

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

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

Tuesday 7 July 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 Green; Damian Hinds; John Nicolson; Giles Watling.

Questions 536 - 617

Witnesses

I: Paul Monekosso Cleal OBE, adviser and non-executive director, sport/health sector

II: Eniola Aluko, former England Women's footballer

III: Huw Edwards, Chief Executive, ukactive

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



Examination of witness

Paul Monekosso Cleal OBE

Q536 **Chair:** Welcome to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. Today we are having a hearing into the impact of Covid-19 on the DCMS sectors, specifically looking at widening access to sport. We are joined by three witnesses. The first witness will be Paul Cleal OBE, adviser and non-executive director across the sport and health sector. We are joined after that by Eniola Aluko, the former England Women's footballer, and finally by Huw Edwards, the Chief Executive of ukactive.

I did ask members prior to the start of this public session whether or not they had any interests to declare. I will now ask another time whether any members wish to declare any interests before we begin. I cannot see anyone, so that is fine.

Good morning to our first witness, Paul Cleal. Paul, good morning.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: Good morning, Chairman.

Chair: Thank you for joining us today. A recent *Telegraph* investigation highlighted that at the top levels of British sport only 3% of board members are BAME. Given that it is 40 years since we had the likes of Viv Anderson playing football for England, Roland Butcher playing cricket for England and Jeremy Guscott running in tries for England, why do you think that even now we still do not reflect wider society at the top levels of British sport?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: It is certainly disappointing. I am, sadly, old enough to remember most of those events, some of them in person, and it has been a long time. I think that sport has some of the same problems as the rest of society. You tend to see pretty low levels of senior BAME representation in most parts of the economy. At board level—and I know this from personal experience—when I am reading requirements for board members, often they are set at a level that requires a lot of senior experience, which is not always necessary, and that can put people off. I think there are still feelings in BAME communities that it is not quite for them.

There is a push and a pull that practically gets in the way of having more board members, but all of those sports should be trying harder to attract people on to the boards. That is the way to get participation at grassroots level, which is what we all want to see.

Q537 **Chair:** Do you think there needs to be a target for BAME representation across UK sport?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I think targets are helpful in the end. In my executive career at PricewaterhouseCoopers we tried a lot of stuff on diversity inclusion over a long period of time. The firm accepted towards my last few years there that the time had come to measure things properly and also set objectives for key people to achieve better



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representation. It does not happen on its own. You cannot just hope for the best and wait for things to change. I think targets are helpful. People will draw the distinction between targets and quotas, where a quota tends to mean a forced number of people, but targets are useful. That has helped in the case of women's representation on FTSE 100 boards, for example. The Davies review some years ago and the pressure of the 30% Club have given real momentum to getting more women on boards and I think that has been very helpful.

The Parker review in the corporate sector aims to do something similar by next year, to have all major companies have one BAME representative on their boards. I think we need to go a bit further than that. Most bodies would need to have at least two, partly to represent the breadth of diversity that the term "black and ethnic minority" represents and also to deal with some of the underlying issues. It is quite difficult as one minority on a board to make real change and having two people will make it easier for the individuals and they will feel more included.

I think targets, yes, and probably ambitious ones would be appropriate. It is disappointing that the main sports do not have much, if any, black and ethnic minority representation on their boards at the moment.

Q538 Chair: Why don't they adopt it themselves rather than waiting for governmental lead?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: That has been the same story in the corporate sector, that people have essentially waited until the point where they are almost forced. You see the same issues with reporting of pay gaps, first with gender and now ethnicity, likely to end up being compulsory. But I think the best organisations take a voluntary approach and go out and do the right thing. I do not expect people to do it just for reasons of social justice or morality. I think it is also in the best interests of the sport with the objectives they should have and the same is true of business. It is the right thing to do from the aspect of the businesses themselves or the sports bodies themselves, rather than just trying to do the right thing for the community.

Q539 Chair: Do you think football could lead the way, for instance, by adopting the Rooney Rule?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: Football obviously is the country's most popular sport. It is very dear to my heart and I think it would make a lot of difference. As I understand it, the EFL has adopted the Rooney Rule. I think it has had patchy success so far, judging by the number of black managers, but I have always felt that if you can get in the door for an interview it gives you a really good chance. We know that in the labour market all around there is still quite significant discrimination against minorities, some of it unintentional, but when people do get the chance—and certainly the National Football League in the US has proved that over time—giving people an opportunity to get in the door and tell their story and their plans will increase the chances of them getting jobs. That has



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led to a significant increase in the number of coaches in the US and I suspect that the same would happen here. In principle, yes.

It is important, alongside putting in something like the Rooney Rule, to make sure that you have a pool of people who are credible candidates, because it does no good if basically there are not the right people around. I think that is achievable, but if football is going to do that it would need to work together across the various authorities to ensure that there was a good pool of candidates for jobs. That in turn will build confidence in the system and I think we would see more black managers.

Q540 Chair: As you said, the EFL has adopted the Rooney Rule, but the Premier League has not. We have had a history of black managers in the Premier League perhaps not lasting as long as they should do. We had Chris Hughton, who is an excellent manager, at Newcastle and Brighton—who was fired—and he did a fantastic job at those clubs. We had Terry Connor, an excellent coach, and we had Paul Ince before that at Blackburn. Is this an issue that needs to be dealt with at the highest level in the Premier League? Should it be taking a much more proactive stance in encouraging black coaches?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I certainly think it should be taking a proactive stance to encourage black coaches, yes. As I said, the Rooney Rule generally is a good idea as long as you have a credible pool of people. That is something else that football authorities collectively could do. It is worth mentioning that a number of Premier League coaches now come from overseas and that is another factor. I believe I am right in saying that over nearly 30 years of the Premier League no English manager has won the Championship. People are looking at overseas coaches because they think it is more likely to bring success. In the early years of the Premier League we saw some black overseas coaches such as Ruud Gullit and Jean Tigana and currently we have Nuno Espirito Santo at Wolverhampton. There are obviously overseas black coaches, but it does complicate the process of the Rooney Rule.

We should be aiming to build a pool of British coaches who are capable of winning the Premier League. I would hope that would be more likely if we had greater ethnic diversity and made sure we gave everyone a chance to build their careers in that direction.

Q541 Julie Elliott: Good morning, Paul. I want to move on to a totally different area of football—grassroots and the community game. The Premier League is now back up and running, although not in its usual format, and yet there is not even talk of grassroots football starting. Do you think that has been the right way around to bring back football in the crisis?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: It is disappointing that grassroots sport has not restarted yet. There has been a lot of talk recently about cricket, for example, and the confusion about how people can go to pubs but somehow village cricket seems unsafe. Most people do not get that. I have seen Michael Vaughan and others talking on the news and



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expressing frustration and I understand that. With grassroots football, organised football would not be on at this time of year. I hope that by the time the season starts it is possible to restart. I certainly think it ought to be possible to run it. The Premier League is capable of a far greater level of testing and creating biosecure areas. That is not practical at park level, but it looks like we are going to have to live with this virus for some time, so I hope that a way could be found to enable local sport to happen as well.

In reality, starting the Premier League made sense, simply because of the investment required to create the number of testing and secure facilities. There probably was not a great number of other options. I know it made financial sense for the Premier League, and probably the Championship too, to go forward and it has given people some football to watch, which is a good thing as well. It is understandable that it has come that way around, but I hope that before too long grassroots sport—certainly at the time the football season is due to start in September—will be able to begin. We will have to see how the virus develops.

Q542 Julie Elliott: If we look at some of the work Kick It Out has done around racism in the grassroots and community game, it is quite alarming. The sharp rise in the number of racist incidents that it is reporting, although it seems to think that that is not the real picture, it is much higher. Is that your experience of grassroots football? What do you think can be done to root it out?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: It is some time since I played grassroots football regularly, but certainly for a long time I was out there on Saturday and Sunday afternoons and I got my fair share of stick from opposition players and spectators sometimes too. That is going back a long time now. I think Kick It Out would say that part of the reason for the increase in numbers is an increase in reporting. It is good thing that people want to report more now. When I was playing, you could not really find someone who wanted to listen to you if you wanted to complain, so I think it is right that people do speak out and try to stop these things happening.

Q543 Julie Elliott: In my experience of watching relatives play football at that level, it is often parents on the touchline that are the worst offenders. Do you have any views on that?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: This is where we get into there being issues in wider society rather than just laying problems at the door of football. People do not develop those attitudes through watching football, they bring them to the game from elsewhere. I absolutely think that the game has a responsibility to root things out and at local level that means referees stopping matches and trying to deal with the problem, but it is very difficult when they are potentially in an unsafe situation. I feel for the referees. It is not like being in a stadium in Bulgaria where you can ask the man on tannoy to announce that you are going to stop the game or walk off in relative safety. There are real dangers for people on the



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Hackney Marshes type football field sometimes and that has to be taken seriously, but I think people have to do whatever they can to draw attention to it and not just let it run.

It is good that people are now using Kick It Out to report it more and as a result you are going to see an increase for a period of time. I hope we can eventually educate more and more people.

Q544 Damian Green: Good morning, Paul. I want to extend the discussion beyond football into other sports. One of the next big events that will focus attention in this country will be the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in 2022. Are there already preparations going on to make sure that we can benefit from the possibility of expanding access, improving access and promoting all the benefits from that in 2022? Have people started thinking about that seriously enough yet?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I have not heard too much about it. Things have gone very quiet in the last few months. We have had the delay of the Olympics and Euro 2020 to next year and I guess people are not very sure when or if events are going to happen. I suspect inevitably that has led to some degree of slowness in planning. The Commonwealth Games is a major opportunity, not only because the event is in this country, but also because when we are talking about ethnic minority participation in events many of our minorities come from Commonwealth countries and it is a great chance to see people's athletes in action. I always feel, as someone of a mixed race background, that it is great to be able to support both the country you live in, but also the country of your forebears and celebrate that in a situation like the Commonwealth Games.

Q545 Damian Green: What about the individual sports? We agonise, as society, about football and its behaviour in this area. When you look at some of the sports that will be very prominent at the Commonwealth Games or at the Olympics, I think intuitively that athletics has a reasonable record of engaging people from minority communities but some other sports don't. For example, swimming does not seem to.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: Going back to the earlier question about board representation, it helps to have people at the top of a sport focusing on the issues of representation. What has happened with minority participation was summed up very well in a report by Sporting Equals that came out in January, I think. It looks at the spread of minority representation across sports. You are most likely to find the black community playing football and doing track and field and basketball. Asians, Indians, Pakistanis and so on are much more likely to play cricket. You get these pockets of over-representation in certain sports and I think a lot of that is not particularly linked to what the governing body does at the top. It is linked to the availability of facilities at bottom.

If you go back to my upbringing 40 years ago in south London, you would have found a lot of Afro-Caribbean people playing cricket. Now there are



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virtually no cricket fields in Southwark or Lambeth and that has curtailed that opportunity, but they do have access to small basketball courts, for example, and that has pushed people in that direction. The provision or lack of facilities at a local level has tended to push people, along with some cultural factors of interest in sports like cricket, in certain directions. I do not think the governing bodies are directing it.

To the extent that there are more black people in athletics, I think it is more luck and natural interest than planning, although clearly a number of these sports are able to work at grassroots level very effectively. You find a lot of black coaches doing athletics around south London, for example, and that also helps draw people in.

