Q425 **Chair:** The press release should have said £5 million in new money, not £20 million, Mr Masters.



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Richard Masters: I am not sure that is correct, because we were redirecting the funds. Therefore, it was—

Q426 **Chair:** Redirecting the funds. There was quite a bit fanfare at the time. There was quite a lot of controversy at that moment. You made the announcement of £20 million, but it turns out that £5 million of that is new money; is that correct?

Richard Masters: £15 million of it is new to the NHS and would not have gone to them. It is redirected—

Q427 **Chair:** Yes, but it is £15 million that would have gone to other charities. Charities face a shortfall of up to £4 billion at the end of September. Effectively, what has happened is that money that would have gone elsewhere to charitable causes is being redirected to the NHS, but it is not the way in which it was put across in the media, that this was extra cash found new for a good cause. Is that fair?

Richard Masters: Yes, correct.

Q428 **Chair:** Fine. On supporting local efforts, I know Giles mentioned the NHS. You have 20 testing pods at all your football grounds. Would you consider, after the season is over, allowing those pods to continue and perhaps allowing local NHS workers to be tested in them?

Richard Masters: We would have to think about that. The whole purpose of the testing pods is that it is part of keeping the people inside that bubble—the players and staff involved in putting on matches—entirely safe. Allowing other people into that environment might create a risk. It is something we can look at.

Chair: Thank you.

Q429 **Clive Efford:** Can I take you back to something the Chair asked you about? I have said in the past that the day the World Cup kicks off in Qatar—kicked off by multimillionaire footballers in stadia built by the most impoverished workers working in the most appalling conditions—will be a very dark day for football. What do you think that will say about the commitment of football to Black Lives Matter?

Richard Masters: It is not a decision the Premier League is involved with in any way. The awarding of World Cups is a matter for FIFA. The English FA is the organisation that feeds into that system. At that particular time, the FA was a bidder and so was seeking to bring the World Cup to these shores. We all know what happened after that and the aftermath of it. Really and truly, it is going to be scheduled in the middle of our season in 2022. It is not an issue for the Premier League. To build a link with Black Lives Matter—some of these things are quite difficult to square away. I think our commitment to that particular cause, our commitment to anti-discrimination, will remain.

Q430 **Clive Efford:** I will leave that there because there are other issues I want to raise. Do you think that the aftermath of Covid financially for EFL



clubs will expose the distortion that is created by parachute payments?

Richard Masters: I think the entire football economy is affected by Covid, and we are all working through those issues right now. As I said, the parachute payments are part of what keeps the Premier League competitive. As I said at the beginning of this session, we are making whole on all of our solidarity commitments through the three areas with the EFL, despite the significant losses that the Premier League and Premier League clubs are facing, which will be in the region of £700 million, and obviously the economic uncertainty. We have to work through these issues.

Q431 **Clive Efford:** The Government made it quite clear—this is a quote from the Secretary of State—that, “Getting the top leagues back up and running will also release much needed funding to support clubs lower down, many of whom are cornerstones of their local communities.” If that were a priority for getting money back into football, is it right that the Premier League should put its own interests first and not the general interests of the Football League and other clubs?

Richard Masters: If we did not restart, it would be very difficult to look at solidarity in its current form. I think restarting has allowed us to get to the position where we can make good on our solidarity.

Q432 **Clive Efford:** Shouldn't it be financially about getting money into the game in general, that you are the bigshot window that can draw that money in that could help some clubs that might otherwise go to the wall?

Richard Masters: At the moment, as I said, we have not been approached about any specific size of issue or specific instrument. We have not. The two things that need to happen to breathe life into the football economy are, first—and it is promising that this activity is now happening—getting spectators back into stadiums and also a clear plan for how everyone can run their competitions next year. Those are the two things that are most important. To return football competitions to some sense of normality and to get spectators back into the stadiums when safe to do so returns the football economy.

Q433 **Clive Efford:** What proportion of income for, say, a Premier League club comes from the crowds that attend and what is the proportion for clubs in the Football League?

Richard Masters: It is higher in the Football League than it is in percentage terms, but it is still vital. It is vital in the Premier League, it is critical in the FL, and the further you go down the league the more important it is.

Q434 **Clive Efford:** If you look at what is happening in Leicester, would you say that has pushed back a potential date for crowds returning to football matches?

Richard Masters: I am yet to understand what the impact of the partial lockdown in Leicester is going to have on the club, but clearly it



demonstrates the fragile project we have on here. We cannot take it for granted. Restarting is one thing. Creating more certainty by completing the season is the real prize. Beyond that, it is about restarting next season, getting that season away with a clear plan, and also the return of spectators to stadiums. Those are the issues we have to focus on.

Q435 Clive Efford: If it is going to be difficult to get crowds back, that is going to impact more on clubs further down the league than on Premier League clubs. Doesn't that make it more essential that perhaps you do not pay parachute payments, that you plug the hole that is at the centre of the English Football League, for instance, which is £100 million, rather than benefiting a handful of clubs?

Richard Masters: There is a clear agreement in place for parachute payments. I do not think there is any question that parachute payments should remain. The question is about how football helps itself. In the current environment, all of the focus of ourselves and the EFL has been on getting our season back up and running. We are only a third of the way into completing the season. As you say, there are risks in the system. We are seeing one of those potentially emerging at Leicester and we need to be cautious and careful.

Q436 Clive Efford: Do you see it as a sustainable position for the Premier League to stand back while clubs lower down the league, that have been in existence for over 100 years, disappear?

Richard Masters: There is no clear evidence that is going to happen, and we need to talk to the EFL about the current status. I know discussions are about to take place with League One and Two clubs shortly about restarting the season. We are in constant dialogue with the EFL about these issues, and they are fast moving and fluid. One thing we have learned is that you need to be flexible and be able to find solutions to problems, which is what we have done in the last three months to get the Premier League back up and running.

Q437 Clive Efford: Have you set a date for getting crowds back in, either in limited numbers or at all?

Richard Masters: It is the Government that will do that. The cross-sport working group that has looked at all of the protocols to restart professional sport, and which football has been able to take advantage of, is looking at the return of spectators and the conditions that would need to be met in order for spectators to come back into stadiums. Football is willing to play its part in that to offer up its own ideas, its own technical solutions and also to act as a test or a guinea pig to different concepts that football and other sports can benefit from. I think it is the most important part of the return. Of course, we cannot do that until we have Government permission to do so and when it is safe and appropriate to allow fans back into the stadiums. That is dependent upon the course of the virus.

Q438 Clive Efford: Can I ask you about the water break? Why do players need



a water break when it is pouring down with rain and freezing cold?

Richard Masters: Good question. The decision to put it in place was a collective one, and we have had some matches played in very high temperatures. In that situation, it is entirely appropriate. The football players have been coming back to fitness as quickly as they possibly can. I think that, on balance, it is the right thing to do, even when it is blowing a gale and it is raining, to have that break and to take on fluids.

Q439 **Clive Efford:** It is not permanent? It is not a financial decision to get more money out of advertisers?

Richard Masters: Definitely not, Clive. No, it is all about player welfare.

Q440 **Clive Efford:** Sure it is.

Richard Masters: It is.

Q441 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Thank you, Richard, for joining us this morning. I would first like to ask you a question about fan involvement in the game. I am a lifelong Liverpool fan myself. I promise not to gloat too much, but I have had a really happy weekend. Has the Premier League considered rewarding fans through incentives, such as Colin Murray's golden ticket idea? I have been working quite closely with Colin on his initiative and his plans to try to get more superfan involvement in the game. I know some of the clubs themselves have been taking steps to try to involve fans as much as possible. We have the fan walls that have been set up. Are there any other barriers that are preventing us getting some superfans or deserving fans back in the stadiums for one-off games?

Richard Masters: It is the clubs that have really close relationships with their own supporter bases, and I know that they have been trying to keep their fan bases in touch. They have been in constant dialogue with their fan groups.

At a national level, we have structured dialogue with the Football Supporters' Association. As you say, there's a number of things that have happened: the fan walls at matches, the constant messaging. I am not aware of Colin Murray's particular idea. I will look into that when this session is over. The thing that is missing from professional football, from the Premier League, is the fans. I do not want to labour the point, but the sooner we can get them back safely inside the stadiums the better.

Q442 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Good. Yes. Football is nothing without the fans.

Going to another matter now, quite a serious matter, we saw the report launched this week on the racial bias in English football commentary. We had the awful incident at Burnley at the weekend, which was quite rightly condemned by the clubs. We have also seen how certain black players are portrayed in the media compared to white players, most notably Raheem Sterling, how he is given that negative portrayal. What issue do all these incidents raise about football's stance on race inequality?



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Richard Masters: We have tried to be very clear on it. From our perspective, there is no room for racism and there is no room for discrimination within football. We have policies and programmes and promotions in place to try to address these issues. That is not to say that we, like wider society, are not affected by racism. I noticed the commentary research has come out this morning. We have not had time to look at it yet, but we will have a look at that and take on board its findings and take action if necessary.

There is an issue about representation within football. There needs to be a greater proportion of people from BAME backgrounds in all parts of our game. We have fantastic representation on the pitch, and that is from the grass roots all the way up to the Premier League, but it does not translate into other areas of employment. We need to do more about that. Yesterday, we announced a scheme with the PFA and the EFL, creating some places for ex-players from BAME backgrounds to enter the coaching environment at EFL clubs, to put more people from those backgrounds into the coaching environment and hopefully see them over time rise through the ranks and to be on the side-lines at Premier League matches if that is what they want to do.

I acknowledge there is an issue, and we will always strive to do more here. It is very much part of our agenda and what we feel is important. I hope you have seen that with our response recently to what the players also find to be a very important issue.

