

Notes of the House of Lords Select Committee on a National Plan for Sport and Recreation engagement event with young adults with disabilities

Wednesday 21st September 2021, 13:30-14:45

Attendees: Bronte Windle, Cameron Smith, Yusuf Hurraira, Doaa Shayea, Azeem Amir, Morgan Woods, Evelyn Roberts, Reece Finnegan.

Members: Baroness Blower, Baroness Grey-Thompson, Baroness Sater, Lord Willis of Knaresborough

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Welcome to all our guests this afternoon, we're absolutely delighted that you've been able to join us. This is our last session for this term before we get to go on holiday for good behaviour, so we're hoping that all of you will enjoy this session with us as well. Could I just briefly introduce myself. I'm Lord Willis, I was a Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament and I'm now a Liberal Democrat Member of the House of Lords, but perhaps more interestingly I was a headteacher. Two of the schools that I was headteacher of pioneered the integration of young people with disabilities, both physical disabilities and sensory disabilities, and we were the first school in the whole country that said if you live south of the River Tees in Middlesbrough then you could come to our school, regardless of medical condition or disability. So when we got a group together today, I was absolutely delighted that from where I started a lot of years ago, we've actually come round to discussing some of the same issues; how do we get young people with all sorts of disabilities interested in physical activity. How do we do it? I struggled with that 30 years ago and I'm hoping you'll give us some of the answers today. We were appointed as a Committee last October, nearly a year ago now, to basically answer this question: how can we make the whole of the nation, not just those that want to solely participate in sport and activities, how can we make everybody fitter, stronger and healthier? This was the main objective. We put together a group of people, a small number of whom you'll meet today, but a very special group. We've got Paralympic gold medallists of international repute, we've got directors of football clubs, we've got people who are former Secretary of State for Sport, we've even got a former trade union leader with us, who is here this afternoon, Baroness Blower, who has been fighting for young people's activities in schools the whole of her career. We're taking evidence until roughly October, and we hope that by the end of November, we will have produced a report with a lot of recommendations. Today's session is so important, because one of the things that we've learnt is that young people are doing less and less activity. The pandemic was a problem, and what we're finding is that young people with disabilities have fared worse during the pandemic in terms of accessing physical activity. We're anxious to hear from you about how we get back on track, how do we make sure that we get some of that ground back? What you say today will be crucially important to our report, so please be as strong as you can, as brief as you can- unlike me- and we'll take note of your answers. I'm going to introduce the other Committee members and ask them to say a little bit about themselves, and we'll start with you, since I've mentioned you, Baroness Blower.

Baroness Blower: Hello everybody and thank you very much for being with us this afternoon. I was indeed the General Secretary of, what at the time was the biggest teaching union, the National Union of Teachers. But more importantly, from my point of view, for over 30 years before that I was actually a teacher, not of sport but I did occasionally teach some dance which I enjoyed very much. I was always very keen to hear from all the students with whom I've worked, both when I was a teacher and when I was a trade unionist, about what they felt about their own education- we sometimes call that student voice. I think that it's really important that we actually hear what young people feel their experiences of education, so I'm delighted to have the opportunity to hear from you today about what your experiences have been.

Baroness Sater: I used to play competitive sport when I was a junior and I loved it. I played tennis to quite a highly competitive level and I've played other sports which I loved. I didn't take my sport onto a professional level like some of my colleagues on the Committee, but I got involved with some charities where we try to deliver more sport and activity to people across the country in local communities. I was chair of StreetGames, which does a lot of work around the country in getting more kids active and giving the accessibility to play more sports across the country, and at the moment I'm the chair of a small charity called the Queen's Club Foundation, where we provide grants to all sorts of organisations, in particular some with a disability focus including Metro Blind Sports. I'm very keen on getting more participation and widening the participation of everybody to have access to the sports that I was very lucky to have had. I come very much from the community led base of getting more encouragement and getting more people involved.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: And our final member who has won more Olympic gold medals than any other British athlete Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Good afternoon everybody. I'm Tanni and I'm a Paralympic athlete. I did track and road racing and I competed in five games. I'm really interested in how we can give more opportunities to disabled children. I was lucky, I went to an amazing school, I went to a mainstream school- which is quite unusual for my age- but we had amazing opportunities to do things. I'm really looking forward to hearing everyone's views this afternoon, so thank you for joining us.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Thank you very much indeed. I'm going to start with you Bronte, if I may, and what I want you to do is just introduce yourself and then tell us when you were at school what were the things you liked best, and least, about PE and sport.

Bronte Windle: At school, I liked some of the PE lessons such as rounders, but I didn't like some of them because I didn't feel involved in them and I felt a bit left out.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Thank you. Cameron, can you tell us a bit about yourself?