Q546 Damian Green: That is interesting. You think that the facilities at the grassroots are more important than say role models at the elite end of the sport in engaging a particular community?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I think it is both. We see every year that everyone wants to go and play tennis after the Wimbledon final. Grassroots coaches are very important and when you look at some of the work that is done—for example, the Premier League Kicks campaign in football—you have local coaches who act as role models on a very local level for the young people who go to those events. A young friend of mine, who I have mentored for many years, runs a charity that does athletics in Lewisham in south London. As well as being athletics coaches, the coaches are essentially mentors to young people and that provides a very important role when people perhaps do not see that even among their teachers at school. Role models at a very local level and the facilities they operate in are critical, every now and again supplemented by the inspiration of seeing someone do something extraordinary at a major event.

Q547 Kevin Brennan: Paul, do you think we do enough to celebrate the history of black sportsmen and women in this country? In particular in my own case, being Welsh, probably the greatest ever Welsh rugby player was Billy Boston, who was born in Cardiff but was never picked for Cardiff Rugby Club because he was black, who ended up playing rugby league in the north of England for Wigan from 1953. Then there are players like Clive

Sullivan, who ended up playing rugby league rather than rugby union and became the first ever black athlete to be the captain of Great Britain in any sport. In my own home town there are people like Mark Brown, who was the first black player to play rugby for Wales. But these names never seem to be celebrated in the way that they should be. They should be as famous as some of the names we heard mentioned earlier. Do we do enough to emphasise the history of great contributions by black sportsmen and women in this country?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: We could do more. I listened to you listing names that I have not heard of in many cases, which is probably proof of that. I remember the great Welsh rugby team of the 1970s, but they



were mostly white and I do not know the other names. There is also a socioeconomic factor here, where often black players have gone into professional sports to earn money. That has perhaps been part of the story why, for example, people in the Afro-Caribbean community have moved from playing cricket more towards football in the last few years because of the obvious attractions. We could always do more.

In America, for example, there is Jackie Robinson Day in baseball, where everyone celebrates that first critical black baseball player and everyone wears his number 42. It is all over the country and it is something that is in the diary every year. It does not just remember him, it remembers the difficulties that he went through in forging his way in the game and inspiring so many other people. On those days we all are Jackie Robinson and I think that is a very nice way of doing it.

We have perhaps had less time to look back on the contribution of black players to sport, but it has been a massive one in the last 40-odd years. I think people in communities here often do not feel quite fully recognised for that contribution. Sometimes it is to the national team's detriment when a number of people who have the choice—for example, young people of African heritage who grew up in London and other parts of the country—choose to play for say Nigeria rather than England. There have been a few examples of that and it is just a choice. Ultimately it comes down to feelings of identity and belonging and we could do more to reinforce that. You make a good point.

Q548 Kevin Brennan: In fairness, there is a statute of Billy Boston in Wigan, so we have to give some credit for that. I want to ask you about something else, given your experience in the NHS and the impact of Covid on sport. Do you think that we are approaching the whole business of trying to restart sport with mass crowds again in the right way? In other words, with social distancing it seems to me it is going to be many months before you could have anything like a significant crowd in a stadium watching football. Should we be exploring different ways of being able, at minimal risk, to get people into sportsgrounds again and spectating, perhaps by some kind of online health app passport that minimises the risk of spreading the infection?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I think those things will be looked at and I am sure many sporting clubs will be desperate to get people back. In last week's Select Committee you talked to Richard Masters of the Premier League about some of the economics of this and clearly it is important to all clubs, even the top ones. As you go down the pyramid in football and other sports, having people come through the gate, paying ticket money and spending more money in the ground is critical for their survival. People will want to explore any route that is possible. Like you, I think it is going to be difficult to get full crowds back for some time until we have an effective vaccine and I have not seen much said about that in recent weeks.



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It is not just the stadia, of course it is getting there. In the sportsgrounds that I go to regularly in London, it is the public transport, where you are mostly up against other people. A lot was said at the early stages when those events at Cheltenham and Liverpool were held in mid-March about the relative safety of outdoor events, but you cannot ignore the fact that you have to get large numbers of people there.

I know that cricket clubs, because they tend to have smaller crowds, are trying to find ways of getting smaller groups of people into stadia to watch games as early as September. I do not know whether that will happen, but I am sure people will look at that. In the same way as we want to get people through airports safely and on to planes, there has to be a way of testing people, but clearly the results have to be pretty immediate and some of the results of tests so far have taken longer than you would want to be able to guarantee that everyone can watch things together in safety.

Q549 Steve Brine: Good morning, Paul. It is good to see you. Thanks for coming on. Last week we talked to the Premier League. I am sure you have caught up on it and I know you work with them. What are your thoughts on the conversation we had with Richard Masters about Premier League players wearing the Black Lives Matter slogans on the back of their shirts? Richard said that it was something that the players wanted to do, but that it was a moral cause not a political campaign. If you look at some of the things that the BLM organisation has said, it is campaigning to defund the police, the dismantling of capitalism and it has had pretty strident views on Israel and Palestine. That sounds like a political campaign to me. Do you have a view? You advise the Premier League. What would your advice be to them on the can of worms that they seem to have opened? Since I raised this last week in the Select Committee a number of people have spoken out. Pep Guardiola at Manchester City has spoken out about being fined £20,000 for wearing the Rose of Catalonia. What did you think when you heard about that last week?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: It is not something I have been asked to advise on, but on a personal opinion level I was pleased to see what the Premier League did in allowing that to go ahead. I think a lot of black people in the country felt, partly for the reasons that Kevin raised in his question earlier, that it was good to see the issue being kept alive by the Premier League. We had the protests and I think we all know that because of Covid we do not want to see endless demonstrations on the streets with people not being able to maintain social distancing. I think what the Premier League has done has been a good way of drawing further attention to it.

As regards the moral versus political, I would draw a distinction between the generic concept of Black Lives Matter and what people are talking about there in relation to not only police brutality in the US, where it started, but also the ability of black people, both there and here, to



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progress their livelihoods and not face discrimination and be able to get better jobs and progress and help their families to do better. For me, that is what this is about. The fact that there is a political movement of essentially the same name that has some objectives—I would not sign up to any of those that you listed at all—is another matter.

Q550 Steve Brine: Are you saying that the statement on the shirts—which is impossible to disagree with, of course—it is a coincidence that it is the same three words that are that organisation?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: My understanding is that the Premier League and the players are not trying to support that organisation. It is a much broader campaign. If an organisation chooses to use the same three words and asks to defund the police, I do not think that is what anyone at the Premier League is asking people to support. It is a much broader campaign. I would go beyond moral and say it is an economic thing. For the black community to have greater opportunities to further their families' living standards and prosper in this country is important and I think the Premier League has rightly drawn attention to that.

I can see the issues about where you draw the line. I listened carefully to the conversation and I know it is difficult, but I think the Premier League has done the right thing. In this particular case the bigger bit from the players' perspective—and we have talked a lot in football about the lack of black coaches and we have touched on it a bit today—is that white players in the game know that some of their black colleagues do not have the same chances as they do of getting managers' jobs in the future if things carry on like this. Things need to change. I think the Premier League wants to see change and the players want to see change, and because it is an issue that is live within their own profession they are entirely right to bring attention to it.

Q551 Steve Brine: I am amazed, by the way, that they did not ask you about that symbol wearing. How is that change being sought? The accusation could be levelled that the easy thing to do is to put a slogan on the back of a shirt; the easy thing to do is to pull down a statue in Bristol. The much harder thing to do is to tackle systemic racism. The Prime Minister put it well, I think, that we should tackle the substance, not the symbols of racism in our society. Am I right in saying that the Premier League announced something early last week—just before our Committee meeting, coincidentally—about coaching diversity? Could you tell us about that programme?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: In my role I act as an independent adviser on the Premier League Equality Standard, which is a rule of the Premier League that the clubs have to abide by and that means they need to show progress on equality, diversity and inclusion. We go to the clubs and receive presentations and assess them. That is what I do for them specifically.



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I fully agree with you, Steve, that this is about systemic change and not just about token efforts. In one of my organisations I have been dealing with issues about the removal or not of a statue and it has been a difficult conversation and naturally one that I care rather less about than the real issues of enabling people to progress, as I said just now. I think that we and the Premier League and football in general and sport in general should focus on real change. That is what I want to see.

In relation to the programme that was announced—I think you are right, it was on Monday last week—it builds on some work that has been done already. It is relatively small. It probably affects about 20 positions to enable more black coaches to work in some clubs, but it is a start. It has to be a lot more than that over time, but we will see what the Premier League and other parts of football want to do. Without a doubt, in my view they should be judged by what they do and the outcomes they generate over the next months and years rather than simply gestures today. But I think that the Black Lives Matter process today has been well received by a lot of black people in the country. It has been appropriate, as I said before, to do it but it is not the end of the story, without a doubt.

Q552 Steve Brine: Finally, ironically, one statue conversation. You probably saw the reports last week about the campaign in Plymouth to have a statue of Jack Leslie, who would have been the first black footballer to play for England, which would have been many years before that milestone was reached. What do you think of that campaign? Do you know anything about it? The BBC were reporting that Jack Leslie should have been England's first black player, but he was prevented from doing so "because of racism". It seems entirely plausible, but I wondered whether you had any knowledge of the Jack Leslie campaign. It is something that was picked up in the public consciousness last week and you can understand why, given the current context.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: No, I am not familiar with that campaign. It comes back to Kevin's point about do we know about these stories. The first people who break through are the ones we remember, but clearly before that there would have been a number who were unable to, for whatever reason. I think it is important in the public realm that statues are representative of society as a whole. The ones that I am familiar with in London tend to celebrate a certain part of our collective history and it would be good to widen that a bit, not necessarily by removing too many of the ones we have, but perhaps by having some additional statues that celebrate other segments of society and their achievements.

Q553 Giles Watling: Good morning, Paul, and thank you for being here. I would like to move on to another form of discrimination that seems to be endemic throughout football. As you probably know, last week Thomas Beattie came out as gay, but that of course was only after he had retired from the game. Graeme Souness said that football had created an uncomfortable environment for gay players and the FA told this



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Committee that they “loathed” homophobic behaviour. Why is this still such a problem for football?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: It is a good question. It is certainly one of the issues that we pick up when we go around the clubs. A lot of our focus is on what goes on in the stands, trying to eradicate homophobic chanting. I do not know the answer to the question of why players have not come out. There must be some. Everyone can see that the statistics would tell you that there must be. One theory I have heard is the players are unwilling to come out because of the risk of abuse from supporters in the stands and of course on social media. That is very sad, but you can understand people’s reticence.

Another theory is that they are concerned about their careers. I suppose they might feel that they are comfortable in the club they are in today, but if they get a transfer somewhere else it might not be so good and perhaps they might not get that transfer. I think people are concerned about the implications for them. Whether they should be or not, I do not know, but I guess it is a question of who wants to be the first to try. I am very interested in cricket and I recall a few years that the then wicketkeeper at Surrey, Steve Davies, came out as gay and he was playing for England at the time. It may be coincidence, but despite all the warm words at the time, I do not think he played for England again afterwards and that is clearly in people’s minds.

It has been the case in the corporate world for a long time that people have been concerned about coming out. It has been made a lot easier, I think the environment has changed a lot, but of course you are dealing with the people who are in the building largely in the corporate world. You do not have to worry about the wider visibility and your next club and so on in quite the same way. I do not know. It is a real shame. More work needs to be done within football to deal with that. It is interesting that it is not such an issue in women’s football. It seems to be very much a men’s football thing.

