



Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Minister for Schools

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Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Chair of Women & Equalities Committee
By email: womeqcom@parliament.uk

19 December 2023

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your letter of 22 November requesting information to support the Women and Equalities Committee examination into Health and physiology-related barriers for girls and women in sport and exercise.

The Government is committed to supporting everyone to be able to lead active and healthy lifestyles. To encourage this, the Government has introduced strategies to promote and address equal opportunities to access sport and physical activity.

The Get Active strategy published in August 2023 provides a blueprint for how a system wide approach including schools can get 1 million more children and 2.5 million adults meeting the Chief Medical Officers' daily recommended amount of moderate to vigorous physical activity. As part of this strategy, the Government has established a National Physical Activity taskforce which is chaired by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport or the Minister for Sport and former England and British Lions rugby player, Ugo Monye.

The taskforce will advise on how to deliver on the targets, challenge how ambitions are being delivered and hold the Government, National Governing Bodies, and the physical activity sector to account at both national and local level.

Scrutiny will come from nominated government departments, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Sport England, UK Sport, Active Travel England, Independent representatives from a range of stakeholders including representatives on a rotating basis from the National Sector Partners Group (NSPG), National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Active Partnerships and Local Government.

For schools, we published the School Sport and Activity Action plan (SSAAP) in July 2023. It sets out a joint commitment from the Department for Education (DfE), Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) to ongoing collaboration at national level. This is to ensure that sport and physical activity are an integral part of both the school day and during after-school activities for all boys and girls. For some individuals this will be the principal opportunity to access organised physical activities that contribute towards reaching the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity for children.

The SSAAP built on the Department's 8 March 2023 announcement of the Primary PE and Sport Premium for 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years, and the funded Opening School Facilities programme until March 2025. Schools can use these funding streams to increase provision and improve equal access to sport for boys and girls.

I look forward to engaging with you and other stakeholders further on this important issue. Please see the response to the initial questions you have asked below in Annex A.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds', is centered on the page.

Damian Hinds
Minister for Schools

Annex A – Response to initial questions from the Women and Equalities Select Committee

What specific actions is the Government taking, through your strategies and action plans, to address girls' disproportionately high dropout rates from sports and exercise, with particular reference to challenges and barriers related to bodily changes associated with puberty, periods and menstrual cycles, the availability of suitable sports and PE kit, and associated body image issues?

We know from Sport England's Active Lives Children Survey in December 2021 that there was parity between boys and girls being active for 60 minutes per day, but in the December 2022 figures, there was a re-emergence of an overall gender gap of 5% between boys (50%) and girls (45%) who are being active for 60 minutes per day.

The SSAAP acknowledged that girls and boys were not getting the same opportunities to play certain team sports in school. The Government has made it clear this was not acceptable and that the expectation for schools should be to give girls and boys equal opportunities and access to the same sports where they are wanted. We called for schools to prioritise equality of opportunity and access in the planning and design of their PE and extracurricular sport.

To encourage schools to do this, from September 2023 the Government has overseen a change to the School Games Mark by introducing equality criteria. The Youth Sport Trust administered scheme now requires a school to demonstrate that it is prioritising gender issues in their planning and delivery of PE and school sport to attain the award.

To tackle the specific barriers faced by girls in accessing PE and sport the Department for Education invested almost £980k for the 'Your Time' initiative which is funded until March 2024. The programme provides leadership and competitive opportunities for girls aged 8-16. An outcome of the programme is to address barriers to girls' participation, which includes body consciousness. We are working with Learning Skills Foundation to capture the learning from this programme and further understand how schools approach issues like body consciousness to support girls to access PE and sport.

The Department is supporting all pupils in school to understand the barriers and challenges related to bodily change through the [relationships, sex and health education \(RSHE\) statutory guidance](#). The guidance supports teachers to deliver key facts about the menstrual cycle to girls and boys which can help tackle some of the stigma surrounding periods and participating in physical exercise in PE and extracurricular sport.

The Government also encourages schools in the non-statutory uniform guidance - [School uniforms - GOV.UK](#) (www.gov.uk) to design uniform policy in consultation with parents and pupils. To support that, the uniform guidance contains a number of recommendations which do contribute to supporting girls to take part in sport and PE, such as: considering how comfortable the proposed uniform will be for pupils; ensuring that their uniform is suitable and safe for pupils who walk or cycle

to school, for instance, by allowing pupils to wear a coat which they could be visible in when it is dark going home; and choosing a PE kit which is practical, comfortable and appropriate to the activity involved.