Cameron Smith: I am an IMAS expert by experience trainer. I work for International Mixed Ability Sport.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: And what did you like or not like at school when you were doing PE and games?

Cameron Smith: It was kind of weird for me because I grew up going to SEN schools, until about the age of 10 when I mixed with the mainstream. Some of the games we played were alright, sometimes though we weren't allowed to play with the mainstream group. It was alright, but it could have been better to play with other people.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: What would you liked to have done Cameron? Tell me one thing that you really would have liked to have done.

Cameron Smith: I would really liked to have played sport with other people and not be excluded.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Not left on your own. Thank you very much. Yusuf, can you tell us a bit about yourself.

Yusuf Huraira: I am registered blind and I'm doing a degree at the moment in HR. I was fortunate enough that I went to a school that was a specialist school for people with visual impairments. Sport and physical education for me was very inclusive, but again I've witnessed it not being inclusive, as I've gotten older, which is something that I'll discuss later on in the conversation if we have time.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: What would you have liked to have done more of in school in terms of sport?

Yusuf Huraira: Just more of a variety of sport. In the years, we focused on blind football and rounders and things, but we didn't look at the sports that provided thrill, so a little bit more of that. Now I'm older I do that a lot more, but it would have been nice to do that when I was a little bit younger.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Doaa, you're a wheelchair racer, tell us a bit about yourself.

Doaa Shayea: Hi everyone, it's a pleasure to be with everyone here today. Yes, I am a wheelchair racer. In school I loved the fact that my school wanted to help me, and I've been very privileged in how supportive my school have been throughout my school years.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Was it a mainstream school?

Doaa Shayea: I transferred from a special needs school to a mainstream school. At the school they played netball in PE and I had to adapt to play netball with everybody else in my wheelchair. Just like Yusuf, I would have wanted more of a variety. But my school were also very welcoming of the idea to bring my racing rollers into the school, for me to do that whilst everybody else was doing PE.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Can I just ask you did you join a club while you were at school, outside of school, to do your racing?

Doaa Shayea: I'd already been signed up at a club that I race at when I'm training, and that's something that I've been doing since the age of 12, so I already had that in place.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Thank you, we'll follow up on that a bit later. Azeem, you're another blind soccer player?

Azeem Amir: Yes, I'm very fortunate to play for the England and Great Britain blind football team, so I'm very fortunate to be able to travel around the world and represent my country playing football. Football for me is like a job. But in terms of the work that I do outside of football, it is all around inclusivity and advocacy for how we can get sport accessible for all. And a lot of the work that we do is working with schools, working with staff, working with young people to showcase to them and make them aware- especially within the mainstream schools- that these sports actually exist. And after listening to people's feedback I think that's the biggest thing for me. I went to a mainstream school, I was born with a visual impairment which means I've got no sight in my right eye and light perception in my left, and like some of the young people on this call today, they'll be the only person in their class with an impairment or a disability, in a sense you stick out like a sore thumb, and the rest of the class can do things that you can't do. I couldn't join in with mainstream football or rounders, because I couldn't see the ball, it's as simple as that, but my school and the staff were fantastic in trying to adapt things, such as putting LEDs in badminton shuttlecocks and turning down the lights, or a fluorescent rugby ball which is fantastic for the first few minutes until it got muddy and then of course I couldn't see it anymore. They were always trying things. The sport that I play now professionally at an Olympic level, they didn't even know it existed until I was at the age of 15, so it just shows that if that exposure was there, and if that awareness was there, if that training was there everyone in the class could have played it. We go in and deliver to schools and the whole class wears a blindfold, and they've got a sound-ball. Instead of making mainstream sports inclusive for everybody else, why can't we make disability sports inclusive and open for all. Let's flip it.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Thank you very much. I suspect that statement will make its way into our report. Evelyn, what did you enjoy about PE in school?

Evelyn Roberts: Hello, thanks for having me on the call. Unfortunately, I didn't like too much about PE in school. I'd do anything to get out if it like get rid of my PE kit or write notes. I got quite crafty with it. I think I remember once, the school being shy of a teammate for a basketball team, and I opted to play. I was really excited, I'd never represented my school before, however by the time I got down there they told me that they had found someone to fill that position. That's when I really became stubborn and never did PE. But that being said I actually got put on the under-25s GB wheelchair basketball programme, and then I became a PE teacher myself. I think that was a big thing for me, it was

like I was overcoming my own barriers with PE and swearing to myself that hopefully it wouldn't happen to a child with a similar disability to me. For the last few years I've been teaching students with SEN needs and autism. Luckily, I have a more unique perspective now, having a disability and teaching PE and I'm really hoping that we've definitely moved away from sport specific curriculums, which is great as it's allowing people to experience sport on a newer level in an open playing field which is good.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Fantastic, thank you. And Reece, last but by no means least.