Q443 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Yes, absolutely. I saw the scheme that was announced yesterday, and I think it is a welcome step. As you say, only 91 Premier League and EFL managers or head coaches are from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background, and there are virtually no black owners, chairmen or chief executives at any of the clubs, so we definitely need to do something to tackle this staff inequality. This scheme you have announced yesterday is a welcome step towards this, but we do need to do more.

Moving on to the issues some of my colleagues have already mentioned about getting political within the games and talking about some of these big social movements, like Black Lives Matter for example, we most recently saw Marcus Rashford's fantastic campaign against ending hunger through the holidays. He ran a fantastic campaign. What guidance does the Premier League give to clubs and players about their participation in politics and campaigning, for example, on social issues?

Richard Masters: When they come through the system, there is a big education programme that is funded and aided by the Premier League, which will have all of these things as part of a young player's education as they are rising through the ranks, through the academy system. There is an education programme in place across all of these issues.

What we are seeing at the moment are particularly young players using their platforms for social good, and that is a change. It is to be



welcomed. What Marcus Rashford has achieved personally with the distribution of meals to the needy in his local area, and then impacting Government policy, is a fantastic example of how players can use their platforms to positively impact. Throughout the pandemic, lots of players have made significant contributions in their communities personally. There is a general awareness of what I would describe as ethics-based issues, which can drift into politics, and I think we need to talk to our players more about some of those issues.

Q444 Alex Davies-Jones: Yes, definitely. Yesterday, we saw the unfortunate news regarding redundancies proposed by the FA. There are big concerns that these redundancies will disproportionately impact women's football and the women's game. I don't suppose you have any more information on what these proposed cuts will be and the impact that these will have?

Richard Masters: I don't want to speak on behalf of the FA, but, as I understand it, I do not think those redundancies affect the running of the women's game.

Q445 Alex Davies-Jones: That is really good to hear. Do you know how we can ensure that any infrastructure spend that is made now in the coming seasons can equally impact both the men's and women's games?

Richard Masters: "Equally impact" is an interesting phrase. They are very different, at very different stages of their development. As I said at the beginning, we have an interest in getting involved in the running of the professional end of the women's game. Until we are able to do that, it is difficult to see how we can have a significant impact on it. I would like to return to that topic with the FA in due course and in relatively short order.

Alex Davies-Jones: Yes, that would be good, and perhaps, Chair, in the coming months we can have Richard back and the FA back to discuss this in more detail, because I think it needs to be explored more. Thank you.

Q446 Kevin Brennan: Good morning, Richard. On what you were just saying about players, could it be summed up as you are saying players' opinions matter?

Richard Masters: Clearly, they matter. They are a very important part of professional football. They have freedom as individuals to express their own opinions. They are also professional footballers; they are employees of clubs; and they have responsibilities and duties under the contract—

Q447 Kevin Brennan: That is the interesting contrast, isn't it, with what we have just been talking about? The individual actions for social good, as you have described, of players like Marcus Rashford and so on and then the collective expression by the players recently, quite admirably I think, about the Black Lives Matter issue and their pressing of the Premier League to allow them to have that on their shirts and so on.

When you were talking about it earlier, I was not quite clear whether you were saying that this was a one-off thing that only happened now



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because we are in extraordinary times, or it was something that the Premier League would consider again in the future were the players to come forward collectively and wish to make an expression of this kind again. Can you just clarify for the Committee what you were saying?

Richard Masters: I am trying to think whether this is the first time the players have expressed their views collectively within the Premier League, and I suspect it might be. It does set a precedent. They were very clear about the two things they wanted to get their views out there about and we were happy to support them. It does not mean in the future that we will automatically see player expressions. What is better on the key issues is for players and managers to support central initiatives, to feel part of those initiatives and not just the message boards—

Q448 **Kevin Brennan:** I do understand that, and I was not asking that. What I was asking was whether or not this was a one-off or whether, if they came forward saying the central initiatives they are not happy with and they wanted to do something like this again in future for some moral cause, as you described it earlier, rather than for a political party or a political campaign in particular—that moral cause might be something like the treatment of workers building football stadiums for the World Cup in Qatar. If they came forward with some moral cause that said, “Construction workers’ lives matter on football stadiums and we want to support that cause,” is that something you would consider, or is what we have just had a one-off?

Richard Masters: I would not say it was a complete one-off, but obviously we are in extraordinary, unique circumstances. We are clear what we are: we are a football competition. We are not a campaigning body. If players did want to come forward, we would listen to them, but there has to be a very high bar and unique circumstances in place. I can’t say it is a complete one-off, but I am not anticipating that there will be player-led causes on a quarterly basis in the Premier League going forward.

Q449 **Kevin Brennan:** You would not rule it out in exceptional circumstances?

Richard Masters: No. Why would we rule it out? It would be in exceptional circumstances and a very high bar. We are enjoying dialogue with players. I do not want to labour my own point, but the point about players feeling involved in the development of policy in certain areas—for example, antidiscrimination—is important.

Q450 **Kevin Brennan:** That is very helpful. We are all looking forward to reopening. I am looking forward to going to watch Cardiff City in the Premier League next year. We are all looking forward to Wales perhaps going one further next year at the Euros and reaching the final, rather than just a semi-final as we did last time. You mentioned earlier that you have had a lot of discussions with the Government about reopening stadiums and fans getting back into stadiums. What ideas have you put



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forward that are novel and innovative and perhaps in conjunction with others that could get more fans back into the stadium than currently would appear possible?

Richard Masters: We are ready to do that. The conversations have been going on for a short number of weeks. We have a club working group set up with clubs of all different sizes and shapes of stadiums that might have different issues with getting spectators back into the stadiums. We would like to come forward with our ideas and proposals for discussion. The system that is being created by DCMS will allow for that and allow for consultation. We are ready to come forward with our ideas, whether they are about, for example, using technology as part of the solution, making investments in that area.

Q451 **Kevin Brennan:** Let us assume for a moment that a vaccine does not come very quickly, which means we could have this with us for a long time to come. Do those ideas about technology include things like trying to get the Government to do more mass testing and then give people a technological passport on their phone, which would enable them to say they had been recently tested and were clear and they were from an area with a low R rate and, therefore, could have a time-limited technological passport to go to the game without the need for social distancing? Is that the sort of thing you are thinking about?

Richard Masters: Yes, in a nutshell. That technology does not seem to be available yet. It is that sort of thing. It is the sort of investments that can be made by Premier League clubs in newly developed stadiums that can overcome some of the issues that sport more widely might face.

Q452 **Kevin Brennan:** Do you think the Government are open to that kind of suggestion or do you think they have put all their eggs in the vaccine and social distancing basket and, therefore, we might reach a stage next season where, for large parts of the season, stadiums will still be empty because the Government are not taking this approach seriously?

Richard Masters: The Government are working with sports to reopen stadiums and allow in spectators. We would like the Government to be flexible in their approach about how we can return to full capacities. Social distancing forms part of Government policy at the moment. The Government tend to be interested in what works effectively.

I go back to one of my earlier statements. The Premier League is happy to act as a guinea pig or to act as a test pilot to try to prove what can act effectively and keep fans safe and perhaps speed up the process, but only in a safe and appropriate way.

Q453 **Kevin Brennan:** Are you working at all on these ideas with other industries—for example, the rock and roll industry, the festival industry—that have very similar issues?

Richard Masters: We are not working with other industries. We are keeping this within the sports bubble. We are in constant dialogue with



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other sports that are represented on the group and more generally, but we would like that flexibility and openness to listen to ideas and proposals. As I said, we have a group of clubs in a working group that is going to come forward with some of those suggestions shortly.

Q454 **Kevin Brennan:** Might it be more likely to be effective if it were a universal solution for paid-for events—outdoor events mainly in sport, but not exclusively—across the sport and entertainment sector, rather than just a sector-specific solution?

Richard Masters: Yes. If that can be the case, we would be willing participants.

Q455 **Kevin Brennan:** The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has referenced the importance of elite stars' role in modelling the use of sport as a tool for mental health. Is there more that the Government could do to support elite sportswomen's role in modelling of mental health benefits?

Richard Masters: Is there more the Government could do? There is always more to be done in this area. I am happy to take ideas on that forward, but, as I have said about the role of women's sport, it is a big part of what our clubs do and it is part of our future plans to enthuse women and girls to play sport. The use of role models is always a big, vital part of generating that enthusiasm.

Q456 **John Nicolson:** Good morning. I was intrigued by your discussion earlier about the distinction you made between moral causes and political movements. You cited Scottish independence in particular. Of course, for many of us, Scottish independence is both a political movement and also a moral cause, so I am putting that on the record.

The World Trade Organisation recently ruled that the Government of Saudi Arabia actively promoted and supported the beoutQ, the Saudi pirate operation that has stolen commercial rights in the Premier League, Wimbledon and sport across the UK, including the Scottish Cup for three years. The World Trade Organisation also held that the Saudi Government had blocked the Premier League's own legal action a total of nine times. Has the Premier League's business ever been stolen before by a state?

Richard Masters: Our commitment to antipiracy is well known. In supporting our broadcast environment, a part of our commitment to the people who invest into the Premier League is to support them with a significant antipiracy effort. In fact, we are to some extent world leading in that respect and have success not only in this country. Our views on what has happened in Saudi Arabia with beoutQ are on public record, and we were extremely frustrated with that process.

Q457 **John Nicolson:** You say you have been very successful, but you have utterly failed with Saudi Arabia. Legal action by you has been blocked nine times. I repeat my question: is there any other example of a state



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committing piracy and trying to block you in this way when you take legal action against the pirates, who are given succour by the state?

Richard Masters: beoutQ is now off the air. We want, off the back of the WTO report and our own efforts and the efforts of other sports, Saudi Arabia to respond positively to the situation and to allow sports rights holders to protect their rights.