Q554 **Giles Watling:** Would you say that there is still a long way to go and it is to do with fear, not only about their careers, but about perhaps intimidation from fans?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I think that is part of it. It would be different for different people and their own decisions. It is very sad, isn’t it, when people feel that they have to hide some aspect of their personality in order to go to work and be successful? I know gay friends who have had to do that for years in financial services, professional services and so on, but who now do not have to do that and it is a big weight off their shoulders. I think the way that the corporate sector has moved has been quite extraordinary, how quickly it has changed in the last decade or so. A lot of credit for that goes to Stonewall as the campaigning organisation.

Q555 **Giles Watling:** In 2007, for instance, homophobic chanting was specifically outlawed by the Football Association. Would you say it is a



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matter of enforcement? What more do you think the Football Association and Premier League could do?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I think the enforcement works quite well now. It is one of the issues we look at when we go around the Premier League grounds. I cannot speak for the lower leagues and I know that there are some incidents that still happen there. Certain clubs tend to attract more attention than others, that is also for sure. You can now text stewards. If you do not want to confront someone in person, which you can quite understand why you would not, you can now text stewards at any of the Premier League clubs and give seat number details and so on if someone is chanting something unacceptable of any nature.

Q556 **Giles Watling:** Do you have evidence that people do that in any great number or not?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: The clubs all keep records of those incidents and in some cases involve the police in that. They all keep a log. The senior stewards will have logs of that, so people do it. I could not tell you off the top of my head how much they do it for homophobia versus say racist abuse, which still occasionally happens, but I am sure they would have the details at each club.

Q557 **Giles Watling:** You feel we are moving in the right direction. What further actions do you think the Government should take now?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: In relation to homophobia specifically or more generally?

Giles Watling: Yes, homophobia specifically, sorry.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: That is a difficult one. I do not think the Government—other than basic legislation to outlaw discrimination, that is essentially what the legal side tends to do. It gets so far, but it comes down to the employers and the people within it to demand change and I think that is what you are seeing.

Q558 **Giles Watling:** I was thinking more about perhaps a publicity campaign, something along those lines.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: The Premier League runs the Rainbow Laces campaign every November in combination with Stonewall. I think that is a good thing. It is clearer what the messaging is about in some stadia I have been in than others. Perhaps a bit more thought could be given to making sure that people understand the messaging and bring it home in more of a human way. Individual stories are often quite powerful ways of changing people's minds. That is my experience. I think it is more than the Government.

Q559 **Chair:** Paul, would you support a change to the Football (Offences) Act so that it outlawed homophobia in grounds?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I must admit I did not know that it did not. Obviously there are general laws about what you should not say. If it is



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not already in the law it certainly should be. I do not hear it regularly in grounds, but it does happen and with certain clubs some of the supporters decide it is a good idea to shout that sort of stuff. If police and stewards do not have the legal basis to stop people currently they certainly should have. I would have thought they did, I must admit.

Chair: It is not a specific offence under the Football (Offences) Act at the moment and this Committee would like to see it made one, of course.

Alex Davies-Jones: Thank you, Paul, for taking the time to speak to us this morning.

Chair: I am afraid Alex has gone offline at that very timely moment. We will try to get back to her. I am going to call John Nicolson in the interim.

Q560 **John Nicolson:** Can I pursue this issue of homophobia in sport? I wonder if one of the problems is complacency. Last week we had here in the DCMS Select Committee the Premier League's Chief Executive Officer, Richard Masters. He said he thought that footballers who come out would be embraced by the game, which he said was a far more welcoming place in 2020. I do not see any sense at all that it is a far more welcoming place. By definition, if it was a more welcoming place people would feel free to come out.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I think you are basically right, John, that it is obviously not welcoming enough. My guess—and maybe this is what Richard meant, I cannot be certain—is that in most clubs teammates would be much more supportive than they would have been 10 or 20 years ago. But as I said in answer to the Chair's question, I think that there are wider concerns about the behaviour of people in the stadia and even more so on social media, which is a shame. That situation clearly is not conducive to people coming out and feeling welcome.

Q561 **John Nicolson:** Let's be blunt here, I suspect we all know what the problem is and it is that footballers are frightened. It is fear that stops them from coming out. You talked a bit about endorsements and sponsorships earlier on. I have a friend who is an agent and he told me that the first gay footballer would make an absolute fortune because big companies would want to be associated with the first footballer to come out and so financially it would be very lucrative for that footballer. I suspect it is nothing to do with suffering financially. I suspect it is a fear that they are going to be harassed online, that they might not feel safe walking in the street in certain communities and that they will have a target on their back as the first person to come out. That is shocking in the 21st century.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: As I said, I think the online abuse is a very real issue and that is still the issue for many black players and black journalists and so on as well. The eruption of hate on social media is a big issue for society and not just for football.

Q562 **John Nicolson:** What do you think it is about football that makes it so unique in society? You cited friends of yours who work in business. We



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can all think of people in the BBC, in broadcasting—which used to be a very homophobic place, in my direct personal experience—every area of society, including politics, with gay Cabinet Ministers, even in the Conservative Party, which used to be riddled with homophobia and passed the most homophobic bit of legislation of recent times in clause 28. What is it about football that lags so far behind society in general?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: In homophobia it is certainly behind society in all the areas that you have mentioned, John. That is for sure. I think it is about fear, as I was saying. It is largely fear from outside the game directly, but historically when I grew up playing football in south London it was a white working class, very socially conservative sport and the people I played with are still in the stands now. Some of them have changed their views and some of them have not and that is the way society is. I think teammates are likely to be very supportive, as they have been over Black Lives Matter. I think you would see much the same solidarity, but there is a fear about the wider implications. You are very much on show. You look at the abuse that some of the black footballers got in the late 1970s and the 1980s and it was horrific. They had to put up with it and they could not hide it. I can understand why gay footballers are reticent about coming out even if there is potentially some financial benefit to them.

Q563 **John Nicolson:** But it seems to me, Paul, speaking as a gay man myself, that footballers are in an enormously privileged position. They are role models and a lot of the very high profile ones are very wealthy. They can protect themselves: they have security guards; they can live in gated houses with alarm systems; they can shelter themselves and protect themselves from immediate physical danger. If they are too scared to come out, what does that say to gay kids living up and down the country who look at them and think, “If he doesn’t feel safe coming out, what hope is there for me living in my housing scheme or my estate or wherever it is that I live in and getting threatened with bullying every day; if my role models can’t come out, I am in a terrible place”? That is the real worry about this.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: It is a major issue. I hope that they draw some strength from role models in other sectors, many of which you have mentioned. But I can see in football that is a problem and, frankly, even if you can afford the security to protect yourself, you would not necessarily want to put yourself in that position in the first place. It is definitely an area of the game that has to improve, but I think it is a bigger issue now in wider society. Internet trolls and Twitter and suchlike are pretty unpleasant, as many people can testify to.

Q564 **John Nicolson:** We are, self-evidently, legislators and one of the most important parts of holding sessions like this is to inform us, to help us recommend and pass legislation to make society fairer. This Committee has previously supported a Bill to criminalise homophobic chanting at matches. How much of a difference do you think that would make?



Paul Monekosso Cleal: I do not think it would be transformative, to be honest, because I do not think there is that much chanting in stadia now. I think the online abuse is likely to be much worse. Legislation gets you so far in banning stuff, but ultimately you have to positively change people's attitudes to society and that is a very slow process. Certainly the events of the last few weeks have challenged people's views of racism and I have heard people talk very positively for the first time about recognising that systemic racism exists in their organisations and their industries and so on.

We have taken a step forward and I hope that we can build on that momentum, but the same applies to other areas of discrimination too. Legislation gets you up to a point of compliance and stopping saying stuff but, as we have seen with racism, you need to get to what people think as well as what they say. There is a risk ultimately that you just drive it underground. You have to deal with the real views of people and that is where discrimination is more difficult to eradicate.

Q565 **John Nicolson:** I feel that we have been talking about this for years. In fact, we have been talking about it for years because when I was on this Select Committee in 2015 and recommended a homophobia in sports inquiry, which we did, there were no gay footballers out. Here we are five years on and there are still no gay footballers out. I do not detect urgency in football administration to change this. I do not recognise a concern about this. There is some concern, but it does not seem to be a pressing concern. What do you think we, as legislators, should be doing? What would you like to see MPs do to force the hand of the football authorities to take this more seriously so that we are not having exactly the same conversation in 2025?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: It is difficult. Certainly to the extent that we can do more to eradicate homophobic chanting, if there are changes to the legislation that can make that more powerful, we should do it. I have talked a lot about targets in relation to black and ethnic minority representation. It is difficult to say every football team should have two gay players in the next five years. I do not see that happening. I hope that in five years' time we are not having this conversation still, but my experience from the length of time it has taken to deal with racism suggests that we might be, unfortunately.

John Nicolson: A depressing thought on which to end.

Q566 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Second time lucky. Fingers crossed. Thank you, Paul. I would like to share some of John's frustrations there and the frustrations of the LGBTQ community on this, that there has not been any progress. There seems to be a lot of rhetoric happening, but no action. I think it is clear that this is a fan issue, as we have discussed. It is a fan engagement problem and this needs to come from the top. Are you aware of any discussions that Premier League clubs are having with the social media companies to help regulate some of the abuse that has been put online?



Paul Monekosso Cleal: On the specifics of no progress, what I observe among football crowds is progress in the sense of attitudinal change generally. I think that has happened and what Stonewall has done with the Rainbow Laces campaign and other campaigns has worked and changed people's minds in much the same way. These people go to work in the same place that we have just been talking about, where people are openly gay, so I think attitudes have changed. What we have not seen yet is people coming out and saying, "I am a Premier League footballer and I am gay". That has not happened and I do not know when that will.

Q567 **Alex Davies-Jones:** That has happened, but in the women's game. I would argue that this is not a football issue, it is a men's sport issue. As you have mentioned, women's sports seem to be much more inclusive, much more supportive, the fanbase is much more supportive of women who want to come out. Why do you think there is such a stark difference between the men's sports and the women's sports on this issue?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I absolutely agree. I think I said earlier that you can see the difference in women's football and I am sure Eniola can comment on that as well. A lot of it comes back to the history of the way sports have developed, the people who have played them, the attitudes they have and it has been very slow to change. It changes on the pitch and in the changing room faster than it does in the stands, but even that has gone through a substantial change. The number of people shouting abuse in the stands is relatively small, but they still—

Q568 **Alex Davies-Jones:** No, they are shouting online instead. Like you said, it just pushes it elsewhere.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I am not aware of where the various football authorities are in relation to discussions with social media. When it comes down to visits that we make to individual stadia, I cannot think about specific interactions with social media companies, but certainly online abuse is one of the areas that clubs are taking action on. They will identify people who have been abusive online and deal with them as far as they can. Of course some of it is anonymous, but if they can identify individuals they will ban them from the stadia in the same way as they did if the chant was in the ground itself.

Q569 **Clive Efford:** Paul, I have listened to all the questions and your answers. Are we getting to the root of the problems that we have here? We have been here before. I have things here like in 2014 Heather Rabbatts launching an initiative with the Government for the Football Association to agree to work together to see what more can be done to tackle discrimination and encourage greater diversity in football. In 2015 we had the EFL adopt the Rooney Rule and we have had various initiatives from the Premier League and the Football League. We have had the letter in 2018 from Paul Elliott on football leadership. All of these initiatives bring us right up to Black Lives Matter, but we still have the same problem. We are not rooting it out. Do you think the FA and the Premier League and the English Football League are doing enough to tackle this



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issue? Are they bringing through the talent that we need to choose from? Are we getting to it at the grassroots of the problem?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: To take the second part of the question, my guess is that we could be doing more to bring through more talent, I mean young British players getting through to be pros and being more competitive and also coaches. As I said earlier, when no English manager has ever won the Premier League, you have to wonder about whether we are doing enough to develop coaching at the right level. More needs to be done, without a doubt.