Reece Finnegan: Hello. Thanks so much for having me. I'm registered blind, I have been since birth, and I went to a mainstream primary and secondary school. It's similar to what the others have said that it's a bit of a mixed bag. When I was in primary school, when it's a lot less serious, I feel like they're better at adapting it. I had this big box of massive yellow balls, with bells in them, and they could adapt things however they felt suitable. If we were playing football, then I could play with the yellow ball. When you then step up to secondary school, and it becomes a bit more serious, that's when you start getting a little bit more isolated. There were loads of sports that I couldn't do, and if they were going to play football or rugby, they would tell me that I could just go to the gym because that's accessible. So there definitely was a change when I stepped up into secondary school. And similar to what somebody was saying before about extra-curricular clubs, when you're little, it's so difficult. I remember really getting into trampolining, and I was absolutely loving it, and after a few sessions the place that was running it said that we can't have him anymore because we can't insure him to be here, because he might 'blind himself off the trampoline,' or injure someone. So it's pretty difficult, because not only is it hard to get into sport in school, but also in those extra curricula clubs as well.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: OK. And Morgan, sorry you slipped off my screen for a little bit, but you're back now. Welcome. What was PE like at school for you?

Morgan Woods: For PE I had zero positives at all. My role was holding the high jump for the other boys and girls, so the motto was if you can jump the disabled, you'd get in the team. That's what it was. That's all I had. Another thing I had was that I had to go to the library during PE, I chose PE as a GCSE I got to learn all about the body and not actually do anything.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: So it wasn't good. What would you like to have done at school?

Morgan Woods: Anything. Not be the high jump. I was part of a boccia team before I did wheelchair racing and I think including that would have been amazing, but there was nothing like that.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: OK. I'm going to pass on now to Baroness Blower.

Baroness Blower: Thank you very much. Anyone can come in on this if you want to. My question, which follows on logically from what Lord Willis was saying, is what would have made PE, and sport in general, more enjoyable for you. And if you want to say something that you might have wanted to try, and maybe if we start with you Morgan, because clearly almost anything might have made it more enjoyable than what you described.

Morgan Woods: Yeah. Opposite the school, there was a disabled needs school, so they had all the stuff and equipment. Archery for example they had, and there was a swimming pool so there are two options that I could have had, but because I couldn't kick a ball or do cricket, they just didn't want to know.

Baroness Blower: That's not a good approach is it for a school. OK, anybody else, either something that would have made it more fun at school or something that you might have wanted to try.

Reece Finnegan: I think as someone implied earlier it's difficult because you have so little knowledge of what's out there when you're a disabled youngster. I didn't find out about certain sports that I would have been able to play until I was already leaving school, so that was quite difficult. I think a good solution is to try and get specialist disabled sports in as many schools as possible and have people that can give intro sessions into mainstream schools, as well as into disability schools.

Baroness Blower: Thanks very much. Bronte is there anything that would have made it more fun for you at school.

Bronte Windle: One thing that could have made it more fun is around teams. It was alright in primary school because the teachers would pick which team you go in, but as you got older- in high school- you could pick your own teams and I was always the last one to get picked. So it would have been better if they did the same thing, and the PE teachers picked the teams.

Baroness Blower: Thank you, and I have to say that the picking of teams is a nightmare for a lot of us. Evelyn, did you want to come in?

Evelyn Roberts: Yes, I just wanted to say that for me I'm glad we're moving away from sport specific curriculums, but I think there needs to be an education on how to design these curriculums so that they're not sport based. I think sometimes people go back to the traditional way, or steal curriculums from other schools and change them slightly, and I think there just needs to be an education on how you design them, so that they can be more inclusive for everybody. As well as this there should be education around differentiation for any learner, rather than just 'how do I include somebody with a disability' and that's not necessarily the question, it's actually how you can differentiate for any learner, and I think that would have just made my experience better within school and I think it will make the school experience better moving forward.

Baroness Blower: Thanks very much Evelyn. Cameron, do you want to come in now?

Cameron Smith: Yes. Even though I wanted to play a bit more physical sport, as I was growing up, I was in an SEN school and I played other sports that were different to people in a mainstream school. It would've have been great if I had been able to do that. But other than that I liked sport throughout school.

Baroness Blower: Good. Can you think of any one thing that you would have wanted to do?

Cameron Smith: Yes. Rugby and boxing.