Q458 **John Nicolson:** I notice I have invited you twice to say whether or not any state in the world apart from Saudi Arabia has behaved like this, and you have declined to answer that. This state, of course, is now trying to buy one of your clubs. That puts you in an extraordinary position. A state that is up to the armpits in piracy is now trying to buy an English club. That is an extraordinary position for you to find yourself in.

Richard Masters: John, I have said, and I do not want to repeat myself, I cannot talk about any specific takeover of any club. I am sorry about that.

Q459 **John Nicolson:** I am not asking you to announce a timetable or to give me any details. I am just pointing out the absolutely blindingly obvious. The Saudis are responsible for piracy. You know it; I know it. You have tried to take legal action nine times. On nine separate occasions, that has been blocked by the Saudi state. You now find yourself in the extraordinary position of the rumour of the Saudi state trying to buy one of your clubs. It is clearly not a fit and proper person.

Q460 **John Nicolson:** Our owners' and directors' test is not a subjective one. It is an objective one. It allows us to disqualify potential owners—and I am talking generally here, not about any specific takeover or owner—on a whole raft of different issues. We think it is robust and it allows us to make decisions that are appropriate. The objective part of an owners' and directors' test would lead us into significant difficulty. Clubs want certainty. If they can find the right owners for their football clubs, they will be allowed through. If they are not the right people, they will not. It is not a subjective test in that respect.

Q461 **John Nicolson:** It is a bizarre test, however. Louis Tomlinson, the singer from One Direction, found himself blocked when he tried to take over Doncaster Rovers on the grounds that he was not a fit and proper person. He might be responsible for crimes against music, but you could not say much worse than that about him. You could find yourself in a position where Louis Tomlinson has been blocked from taking over a club, but the grisly Prince Mohammad bin Salman, who is implicated in the murder of Jamal Khashoggi—Mr Khashoggi was lured into the Saudi embassy and then murdered and chopped up into little pieces—passes the fit and proper test and takes over a club. That would be humiliating for you, surely.

Richard Masters: As I said, you are really asking me to comment on a confidential process, and I simply cannot do it.

Q462 **John Nicolson:** I cannot imagine a situation where someone who is



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implicated in murder is allowed to take over an English club.

Richard Masters: Again, you are asking me to talk about something, and I simply cannot.

Q463 **John Nicolson:** When do you expect to announce the decision?

Richard Masters: All processes have to conclude, and I would like the process to conclude shortly, but that is as far as I can go.

Q464 **John Nicolson:** The test normally takes three weeks, but in this case, it has been going on for months. Why has it taken so long?

Richard Masters: There is no timetable for the board, and it is the board that considers takeovers. There is no timetable set as part of the rules. There is no particular timeframe that these things normally take. Some takeovers are straightforward and others are not.

Q465 **John Nicolson:** If he passes the test—and I have a horrible feeling he might—are you going to ask him for a guarantee that he will stop Saudi piracy before he gets his hands on the club?

Richard Masters: You are, again, asking me to comment on a confidential process, and I am really sorry, but I cannot talk about it.

Q466 **John Nicolson:** I am told that the Premier League has been put under enormous pressure by the Government to look favourably on the Saudi deal. Have you spoken to anybody in the Government about it?

Richard Masters: Again, I am talking generally. During my time at the Premier League, I am not aware of the Government placing any pressure on the Premier League one way or another in relation to any takeover.

Q467 **John Nicolson:** But this one is different because the Government are very keen to keep good relations with Saudi Arabia, regardless of how brutal the regime. The Saudi takeover is different from most takeovers. Are you assuring us that there have been no discussions between Government Ministers and you, or indeed anybody in the league, about this?

Richard Masters: You are suggesting that we were put under pressure to go one way or another and that has not happened.

Q468 **John Nicolson:** There has been no pressure?

Richard Masters: No.

Q469 **John Nicolson:** Have Government Ministers expressed a view to you about whether or not they would like this to go ahead?

Richard Masters: You are asking me to talk about it, but, generally speaking, that has never happened.

Q470 **John Nicolson:** No, in this specific case, has any Government Minister expressed a view, either favourable or unfavourable, to you?



Richard Masters: No.

Q471 **John Nicolson:** I am sure we will return to this, but can we move on? Earlier in our discussion, you said the following, "There is no room for discrimination in football." Four years ago, in this Committee, the Chairman of the Football Association, Greg Clarke, told me, "It would be impossible for a gay Premier League player to come out." He went on to say that he would be "amazed if there were not a gay player in the Premier League," and that he felt "ashamed that none had ever felt the confidence to reveal that fact." Still not a single player in the Premier League has come out—that is since 2016—and he felt ashamed. Why does football lag so far behind society?

Richard Masters: I do not agree with Greg's assessment of that situation. If a gay player did wish to talk about his sexuality more openly, it is his personal right to do that if he wishes to do it, but the response would be a positive one. Things have changed. He would be embraced by the game. While it is something that has never happened during a playing career, it has happened subsequently. There is a recent example of that. Personally, I do not think that the concerns Greg expressed a number of years ago are around in the game today. It is a much more welcoming place. That just would not happen.

Q472 **John Nicolson:** Mr Masters, it is clearly not a welcoming place. If it was a welcoming place, footballers would have come out and said they are gay. The fact that they have not means that they do not feel it is a welcoming place or a safe place. Otherwise, by definition, footballers would have talked about their private lives in the way that any of the rest of us do in society from time to time.

Richard Masters: I accept the point you are making, but we do everything we can to allow that to happen if that is what an individual wants to do. We have our own partnership with Stonewall, which is designed to further the cause of the LGBT community within football and to ensure that our policies and practices are up to speed. All of our clubs do something similar in their own names. We hope the situation will continue to develop positively.

Q473 **John Nicolson:** I do not know what "will continue to develop positively" means. It has utterly failed. Whatever you are doing is not working. If there was not somebody in Parliament who had come out, Parliament would have an inquiry into it. If there was not somebody in business who had come out, big city firms would be worried about it. Trade unions would be worried if there was not a trade unionist who had come out. You are entirely unique in society in that not a single person has ever come out. You must have a theory, surely, about why football has so dismally failed to provide a safe environment and not a single player feels comfortable in coming out. You must have some idea of why this is.

Richard Masters: It is down to the individual to decide if they want to—

Q474 **John Nicolson:** No. Of course, it is down to individuals to decide. That is



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obvious. Nobody can be forced to come out. But the point is that the fact that nobody has felt able to come out is a failure within football.

Richard Masters: It is. I agree with you.

Q475 **John Nicolson:** Why do they not feel safe?

Richard Masters: We need to work harder on it. Creating a safe environment for all our employees is part of our job and part of our responsibility.

Q476 **John Nicolson:** They do not feel safe. That is why they have not come out. What is your theory? Why do you think people do not feel safe?

Richard Masters: I suspect it is the very public environment that players exist in. That is it. They are performing on a public stage. They are under an enormous amount of pressure as it is. Maybe that is why they decide to not make that choice.

Q477 **John Nicolson:** They feel that they would get abused, bullied and threatened and that is why they are not coming out. If that is your theory, I agree with you because it is blindingly obvious that that is what they must deal with.

Richard Masters: I said that I know there is a difference of opinion here, but in reality the environment that clubs create and exist within stadiums—and I move social media to one side here, where lots of things are going on—is where we need Government support in the online harms area to support people in football and particular players not to be abused for whatever it is they are saying or for their backgrounds. I feel that football is absolutely ready for a gay footballer to decide, if they wish to do so, to talk about their sexuality.

Q478 **John Nicolson:** Your advice would be, “If you feel free and want to come out, come out. It is a safe environment and you have nothing to fear.” Is that your conclusion?

Richard Masters: As I said, football is ready, yes.

Q479 **Damian Hinds:** Mr Masters, in answers to a number of my colleagues, you have distinguished between political campaigns and moral campaigns. I am interested to know how you define the difference.

Richard Masters: John raised a cause. I did not actually raise it. Somebody else used an example of Scottish independence as both moral and political. It is difficult always to draw distinctions between them, but on this occasion when we are talking about Black Lives Matter, what we are supporting, and the players are supporting, is the sentiment behind it and not any particular political organisation. While the dividing line might not always be obvious and arguments can be made both ways, it is able to draw that distinction.

Q480 **Damian Hinds:** There was the precedence and what your appetite was in future for running other campaigns, which would presumably be on other



matters. You said this was different because players had come forward and wanted to do it and, if in future players came forward and wanted to do some other kind of messaging, you would look at that. When you say that “players had come forward,” what does it take? Is it near unanimity among all the players in the Premier League? Is it a qualified majority? What is the mechanism by which you measure that players in general will want to run this campaign in the future?

Richard Masters: I did talk about all the different circumstances that led us to supporting that message. The methodology for dialogue with the players in the current environment we find ourselves in is a call pretty much like this where we speak to the club captains. We have the BAME participants’ group to talk to as well. Part of the role of those club captains is to communicate with the rest of the squad and to talk to them. On this particular occasion with those messages about the NHS and Black Lives Matter, I think it was totally unanimous. I feel that all players from whatever background supported it. It was unanimity.

Q481 **Damian Hinds:** You have mentioned a number of times the Black Lives Matter messaging and the support for the NHS. I am talking now about the future and were there to be some additional proposal come forward. Is your answer that there is not a way of directly engaging whether there is a majority or near unanimity among players for supporting some campaign, but it would emerge through this dialogue with club captains, who are expected to be in touch with their players on these matters? Is that right?

Richard Masters: Yes. There is extremely good dialogue between the clubs and their club captains and the players. It is not difficult to get a view on particular issues. This is a unique set of circumstances. If it did happen in the future, it will have to be looked at on a case-by-case basis and on its merits. There would be a high bar. We are a football competition first, not a campaigning group, and that is what we need to concentrate on. This is our response to a unique set of circumstances.