Progress is patchy, as you were implying. It is not zero but it is patchy. We have made progress in a number of areas. I think the clubs understand equality, diversity and inclusion issues much more than they did before. The work we have done in the Premier League Equality Standard has helped and I have seen real progress in clubs, but there is no question that we are still dealing with some of the deep-rooted problems in society that we had 40, 50 years ago. The work I have seen on discrimination in the labour market generally just on the basis of people's names tells you. The first studies that were done back in the late 1960s and the studies done last year are 50 years apart but remarkably similar and that is depressing. There are still major underlying issues of racism, for example, that need to be dealt with. I think that is precisely why the Black Lives Matter process, whether you like the term or not, is important and it is great that it has raised it, even though it has taken some very sad events to bring it to the fore again.

Q570 **Clive Efford:** Is the problem with the squads of players themselves, that they will not accept black leadership? Is that a problem?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: Not to my knowledge, no. I would be surprised if that was the case. I very much doubt that is the issue.

Q571 **Clive Efford:** Why aren't the people who make the decisions about who becomes a senior coach, who becomes a manager, choosing black candidates more? There is clearly a very high representation of BAME footballers, very talented people in the game. Why aren't the people in those managerial positions or executive positions making those decisions?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: Frankly, I do not know. To go back to your original question, does more need to be done, yes, and I think for exactly that reason. We talked about the Rooney Rule earlier. It is a good proposal in practice, but you need to make sure you have the talent there. I think more could be done to illustrate the range of black coaching talent that there is, for example. I have not seen the data and I do not know how many people have the relevant qualifications, black versus white. But you are right that over probably 25 to 30 years a quarter or more of professional footballers at the top level have been black. You would expect by now there would be a lot more senior coaches and managers and you would expect it to have filtered through off the pitch



as well, which it has not. Definitely more needs to be done, there is no question.

Q572 **Clive Efford:** Is it consistent with supporting Black Lives Matter for the Premier League to reject adopting the Rooney Rule?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: It is certainly worth considering. As I said, you need to work on the pool of talent that the Rooney Rule would draw upon, but I would advocate it as worth considering. It has worked in the US and I think it could work here as long as we are clear we have the right pool of talent to fish in.

Q573 **Clive Efford:** Do you have any idea what the Premier League intends to do instead of adopting the Rooney Rule? It has said that it is going to take other measures.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: No. One of the issues, if I look at the number of roles—there are 20 clubs at any given time in the Premier League and each has one manager—when a managerial opportunity comes up, even if there were 25% black candidates around when the Rooney Rule was enforced, the most likely outcome in every case is a white male manager at the moment and that is typically what tends to happen. What you see is the aggregation of a number of individual decisions, each one of which you could probably defend, but when you look at all of them together it does not look right.

You mentioned Chris Hughton. I remember Darren Moore as another example. I think a lot of black people feel that those coaches get given less time to turn things around and sometimes other people get longer. I know Raheem Sterling was quoted as saying that he felt that some top black ex-England players do not have jobs when white ones have. It is very hard to prove statistically because there are very small numbers involved, but you keep getting the feeling—I talk to a lot of black friends about it—that that is always slightly against you. That is what tends to happen in most spheres of the economy, to be honest.

Q574 **Clive Efford:** Doesn't the Rooney Rule put the pressure on the authorities and those at the head of the game to create a pool of talent? In the absence of the Rooney Rule there is not that pressure to create a pool of talent to invite to interviews and to select from.

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I think it could do that, yes. That is why I made the point about a pool of talent in the first place. Nobody wants something tokenistic. If you have five people shortlisted for a role and one of them happens to be non-white but is a no hoper, that is no good to anybody. It rather tends to reinforce the prejudices that people start with and we are talking about prejudices here. We are talking about preferences or people feeling risk averse about trying something that feels new. When you have five or 10 games of the season left and do not want to be relegated, you go with the safe option. The safe options, in my experience, do not look always that reliable, but you do not get criticised for taking the risk.



You have to find a way of creating that pool of talent, yes, and that can be done, I believe. That can be done through making sure people have the right qualifications and giving them the right experience. Indeed, the programme that we were talking about recently—it was announced last week—is very much about giving people practical experience as well as the underlying coaching qualifications and they need the combination of the two. But of course when it comes to high profile former England players, for example, often they will be given a chance without necessarily having a great deal of experience and that is often the difference between white and black managers, in my experience.

Q575 Damian Hinds: Paul, just one question from me. Linking this conversation we have been having about sport and football in particular with your experience at the top of business and also as a social mobility commissioner, there are some sectors that have made significant progress—not as much as one would like, but significant progress—in some of these areas. Might you do a quick compare and contrast between them? Say professional football, talking about management and administration of the game at the highest levels, how prevalent are modern HR techniques? It is probably not realistic, for example, to have name-blind recruitment in football, where everybody knows everybody, but things like unconscious bias training, how common is that at the top of the sport and should it be made effectively mandatory?

Paul Monekosso Cleal: I have not seen unconscious bias training used in football. It may be, but I have not come across it specifically. I think there are a range of interventions of that type that could be useful.

If I look at where people have had more success, I would say that a focus on outcomes is very important. You need to have the data, understand the problem, work out, for example, at the level below where you are looking at, which in this case in the football space might be academy coaches and second and third-level coaching jobs in clubs, people who are in the England set-up, working out where your pool of potential talent is and making sure that they get the opportunities and experience they need. Mentoring is often important as well. There are lots of different things that we have seen do work in other settings, things that promote women's advancement, ethnic minorities and social mobility, as you mentioned, Damian, rightly. All those things can be done.

There is an issue of resources across the clubs. You need change within the clubs rather than within the Premier League as an entity. It is different from the US, where you have a league as an entity and the clubs as franchises essentially, so the individual clubs have to make decisions. Some of them are quite small, so you have a range of people, clubs that are international global entities and others that are local clubs that have made it into the Premier League and they have very different resources available.

There is more that can be done to share best practice from both within what is going on in football already, but also from outside. One of the



things we tried to do from our work on the Equality Standard assessment panel is to bring some of the experience we have seen in other sectors when we are talking to clubs about what they can do differently. Yes, I think there is lot more good practice from outside that could be brought in. We have to recognise that a lot of these individual organisations are still quite small and are still learning. What we have done in the last three years with the clubs in the Premier League is build capacity and an understanding of the business case for change, if you like. I do think they are in much better place to build on from here, to take on some of those lessons that you rightly mention.

Chair: Thank you, Paul, for joining us today. It has been very interesting evidence.

Examination of witness

Eniola Aluko

Q576 **Chair:** I am now going to call our second witness, Eniola Aluko, the former England women's footballer. Good morning, Eni.

Eniola Aluko: Good morning.

Chair: I am sorry to have kept you waiting, but thank you again for joining us. You are very welcome. An easy question to start. We have heard from our previous witness about the shameful lack of representation at the top level of sport for BAME communities. What do you think is the problem and how do you think it should be tackled?

Eniola Aluko: There has been a lot of progress, certainly from when I started playing football 20-plus years ago, when there was absolutely no one I could look to in the game that looked like me, either as a woman or as a black woman. I grew up with a coach, Marcus Bignot, who was mixed race. I did not think about it at the time, but now I look back I realise that was quite unique.

Fast forward 20 years, we are still seeing a glass ceiling to a certain extent, from where we have gone to having great representation on the pitch—I am a big fan of the Premier League, it is a global league in terms of it having players from different backgrounds, races, religions—but we see that transition does not necessarily reflect when it goes off the pitch into the boardroom and even in ownership. The ownership of clubs, again 10 years ago it was not as diverse as it is now. I think most of the Premier League is foreign-owned now. I do take heart from the fact that we have progressed in terms of representation on the pitch and in terms of diversity ownership, but there are still some ceilings and issues of representation at boardroom level and senior management.

I think the way to tackle it—and I have obviously listened to the call so far—is through recruitment. It is about recruitment behaviour, recruitment patterns and it is about saying when we are looking for the best talent, are we fishing in a wide enough pool to find that talent or are



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we doing what we have always done, which is safe and nepotistically recruiting from the people that we all know and that look like us? Once you fish in a wider sea, you will be surprised what you find in terms of the pool of talent. For me as a new sporting director, for sporting directors all over the country, and for owners, if you want the best talent you should—it is in your interests—look as widely as possible.

With football in particular, off the field there are a lot of people who work in football but did not play the game, who are successful in business, who have been lawyers in previous times or have had other careers in business and so it is also about saying whether we can recruit from other areas of life. You can be passionate about football without having to kick the ball. Some of the best managers in the Premier League—José Mourinho, Jürgen Klopp, Pep Guardiola, Alex Ferguson—they were not amazing footballers, but they were incredible managers. It is also about going further and saying yes, it is about race and it is about females, but it is also about diversity of thought and recruiting people from much wider backgrounds than just football. It adds to the management that you can get in the game.

Q577 Chair: Would you support the idea of targets for BAME inclusion at the top level of UK sport?

Eniola Aluko: Yes, I think at this point we have to. There has to be something intentional about change. When you rely on self-regulation and people doing it for themselves, they tend to just fall back into the comfort zone of what they have always done. I think we do need a target. I know that the 30% target was mentioned earlier. I think that is a good one in terms of it being something that you can always strive towards achieving. When you look at other areas of football, there are certainly mandatory rules that are put into place that challenge and do very quickly change recruitment behaviour.

To use an example, the home-grown player rule came out, I believe it was four or five years ago now, and the rationale behind it was to protect the development and the pathway for young home-grown players and the investment that clubs were putting into academies to raise up players from the local communities or players who grew up playing in this country. You now have a quota system where you must have X number of home-grown players in teams, which means that all of a sudden there is greater investment in the academies, there are more top English players coming through, which in turn helps the national team because there is a premium in terms of value on British and English players. It is not just English, obviously. You can have foreign players who come over young as well and they are home grown. The point I am trying to make is that that was a mandatory rule that instinctively changed recruitment behaviour, it instinctively changed investment behaviour and I think that is what needs to happen in terms of representation of black and ethnic minorities. It needs to be something that, whether owners or directors



like it or not, this is what the game needs to do and it needs to shape behaviour.

I go back to the point that ultimately you will be surprised what you find if there is an intentional drive towards a pool of talent. For me, it is two-pronged. You have to encourage the pool of talent. I think we have lost a lot of talent and lost a lot of black coaches from the game, who just do not believe that the pathway is there. We need to keep driving black players to get their qualifications, make sure that they are top candidates when the opportunity comes, but on the flipside we need to make sure that we are intentionally creating the pathway for those people to come through.

Q578 **Julie Elliott:** Good morning, Eni, and welcome back to the DCMS Select Committee. I want to move on to the women's game. Richard Masters from the Premier League told us last week in evidence that he was interested in the Premier League taking over the Women's Super League. Do you think that would be a good thing?

Eniola Aluko: Yes. I am a big fan of the Premier League. What it has become is a global brand that is loved all around the world, in every corner of the world, with players from all over the world and young kids are able, through generations, to support amazing teams. I think that is where the women's game can go too. I think the women's game, from when I grew up playing when it was not on TV, is now a great product on the field. The WSL is attracting players from all over the world. There is broadcasting and commercial investment now, with Barclays recently investing in the league. I think where the Women's League is now is almost a replication of where the Premier League was probably two years ago. The minute a brand like the Premier League takes it over, it instantly will take it to another level, just because of the reach and what the Premier League is as a global brand.