Baroness Blower: Boxing, interesting, Thank you Cameron. Azeem I think you've got your hand up.

Azeem Amir: I was just going to say, in terms of disabled people taking part in sport, I think a massive thing that comes into play is networking for the school. For a lot of schools- like the person said earlier about a schools across the road that was a specific disability facility with all the specialist equipment- there are local specialist clubs and schools in the area and there will be a person in a wheelchair, and they're in a mainstream environment doing physical education, but the school don't know how to access the facilities. For example, in the summer they don't know how to access tennis and down the road there's a wheelchair tennis club, but it's not just known about. Same in our sport, blind football and goalball, there are clubs in the local vicinity with coaches and specific equipment who are almost begging for schools to reach out. I think with a better network, whether it be registers or links, if we can start doing better work around networking in local areas that's where hopefully it will allow for more inclusivity in schools. Here we are slating schools but, who's is helping the schools? There isn't anything there for them.

Baroness Blower: Thank you, that's all very helpful.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Thank you, I'll move on now Baroness Blower and bring in Baroness Grey-Thompson.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: A few of you have already started answering the question that I wanted to know about, which is on where the equipment is and where the local clubs are. So what I'm interested in exploring a bit further is how many of you have tried to join a mainstream club- which is seen as something for non-disabled people- and what your experience of trying to join a mainstream club is. I'm going to try not to start with the wheelchair racers, because that's a bit biased, Azeem could I start with you.

Azeem Amir: I live in an area just outside of Greater Manchester in Rochdale, and sports provision in general here is very good. You can go down the road, if you're fully abled, you can go and play football in Sunday leagues, or cricket clubs, we're very fortunate. But sadly, for me, the doors just never opened to these clubs because they themselves had never had somebody with a disability inquire. When I inquired the first thing they said was 'it can't be done, we just don't know how we can incorporate you.' Specifically in my field, where you can't see, there is something in place called pan disability. Pan disability is where they'll incorporate people with a learning disability, and those with the sensory impairments such as hearing impairments and visual impairments have got to be

in a category on their own. The nearest club for me to actually access football was 30 miles away. We're already putting up the barriers in terms of transport and cost- how are people, young people in particular, going to be trekking 30 miles to access a two-hour football session because there is nothing in their local area. I think that's where it all starts, and hopefully more opportunities will open it up. The one team I was actually able to join when I was younger at the age of 11 was, believe it or not, 10 pin bowling. I actually played competitive 10 pin bowling. It sounds mad, but that was the only sport that I was able to access. Really, if you throw a ball down a lane and the pins get knocked down someone tells you what pins are left up, and you try and knock them down, so you don't actually have to be able to see what's at the end of the lanes. When I was going through the transition between primary and secondary school, the sports that everyone else was playing was football, cricket and rugby and I was playing 10 pin bowling. It was what it was, but if we could find a way to open up sports to make them a bit more inclusive, I think it will make a big difference. For me the biggest factor is the social factor, because if people struggle to make friends inside school, they usually make friends in clubs, but for those with a disability if we're cutting them off from accessing the clubs then we're depriving them of that social life.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Just as a follow up to that, did it feel like you were wrapped in cotton wool because of your visual impairment?

Azeem Amir: Absolutely not. It was the opposite for me. My parents wanted me to try, and they were very open to trying new things. It was "Azeem let's try skiing" or "the school want to take you kayaking, and we're not sure what you'll do in your own boat, but we'll try it anyway- as long as you've got a jacket on, you'll be alright". It was that kind of mentality of let's not knock it until we try it. I think that's why I've got to where I am now, at such a young age, it's because of them. They would say that we want to go go-karting, and they would suggest two-man go-karts where you are assisted going around. Why can't we try different adaptations to sports, but sometimes people don't want to go there because they think of all of the negatives, but they don't think of all of the positives.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Thank you. Yusuf, you've got your hand up.

Yusuf Huraira: My experience is I joined my local goalball club just as I was leaving secondary school, so in terms of disability clubs I've been a part of that for five and a bit years now, which is all great. But in terms of getting physically active, I can talk about a bad gym experience because I've had one of those as well. I joined quite a big well known gym group and I was told that they were fine with me coming, and I filled out their personal emergency evacuation for health and safety purposes, and I was given the reassurances that it would be all good. When I arrived for my first day at the gym, I just felt like I wasn't welcome due to the way that I was spoken to and people's tone of voice. I didn't feel comfortable and subsequently left. I haven't been back to find another gym group just because of the experience that I had with my previous place.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Thank you. Maybe I could follow up with you about that afterwards. Doaa, and then Morgan, can I come to you on this question about inclusion in mainstream clubs and whether it has been easy or difficult.