Q482 **Damian Hinds:** Can I ask you about something completely different about clubs’ community involvement and a very different aspect of cultural understanding, and that is about learning languages. I know that different Premiership clubs do all manner of different community programmes and they choose their own, but it just so happens that in this country we have relatively low levels of language learning compared to other European countries. It has improved in recent years, but it is still challenging, particularly for certain languages like German. It also just so happens that you run possibly the most linguistically diverse business in the whole country, stocked full of role models who speak the full range of languages. I had the opportunity to visit the Arsenal Double Club programme about a year ago. It is a fantastic programme for kids, not just in north London but there were kids that day there from Sheffield. They were there to improve their Spanish and their Portuguese and to be inspired by Premiership players.



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Notwithstanding the wide range of community work that clubs do, do you think that Premiership clubs could play an even bigger part, particularly in helping to support languages and the cultural understanding and seeing the wider world that goes with that?

Richard Masters: It is a good question. Of course they could. You are right. It is incredibly culturally diverse with multiple languages being spoken on the pitch and in the dressing rooms. That is a good thing. There are some role models there who could play a part. I am happy to look at that and the Double Club concept at Arsenal. I am not aware of whether that is replicated among all of our clubs. I can find out and look at that for you.

Q483 **Steve Brine:** Richard, can I turn to the subject of planning? Any organisation has a risk register. Clearly, there were risks to returning the Premier League. There are risks to crossing the road. There are risks to every bit of unlock for every bit of society. The Premier League is no different. Given what has happened in Leicester, which with the greatest optimism in the world is probably not going to be the last, what is the planning? What does the risk register say about completing this season? Is there a possibility that this season may not be completed?

Richard Masters: There is always that possibility, yes. We are dependent upon the course of the virus and the Government's decisions in response to that. We are cautiously optimistic. We are responding now to what has happened in Leicester overnight. We have been planning for quite a long time to adapt to a neutral venues model if necessary for a variety of different reasons. We can, clearly, cope with the situation in Leicester. Should it mean that the club cannot play its home matches for the foreseeable future or just this weekend, we can adapt to that. If that were to happen in multiple areas or if the course of the virus creates other risks, there is the risk that we might not be able to complete the season.

We have to get through until the end of July, complete our 380 games, look cautiously optimistically to season 2021, set a start date, work with the other football bodies to create a calendar that works for all, and then keep our fingers crossed that we can get fans back in the stadium and recover the economy. That is the plan, but that is all dependent on the course of the virus. We have shown our flexibility to that, and we will have to operate within Government guidelines.

Q484 **Chair:** I have a cheeky follow-up to that. If we were in the unfortunate position where there were multiple centres affected by this and you had to curtail the season, would Liverpool definitely still be the champions after 30 years, yes or no?

Richard Masters: As you know, the Premier League clubs decided to deal with the issue of curtailment and what would have happened in a situation where the season was not completed. We left that to a discussion that will happen when that point is going to actually occur. We



are optimistic that we can finish the season. We will have to come to some sort of agreement about what model might be used going forward. With our risk register and forward planning, we have all learned that we need to deal with these sorts of issues inside our rule book. Liverpool are now our champions, so we do not have to worry about that.

Chair: That is a relief at least for those in Liverpool, although not to this Manchester United fan. Thank you very much, Richard, for your attendance today. I know it has overrun. We are very grateful and also for the courtesy you have shown us in your answering of questions. Thank you.

We are going to break for two minutes while we set up our second witness from the Lawn Tennis Association.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Scott Lloyd.

Q485 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee hearing into the reopening of sport after Covid-19. We are now joined by our second witness, Scott Lloyd, the Chief Executive of the Lawn Tennis Association. Good morning, Scott. Thank you very much for joining us. I am sorry to keep you waiting.

My first question is about the financial impact of the cancellation of Wimbledon on your finances, given, I believe, that 90% of the money from that particular competition goes to you and to all your operations. What is that going to mean for you as an organisation? Has it helped that the All England Club had pandemic insurance?

Scott Lloyd: Yes, it certainly helped that that insurance policy is in place. It is very early to say exactly what impact it will have on our finances this year. It is naturally a very complex policy and a very complex claim. I suspect it will take many months for the All England Club to work through that.

It is true to say that we receive 90% of what is referred to as the "surplus", in effect the profit from the championships, in the normal course of the event. We use those, as a not-for-profit body, to invest back into the sport and to grow and develop the sport. We have had to cancel our own major events this year, the Fever-Tree Championships at Queen's and those we run in Nottingham, Birmingham and Eastbourne. They represent about a third of our total income, so that is also a considerable impact for us.

Q486 **Chair:** I attend the one in Birmingham as a spectator, and I was very sorry to see that go. A third of your finances from that have gone. What proportion of your money comes from Wimbledon?



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Scott Lloyd: Approximately two-thirds would come from the championships and approximately one-third from our other activities, primarily those major events that I talked about.

Q487 **Chair:** While you wait for the pandemic insurance to pay out to the All England Club, basically, you have no income coming in. Is that fair?

Scott Lloyd: Yes, that is true. We have been having to work to manage our cash flows very carefully. We have financial reserves that we have built up over time and that are largely in place to offset losses or manage through uncertainty in any given time. We have been looking in the very first instance to try to deploy those to sustain our work and, in particular, to support the wider tennis community through this very difficult time. We try to react very quickly and put in place support packages for our coaches, officials and venues across the sport and for our elite players as well to try to tide them over during a very difficult and uncertain time.

We put in place support grants for our coaches. We have some 6,000 accredited coaches, who are largely self-employed. We put in place hardship funds for venues to apply to us for interest free that will help tide them over while their doors are shut. We have worked very hard to put on a calendar of behind-closed-doors events through July for our elite players to try to give them playing opportunities and earning opportunities ahead of any return to international tennis. We have tried as far as possible to look to cover the widest possible tennis community in the near term.

Q488 **Chair:** You just referred to elite players behind closed doors. Was that the Battle of the Brits because of the broadcast rights on Amazon Prime?

Scott Lloyd: That was the first event last week. That is correct. That was hosted here at the NTC. We have other events throughout July. We have our women's equivalent event, which is the Progress Tour Women's Championships for our elite players. We have a number of what are referred to as British Tour events, which look after different cohorts of the professional athletes that we have in this country. In fact, across those events, we have free-to-air BBC streaming of two of them and we look to stream the content through our own channels, again free to air, for all of those events.

Q489 **Chair:** You have set in train a plan for a period of time to ensure that players, coaches and so on are allowed to stay within the system. How long does that plan last for? What would happen, for instance, if we were not to see, heaven forbid, a full-scale Wimbledon next year or those other events such as the Birmingham event or the Nottingham event, which bring in a third of your revenue?

Scott Lloyd: The initial efforts were to try to go as far as we possibly could to support those communities across tennis. The tennis community has also benefited from the wider Government support packages that have been put in place—for example, the self-employed income support



scheme, the business rate relief for venues and others—and for that we are very grateful.

In respect of planning for the future, as you are aware, it looks very uncertain. We do not know exactly what that looks like. I can say that we have acted early to save costs wherever we can. We have sought to support the tennis community in the near term, and we will be working towards cutting our cloth accordingly as we work through what the next year or so looks like in respect of the major events and the championships in particular.

Q490 Chair: You mentioned the Progress Tour. Are you treating female and male players the same, and the same with coaches and so on? We have seen from the Premier League that there is some disquiet over the fact that they talk about different stages of development and whether they are willing to put the same shoulder to the wheel to help the women's game. Are you committed to ensuring that women's tennis is on an absolutely level playing field?

Scott Lloyd: Yes, absolutely. Tennis is proud to be a gender-balanced sport. Children learn together, both recreationally and in competition. It can easily be played in a mixed format. We fully support the men's and women's games equally. At elite level, arguably, there is greater parity between male and female players than perhaps in any other sport. In relation to the behind-closed-doors events, the calendar we have put on through the rest of this summer gives exactly the same opportunities and the same level and scale of events for our female players and our male players.

Q491 Steve Brine: Good morning, Scott. Can I ask you about Wimbledon? I guess you are feeling rather surreal that you are sitting talking to us when it should be going on right now.

We have just been talking to the Premier League. There was a lot of noise around football. Football just kept on and on. Ministers received that well and football is back. Football is a contact sport. It leads to huge crowds, sometimes outside the stadiums, not literally outside stadiums during matches, but we were just talking about the scenes at Liverpool last weekend. Given that you are much more than 2 metres apart on either side of the tennis net, do you feel that you were hasty in cancelling Wimbledon?

Scott Lloyd: One of the biggest challenges for international tennis is the international nature of its player field. If you can imagine across male and female, 128-draw singles events, doubles events, mixed events and wheelchair events, the number of professional players who would need to travel from all different parts of the globe to attend and play in the championships made the logistics in that particular respect extremely challenging. That pretty much remains the case now. We are only going to start seeing some early returns to the international tour during August.



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The logistics are still being worked through and will need to be managed very carefully as different countries enter this crisis at different times, and there are different restrictions on travel arrangements and quarantine. All of those factors and all of those variables in particular affect tennis and the international nature of its player field.

Q492 Steve Brine: Football has a very international player field. They travel a lot, too. Did you even discuss it, or did you just say, "We are not doing it this year"? Did you even discuss how you could do socially distanced tennis, not on the court but around the court, with crowd noise, as they have done for the Premier League football and people just watch it on television? Let's face it, because of the size of a tennis court and the crowds around a tennis court, the vast majority of people watch and enjoy Wimbledon on the telly. I wonder whether you considered that, or was it always going to be impossible?

Scott Lloyd: Naturally, the decision to cancel the championships is one for the All England Club, but I know that they were incredibly keen to see the championships go ahead. We certainly did not want to see the championships cancelled. You are right in that it is a fantastic showcase for our sport in this country. It gives us an amazing shop window. In fact, it is that visibility of tennis that we are working extremely hard to maintain during this time to ensure that we continue to engage with our fan base. However, just the sheer logistics of organisation events of that scale and the international travel made it an impossibility this year.