To be honest, you are already seeing that kind of organically happen. If you look at the WSL, you already have a lot of Premier League teams who have women's teams in there—Chelsea, Arsenal, Manchester City, Manchester United, Spurs, Everton, you name it—and most of the league is already in the Premier League. I think Premier League clubs are already recognising that it is important to have an elite women's team as part of the club, as part of the brand; Aston Villa, obviously where I am now. It is important that the ownership groups recognise the importance of having women's teams for their consumers and for their fan base, which is obviously full of women as well. I am a big supporter of the Premier League taking over and that is no disrespect to the FA. I think the FA has done an incredible job in creating the WSL, creating a product and a brand that has grown so much over the last five to 10 years.

Q579 **Julie Elliott:** You have talked about the visibility of women's football, which nobody will disagree in recent years has grown massively. However, during the current crisis we have had men's football back on terrestrial television since mid-June and yet there is no women's football



being shown at the minute. Do you think that the lack of visibility of the game at moment will have any impact on the motivation of girls to stay in football in academies and education settings?

Eniola Aluko: I do not think that the impact of the Women's League not playing now is going to or should drive down participation. I think participation at grassroots level is strong enough now, where you have girls in the system who are playing because it is part of their life, part of their goal and part of their development, regardless of whether they see it on TV. Obviously it does help for girls to be able to see women's football regularly on TV, but the reality is that the season always has a break and sometimes absence makes the heart grow fonder. Having women's football being away while men's football is on, but with the knowledge that it is coming back in September, I do not think is going to turn fans away. If anything, it is going to get fans excited.

Obviously we have to collectively figure out when and how we can get fans back into stadiums, but now broadcasting of women's football is in a good place. If you cannot attend a game, you can watch online, you can watch through the FA Player—which is a fantastic product that the FA created, where you can watch every women's game free on an app—or you can watch it on TV. I would like to think participation would not be affected by this crisis.

Q580 **Julie Elliott:** Of course if you are talking about apps, we have to remember the huge numbers of people who are digitally excluded in this country, who would not have access to that, from many communities.

Richard Masters also last week told us that the Premier League has given £1 million towards testing provisions for when the new season starts in September to help the women's game to get back up and running. Do you think that is enough to help?

Eniola Aluko: I would not want to comment on how much is enough. I am not a medical expert and I am certainly not a Covid-testing expert, but I would assume that the FA would have spoken with the Premier League and the FA medical teams, medical advisers, would have spoken with the Premier League as well as the Government to understand what is required in terms of the Covid protocols, which did prevent the league finishing. I think it was top of the agenda at the time in which the league was cancelled. I would assume that that amount of money is requisite to at least get us back in preseason, which for a lot of teams has already started.

At Aston Villa we are starting next week and we will have Covid protocols in place. I am certainly pleased and happy that there has been some funding put together for us to go back to preseason and start. Whether that will be topped up I do not know, but I am certainly grateful that we are not talking about the Women's League not coming back.

Q581 **Julie Elliott:** Which I think was a distinct possibility if funding had not come in. What were the challenges, do you think, around the women's



game restarting and what worries you most about it at the moment?

Eniola Aluko: The challenge for the women's game is quite an exciting one in the sense that we have an opportunity now to increase our fan engagement and figure out ways to do that when the game comes back and are able to hopefully bring the fans back in. We have time to understand what that looks like for fans.

I think there has been a gap in broadcast viewing figures, which have been incredible over the past five years. I have worked as a broadcaster for Sky, for BT, for BBC, for Fox in America, and certainly during the World Cup and European Championships the viewing figures have sometimes outshone the viewing figures for the men's team in terms of the national team. The challenge is about translating those numbers into bums on seats every week. That is the fundamental challenge, I think, for women's football. Once we crack that, we are going to start seeing a game that will start to create its own economy, bring in the money and start to pay back the investment that has been put in.

We do not necessarily have the challenge that the men's game has, in the sense that there has been a huge vacuum from the men's game because fans cannot attend. The women's game never had lots of fans attending every week so we have lots of opportunity and scope to figure it out. When fans can come back, there is going to be a huge hunger and desire to watch football and we want to be positioned in a way that engages those fans. At Aston Villa in particular we have a great opportunity because we will be playing at Walsall's stadium over the next two years, which is in the catchment area of 75% of our fans, which means that we have a job to do to engage those fans to come to our games because it is close and it is easy.

Those are the things that I think are a challenge, but also a huge upside and opportunity. We have not necessarily had the problems and the revenue issues that men's football has had because our revenue stream never came from fan attendance.

Q582 **Giles Watling:** Hi Eni, it is really good to see you again. Thank you for coming in. Touching on what Julie Elliott was talking about and drilling down a bit further, it is great that the game has come on. Women's football is there now, people are watching it, fantastic. But along came coronavirus and it has hit everything. It has dented all sorts of sporting events all over the place. Do you think that as it is still emerging, women's football has been unfairly impacted? What do you think we should do to redress that balance as we come out of this Covid lockdown?

Eniola Aluko: I do not think women's football has been unfairly impacted. Fortunately, at the time when the league was cancelled, pretty much 80% of the league had been played. There was lots of alignment between the FA on the women's side and the Premier League on the men's side and a lot of the decisions were being taken as one, which I think is great, in the sense that women's football maybe 10 years ago



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would have been cast aside as a separate consideration. Certainly with all the calls that I had with the FA, which were many during lockdown—

Giles Watling: I bet.

Eniola Aluko: —all the consideration was in alignment with the professional game. I think the real deciding factor obviously was Covid and the testing regime, which I think even for the Premier League was challenging. I do not think the women's game has lost out. I think that to the extent that teams will be back in preseason next week, that we have been able to recruit players, that we have been able to carry on as normal as possible, there is lots to look forward to. Certainly for me—and I can only speak for my job and my role at Aston Villa—we have not felt that there has been any change in operation. We have had to adjust a few things. Certainly for some clubs there will be financial impact.

Q583 **Giles Watling:** Yes, but you do not think the women's game has been unfairly impacted, which is what I wanted to know.

Eniola Aluko: As a whole, no, but I think there will be individual clubs, because their men's team has suffered—this goes back to my point about teams that do not have Premier League investment—there will be significant impact. Let's take Bristol. The revenue percentage for men's teams that are not in the Premier League in terms of fan attendance is much higher.

Q584 **Giles Watling:** So they are all going to be hit harder?

Eniola Aluko: They are all going to be hit harder. If you have a women's team, naturally that is obviously going to trickle down and impact, but the fact that a lot of the women's teams are run by Premier League men's teams, there has not been as much of a financial vacuum as perhaps there would have been in lower-down leagues.

Q585 **Giles Watling:** I would like to move on to a more personal thing. When you gave evidence before so eloquently about the bullying and harassment that you experienced in your time as an England player, you appeared before us and it was a great piece of evidence. Did that make a difference, you appearing before us? Did you get reverberation out there afterwards?

Eniola Aluko: I think it did. I am eternally grateful to the DCMS for giving me that platform and opportunity to speak publicly about my case and speak to change, because ultimately that is what it brought. Shortly after the DCMS hearing I was able to sit down with UK Sport and the FA and talk about the whistleblowing and anti-racism policies that they were going to implement. I genuinely would like to believe that if a similar thing happened to another black player in the team today, it would be dealt with much differently, first of all that it would not happen, but that it would be dealt with much differently, much more independently and without conflict.



I think there was a reverberation. Certainly it changed my life and I would hope that did drive change. There is still a long way to go in terms of just the national women's team understanding how important it is to take a stance against racism. I still think that to this day none of the players, certainly publicly as a team, have come out and said, "We do not endorse racism". There were a few things that they did back in 2017 that confused people slightly in terms of where the team stands. It is very important, aside from Eni Aluko, aside from me, for the team to come out—particularly in this climate—and say, "We understand that there has been some confusion" and perhaps, "We understand that people believe that we endorsed racism, but we do not". I still do not think for the general public that is necessarily clear. We have to be aware, the general public does not forget; people do not forget. You can move on with your life, but I am reminded all the time that a lot of people fight more for me than I do for myself. People do not forget, so I think it is always important to deal with these things, be clear and move on.

Q586 Giles Watling: The message I am getting is that we need to keep on at this.

Eniola Aluko: Yes. I think racism is something that has been in society since the beginning of time. I do not think we will ever be rid of it, but what we can do is make sure that the people who do have those ignorant views do not feel comfortable in sharing them in public. I would like to think that is where we are now, but it needs to continue being an environment where we just respect each other's differences and respect the beauties in our differences. For the people who are ignorant and do not want to learn, do not want to listen, you probably cannot change their minds, but you can make them feel very uncomfortable in sharing their views.

Giles Watling: You are a superb ambassador. Thank you very much.

Q587 Chair: You would have heard in the previous witness session that we talked about homophobia in football. Talking about ignorant views, which you have just mentioned, what do think men's football has to learn from women's football when it comes to that?

Eniola Aluko: I do think there is a distinction. In women's football you have a lot of players who are very comfortable with being gay, very open about their sexuality. There are some cultural differences with that. Certainly in all the teams I have played for, there has never been an issue—if you are straight, you are probably stand out more in women's football—but there is always that respect in terms of sexuality. I think in the men's game, knowing people in the men's game, having a brother in the men's game, there is not an issue in the dressing room. There are gay players and they are just as respected and just as loved and just as admired in the dressing room among their teams.

I think the issue is more about the public. The issue is about, "What backlash am I going to get?" The history does not read well. We had that



tragic case of Justin Fashanu taking his own life. I do think though it is going to take a player just saying, "This is who I am. I am gay and I am a great footballer too and it does not matter". That is going to be the game changer. It has been for many female players. To the point earlier, John's point, there is a huge upside for a male player doing that. They will be admired around the world and I think a lot of fans will say, "Oh wow, okay. It does not matter, they are still great footballers and it does not change anything". I am hoping and praying that a male player will come out while they are playing, because I think a lot of players come out as gay after they retire because they just feel the risk is different. I think it would change everything.

Q588 Kevin Brennan: Following up on that question, I think there were 41 female players at the last Women's World Cup who were openly gay or bisexual, but would it not be problem for a male player to come out at the next World Cup in Qatar, given that the sentence for being gay in Qatar is seven years' imprisonment?

Eniola Aluko: Yes. I think that is a huge conflict and there is certainly a question about whether World Cups should be played in places that have human rights approaches that are different from other places. I would like to think that usually when countries do get World Cups they create an environment that makes it comfortable for the world to be playing in their country. I had the opportunity to be in Russia in 2018 working as a broadcaster. Speaking to Russian people, they said, "It feels completely different to what it usually is". It was like an alternative reality. I would like to think that if that was to happen in Qatar, a player would not be arrested and it would be hugely powerful just because of where it is; it completely contradicts the environment of where it is.

At this point, where society has moved on in terms of understanding and accepting different sexualities, in football it is just about players being brave enough to say, regardless of the backlash, because I think we are seeing that with players with racism. We saw Marcus Rashford just a few weeks ago literally singlehandedly taking on a matter that he felt was important that affected him and changing Government policy as a result. I am sure there were people in his ear telling him, "Gosh, it could go this way, there could be dangerous repercussions". We see players—Raheem Sterling—multiple players now coming out, regardless of risk, talking about quite uncomfortable societal issues. I think it is going to take that, for a player to say, "Do you know what? This is who I am. I do not care about the backlash". I think that player would be protected much more than they probably think. I do think that that is the last bit and I am hoping that it happens in the next few years.