Please set out any plans the Government has to address gendered differences in early years physical activity (the “gender play gap”) by tackling gender stereotyping of pre-school age children.

The [Early Years Foundation Stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#) sets the standards and requirements all early years providers in England must meet to ensure that children from birth to five learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe.

The EYFS requires early years providers, ordinarily schools, to complete the EYFS Profile assessment at the end of the academic year in which children turn five. Each child’s level of development is assessed against 17 early learning goals (ELGs) across all seven areas of learning in the EYFS. The EYFS Profile results for the 2022/23 academic year show a higher percentage of girls is at the expected level in the physical development area of learning when compared to boys (91.9% and 78.8% respectively). A higher percentage of girls are at the expected level for the gross motor skills ELG (95%) compared to boys (89.3%) and for the fine motor skills ELG (92.7%) compared to boys (79.7%). This trend was also seen in the EYFS Profile results for 2021/22 with 91.6% of girls achieving the expected level for physical development compared to 78.4% of boys.

The EYFS learning and development requirements include the seven areas of learning and development which must shape educational programmes (activities and experiences) for all children in early years settings. Physical development is one of the three prime areas of learning and development which also includes communication and language and personal, social, and emotional development.

The Department has also made early years child development training publicly available. This online programme is designed to help practitioners improve their knowledge and understanding of child development so they can support children in early education settings. This includes a module on supporting physical development in the early years which promotes inclusive practice by setting out the importance of encouraging all children to participate in a wide range of activities regardless of their gender and avoiding stereotypical behaviour.

Does the Government have any plans to encourage or mandate greater understanding of female health and physiology-related barriers to sport and exercise among PE teachers and/or coaches/instructors in the wider sports and exercise sector?

The Department for Education plans to publish non-statutory guidance early in the new year to exemplify how schools already offer equally accessible PE and wider school sport to boys and girls as well as offering at least 2 hours PE curriculum time. Officials are currently working closely with a wide range of stakeholders, such as subject associations and other sporting bodies like the FA and Women in Sport, to finalise this non-statutory guidance for publication in the new year. This

guidance will be an opportunity to point schools towards the guidance and training opportunities from organisations such as Women in Sport and campaigns like Studio You, which offer a wide range of access to resources and professional development opportunities for teachers to further enhance their knowledge and understanding of delivering PE and school sport to girls effectively.

The Department will be looking at how we can amplify content such as [This Girl Can's Studio You partnership with Bodyform | Sport England](#) to schools through the guidance publication in the new year.

Is the Government taking any action to encourage more women into sports science and to increase the field's focus on health and physiology-related issues affecting girls and women?

This Government is focussed on levelling up opportunity so that every young person regardless of their gender, background or geographic location, can get the skills and training needed to secure rewarding, well-paid jobs.

We know from qualification entry data that parity of participation in sport related courses appears to be more equal at the degree level compared to GCSE level. In the 2021/22 academic year only 37% of entrants to PE GCSE (36% in 2022/23) were girls compared with 49.9% of entrants to biological and sport science degree routes being girls in 2021/22. Between 2019 and 2022, there was a 9% increase in the number of women accepted onto full-time undergraduate sport and exercise sciences courses, from 5,240 in 2019 to 5,710 in 2022.

The Diploma in Sporting Excellence programme (DISE) was initiated by the Government in 2018/19 and continues now under the leadership from Sport England to offer support for elite young male and female athletes aged 16-18 in amateur sports who can't usually get employment in their sport, and who wish to take a 'dual career' approach of continuing their development as elite athletes as well as working towards other qualifications. The modules such as Applied Anatomy and Physiology for Professional Performance offer students with the opportunity to develop a focus and interest the health and physiology related issues affecting girls and women.

High quality, careers information, advice and guidance is key to helping all young people make informed decisions about their future, to open their eyes to a range of different career possibilities and challenge stereotypes.

Whilst an essential element of careers advice is that it is impartial, we work with The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) to support schools and colleges to embed best practice so that young people are aware of the full range of careers, and have access to meaningful encounters with a range of employers and workplaces.

The National Careers Service is also available to all adults in the UK, providing information advice and guidance on learning, training and work. The service aims to inspire customers, to explore career options they might not have considered. The service has added case studies to the Explore Careers section of their website to demonstrate the different ways you can get into a career. These real stories aim

to inspire people to consider careers they might not have considered, for instance they show females in careers such as a Microbiologist and a Data Scientist.