Q493 Kevin Brennan: What has the uptake of outdoor tennis facilities by the public been since they reopened in June? Do you have any breakdown of groups by socioeconomics, ethnicity or gender in relation to the take-up?

Scott Lloyd: The anecdotal evidence is that players have been returning to the court with great alacrity, and it has been extremely well received. Initial data sources imply that our bookings through online systems are up 250%. That is great news, but I would stress that we are talking about outdoor tennis right now. We are particularly focused on and disappointed by the fact that we are not going to be able to resume indoor tennis from 4 July like many other activities or leisure pursuits.

The anecdotal evidence right now is very good, but with tennis resuming only halfway through May, we do not yet have a full month of data that we have been able to segment down into different categories. I would be very happy to provide that insight and those datapoints as and when we are able to formalise them as we go through the coming months.

Q494 Kevin Brennan: That would be very helpful. I am quite interested in the point about tennis in public parks. Certainly, in my constituency, a lot of what were formerly tennis courts that were available to the public have been turned into beach volleyball courts, basketball courts or multiuse football court areas. What is happening to tennis in our public parks?

Scott Lloyd: I agree with you. It is an area we are particularly focused on, and we absolutely want to try to provide the tools, the plans and the



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investment we can to help support park tennis to grow and thrive again. We have recently launched a series of initiatives in park accessibility for tennis. We have been investing in a digital platform called LTA Rally, which enables customers to find their nearest court, book a court and, if needed, find someone to play with, which is often one of the barriers to participating in tennis.

We have identified over 1,000 parks across the country where we want to grant fund up to £7 million to the local authorities involved to put in gate access systems that allow customers to book the courts. This is at no cost to the local authorities, and it is not income-generating for the LTA. It is about trying to ensure that the park courts remain viable and sustainable for the local authorities and are maintained over the long term.

We have also recently acquired a business called Local Tennis Leagues, which looks to put recreational competitive tennis back into parks. We are hoping it might be the first baby steps of the tennis equivalent of Parkrun in that you could be sure that in your local park you could access a friendly, welcoming, recreational competitive form of tennis.

We would be very keen to discuss and work with the Government on how you could provide us with support for local authorities to maintain the sports facilities in parks and work with the LTA to help roll out key park-based initiatives. We feel that that is incredibly important for us.

Q495 **Kevin Brennan:** Do you know what has happened to the number of tennis courts in parks in recent years? Do you have the figure for that?

Scott Lloyd: I do not have recent figures on the extent to which tennis courts have fallen out of stock, but I do know that we have a very healthy tennis court stock in parks. Through the work we have done, we have identified just over 1,000 parks where we want to invest money, with the support of local authorities, to ensure that we can make the courts as viable and thriving as possible.

Q496 **Kevin Brennan:** Has the Tennis for Free charity initiative had any impact on participation rates or inclusion?

Scott Lloyd: Yes. Tennis for Free is a fantastic charity that we work with very closely. We have invested £650,000 into Tennis for Free over the last three years with a view to rolling out those programmes into as many different parks as we can. We would be looking to bring Tennis for Free along with us and into those parks as and when they are enabled and as and when local authorities join in the programmes.

Q497 **Kevin Brennan:** Is there any evidence that it has had any impact on inclusion?

Scott Lloyd: We launched our vision last month of tennis opened up. Diversity and inclusion and taking tennis to new and diverse audiences sits at the very heart of our ambitions in that respect. Tennis for Free, particularly from an affordability perspective, is just one of the key parts,



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along with many others, that we are working on to try to ensure we meet those aims.

Q498 **Kevin Brennan:** People have been talking about this for decades in tennis. Do you think any real progress is actually being made or are you just banging your head against a wall?

Scott Lloyd: No, I am delighted to say that over the last year—ironically, the year to the end of March—we saw participation gains across many of our different metrics for the first time in a long time. I am cautiously optimistic that the work we are doing is going in the right direction.

We are proud of our gender balance. We are proud of the initiatives we have to try to take tennis to new and diverse audiences, whether that is Tennis for Free or, for example, our Serves programme, which specifically targets taking tennis into harder-to-reach and under-represented communities. That programme is only a couple of years in and we have 30,000 participants. Three-quarters of those participants come from the 30% most deprived communities in the country and over half are from a BAME background. We are confident that we have the right programmes now to try to make progress in that area.

Q499 **Clive Efford:** Following on from that, I want to ask about facilities in parks provided by local authorities. Have you seen a loss of facilities over recent years when local authorities have been forced to make cuts and can no longer maintain tennis courts?

Scott Lloyd: I do not have the specific data to say to what extent tennis court stock has been lost. I do know, though, that we have a fantastic tennis court provision in parks up and down the country. Our priority right now is to make sure that we are able to support local authorities to make those parks as viable and sustainable as they can be. We have ringfenced specific investment to provide to local authorities to help that happen.

One thing I would ask, if I may, is that we would welcome any discussions we can have to help drive adoption of those programmes into local authorities to make sure we can bring the tennis courts to life.

Q500 **Clive Efford:** How much do you partner with other sports to bring in economies of scale when working with the community and in schools?

Scott Lloyd: We would welcome discussing a facility investment strategy that we launched last year. We have quite specifically identified 96 locations—72 in England, 12 in Wales, 12 in Scotland—where there is not an indoor tennis court available on a pay-as-you-play basis within 15 to 20 minutes' drive time, depending on whether you are in an urban or rural area. We had identified the need and had committed to investing £125 million over the next decade to specifically target those 96 locations and provide the tennis infrastructure to ensure we can deliver tennis on an all-year-round basis rather than being perceived as just a summer sport.



I welcomed the Government's manifesto for investing £550 million into the Football Foundation and to work with other sports to help provide and support sports facilities. The LTA Trust is tennis's equivalent of the Football Foundation. Not only are we in dialogue with the Football Foundation, but we would also very much welcome discussion as to how we could consider working together to deliver that facility investment strategy now that some of those funds and resources have necessarily been diverted to support the tennis community in this coronavirus crisis.

Q501 Clive Efford: Indoor tennis is very demanding in space efficiency and cost. Is that setting the bar too high? If you are struggling to get into communities that hitherto have been excluded or do not have access to tennis, is that really what your priority should be?

Scott Lloyd: That is precisely why it is a priority. We currently have a network of 52 community indoor tennis centres across the country. By definition, those 52 have typically been built in locations where there is a greater level of certainty that they can be sustained. The harder-to-reach communities are those that we now have to go after to ensure that we can genuinely open up our sport and deliver tennis on an all-year-round basis. That sits at the heart of that particular part of the plan. Whether that bar is too high, we feel we have to set the bar high if we want to ensure that we have a growing and thriving sport.

Q502 Clive Efford: Tennis has struggled to get into what I would describe as working-class communities over the years, but other sports have been quite effective in working in those communities. I am thinking of community football trusts at all levels of football and also rugby league and the RFU. They have done an enormous amount in many of those working-class communities. How much do you partner with them to give you that reach into the communities where tennis was perhaps under-represented in previous times?

Scott Lloyd: We have regular dialogue with our peers across sports and across the other national governing bodies. We are also fortunate that, as tennis, we have some 2,700 registered venues across the country and the parks I have already referenced. We have a very wide network of venues that we can deliver tennis through.

The crucial thing for us is to ensure that we make those courts available, we open them up to as wide an audience as possible and we promote the affordability of tennis, which actually is much more affordable than the perceptions might be. That goes to the heart of our vision. We want to break down the perceptions or the barriers that people feel they may have in respect of tennis and really demonstrate that it is a sport for anyone.

Q503 Clive Efford: I am sorry but if I could push the point, it sounds like you are saying, "We have these centres in communities already. People should come to us and we are not going to go to them," but should you be reaching out into those communities? For instance, with short tennis



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and all the rest of it, it is not about the structure of a tennis court. It is about getting the kids to pick up a racquet and practice hand-eye coordination and see if they like the sport, is it not?

Scott Lloyd: Absolutely. I can speak for myself and my children. They have learned to play by using a table-tennis bat and a sponge ball against the kitchen window.

You are absolutely right about how we get people into our sport. We are going to the communities through the targeting of the parks that I have referred to. In fact, two weeks ago we wrote to 207 local authorities to specifically urge them to adopt this investment we want to provide and the technology solutions we want to provide to make sure the courts are viable.

I mentioned Serves earlier, which specifically takes tennis into town halls, mosques and local sports clubs and provides tennis in a form where kids can pick up a racquet and can play. At the beginning of last week, we launched a national marketing campaign called Play Your Way. It is, again, encouraging anybody to pick up a racquet, pick up a ball and play however it suits them, whether it is against a wall, on a short tennis court, in a local park or wherever they can. Everything we are doing is to try to make tennis available in that way.

Q504 **Clive Efford:** Are you able to give any examples of where you partner with other sport disciplines within the community to reach out to kids to get them active and have a taster of your sport at an early age?

Scott Lloyd: Naturally, we will share court space in leisure centres, whether it is with netball or on occasions badminton, and sometimes in parks. The point was made earlier in respect of basketball, netball and multiuse courts. There is a number of instances whereby tennis is seen and played alongside others. We believe that having those community hubs where a number of different sports are available in the one place is absolutely critical to the viability and sustainability of all of those sports facilities because it gives the customers a choice. They can pick up a tennis racquet in one week and pick up a basketball in another. That choice and diversity ensures that the customers come back week after week and, hopefully, month after month. We are absolutely behind looking to try to achieve those sorts of aims and work with other sports.

Q505 **Chair:** I have one final question, Scott, a bit of a cheeky one. What did you make of Mr Djokovic's Adria Tour and what went on there? It seemed to have all the social distancing of an American frat house party.