Q589 Kevin Brennan: One other question from me. You are working now in professional football. Obviously that decision to take the FIFA World Cup to Qatar was symptomatic of the financial corruption in football at the international level. Working in the professional game now, what are your reflections on the sorts of practices you see, the big money that is



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involved and things like the proposed takeover of Newcastle United by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund? What are your reflections, as someone who has previously blown the whistle on wrongdoing in sport, on how you see the game?

Eniola Aluko: To my earlier point, I definitely celebrate the multicultural, multi-diverse nature of the Premier League, both on the pitch and off the pitch in terms of ownership. I think there is a lot to be done in terms of boardrooms, but obviously we have to have quality control and we must make sure that our leagues, our clubs, are not funded by conflicting funds that have human rights abuses. The fit and proper person owner test should solve that. Perhaps it is making that more stringent.

When we look at other rules in football that do their job, whether they are about money laundering, anti-corruption, anti-doping, those rules do their jobs. Betting has been something that is coming more into the conversation now in terms of clubs moving away from betting companies as sponsors, in terms of punishing and coming down hard on players and players' families regarding betting. I think the rules are there. It is just about making them more stringent. Financial fair play has a great impact on clubs in terms of spending. If it means making rules more stringent so we are not having to discuss the potential human rights abuses of owners coming into the Premier League because they would not get past the fit and proper person test, then that is what needs to happen.

Q590 **John Nicolson:** Thank you so much for your testimony. Can I just say that some of things you have said I find very moving. I wrote down what you said about gay footballers being gay being not an issue in the dressing room; they are just as loved. It is self-evident that that should be the case, but I thought the way you said it was very striking.

The previous witness talked quite a lot about abuse online and the abuse that gay people get online and would get online were they to come out. One of the things I am observing online at the moment is a huge amount of abuse against trans people. It seems to be a relatively new thing, this upsurge in anti-trans abuse, but it is prevalent and it is deeply offensive. One of the justifications that some of the abusers use is that people in sport are using their birth gender to give themselves enormous advantage. For example, in football, if you are born a man and you are trans and become a woman, you have huge advantage over somebody who was born a woman. Do you think that trans people are a problem in women's sport, particularly in football? Do they have an unfair advantage?

Eniola Aluko: I have not had any examples or do not know of any examples, but I think it would be contradictory of me to say that everybody is welcome, whatever sexuality, race or belief and not include transgender people in that. Advantage? I do not know. Football is a meritocratic sport. I used to be a really quick forward and was really fast. I think a lot of people, a lot of defenders would say I had an unfair



advantage. Advantage is subjective. What I would say to that is that everybody in women's football should be welcome. It is as simple as that.

Q591 **John Nicolson:** Thank you for that, because if you listen to what some of these people are saying online, you would think that trans women were winning Wimbledon as a matter of course, that they are the backbone of every football and cricket team and have won every single weightlifting contest. It is a parallel universe that they seem to live in and I am glad to hear you confirm it from your perspective.

Eniola Aluko: In terms of online abuse, it is relative, the world we live in. To the extent that the likes of Twitter and Facebook allow it to happen, it will continue to happen. I do not know what Government can do to hold the likes of Twitter to more account. I do not think there is enough done to prevent social media abuse. I saw Katie Hopkins be suspended from Twitter the other day and I thought, "Oh, all right, it can be done". Quite clearly there is potential for people to be taken offline for the hateful things that they say. I am not sure why it is not more prevalent.

John Nicolson: I think that is a question all of us ask. The good news is that Katie Hopkins has been taken off Twitter permanently.

In concluding, one of the problems is sometimes I think that politicians get frightened by very small, vociferous minorities on Twitter. For example, there is a debate about the Gender Recognition Act at the moment. My experience as a politician is that people never talk about this on the doors and sportspeople and athletes like yourself do not talk about this. Politicians are scared when they see a big pile-on and they think, "Oh, perhaps these people represent a mood in society" and they get frightened away from progressive legislation, and of course that—apart from just the unpleasantness of the abuse targeted at individuals—can have a policy knock-on effect, which is a concern. I appreciate your evidence. Thank you so much.

Q592 **Clive Efford:** Eni, thank you for coming in today to give evidence. It is a pleasure to hear your evidence. Can I clarify a couple of things that you said earlier on so I fully understand? Did you say in an answer earlier on that there are gay players that are out among their peers in the dressing room, but just have not come out publicly or did I mishear?

Eniola Aluko: *[Inaudible.]*

Q593 **Clive Efford:** I do not know if I should be, but I am surprised that is the case and it has not become public in any way. That is good to hear.

Eniola Aluko: I think there have been rumours and newspapers that try to get the exclusive on who this player may be. Ultimately I think the statistics would say that of course there will be gay players.

Clive Efford: Absolutely, yes.



Eniola Aluko: I think the beauty of it is that 99.9% of players would say, "I would not care if my team mate is gay". The issue now is that fear of what fans are going to do and say, but I do not think that is as legitimate a fear as it used to be because we are living in a world now where being gay is something that is widely accepted. Yes, you will be subject to abuse on social media, as women are, as black people are—there is so much. But I do think that now if a current player—let's say a current Premier League player—comes out as gay, they would be widely praised, applauded, lauded and respected. I use the analogy of what is happening now with players who are using their voices against racism. They are being applauded and clapped up and praised because they are using their voices; they are using their platforms.

The impact that has, there are going to be so many little Marcus Rashfords in Manchester who are totally inspired by what he did the other week, young boys who probably thought that, "There is not much going for me in life" are now inspired by Marcus Rashford. In the same way, a gay Premier League player coming out, or any gay player coming out around the world who is currently playing, that would have a huge impact on young gay boys who may like football, who may feel, "Oh, I cannot play football" because of all the stereotypes around being gay. I personally look forward to that and think the impact would be hugely positive.

Q594 **Clive Efford:** It is great to hear. The players have a lot to teach the fans. I think that is absolutely right and it is good to hear your answer. The other thing I want to clarify with you is you believe that the talent base is there among BAME people within the sport of football and it is just that at executive level they are not being given their chance.

Eniola Aluko: I think the talent base is there. I think there is a lot of BAME representation, certainly in academies. You will see a lot more black coaches in academies than you will see at the top level. That says to me that there is a pathway pool being created, but it is not necessarily allowed to rise up to the top. I think the Premier League this week announced that it has started a scheme again to incentivise new coaches who have a minimum UEFA B licence to go into coaching, to be black coaches who can become great candidates.

I think there is a bit of a racist assumption at the moment that somehow black coaches may not have the qualifications or may be inferior and the reality is that there are lots of coaches who are not good enough that are white. Like anything in life, there are lots of very good people and lots of bad people. In the same way, there will be great black coaches and there will be bad black coaches. The minute we judge people by their talent and their character rather than the colour of their skin, then we are getting to where we need to get to. But obviously we are seeing a discrepancy in terms of we are only seeing one type of person in boardrooms and top managerial jobs, particularly in the Premier League. That is only going to get better if the pool of recruitment gets wider.



The incentivisation of black coaches who are already in the system or black coaches coming out of football, if that grows, then you will get—I use the analogy, we want to find a black Pep Guardiola or a black Jürgen Klopp. We are not going to find them unless we look and we incentivise the pathway to find them. There is a lot to do there, but I do want to applaud the Premier League because it has listened. I wrote a column a few weeks ago about the Black Lives Matter movement. I said the Black Lives Matter is fantastic, the symbolism and the performative action are great, but ultimately there is still a huge elephant in the room in terms of racial relations and representation at top levels of sport. A few weeks later the Premier League has come out with a new initiative and that is what we want. We want initiatives, we want incentivisation of the pathway and there are potentially some mandatory policies that will drive owners and directors to recruit more widely.

Q595 Clive Efford: We have had initiatives though for the best part of the last decade from the FA, from the Premier League. You were very outspoken in 2017 and perhaps spoke very powerfully about the racism within the sport. Do you think that what we need is new initiatives or is it what you were speaking about earlier, that the talent is there, so just get on and employ them?

Eniola Aluko: I think it is two-pronged. You have to create initiatives and a pathway. You have to incentivise the pathway and initiatives are good to do that, like the minimum qualification incentive, which is great. If you are saying to black coaches, “You must have minimum UEFA B, you must have X, Y or Z qualification” that is upskilling black coaches. What I think is important is that there is a lot of misconception around the Rooney Rule and what we are trying to do, this idea that you should be given a job because you are black. No one is asking for that. Football is a very competitive meritocracy. What we are saying is that we want the best black candidates to be given the opportunity to get into the room and shine. The owners and the directors who are open-minded enough to see talent for what it is will pick that black coach or black director, as I was for Aston Villa by the owner, Christian Purslow. I would like to think that me being a black woman was incidental to the fact that I was also a lawyer, I did a two-year Master’s in sport directorship and I have lots of experience in the game. So anyone who says to me, “You got the job as a black woman”, maybe, but I also have great qualifications. It is the same in coaching, that we want upskilling. We want initiatives that will upskill and incentivise.

The flipside of that, the second part of that is obviously saying there is probably a bit of prejudice here with selection and we tend to go for what we know. Can we mandatorily say you must interview two qualified candidates—two or three, whatever the number may be—for the job? Then we will start to see owners go, “That was a very good candidate. I want to give them a job” but if it is not in front of you, you are not going to choose it. There is a two-pronged step. At the moment there is just a lot of recycling of the same people in the game and if you do something



like make a target or a quota, as I mentioned with the home-grown quota rule, you will start to see recruitment behaviour change.

Clive Efford: Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to hear your evidence. I look forward to you being the next chief executive of the FA.

Eniola Aluko: Thank you.

Chair: Eni Aluko, thank you very much for your evidence today. It has been a great pleasure to welcome you to the Committee once more.

Eniola Aluko: Thank you for having me.

Examination of witness

Huw Edwards

Q596 **Chair:** I now welcome our third witness, Huw Edwards, the Chief Executive of ukactive. Good morning, Huw.

Huw Edwards: Good morning.

Chair: Good morning and thank you for waiting. I know we are slightly overrunning, as per usual. Thank you for joining us in this session. You have been listening to the other witnesses. Just slightly separately, in relation to your industry and Covid-19, what do you think are the remaining barriers to reopening indoor sporting facilities and what lessons do you think sport can learn from the reopening of hospitality, for example?

Huw Edwards: Good morning, Chair. Thank you for the invitation. We are moving very close and very soon to the announcement on the reopening of the sector. That was indicated by the Prime Minister last Friday. I think that movement has happened at greater pace and urgency across Government, where you have seen ukactive working very closely with Government officials, directly with the Chief Medical Officer's team, representatives from SAGE and representatives from Public Health England. What we have found is that even though this evidence and our guidance for reopening the sector has been with Government since early May, what was required last week was that level of direct engagement. We hosted five site visits over six hours with senior officials to answer any of their outstanding questions regarding the reopening of the sector, which obviously covered health, fitness and also indoor sports.

What they were taken by was the professionalism of the sector, looking at key areas, looking at membership contact and membership tracking. We have an inbuilt track and trace system within the sector, given the way our membership systems work, so we are able to identify who has been in our facility at any time and that becomes very useful as and when there is any required engagement. Incredible levels of hygiene and sanitation have been put in place across the whole of facilities, social distancing arrangements have been clearly in place for respecting the social distancing guidelines and looking at other wider areas around



airflow and air extraction, there was great reassurance. I have continued those conversations with officials over the last couple of days and now we await the direction from Government in terms of reopening.