Doaa Shayea: Absolutely. This has been something that I've really struggled with throughout my athletic career, being way down in Devon which is very isolated. When it comes to competition, I have to travel so far to compete with everyone else and when it comes to training, I am the only known wheelchair racer in Devon so for me it has been very difficult with training. I don't have a group to train with. I'm pushing myself around the track, and it's just me and my coach. The only time I get close to competition is racing against non-disabled athletes and it's not the same. They shoot off before me and I just can't get myself in that mentality, because I don't feel like I'm racing the people that I need to be racing. So that's been extremely difficult on my athletic career and it's still an ongoing situation.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Thank you. Morgan?

Morgan Woods: For me, all I had was wheelchair racing from the beginning, at the local track they had wheelchair racing. But it was about keeping fit. Kids could come down; normal abled children could come and try wheelchair racing by sitting in a chair and doing a couple of laps. Really, my only coach was my dad to begin with, there wasn't really anything else. And then I got lucky as David Weir came and had a look at me, and as I left to go and join him, it instantly closed down. There was no support for it, and it shut. Now I have to travel 150 miles a day, there and back, for two hours. It takes up most of my day and most of my money. I also had a summer school which was ok, but it could do with more funding and there wasn't much to do there, but that's how they knew that I went to a mainstream school and they tried to help out, but my school didn't want anything to do with them. Nothing at all so I was stuck.

Baroness Grey-Thompson: Cameron, so the question is on what it has been like joining a mainstream club. Has it been easy or difficult?

Cameron Smith: Well it has been difficult because I've been in mainstream sport myself. I've tried football and I didn't fit in and they would shove me to the side. I tried kickboxing and I didn't fit in, because they would laugh at me because of my size and because of my condition. It's not right really, because I couldn't fit in and it made me feel unwelcome. Except for one of the coaches who had experience with people with disabilities, and he made me feel welcome.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Sorry Baroness Grey-Thompson, can I just come in and ask if anybody, when they were at school, actually had clubs come in to offer them inclusion in their clubs. Did anybody come along, and say come and join our club. (*Nobody says yes*) Nobody. Tanni, I find that really sad, really disappointing that that was the case.

Cameron Smith: Joining IMAS, Mixed Ability Sports, opened the barriers for me, because the sports that I wasn't able to do, I can actually do them now. I enjoy it and I feel like I'm part of the club. I've got friends and I feel like a part of the family.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Fantastic. That's fantastic.

Cameron Smith: I enjoy playing rugby, I played for the Bumblebees at Bradford and Bingley which has been going since 2010. I right enjoy it.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Thanks very much indeed. Baroness Sater, back to you.

Baroness Sater: There's always usually someone that has encouraged you or inspired you to get active or play in sport, and it would be really good to hear from you who that person might have been, whether it be a teacher, coach or a famous sports person. Have any of you got somebody that has really inspired you, or encouraged you, to get involved?

Evelyn Roberts: The person that inspired me was Clare Strange, also known as Clare Griffiths. She scouted me to get involved in a club, and I guess that she was close to retirement and wanted someone to pursue the sport as much as she did, so she really just dragged me through it. I was really worried that I had no idea what I was doing, and she just told me to tie my hair up and get in this wheelchair. She told me what tournaments to go to, what to do, shaking hands with the right people. I think it was her attitude and her motivation- she was probably more motivated than me at some points- that just made me want to pursue my career in PE and just within inclusion in general.

Baroness Sater: Great thank you. Azeem?

Azeem Amir: Just quickly on the last point. I think we knock a lot of local clubs, in terms of them coming in and them trying to showcase to schools and organisations the provision that is offered. But a lot of that work is usually just an email with a leaflet attached, and it just gets lost in transition, it gets lost when it's pinged over saying that there is a local wheelchair football club or a local boccia club. An email or a leaflet is not very tangible, and it just ends up in a junk file that is never opened or never sent on to the right people. I've noticed that does occur quite a lot, especially when we're going through school's firewall. I think if we could come up with a way to address that, and actually getting signposted done more correctly and a bit more accessible, I think that would make a big difference.

In terms of the person who inspired me, for me it was my mobility trainer. When you're visually impaired the local authority have someone in place who teaches someone with a visual impairment how to get around as independently as possible. So how to use a cane, how to get on the bus, how to pay for things in a shop. And that person for me, he also helped me to access sport. He was one of those who said that no matter what you do, as long as put your mind to it you'll find a way to not only get around barriers but also succeed. When I found out about blind football that person really supported me, because he said that you now have an opportunity to play on an even playing field. Everybody has a blindfold on, everybody is listening to the ball, there is no one that can see more than anybody else- it comes down solely to ability and hard work. I think that mentality helped me so much when pursuing my sport and get to the position I am now. I think that everybody has that one person that they've come across,

but the hope is that we can get more people like that to inspire and push younger people. Who knows what the possibility is when we're going to these disability sports have a go days? I was once that person and hopefully we can inspire the next generation to do that too.