Scott Lloyd: He has now apologised publicly, which of course he is right to do, but what happened shows the importance of taking full precautions, as we have been seeking to do at the National Tennis Centre in Roehampton throughout this crisis and, for example, as was seen at the Battle of the Brits last week, and of course will be for the upcoming British Tour events as well. Taking all the necessary precautions and considering the safety, health and wellbeing of all of the players and in



fact more broadly than that is absolutely critical. Yes, I am aware he has apologised, and he is right to have done that.

Chair: Thank you, Scott. Scott Lloyd, Chief Executive of the Lawn Tennis Association, thank you for joining us today.

Before we move on to our third witness, Ali Donnelly from the This Girl Can campaign, we are going to watch a short video concerning the campaign.

A video was played.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Ali Donnelly.

Q506 **Chair:** Good morning, Ali Donnelly from the This Girl Can campaign and Executive Director of Digital Marketing and Communications at Sport England. Thank you. That was a great video, by the way. What did you learn from your Join the Movement campaign about exercise levels during lockdown? Was there a gender split in the reported levels of exercise? What were the reported levels for young people and children?

Ali Donnelly: From pre-lockdown statistics of activity levels of children, young people and women, and more broadly across all the demographics, we had an all-time high. We were starting from a place of real growth going into lockdown where more women than ever were active heading into March and April. We have been talking over the last 12 or 14 weeks about what has been happening to activity levels, and broadly they have held up, but we have seen the exacerbation of inequalities that existed before lockdown, so fewer women than men have been able to be active throughout this time; particularly disabled people and people with long-term health conditions were really struggling.

This Girl Can played a really important part in helping to close the gender gap. We were worried that women have found it difficult in recent months for a variety of reasons. There is a lot of very interesting research out there from people such as the IFS, Women in Sport, about what has been particularly difficult, the burden of care, childcare responsibilities and so on, amplifying gender stereotypical norms that existed before. As we come out of lockdown, there is a widening of that gender gap. At its worst, it was 10%, the ability of women versus men to be active at this time.

Interestingly, you mentioned children, and one of the positive things is that more girls than boys have been active during lockdown. That is unusual because ordinarily the gender gap between boys and girls is quite significant. I think that is telling us that probably boys are more used to team sports, formal organised activity at school, and they take part in activity in that way, whereas girls have used this time to be active in a way that they want to be. There are some interesting lessons there for everybody who was involved in putting on girls' sports.



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In summary, good momentum going into lockdown, some areas to worry about coming out. However, there was great progress and we should not lose sight of that.

Q507 **John Nicolson:** Thank you, Ali, for joining us. Sport England research has shown inequalities in exercise opportunities are particularly stark when comparison is made between society in general and black and minority ethnic people, especially black women. Why do you think that is?

Ali Donnelly: Our focus on inequality has sharpened significantly in recent years, and that is partly because very often the challenge in helping people to take part in sport and activity is that the people who stand to benefit the most struggle the most. There are intersectional problems here with not just ethnicity but also affluence, gender, accessibility and so on. Our work has been to try to shine a light on what these challenges are. I don't know if you have seen it, but in January we published the most comprehensive picture ever of what we would call an ethnicity gap in sport participation and it showed, pretty starkly, that if you are from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background, you are far less likely to be physically active. For example, 61% of white British women are active in the definition of what the CMO would call active, but that drops to 49% if you are an Asian woman.

There are significant challenges there and we are increasingly focused on tackling them through programme investment and shining a light into what is happening there.

Q508 **John Nicolson:** Why do you think that has happened? Why is there that big gap?

Ali Donnelly: Partly, it is about access to opportunities; partly, it is a lack of understanding by those who deliver sport and activity of what specific groups want. For girls, for example, whether black girls or Asian girls, there are often cultural challenges around being active. You saw on the ad there, for example, the brilliant woman, Glynis, who is in the swimming pool. She talked quite a lot, when we launched the campaign, about some challenges. She has very thick hair and it is difficult for her to wear a swimming cap, for example. Our job is to make sure that providers understand the barriers that specific groups face, whether they are BAME, disabled, women, and are doing something specific about it.

Q509 **John Nicolson:** What effect do you think the lockdown has had on that gulf that you identify?

Ali Donnelly: We are looking at two challenges. One is activity levels. I talked about the exacerbation of the gender stereotypical norms that are reverting back a little bit, and I mentioned some of the evidence around that. As we re-emerge, we need to be very alive to that and make sure, in the work we were doing to close the gap, that it does not worsen.

The second thing—and you have talked quite a lot about this today already, with Richard in particular—is the lack of visibility of elite



women's sport, but 2019 was obviously a huge year for seeing women's sport on television, reading about it in newspapers, hearing about it when you are doing your shopping or whatever. The three big world cups—football, netball and cricket—were huge and visibility is important for participation and growth. It is also very important for girls to see that whatever they want to do, they can do. That will have an impact. There are lots of reasons for that. It is not necessarily just about men's versus women's sport, but those are the sorts of issues that we are grappling with now as we come out of lockdown.

Finally, I would say that the continued closure of gyms, pools and leisure facilities for women is worrying because women disproportionately use those facilities. If you take, for example, regular fitness classes, the classes that are offered by leisure centres, 80% of people who attend those are women. We were disappointed, like others—I think Scott mentioned it just now—that the next wave of reopening does not include indoor facilities and we are very hopeful that is going to change soon. Those facilities are ready to go and are very important sessions for women.

Q510 John Nicolson: Obviously, sport is devolved, as is the process by which we are coming out of lockdown. It is different in Scotland and England. Looking to the future, is there anything more to help address this inequality gulf that either my own Government in Scotland could do, or indeed the UK Government down in London could do for England?

Ali Donnelly: We work closely with the other sports councils, including Scotland's. It is interesting that today there is a conversation happening right now where the chief executive of Sport England and the chair are looking at race in sport, and all the home nation councils and UK Sport are involved in that. I think we are starting to become a lot better at sharing best practice and understanding the challenges that people across different audiences face. We will have to see a lot more of that to tackle some of the challenges coming the way of the sports sector in particular in the next months and years.

Q511 Alex Davies-Jones: Thank you, Ali, for joining us this morning. You have already mentioned some of the stats that have shown that women have been disproportionately impacted as a result of the coronavirus in having to bear the brunt of childcare and home schooling on top of the financial pressures of being in an insecure workplace. They are more likely to have been furloughed, for example, or at risk of redundancy. Do you have any stats, or do you know of any stats, that show the impact this is having on women's mental health?

Ali Donnelly: We don't, but as part of our work we have a piece of research called Active Lives that tracks activity levels across the year. We have just started asking about loneliness and mental health, so I think we will start to see a bit more of that in the months ahead.



Everybody knows the importance of sport and activity to your mental health and wellbeing. It is not just physical. We know that many people who have not been able to get active in recent months are the people who would benefit most from being active. The whole sector has a job to do here, to make sure that those who are worried about being active again—women who are worried about being active and people with long-term health conditions who have not been outside very much at all benefit the most, physically and mentally, from being active. I do not have statistics for you, but I can say that that is a huge factor in the work that the entire sector has to do, to get people back out there as soon as they are allowed to.

Q512 Alex Davies-Jones: Absolutely. Do you have any particular sports or exercise that you would recommend to be more beneficial in helping in this regard?

Ali Donnelly: In the Join the Movement campaign, which we launched during lockdown and which was really successful, we set up an entire digital offering for people of all different backgrounds. Whether you were inactive before and just wanted to understand how to stretch and move, whether you were wanting to do online yoga and so on—it is all on the Sport England website, which is a useful plug. If you look up Join the Movement, we have set it all out there, with expert advice from the entire sector.

Q513 Alex Davies-Jones: Have you seen the Government's efforts addressing this opportunity, and is there anything that you could recommend Government do more in order to promote this?

Ali Donnelly: Some of the very interesting discussions that have been had around, say, obesity—we have been talking quite a lot about it at Sport England. Tackling the obesity challenge is complex and it is great to see that the PM is prioritising it, but tackling obesity is not just about diet and nutrition. It is also about your fitness and your physical health.

One of the things we would like to do is to make sure that sport and physical activity is front and centre of lots of Government intervention around people's health. I am sure everybody would agree that there has never been a time when people have been more concerned about their own health and have thought more about their own health, whether that is what they are eating, how fit they are, what sort of activity they are doing, so we would like that to happen. We really want to see indoor facilities opening.

Lastly, I think lots of people here will be interested in what is happening in recreational sports, team sports. We are working with a number of national governing bodies now, including football, rugby union, rugby league, hockey and others, to put proposals forward to Government to get team sports back so that children, girls, and women can go back to playing cricket and football again. On all these things, we want the Government to provide a clear timeline for their return.



Q514 Alex Davies-Jones: The video we have just seen is a fantastic advert from the This Girl Can campaign. We know that one of the big things that you are pushing on is that fear is the commonly associated emotion for women and girls in relation to exercise, whether that is fear of performance, fear of how they look, fear of costs. You have already mentioned that you have seen an increase in girls more than boys being active, which is really encouraging to know, but as we go forward do you think the coronavirus pandemic has had an effect on women's fears about physical exercise?

Ali Donnelly: Yes, it has. We know that because women have told people like Women in Sport, who have done some research into it. Around 40% of women told that charity that they were concerned that they were losing their fitness and that lockdown would have a long-term impact on their fitness levels. The entire premise of the This Girl Can campaign from 2015 to now is based on the insight that women fear being judged, whether it is about how they look or how fit they are. We have had a period of months now, three or four months, where lots of women have not been able to be active at all.

Yes, we do think so, both because they told us and because we know a lot about how women feel through years and years of campaigning to help reduce the gender gap. That is a very real fear. If you have not been to your gym class for three or four months, and you naturally feel nervous about how you might look or feel there, that is just going to be exacerbated. We are working with providers to make sure that women feel very welcome and it is understood that it is going to feel a bit different and everybody is going to feel a bit nervous.