Q597 Chair: It is interesting that you emphasise the point that this has moved at pace in very recent times. I listened to an interview with Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson just the other day on the radio. She was pretty angry, frankly, about what she saw as Government's lack of engagement with your sector. Is that the story? Was that what was happening until very recently? Do you think Government just did not get it in terms of your sector?

Huw Edwards: It is a good question. My Chair was very frustrated and angry, as we all were within the sector. Looking at the conversation we had last week, I think that there has been an issue of having that direct engagement that we had, working through the sponsor Department here and the sponsor Departments then working into the centre, working very closely with No. 10, working with the Chief Medical Officer's team and with the representatives from SAGE. It was only when they were able to facilitate that direct engagement between ukactive, its major operators and the experts we have within those operators and those officials were we able to clarify any of the outstanding questions that we felt we were going in effect from theoretical decisions through to operational decisions and once we were on site, once they were able to see how the sector is going to operate.

Yes, there were frustrations, yes, there was surprise that we were not in that suite of sectors announced on 23 June. What we quickly moved on was a real focus on what we needed, which was that direct engagement and the site visits. What hopefully will happen in the next couple of days is a direction around the timetable for reopening, which from our sector—all sectors are very important and we understand that—we recognise that potentially our sector has a unique role to play, given we are in the health business and this is a health crisis. We can contribute to the solution around health in society, through both prevention and rehabilitation from Covid-19.

Q598 Chair: You mentioned test and trace and how you have good IT support in order to ensure that you can see who your customers are, what they are doing, where they are effectively within your networks. What other measures do you think are needed in order to get indoor activity going? I do not just mean in terms of your sector, but more widely. Yesterday we saw the money for performing arts, for cultural institutions. There is a concern here that even at one metre, a lot of indoor activity does not work. What is your thinking in terms of what needs to happen? What do you need to put in place in order to effectively run profitably?

Huw Edwards: In terms of the activities taking place, there are probably two parts to that question. The activities taking place, what they saw last week was the ability to operate exercise activities on the gym floor, in the group exercise classes, on the main weights floor in terms of moderate to



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higher intensity and lower intensity activity as well. Then they have seen what we can do within the sports halls. We are working very closely with the national governing bodies that utilise our facilities to make sure that their individual guidance around how you can activate sports like squash or badminton, obviously swimming—you look at the swimming pools we visited last week, there is the widening of lanes—there is an ability to have smaller classes and operate in a way that is compatible with social distancing. We have been working very closely with the NGB to have a direct dependency on our opening time and then we will make that work.

The separate question is around the sustainability of the sector. There are probably two areas there. This is not a homogenous sector. We have public operators and private operators. With regard to private operators, there is an opportunity for Government to support the stimulation of demand and the Chancellor is making a statement tomorrow. We are hopeful that we are part of those suggested announcements around VAT and business rates, continuing the support between landlords and tenants to make sure that we find an equitable solution there. There is a big problem in public leisure and that has been with Government, especially working with the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government for a long time.

The Department has a requirement, given the non-statutory status of public leisure, to make a direct intervention at the earliest opportunity because we are sleepwalking into a loss of public leisure across the country. We are estimating the potential loss of 50% of those facilities by the end of this calendar year. It has fallen between the cracks, I feel, in terms of its non-statutory status, so that needs urgent addressing to support immediate funding to allow these facilities to reopen, because while we are no doubt looking forward to getting the green light on the reopening of the sector, some of those facilities, especially on the public side, will not be able to open.

Chair: What percentage will not be able to reopen? Did you say 50%?

Huw Edwards: We are projecting up to 35% of facilities will not be able to open as and when the green light has happened. We are also projecting that over the rest of this year, if the funding that we have requested from the Government is not provided around public leisure, you will lose probably 50% of the public leisure estate. We recognise the important role that all our members play, both public and private, But from the public leisure side, and especially in terms of issues around lower economic groupings and representatives from the black, Asian and minority ethnic community, we know that will be one in four members.

When you are looking at the issues around health disparities from the Public Health England report, our sector had a key role to play in addressing that. It would be a tragedy if these facilities were not funded and supported. Also we need the whole sector to be supported collectively because we have a key role to play in combating this health crisis as and when we are open again.



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Q599 **Chair:** Half of all leisure centres could close. Did you get any help at all in March? £195 million was announced to support physical activity. Did the leisure centres see any of that money?

Huw Edwards: This is really a bigger plot. We have asked the Government for just under £800 million to support two paths. First, the funding for public leisure in that interim period while they have been closed, but also to support sustainability in the short to medium term. There is a conversation around how public leisure is categorised. It is obviously non-statutory in the role it plays. It obviously provides a lot more social value than just straight activity, exercise and sport, because it has an impact on reductions in knife crime, isolation, loneliness and of course issues of mental wellbeing. These are facilities in the fabric of the community. There are facilities where the constituencies of all the members here could be under threat.

There was clear talk and very important talk yesterday around the Crown Jewels, around art, a sector that we completely appreciate and support. There is a Crown Jewel at stake here as well. Stoke Mandeville provides visits and supports half a million people every year. It supports 50,000 disabled people every year. It is also the birthplace of the Paralympic movement and that facility is currently under threat. It would be an absolute tragedy if that facility was lost, given its historic role and also its current role in terms of supporting the community that it has.

Q600 **Damian Green:** Good morning. I am glad to hear that you are optimistic about early changes to the rules, but as we sit here today, to many people it will look ridiculous that pubs are open, but gyms, swimming pools, bowling alleys and so forth are not open. In all your talks with the Government, have you heard any scientific evidence that makes you think, "Fair enough, maybe gyms and swimming pools can be more dangerous than pubs"?

Huw Edwards: That is a very good question. I think it is down to relative risk. From our perspective, we have argued all the way through that the relative risk of going to a gym, a leisure centre or an indoor sports facility is low. There is risk when we leave our house with Covid-19, of course. What we have done in the last couple of months is the following. We have provided the Government guidance in early May around how we feel we can curate our facilities within social distance guidance. What happened over the last couple of weeks is, on reflection, following the 23 June announcement, there was desire for greater clarification on a number of areas. We got that clarification and we were able to provide that clarification last Wednesday, especially in the conversation we had with the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, representatives from SAGE and representatives from Public Health England.

There is a hindsight conversation about whether those visits could have taken place six weeks ago, of course, and there is an understandable frustration that they did not happen then. But they have happened now



and I am growing in confidence in terms of the conversation we have had with the Government over the last couple of days. Those visits and the inspection of our facilities, both the public and private, of various different sizes and various different shapes, has shown and given complete confidence on how we can operate in as safe a way as possible, respecting social distancing, having the highest levels of sanitation and crucially tracking who comes in and out of our facilities as well.

Q601 Damian Green: Any distinction in terms of safety and therefore likelihood to be opened soon between public sector facilities and private facilities?

Huw Edwards: Our indications were they would be opened at the same time. The visit we had last week involved public and private operators and the Prime Minister announced last Friday, I believe, in his press briefing that he will be given that timetable over the coming days. Our expectation is that given the commonality of some of the operations—obviously there are different dynamics to different parts of the facilities, but our intention is that there will be a green light for both the public side and the private operators as well.

Q602 Damian Green: You make the point that you have now been able to make your pitch and you feel it is being listened to. In the course of the last few weeks, how well do you feel your sector has been represented by DCMS and Sport England?

Huw Edwards: I want to give credit to the teams at both DCMS and Sport England. It comes down to a much bigger structural issue in terms of how sport and physical activity is seen across the Westminster estate. I have had conversations now with multiple Departments, associated with not just Covid-19, but the state of sport and physical activity in the UK. While there have been great endeavours in terms of the work that DCMS and Sport England have done in terms of the conversations, the accountability for sport and physical activity is scattered across the whole of the portfolio of Departments, especially in the case of public leisure and some of the conversations we are having around the memoranda around forfeiture, especially for rent arrears and avoiding statutory demands for the private operators. We are speaking with various other different Departments, like Communities and Local Government. While probably there is an advantage in terms of the observation of sport that has led to it being across all these other Departments, I do feel the collective lobbying is diluted because the accountability is split across so many Departments.

Q603 Damian Green: Would you prefer public leisure to be defined in some way that you had one Department who would then act as your sponsor?

Huw Edwards: That is a good question. There is a need for public leisure to be redefined per se and I think the role it plays is currently a non-statutory responsibility of local authorities. It is clearly evident that local leisure especially is playing a role across a much wider level of KPIs,



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especially around wider health, social care, isolation, loneliness, antisocial behaviour and crime reduction. It needs a redefinition. It needs clarity as well in terms of its long-term role. That is a conversation that is required and I think there is a great appetite to have that conversation. In the short term we just need the money signed off and the urgency of the money agreed by the Treasury in order to save the estate. Not saving the estate would run counter to everything we are trying to do around both combating Covid-19 and rehabilitation from Covid-19, which is going to be crucial in terms of in-community support.

Q604 Steve Brine: Hello, Huw. Just a quick one from me on the old swimming. What has been the issue with swimming? Chlorine is a pretty good killer. Presumably it is the changing facilities. What about lidos? Clearly you could rock up there in your trunks, quite a sight to see if I did, but I am sure you would look great. What is the issue with the outdoor pool, especially given how hot it has been?

Huw Edwards: Yes, good question, Steven. I think the situation generally with both indoor and outdoor pools has come back to exactly the position around clarity and exposure to those people who are directly making the decisions in and around the CMO and around No. 10. What was evident from the visits we had last week, especially to Kensington Leisure Centre, which has a major swimming pool—obviously we visited private swimming pools, both indoor and outdoor as well—it was just providing clarity. It was providing clarity on how they would operate. You are right to say there is evidence to suggest that chlorinated water is a great combatant of Covid-19. The set-up in these facilities will respect social distancing, for example, the widening of lanes.

For all intents and purposes, it has come down to having exposure to the decision-makers right at the top in terms of those who will be signing off the guidance and then the reopening of the sector. The pace of that following 23 June has been evident. We were given reassurance from SAGE, from Public Health England and from the CMO's team around where we are, and we await that final decision, hopefully at some point in the next couple of days.

Q605 Steve Brine: Do you think that it has been imaginative enough? You could have been in a position where you could open outdoor swimming pools and people come already dressed up or dressed down. You could get around it with a bit more imagination, could you not?

Huw Edwards: I think so. With hindsight—and I think there will be collective agreement on that—the ability to get those decision-makers out to those facilities in the last four to six weeks would have seen our sector open in that last week of sectors that were announced on 23 June for the 4 July opening. That is frustrating, but we have now had those visits and we are now going to hopefully have those conversations and get the green light for our sector over the next few days.

Q606 Steve Brine: If you had to put money on it, would you say this time next



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week you will be able to go to the swimming pool?

Huw Edwards: I would say hopefully we will get the green light in the next few days. The operators need to set up their facilities, so hopefully in the next couple of weeks.

Chair: Can you unmute, please, Clive?

Clive Efford: I thought I had, beg your pardon. Huw, how are you?

Huw Edwards: I am good, Clive. How are you?

Q607 **Clive Efford:** Good. Huw, I am sorry if I am a bit slow on the uptake, but I did not quite understand why it was you were not allowed to open on 4 July. The number of pubs that must have had all sorts of complications must be far more numerous than the number of leisure centres and gyms that presented the same problems. How far in advance of the announcement were you told that you were not going to be able to open on 4 July?