Baroness Sater: Yes. You're an inspiration yourself. Bronte, do you have anybody that you would like to talk about?

Bronte Windle: When I was a teenager, I wasn't really interested in sport due to being bullied about my mental health when I was in school. However, 8 months ago my sister heard of Mixed Ability Sport for rugby, and my mental health was at the point where I wouldn't come out of my bedroom, and I wouldn't talk to anyone, and my sister said why don't you give it a go as it will get you out. But I thought no, because the same thing will happen again, and I'll get bullied. I gave it a go, and it's the best thing that's happened to me. I just feel included and part of the family.

Baroness Sater: Thank you. Doaa, have you got somebody that you'd like to tell us about?

Doaa Shayea: Yes. I would definitely say my athletics coach. He's definitely been my rock and he really does understand how difficult it is to be an athlete with no one else to push me and I'm constantly having to push myself. He's had to take on an extra role, of not only being my coach but also being someone that can motivate me in every single way, even though I've never had that competition or those athletes to push off of and reach my potential. So it's always had to be him, and I've relied heavily on his motivation and encouragement.

Reece Finnegan: I think it's similar to what everybody else was saying, that there are always specific individuals who stand out. If it wasn't for my dad when I was little driving me for two hours into London to go to taster sessions, and the coaches that I would meet there that would be really supportive and follow up with you after and be like come along to the next one, I might not be involved. It's always people like that who you remember the most. I used to play blind cricket when I was younger, so the first coaches there were supportive. I think it's so down to people that are volunteering their own time, which is amazing when you get those people who inspire you to carry on doing sport, but I think if there was more of a system in place where we were able to access sport, in the same way able bodied people are, I think we wouldn't have to rely so much on these one or two people that really pull you through and make sure you don't fall down the cracks.

Baroness Sater: Cameron, did you want to tell us if there is somebody who has inspired and encouraged you to play sport.

Cameron Smith: Yes. The person who encouraged me to play sport was my sports teacher. He was a professional rugby player when he was younger. He died about 12 months ago, and he died on the astro-turf which was quite sad. He was really inspirational, and I hadn't come across someone who had made

you feel as included in sport until I came across IMAS. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be doing sport now.

Baroness Sater: That is a great legacy that he left.

Lord Willis. Yes indeed. Can I come to Baroness Blower please?

Baroness Blower: I think some of you have answered this question in part, but I'm going to ask you, in what ways do you think that either schools or communities could help you and other people to be more active. We have to make recommendations so it would be really good if you had some suggestion on what things could be done.

Reece Finnegan: I think a massive thing is having the equipment and the facilities there in the first place. I play loads of blind tennis at the moment, I'm absolutely obsessed with it and I would play it every day if I could, but it's just not possible because there are only a certain amount of facilities, it's quite far away and I have to rely on a couple of specific people to be ready to help me play. I'm only able to play it once every two weeks. The equipment for it is just so expensive. To buy two tennis balls for blind tennis costs £22, whereas a regular sighted tennis ball would be a couple of pounds. The tactile lines that you need to put down, to be able to have an umpire and fetch balls has to be figured out, and that's before you even figure out the cost of membership for a club or getting to it. I think that cost is a massive thing and is a barrier for loads of disabled people trying to get involved in sport. And also attitudes as well; people being aware of these sports existing and being able to then accommodate that. You get a mixed response from clubs. Sometimes you go along and say I play blind tennis, and they will ask what it is, and they will watch you play it and want to get involved, whereas other clubs will say we can't facilitate that, or they will give you space at a really inconvenient time, like a morning slot during the week which if you work you just can't make that at all. I think it's also just exposure as well. Something that I was going to say in the last question, that I forgot to include, but seeing stuff like the exposure on the Paralympics has been so amazing for inspiring young disabled people, but it also helps clubs to see how important disability sport is and maybe they can be a bit more accommodating for it. The other thing as well is the actual access to the places. So, for example lots of venues that I try and go to, they won't have accessible booking forms, so I can't book a court myself because you can't access the website, or you have to write your name on a board to get a place there and I just can't do that. So you're constantly relying on other people, you're constantly having to pay a load of money that sighted and able-bodied people don't have to.

Baroness Blower: Thank you ever so much. Evelyn, would you like to come in.