Q515 Alex Davies-Jones: You mentioned the importance of seeing elite sports people in that role-model role. The DCMS Committee is leading a cultural renewal taskforce on the reopening of recreation and leisure centres, which you have mentioned. There is currently only one sportsperson on that panel and that is Alex Scott, the footballer, out of a group of nine, and only three of those people are women. Do you think this balance is proportionate?

Ali Donnelly: Sitting underneath that are specific taskforces looking at the sectors DCMS is most concerned about. Our chief executive is sitting on the taskforce that meets regularly with the Sports Minister and others and that is feeding up into the cultural group that you mention there. The sports sector has had its voice heard and is part of the day-to-day conversations, but we can always do more with gender balance and with being more vocal about the benefits our sector brings.

Q516 Alex Davies-Jones: In our session with Richard Masters from the Premier League earlier, we discussed the relevance of the promotion of the Premier League coming back, the men's game. There was not a single mention of the women's game during the press conferences. Do you think that the DCMS is an agenda setter when it comes to boosting the profile and resources given to women's sport?



Ali Donnelly: I think there has been a great improvement made and the visibility that we talked about for 2019 has catapulted women's sport into the spotlight, and it is not going away. We saw the Secretary of State talking about the importance of women's sport recently at one of the press conferences that he led. I think the Department is alive to the fact that women's sport has not been as visible as it would like.

This is not just about men's sport coming back and women's sport not coming back, it is about sports that have resources to come back versus sports that do not have as many resources to come back. In its own way, personally I think it tells the story of women's sport perfectly. Historically, it has had decades of underinvestment, and at a time when it needs investment—if you want to do mass testing in lockdown biosecure venues, you need to have resources and infrastructure to do it and a very limited amount of women's sport has that. It tells the story in its own way quite well. We have made great progress, but now when you need investment and infrastructure, we do not have it, but neither do other men's sports, and I think DCMS is very alive to that. DCMS has been engaging very widely with women's sport and with us.

Q517 **Alex Davies-Jones:** If I were to give you a magic red pen on the Department, what would you do? What would you mark them as and recommend that they do differently in order to boost the situation?

Ali Donnelly: We are an arm's length body of DCMS, and we all need to continue working to tackle inequalities. It is an increasing focus for us all. For example, our investment programmes are not focused as heavily on national governing bodies as they perhaps used to be. They are equally weighted and focused on people who can deliver activity to communities that are difficult to reach. I don't like that phrase, but they are difficult because there are many inactive people there. I think it is about continuing the laser focus on inequality. That is what Covid-19 has done. It has shone a light on inequalities across our society. Sport is no different and the inequalities have shown themselves. There is a huge job to be done.

I don't know if I have answered your question brilliantly, but I suppose my answer is to continue thinking about sport as something that affects communities and it is not just about the elite end of sport.

Alex Davies-Jones: Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much, Ali.

Q518 **Chair:** Do you think, Ali, that it should be a prerequisite, before a sport is brought back, that it shows a viable plan for bringing women's sport back?

Ali Donnelly: I think men's sports are involved in doing that now. The ECB talked yesterday about the challenges they have had, and they were very honest about that. They are able to bring men's county cricket back in August but have not been able to give the same date to the women's game. The ECB set out why that is. It is a new competition and the infrastructure just is not there.



I have been quite encouraged by what the FA, the ECB, the RFU and others have been saying. There are plans there to bring women's sport back and I think what has been really good about the momentum at the elite end is that there is pressure on national governing bodies now. People expect them to prioritise women and girls. I always make the point that for most sports women and girls are the growth areas. That is where the numbers are increasing. In many sports, though not all, the number of men is flatlining or declining.

I am not concerned that there is not a sharp focus on growing the women's and girls' games and bringing them back. I think there are very complicated challenges to do with historical underinvestment. That is not just from governing bodies or Government; it is also from broadcasters and commercial sponsors, and so on.

Q519 Kevin Brennan: Many years ago, I was involved as a Minister in the Education Department with responsibility for school sport in trying to get more girls involved in sport. I wonder if you recall that in 2012, when the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, abolished the two-hour requirement for compulsory school sport, he said a lot of schools were meeting that by doing things like Indian dance. Do you think that that set back the cause and is partly responsible for why we have not had further progress, that kind of attitude towards activities like dance?

Ali Donnelly: I think what is important in school settings is that we understand that for many children and young people the school's facilities are absolutely vital. We know, for example, that teenage girls, black and Asian children and children from less affluent families, rely extremely heavily on school provision and that we have to find new ways to engage children.

I don't remember that. I don't know much about what happened at that time, but what we know is that the activity levels of children and young people are not good enough. They are on the rise, but there are massive challenges there. When it comes to girls' activity in particular, we know that what girls want is enjoyableness. They are less focused on skill acquisition and more focused on enjoyment. What we are trying to do is work with girls, teachers and schools to give girls access to what they really want, and that is not always—

Q520 Kevin Brennan: To be clear, things like yoga and dance and so on are very valid ways of trying to get more activity and participation among girls and women in particular.

Ali Donnelly: Definitely. The fact that more girls than boys are active during lockdown, which is really unusual, is probably telling us that if you empower girls to do things they want to do, they will choose the things that are right for them.

I would mention that we are just about to launch a new platform called Studio You, which has been a couple of years in the making. It is being



piloted through the schools in September. It is a Netflix-style workout platform, specifically to help less active people or engage teenage girls to improve their experience of PE. One of the things that This Girl Can has taught us is that for many girls their experience of PE at school, which they did not enjoy, carries on for the rest of their lives. They often resist being active or resist taking part in formal sport because it reminds them of something they did not enjoy. There is a really interesting conversation about activity in schools that we are engaged in.

Our view is that when schools come back in September, there must be space for PE and activities within the curriculum, even though there will be pressure on the schools and the teachers for space and timings. We have talked about the mental and physical benefits that sport and activity can bring, and that is especially important for children.

Q521 **Kevin Brennan:** That is absolutely right, which is why it was such a devastatingly shallow thing to say at the time. What more could Government do to support elite sportswomen's role modelling of mental health benefits?

Ali Donnelly: It is not necessarily just Government's job to do that. Mental health is one of the conversations that are happening in sport now that were not happening five or six years ago. Recently, the conversations have also been about race and inequalities in sport. There are topics of conversations that are suddenly widely talked about.

I think what sports can do, and what athletes can do, as much as they can, is to be honest about the mental health challenges that they have faced. We can encourage them to do that. I am not necessarily sure how much Government can use athletes to do it, but sports need to make sure that there is a safe space for their athletes to talk about how they are feeling, whether that is privately in the lead-up to big sporting events, or off their own bat, talking to the media about how they feel.

We have seen some athletes really help break the stigma around mental health in recent years. Our chief executive was on a call recently with lots of athletes and Prince William talking about the impact that it makes if you are an influential figure in society. Whether that is as an athlete or a celebrity in other ways, you talking makes a huge difference. I think it is really just about continuing to normalise that conversation and making sure that sport is playing its part through various initiatives.

Q522 **Damian Hinds:** It was very encouraging to hear what you said, Ali, about girls' participation in exercise during lockdown. We know that anyway, in any year, there is a pattern where quite a lot of girls drop out of sport, having been active and then there comes a certain point, in secondary school, where they drop out. Presumably, that has still been the case this year, and it is going to be harder to try to re-energise people. Could you say a word about that trend and where you see it going? Are we seeing any improvements?



Ali Donnelly: Yes, we are seeing some improvements, but I should be honest and say that the gender gap is pretty clear between boys and girls. It is 51% to 43% and less than half of children and young people meet the CMO guidelines currently. We would present that as progress because it has increased, but they are still pretty stark numbers.

On the point about girls' activity, we see the gender gap start in year 1, and it carries on right through to secondary school, but what girls are telling us is that often the provision they get in schools is not what they want. I mentioned our Studio You product, which pilots from September. We have invested in both the research behind that and the product. It is intended, in part, to tackle that, to help teachers to have other ways to engage girls and teenagers. It is not going to be the "be all and end all" solution, but it is a start to try to understand a bit more how we can get girls to stay active in ways that are right for them.

For many girls, playing on the school football team or netball team is not what they want. It is not the kind of PE provision they are interested in. As girls become women and move into adulthood, team sport is very important, but activity is much wider than that. It is the fitness classes, swimming, walking, running, exercising with friends. We should be starting to replicate what they are offered in schools with what women end up doing when they are older.

There is a huge piece of work going on with schools. I reiterate that it is really important—you made the point that it is going to be harder to engage girls—that when schools do go back the space remains for activity and PE, notwithstanding the pressure that schools are under.

Q523 **Damian Hinds:** If we have time, I would like to unpack this a bit more. I think we all recognise that having some form of physical activity is really important. When we talk about young people, children, developing character and resilience, people will often say there are different types of character building that come from different types of activities, some things that you do alone, but there are different things that develop, particularly from team sports and team activities, first of all, and competitive team sports specifically. Are you totally agnostic about the different sporting activities that children in particular undertake?

Ali Donnelly: No, not at all. It would be remiss of me, as someone representing Sport England, to not talk about the importance of sport in its truest sense. Of course, that is important. You will remember from the Department for Education days the work in embedding the idea of physical literacy being very important for children, and you can develop that in lots of different ways.

The point I am making, because I am talking about girls more specifically here, is that some formal sport—and traditional sport I suppose we are talking about here—is incredibly important. I spent my whole life playing rugby, so I believe that very strongly. But at the same time, we have to try to address the fact that so many girls feel left out of that system and



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don't want to do it and don't get offered anything else. We are trying to help plug that gap so that both things can co-exist.

