

Dame Caroline Dinenage
Chair, Culture Media and Sport Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

26th June 2025

Re: Game On Inquiry oral evidence session follow-up

Dear Dame Caroline,

I am writing to thank the Committee for inviting ukactive to give evidence as part of the Game On inquiry earlier this month, and to reinforce some of the messages we spoke about at the session.

As you are aware, our members are the driving force behind physical activity in this country. In 2023/24, an additional 904,000 adults took part in swimming and fitness activities on a regular basis, bringing the total number to more than 14 million. This puts participation within our facilities third behind only running and active travel as keeping people physically active.

This is particularly true for encouraging women and girls to be active – Sport England's Active Lives survey showed more than 7.6 million women had taken part in fitness activities, like attending gym sessions or getting active individually in the gym, at least twice in the past 28 days.

Furthermore, we know there is increasing demand for usage of our facilities. The UK Health and Fitness Market shows the growth of the sector, with a record 11.5 million people now members of health and fitness clubs. This growing demand represents a major opportunity for economic growth and improving the health of the nation.

The prize is clear. The annual social value of community sport and physical activity is £107.2bn, while keeping people active saves £540m through reduced GP visits and £780m through reduced use of mental health services. Meanwhile, musculoskeletal conditions account for 30 million lost work days and up to 30% of GP appointments, with an estimated cost to the NHS of £6.3bn a year. Our sector is perfectly placed to reduce the impact of these conditions.

The Government has stated its ambition to take pressure off the NHS through three big shifts that place a great emphasis on prevention and community services. Facilities are fundamental to this effort, and to maintain good national health and wellbeing and address poor health and wellbeing. Our ability to renew and grow our facilities will be a big factor in determining the success or failure of this ambition.

The Government recently announced £400m in additional funding for community sports facilities. While this is welcome, concerns remain over the distribution of this funding, given successive governments have prioritised investment to a limited area of traditional sports facilities. While these sports remain important to communities, they have not, and will never, increase participation in physical activity to the level required.

If the Government is serious about unlocking the potential savings associated with physical activity, it must focus on those parts of the sector proven to deliver the highest levels of participation – gyms, pools and leisure centres. These facilities have far greater potential that is yet to be unlocked.

This is why we hope your inquiry will recommend the following measures:

1. Invest in the growth of the sector by setting out an industrial plan for the health and fitness sector, covering access to finance and tax relief, workforce, planning and more.
2. Incentivise more people, particularly from underserved areas, to get active by utilising tax and regulatory reform.
3. Ensure it addresses areas of potential market failure within the sector – particularly swimming pools.
4. Work together with both the public and private sectors to develop a plan for the long-term financing of public leisure.

The Government's long-held, narrow focus on grassroots sport is failing to utilise the nation's full infrastructure for physical activity it has at its disposal to grow participation and reduce health inequalities. We now need a comprehensive strategy for driving the growth of the sector.

With the Committee's support, we can demonstrate the opportunity for the Government to unlock our sector's potential as part of its mission for growth and renewal.

Yours sincerely,



Huw Edwards

CEO, ukactive