Evelyn Roberts: I mentioned straying away from sport specific curriculum, which is great, but I think teachers need more guidance on this. I think people still try to adapt curriculums, but it's not necessarily the best way and it's often quite traditional and linear. Another thing is, I think schools have quite a lot of money, particularly with the Primary PE Premium money, which is great as money could be a barrier, however I think people need guidance on the potential

equipment that they could buy. Unless the person ordering has the knowledge themselves on what to buy they often don't know what to get, so I think a directory or government recommendations would be great there. The last point is around psychological barriers. I think a lot of the time, the reason for disabled people not participating in sport is due to psychological barriers, and if there was any way that there could be some kind of mentoring scheme within education that would be great. I also think there should be a massive emphasis on differentiation in teacher training, and it's not disability specific, it is just you teach who you teach, and you should adapt for everyone, disability or not. And the compulsory hours that you spend on SEND within teacher training is actually nothing, you can do day if you wish on SEN, but you don't have to do it which for me is crazy.

Baroness Blower: Thank you Evelyn. Doaa, would you like to come in now?

Doaa Shayea: First of all, I think education is key and we need more awareness for disability and disability sport. I think there are a lot of people, facilities, gyms and so on who want to help, and want to be inclusive, but they just don't know how. When they are faced with people with disabilities they freak out and are unsure on how to accommodate and adapt to us, and how they can help us. The other huge part, talking from my own experience, money is a huge barrier especially for someone who is not in the Midlands or London, where there is more support financially there. It's left then on the athlete to try and dig out a way to be able to achieve their dreams and passion and to be able to chase them. With the lack of financial support, they could unfortunately end up detached from their passion and it's something that shouldn't get in the way from them achieving in their chosen sport. Lastly, I think representation is absolutely crucial. If we were to get a more accurate representation of disability, and not misinformation and harmful narratives of disability, that could then help people who don't have disabilities, and people with disabilities, to really see sport to be inclusive and accessible to everybody. Fitness and sport is for everyone we just all adapt to it differently and find a way for it to fit us individually.

Baroness Blower: Thanks very much, I think that's really good. Yusuf?

Yusuf Huraira: I think in a lot of schools, there are mainstream schools that have resource bases and I think that something that could be done to improve the awareness is integration within the resource base into the wider school. I can imagine that schools say that we don't want this to happen within our PE lessons, but the more that they do do that then the better for everyone. It would be beneficial for the pupils in the school, they would get a wider understanding. From a club's perspective as well you could get more interest and a lot more people could go to the session. The school that I went to was really lucky as there was a junior and secondary school on-site, so our headteacher at the time was all for integration and making sure that the sighted peers did get involved in any activities that the school was running. But a lot of headteachers won't do that, because they don't want the hassle of arranging that sort of event. So just more partnerships from school to school, because in the built-up cities the schools can be literally under a mile away.

Cameron Smith: The thing that I'm doing is to promote Mixed Ability Sports, where people with disabilities and people with disabilities play together, and I think that would be better instead of both of us being apart. If we're together we can support each other in sport. That's how we do it. We break those barriers down, so we can play together. That's what Mixed Ability Sports is about.

Morgan Woods: I would say that funding is a big one. I've noticed that ever since I've gone past the age of 18, I'm not cute anymore so they don't want to fund that. I would also say coverage because you don't really see competitions. The only way I knew my coach was on a game show, that's how I knew that he was from. I would say that those two are the most important, because I think if we get both of those done then a lot more people would know about disability sports.

Baroness Blower: Thank you very much Morgan. Thank you Lord Willis.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Thank you. Baroness Sater?

Baroness Sater: We've just been touching on some of the barriers in school, but looking back over your school lives, what do you think have been the main barriers to you participating in PE and sport and what could schools do differently. Would anybody like to start?

Yusuf Huraira: The barrier in secondary was not having the opportunity to try out the whole extensive range of sports. In my school we only focused on blind football, goalball and rounders and that was all. One term was blind football, the other goalball and so on. That was great, but like I said earlier I would have liked to do more and try sports like curling and athletics. I can only guess now that the reason for us not trying out more sports was the experience and the confidence of the teacher at the time.

Baroness Sater: Thank you. Reece?

Reece Finnegan: As I touched on earlier, I think funding is massive as well as not having the right equipment. And it is the attitudes. I know with my secondary school they would try and adapt things for me in quite weird ways that would end up being a little bit embarrassing. I remember doing hurdles at school, and they would say we obviously can't have you doing hurdles, so they put a tiny strip on the floor that wasn't raised at all and I had to run alongside all the sighted children doing it, and I just thought it was so embarrassing. So if they had official routes, or they had the knowledge of how to actually adapt sport properly, in the way that it is being up and down the country with disability sport, then I feel that it wouldn't lead to those moments and you wouldn't have disabled kids feeling isolated in PE. They could actually do something where they're keeping fit and something that they could pursue as they leave school as well.