I think it is about changing the narrative from being about in school we do X and Y and that is it and opening it up a bit more to say what else might engage the children over here who are now inactive or not interested in this. We are doing this alongside teachers. This is not us deciding here is a product you should use instead. These things will co-exist and the more choice you give young people, the more chance you probably have of embedding those physical activity habits earlier.

Q524 Damian Hinds: Just to be clear, you are not totally indifferent between activity in general and traditional sports specifically?

Ali Donnelly: No, I think they absolutely sit alongside each other. Many women who play team sports, for example, throughout their adulthood, will also be doing yoga or walking or cycling. Yes, absolutely. It is about offering a choice of both and the two things sitting alongside each other. Formal sports, the things you talked about at the start, building resilience, understanding teamwork, being able to transfer the things that you learn as part of a team into your future life—we often hear leaders of organisations say that being part of sport gave them transferable skills for life. I think it is really about the mix of the two.

Q525 Damian Hinds: You spoke earlier about physical literacy, and I think all of us these days are more conscious of the links between physical health and mental health—healthy body, healthy mind, and vice versa. As you know, from September health education will be mandatory in schools, alongside relationship and sex education. Most schools, of course, do variations of it anyway. But what do you think is the opportunity of health education being formally on the curriculum for everybody to help to embed and sustain positive attitudes to sport, particularly among girls?

Ali Donnelly: You could probably get a person more expert than me to comment on this, but we are still in the midst of our public health crisis and I think that how people feel about their health, whether you are a parent or an adult thinking about your own health, gives us an opportunity here and a momentum behind being fitter, healthier, more active, eating better, and so on. There is a door here that we can push. I referenced obesity earlier as an example of that. If the Prime Minister is determined to really tackle obesity, physical activity and sport absolutely should be at the heart of it.

When you are talking about public health in schools, we will never be in a better time to talk to children, work with them and help them to understand that the healthier you are—whether that is your fitness, your mental wellbeing, the food that you choose to eat—the better served you are as you go through your life. It is always the right time to do that, but probably the time has never been more right than it is now.

Q526 Clive Efford: Ali, do we do enough sport in schools?



Ali Donnelly: I think the challenge for sport in schools, as I have been saying, is about offering something that helps everyone and is not so formal and so specific in its structure. I think I have referenced some of the work that we are doing in schools to help with that. The activity levels of children and young people in England are not good enough. Less than half of children are meeting the guidelines. It is something that we have been talking about for quite some time now.

I should say that schools play a very important role in helping children to get active, but we are responsible primarily for outside-school sport and activity. The Department for Education has the people to ask specifically about this and their plans for the curriculum, but we are increasingly focusing on investment, research and insight into what is happening outside school. For example, we are very much in favour of all the work that the Department for Transport is doing on active travel and how children can fit into the picture there, walking to school, cycling to school, scootering to school, all of those things that fit into the new world that we are about to go into. It is not just what is happening inside school, as important as that is. Sport England's focus is very much outside of that, but we are continuing to work with teachers and the Department for Education to make sure that everything that is being done there offers something to everyone.

Q527 **Clive Efford:** I know you are not primarily responsible for school sport, but do you think teachers are trained in physical education enough during their teacher training?

Ali Donnelly: We are investing in teacher training at both primary and secondary school level to help with this. Teachers themselves are asking for more support and more training, and we are working with DCMS and the Department for Education to deliver that. Teachers do an amazing job under difficult circumstances to run PE and sport, many of them giving up countless hours outside of school hours to do so with games and training in the evenings and so on, but they are asking for more training and we are investing in that.

Q528 **Clive Efford:** The answer is no but it is getting better?

Ali Donnelly: Your words, but I think the answer is that teachers are doing a really good job, they are seeking more training and we are helping to provide it.

Q529 **Clive Efford:** Is there anything that you would expect the DfE or DCMS to do to improve that situation?

Ali Donnelly: One of things we have seen already—I have talked about obesity already a couple of times—is a real working together across Departments to look at what we could do, what proposals we can put forward that can contribute to the strategy. There have been some really positive conversations happening between DfE, the Department of Health and Social Care, ourselves, DCMS and others to look at improving provision for children and young people, whether it is in school or



outside, as part of that strategy. I think it is front of mind and front and centre of what we want to do. Our Secretary of State for Health at the moment was previously a Secretary of State in the Department that looks after sport, so I know it is obviously an important area for him. As I already mentioned, we are pushing an open door here.

Q530 Clive Efford: I recall a figure from a Sport and Recreation Alliance report back in, I think, 2014, or it might have been earlier than that. That figure was that the cost to the economy of inactivity was about £16 billion a year, and they anticipated that by 2049, it would grow to £49 billion a year. Do you think we recognise enough how much inactivity is costing our economy and our health service?

Ali Donnelly: You are absolutely right to point that out. One in six adults in the UK dies as a result of being inactive. We can talk a lot about the progress we are making with numbers. From our last piece of research, we can see that 63% of people were active by the definition of active, but 11 million people were still inactive. I think the answer is no. I think probably people do not pause to think too much, or enough, about the impact of inactivity and that is deeply worrying, particularly at a time, now, when we are talking about public health in a way that I have certainly never seen us talk about it before. That is our job too, as Sport England, to tackle levels of inactivity and increasingly that is where our investments and expertise are going.

Q531 Clive Efford: Was Sport England consulted about the opening of gymnasiums and swimming pools? Are you aware of that?

Ali Donnelly: Yes, we are among a number of people across the sector, including ukactive, which you all know about, who have been putting forward plans that were being put out there and the mitigations that they put in place to meet the public health guidelines. We have been talking to Government pretty consistently throughout lockdown. As I said, we were disappointed that gyms and leisure centres were not included in the 4 July reopening, not just because of the health of the nation; almost 13 million people are using gyms and leisure centres weekly. We were part of the conversation, and we are still talking daily. My understanding is that public health officials, in the coming days, are going to visit some facilities and some sites, with a view, I hope, to giving them the green light ASAP. Let's hope that impasse ends pretty soon.

Q532 Clive Efford: Did you get an explanation as to why they could not open when we are opening pubs and other facilities where it may be even more difficult to achieve social distancing even of 1 metre? Did you get an explanation as to why they will not open at that time?

Ali Donnelly: The Prime Minister was asked, I think in one of his final press conferences, why it was not part of the reopening and he set out the reasons that I guess have been put forward by health officials. From our perspective, we feel they are ready to open now, not just because this is important to activity levels but there are many local authority-owned



leisure centres and trusts that are struggling financially and many of these centres support, disproportionately, activity levels for under-represented groups. The Prime Minister set out the rationale, but we think that the sector has done an incredibly difficult and impressive job of addressing all the concerns, and we hope that we will hear some news on that in the coming days.

Q533 Clive Efford: I think you heard me asking questions of the Lawn Tennis Association earlier on about co-operation with other sports in community engagement. Do you think that the big sports, such as football, rugby, rugby league, tennis, and so on, do enough to get economies of scale, use their resources efficiently and engage with communities where it has been hard to get people active?

Ali Donnelly: Sometimes a crisis pushes people together in a way and at a pace that they might not have been before. It has been really heartening to see that lots of organisations and sports have come together during lockdown to talk about their particular challenges and how they can help each other. I mentioned earlier that there is a huge number of governing bodies that represent recreational team sports—rugby league, rugby union, football, hockey, basketball, netball and others—that have been in active conversation daily in recent weeks about how they can collectively put a framework forward to Government, which they have now done, to say they represent team sports. It is not like, “We represent football. We represent hockey. We represent netball,” but “We are a collective group of people who really want to get team sport back up and running and here is a framework within which we feel we can all work.”

I think there has been an acceleration of organisations working together in the sports sector in recent weeks, and I hope it continues. Lots of new relationships are being built and lots of insight is being shared at a pace that did not exist before, although of course there were links between all the big sports. The challenge there is to keep that going afterwards.

Q534 Clive Efford: As a big funder of sport at that level, isn't there more that you could do to drive that sort of co-operation, if it is desirable?

Ali Donnelly: Yes, and we do bring sports together under specific themes. For example, for the women and girls work, we bring lots of sports together, and it is not just sports; it is also people who deliver insight and expertise. I mentioned the charity Women in Sport. We talk to Women's Sport Trust, the Youth Sport Trust and so on. We do that quite a lot already, whether it is on specific themes or around specific moments. I guess we are the kind of glue that holds a lot of it together. We co-ordinate lots of efforts. However, big sport in this country has a powerful voice, and what we have seen with the team sport example I have given is how they have come together collectively to say, “We have a shared problem here; let's try to share the solution.” I think that is really positive.



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Q535 **Clive Efford:** This Girl Can, in my opinion, is one of the best campaigns I have seen in sport, and it has been incredibly successful in engaging with people who hitherto had not engaged with sport. Is there anything that other areas of sport can learn from the success of This Girl Can?

Ali Donnelly: Yes, and we do share. One of the reasons that I think This Girl Can has been successful is that we took our time in setting it up. The team that was here when it was established in 2015, before my time, took a long time to talk to women, to find out what they wanted to see, what would help them, what barriers they were facing and so on. We have been sharing that insight with the sector for years. We have been talking about fear of judgment. The ad that you saw earlier is a new ad that we launched in January, and it was around normalising relatable conversations that women often are afraid to have and we have been sharing that with sports. You see Kirsty in the video, who takes part in a Sport England-funded programme called Back to Netball after she has had a baby. For many women, getting back into activity and sport after they have had a child is very difficult, very daunting.

We have been sharing lots. We have been normalising the conversation but sharing with all sports, the entire sector, that this is what women are telling us and this is what you can do to help break down those barriers. I think that kind of insight-led, research-driven, data-driven campaign is why it has been successful. We would like to replicate it across other demographics in the years ahead, and perhaps children and young people is one of the areas we will start to look at.

Chair: Thank you, Ali Donnelly from the This Girl Can campaign and Executive Director of Digital Marketing and Communication at Sport England. That brings this session to an end.