Huw Edwards: We were probably given the indication in the last 24 hours or so before the Prime Minister's announcement. We were obviously incredibly frustrated by that in terms of understanding why. I think the sector was really frustrated about the why, given the amount of information we had provided and given the work we have been doing very closely with partners like Sport England and DCMS in terms of that. We got to a point where there was a huge amount of frustration. We got the indication in that final 24 hours. I think what happened in that 24 hours and immediately after the Prime Minister's announcement was a recognition that we needed to address the issue, which was ultimately not necessarily concerns, but outstanding questions about how these facilities operate.

It was noticeable when we took the experts and the leaders around the facilities last Wednesday that they were able to see how these facilities operate in 2020. That provided a greater level of reassurance around membership monitoring, social distancing, the hygiene levels and also the modern levels of regulation around airflow, air extraction and so forth. Ultimately, I would say that there was a delay in that level of direct engagement, which could have happened—frustratingly—four to six weeks earlier. Those questions have now hopefully been answered and now we can move into a speedy resolution and get the sector reopened.

Q608 **Clive Efford:** If those were the issues, you have to wonder how they opened pubs, do you not? All of those issues must apply tenfold to public houses. It is an extraordinary decision, is it not, to separate off these large leisure facilities on the whole from pubs, many of which will be quite tiny?

Huw Edwards: Yes. There is obviously a wider debate on the optics there, Clive. Yes, there was some comparison to other sectors. It is a frustration that we are in the health business and we play a crucial role, especially where Covid-19 has been an attack on the resilience of



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people's health. You see that the highest rate of hospitalisation after age relates to obesity. We are in the health business and we have a key role to play right now as we open in getting our communities healthy to not only combat Covid-19, but also in the facilities in Eltham where you are. No doubt that is going to be a key role in the rehabilitation.

This is a nasty virus and the rehabilitation schemes will have to match what we have in terms of cardiac, pulmonary and cancer rehabilitation. We are a national service here and we are the front line in supporting NHS and getting the nation healthy. That was a bigger frustration to those comparisons with other sectors, and especially that there was a lot of evidence from mainland Europe over the last four to six weeks where millions of people have been going to our sector in our partnerships across Europe.

Q609 Clive Efford: Yes. You have been looking at my notes because that was where I was going to go next, this whole issue of health. There are reports coming out now that there are after-effects, even for people who have had a mild dose of the virus; they can suffer some ongoing issues. There is clearly a health role for gyms and leisure centres, but perhaps particularly the public sector ones, in the recovery of people's health and mental health as well. Of course you must not miss out on that. Does your sector have a plan? Are you talking to the Department of Health to play that role, because it is going to be an important one that is going to be ongoing, is it not?

Huw Edwards: That is a great question, Clive. Yes, we are obviously awaiting a strategy around obesity in the coming weeks; that is the indication. We want to make sure we are consulted and make sure that we are able to support the development of that. It will be a very important strategy to complement the other strategies that are in place. There is a clear need and our sector and our members, both public and private, and also children's activity providers have a key role to play in supporting and increasing the resilience of our society. This has been an attack on individual resilience around health and within community resilience. What do we need to do? Any plan that is required will need to look at the youngest to the oldest in society.

We need to have major interventions around children and young people. 80% of children who are obese will take that into adulthood. There is a real need to support the children and young people's agenda, recognising the premium that was announced on Sunday. But that took a lot of effort, especially from organisations like YST and ourselves to get it over the line. There needs to be a holistic approach to children and young people and radical change into what has been presented before. We need to look at our own workplace. We are now all sitting down here. Sedentary behaviour is exacerbated by Covid-19. How are we going to get greater movement, health and wellbeing into the workplace? Then we have to look at long-term health conditions and aging.



You are right, these facilities need to be the front line of the NHS and support the NHS in terms of its agenda. There is a real role recognising the National Academy for Social Prescribing, which was announced at the backend of last year, that we can play and have better deals with the NHS and with the Social Prescribing Academy. The sector, NHS and the Government will be hugely dependent on our facilities, not only to address the issues of prevention and build up immune systems but, as you rightly say, Clive, rehabilitation will be taking place in Eltham, in the communities that you have, both public and private, and there is a great opportunity to build these up and support the strengthening of a workforce to be able to provide those in community services.

Clive Efford: Great answer. Thanks, Huw. Good to see you.

Q610 **Damian Hinds:** Just to follow on from Clive on that public health angle, particularly on children, it sounds like you are confident that things are going to move now very quickly, which is encouraging. How important is it that particularly public sector sport centres and leisure centres are open in time for the school holidays and how will you give confidence, particularly to parents, about the safety of coming out?

Huw Edwards: We are going to be working very closely with our members and the public sector around the guidance that is coming out. We are working very closely obviously with DfE on the publication of the guidance last week around how facilities and how children's activity providers can support the activity levels with children and young people, noticing the decline in activity levels that Sport England identified in its recent research. We visited Kensington Leisure Centre last week as part of the site visit with the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, SAGE and PHE officials. It was already ready to go in terms of its programmes around swimming and around family classes. It will be updating and setting up its operations.

In terms of the wider process, there is a question of how radical we want to be. Your school sport and activity action plan pointed to a lot of that direction. How can we support children being as active as they possibly can be going into the summer? We know that, especially from low-income backgrounds, children can lose up to 80% of their fitness levels during the summer holiday. We have argued quite a lot about not only just community leisure centres being able to equip that, but the facilities you have in local communities, especially school facilities, can be opened and opened at scale to support especially children and young people from the lowest income backgrounds to be at it. That is the real challenge here: how do you stop the decline in children's activity that you have seen over this period—or exacerbated by this period—and utilise facilities you have in your community in a way that has never been seen before on a radical scale, with ambition?

Q611 **Damian Hinds:** I wanted to ask specifically about capacity utilisation and yield management, effectively. You have a fixed-capacity asset that is going to be more constrained now than it would have been in the past



and you have two big groups of people that you are trying to attract. There are people returning, which presumably is a relatively straightforward set of messaging, but there are also people who have not been habitual users of sports and leisure centres in the past, but who we need to try to help reactivate. I wondered—and it is a big combined question—what initiatives can we expect to see, first to reach out to that latter group, but also—you sort of touched on this already—how to increase the capacity at a time when these restrictions are in place?

Huw Edwards: That is a great question, looking at some of those more entrenched engagements. We are looking at our figures. We are not going to know until the doors open, hopefully in a couple of weeks, but we know from our own polling, Damian, more than 80% of members want to come back as quickly as possible. We are also seeing that 25% to 30% of non-members want to go back into a gym facility. We give credit to the Government for the volume of messaging over the last 12 weeks around the importance of exercising in combating Covid. There will be capacity in the system because if you look at natural levels of activity within both public and private operators over the July to August period, while there will be social distancing, there will also be the ability to confidently accommodate those numbers in that period of time. We will need to monitor that going into the autumn.

The real opportunity is, as you say, going around existing estates and the existing portfolio facilities that you have. We have done some projects with partners like Sainsbury's, where we opened up 70 schools last summer and had over 100,000 children and young people attend. There is the opportunity to move at real scale here. It was alluded to by Paul in the previous evidence session around the Commonwealth Games. Why do we not show them what we can do in terms of opening up existing assets to accommodate and support the young ones in our society to be active and marry that with the work around free school meals? You can target those 1.3 million kids on free school meals and give them the activity level to marry with the challenges they have around diet. That is a real opportunity there. That is where our argument would be. That is a real area of existing facilities that can be utilised in a way they have not been before. It just comes down to ambition.

Damian Hinds: Thank you, Huw. Let us hope for good news in the next few days.

Chair: Unmute, Giles, please.

Q612 **Giles Watling:** You cannot hear me because I did not turn the microphone on, I am sorry. Hello, Huw, and thanks for being here. I just wanted to ask a very simple and very quick question. What measures practically on the ground are you taking to be Covid-ready and distancing? How does it work? Is it all to do with health regimes? Is it to do with distancing? How do you do it? I am interested because what you do is not unlike the theatre sector, which I am interested in as well. We should all cross-fertilise and learn from each other.



Huw Edwards: Giles, if you want to sort out a visit in Clacton, we can go down to one of the facilities and show you in the next couple of weeks. It will feel different when customers go back. There will be controlling of access in and out of facilities; there will be monitoring and control of numbers coming in and out of facilities. In terms of equipment, especially on the gym floor, you will see areas mapped out to maintain social distancing, as the guidelines are, and you will see equipment like treadmills and exercise bike equipment, almost alternate equipment, taken out of usage to maintain social distancing regulations. In terms of group exercise, we are restricting the numbers of people in the class and restricting times. In addition to that, you will not be able to move without seeing sanitisation pods. As Steve alluded to in terms of swimming, we are encouraging people to come beach-ready for swimming and indoor pools. There is obviously going to be a different look and feel.

We have been working very closely with our operators and our members with a Fit Together campaign, looking at the support, the encouragement and the stimulation of encouragement for people and using myth busters in terms of sweat—obviously Covid is not transmitted in sweat—and reassuring their customer base about their return. People want to come back, they want to get back into their rhythm, but what they will see is an updated facility, great levels of hygiene and sanitisation and social distance space. What you are interestingly seeing in mainland Europe in the four to six weeks they have been open, where you have historically had the peaks of activity in the morning before work and in the evening after work, you are getting more of a level playing field, because of people still being in their home and the hybrid between home working and office working. You are getting murmurs at certain times, 11 am, 2 pm and 4 pm, and that will help support capacity management within these facilities as well.

Q613 **Giles Watling:** Your facilities are needed now more than ever, pretty much, because people are not out and about.

Huw Edwards: We need to get the nation healthy and we are going to be the front line of that. That has to be the drive and we will work with the Government and with all the parties on prioritising the sector's role in the future.

Q614 **Giles Watling:** Yes, absolutely. You mentioned all those measures that you are taking, wiping things down, keeping things clean and distancing. But in relation to actors onstage, if you are exercising in any way you are creating aerobic particulates that hit the air. Are you talking about mask wearing as well?

Huw Edwards: We are not talking about mask wearing. What you will see in terms of ventilation systems is obviously air extraction. We work very closely with our own ventilation teams. We are the experts on SAGE, who reassure about the airflow and the air extraction within these facilities. We would love to support other sectors who are in the same boat as us to give them the level of guidance and support that we have



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had to this point and hopefully have the green light in the next couple of days. That is an offer that we would be more than happy to support.

Q615 **Giles Watling:** Industrial air extraction might be a way forward for a lot of areas?

Huw Edwards: The sector is incredibly regulated in terms of air ventilation and air guidance. With the six feet guidance, Sport England have guidance around public theatre as well. Airflow and air extraction is suffice to minimise the risk associated with any transmission.

Q616 **Giles Watling:** Does that include air filtration?

Huw Edwards: It does.

Giles Watling: That was very interesting. Thank you, Huw.

Q617 **Clive Efford:** Very quickly, Huw—you may not have this to hand, so if you could send it to us—but I remember a sport and recreation report quite a number of years ago that made a prediction about the cost to the NHS and the cost to the economy of lack of activity. I wonder if your sector has any figures around that that they could send to us about the contribution you could make in preventing those costs coming about.

Huw Edwards: Yes, 100%, Clive. Physical activity is the fourth largest reason for premature death in the UK and the economic cost is £20 billion every year.

Clive Efford: If you could send those figures to us, that would be great.

Chair: Thank you for evidence today, Huw Edwards. That concludes our session.