Morgan Woods: I think it's the knowledge. You're a PE teacher you should, I guess, know what a disabled person can do or at least know how to change a sport to be inclusive for everyone. So knowledge would be the best thing.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: So it's teacher training?

Morgan Woods: Yes.

Evelyn Roberts: It's interesting that you say teacher training, because I did my teacher training about two years ago in PE and having a disability myself it was really interesting to see how they teach how to include disabled people. There were only two lectures on differentiation, which is adapting the lesson to include everyone, and I've realised that it's such a hard skill and I think there needs to be more on it. As much as I advocate for it, and I try to differentiate my lessons as much as possible, I do only teach a certain number of children, so it really does need to be filtered into the teacher training system. I know that it's hard because obviously PE is quite a competitive course and not a lot of money around that. Another thing that the schools should do is that kids have a lot of EHCPs, particularly if they have a lot of additional needs, so they actually get quite a lot of funding to accommodate for their needs, and I think there needs to be a directory where schools can use that EHCP money to help children engage in sport. But again, a lot of people don't know what is out there so if there was a government recommendation that could be put forward that would be great. Sorry, the last point was that I myself didn't have an EHCP, I have cerebral palsy but I didn't get EHCP funding, so there was a barrier there because I have needs that need to be catered for but the school didn't receive funding, so they didn't have money to cater for my needs. So there is no-man's land, and it's what we can do for those people that have physical disabilities but don't have an EHCP.

Baroness Sater: Thank you, that's really helpful. Azeem?

Azeem Amir: I think for me a large part of it is box ticking. And box ticking, someone said it earlier on where let's say they've got to teach physical education but because they don't want to make it accessible, they ask the student to go into the library to learn about the body and the teacher will say that they're doing physical education or they're learning about physical education. But the cases where it is successful and where it works really well, is where the teacher or the coach goes that one step further and above and beyond to push themselves of their comfort zone, to say what can I do to make sure that this person can access this sport, or this topic that we're covering in PE. So I think that's a big part of it. It's hit and miss; if you're lucky you'll get an individual like that, and if you're unlucky you're in the library. I think if we can find a way where there is a lot more sharing of information, we can have teachers say 'I came across a school in Manchester who were adapting this sport, so we'll try and do the same.'

Baroness Sater: Bronte, would you like to come in at all?

Bronte Windle: We had different sets at school. If you were in the bottom set you would probably just do basic sports like football and netball, but the higher sets would do more sports and different sports. That's how it was at my high school, and I didn't think that it was fair that the set decides what sport that you do. I think it should be all included, and that all the sets do all the sports, and they can try it out.

Doaa Shayea: I think it's just a matter of getting society to understand fitness and sport is for everyone, but everyone does it in a different way and I think that's the key thing here. We all have a right to be able to do fitness and sport, but we all adapt to it differently- whether we have a disability or not. Everyone is going to find their own little ways of being able to achieve fitness and sport. So I think I would say to not put us all in one box and categorise us but look at the individuals needs and their abilities. Even if it's the same disability we shouldn't assume that everybody is going to be the same, because we are all beautifully individual.

Baroness Sater: Thank you. Cameron, did you want to say something about what the barriers were for you at school?

Cameron Smith: The barriers for me was that we weren't allowed to play with the mainstream school as we were an SEN school. As we got better, we did play some sport with the other lot, but it wasn't as good because we couldn't keep up with it because of our conditions. But it would be better if we could all join in together rather than being left out.

Baroness Sater: OK, thank you. There is one last bit of a question that I would like to ask you which is since leaving school, what have been the main barriers you've faced in being active.

Morgan Woods: Club, distance, and money. That's all I have to say really.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: I think that's a pretty good note on which to finish, because that was so perfectly succinct. Can I just say to you all, I just found that last hour and a quarter absolutely fascinating. What has really sort of saddened me, is that though it was nearly 30 years since I last taught in a school that pioneered inclusion, that the same problems are arising in today's session and I found that very sad indeed. But I found you all utterly inspirational in the way in which you have tackled the barriers, the way that you've got round them, the way that you have continued to fight for what you should get as your basic rights in terms of being fit and active and joining in a sport. I thank you enormously on behalf of the Committee, we genuinely appreciate what you've done. I think my colleagues would say that we've had a lot of sessions over the last year and this has been one of the highlights for me. Thank you all very much indeed and I now declare this session closed.

All: Thanks

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