

Written evidence submitted by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES)

EVIDENCE TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT SELECT COMMITTEE.

BASES is the professional body for sport and exercise sciences in the UK. Our mission is to drive excellence in sport and exercise sciences through the promotion of evidence-based practice and the development and enhancement of professional and ethical standards.

Recommendation 1: That a national campaign encouraging people to return to sport, the Gym and physical activity is launched. That this campaign adopts a 'sport for all' approach and specifically promotes the mental health benefits of physical activity and exercise.

Our thinking behind this recommendation is that a combination of the Pandemic and the accompanying lockdown to control it has increased sedentary behaviour and broken the habit of playing sport, going to the Gym or being active as part of everyday life. Simply reopening facilities will not re-establish these habits. Therefore, noting the success of the 'This Girl Can' campaign we recommend a new social marketing campaign focusing on improving physical and mental health in natural and outdoor environments be launched - "go outside and move; it'll improve your mood".

Such a campaign could also consider i) the need for some people to reimagine their sport and exercise goals given the 'new normal' and ii) that those sports that need access to a facility that was closed during lockdown (e.g., swimming) may have been more affected than non-facility-based sports and may need extra support.

Recommendation 2: That pathways be established to signpost patients with long-term COVID and Post Pandemic physical and mental health problems from the NHS to health enhancing community sport, Gyms and programmes of physical activity.

Going forward we are concerned that there will be long term public health problems caused by the Pandemic including long-term COVID, mental health problems and an increase in sedentary behaviours which are linked to non-communicable diseases of national importance such as obesity and type 2 diabetes. To address this, we need to have a joined-up, cross Departmental, response that integrates policies in Sport with those in Health, Education and Transport.

Recommendation 3: That planning begins now to prepare to support those hardest hit by the financial and social impact of the Pandemic (e.g. families affected by unemployment) to take part in community sport, Gyms and programmes of physical activity.

Our thinking is that the economic impact of lockdown will continue over the next 5 years and we need to prepare to ensure those most socio economically challenged can still access sport, Gyms and physical activity programmes. We are particularly concerned to ensure that primary school children's physical literacy is not stunted first by the Pandemic & lockdown and then by any financial downturn. For example, there could be a sport club equivalent of Free School meals to give children and their families free access to sport and fitness programmes. Thought might be given to supporting initiatives such as the daily mile in Schools (<https://thedailymile.co.uk/research/>) alongside interventions to develop children's physical literacy.

Recommendation 4: That resource be allocated to animate local parks and urban outdoor green spaces as safe and attractive places for casual community sport, exercise and programmes of physical activity.

One of the major lessons from lockdown was the importance of green open space near to where people live enabling them to get some fresh air and to move. These spaces can be targeted and badged as integral functions in the national fight to get the population moving. A focus of any resources allocated to this area could be helping people reconnect with nature and the value of local spaces.

Recommendation 5: That the volunteers who administer and organise community sport, Gyms and programmes of physical activity be given the appropriate training and equipment they need to manage and govern their clubs online.

Our thinking behind this recommendation is that because of lockdown a lot of 'life' has moved online, and it is likely that this trend will continue as part of the 'new normal'. Therefore, increasingly the governance of sport will take place online and in cyber space. To ensure as many people are supported to volunteer as possible it is important that training in online sports administration is provided along with access to appropriate IT infrastructure, to ensure we do not widen health and digital inequalities.

Conclusion

From the evidence, it is our firm belief and expectation that if the recommendations made here are not accepted that the magnitude of the negative impact on the health of the nation will be profound.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the devastating impact of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). In particular people with obesity are at a greater risk of infection and experience more severe symptoms and outcomes including mortality. Obesity and other NCDs including Type 2 diabetes are most prevalent in people of a lower socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic minorities. NCDs and other lifestyle related diseases are responsible for a large proportion of health spending including medical procedures, and pharmacological interventions. The Covid-19 pandemic highlights the role that diet and exercise can play for the prevention and control of NCDs and limiting the impact on future pandemics particularly as evidence is burgeoning that due to lockdown the nations waist line is increasing. Partly due to increases in sedentary behaviour and lower prevalence of people meeting physical activity guidelines for health.

At this moment of national crises sport clubs, Gyms and interventions to promote physical activity must play a fundamental part in improving the health of our communities and protecting our NHS. For sport to 'do its bit' will require us to reimagine our sporting and active futures. The Pandemic can act as a catalyst for change including i) improved partnership work between 'sport' and 'health', ii) recognising the value of less traditional activities and iv) developing creative and innovative solutions, for example, the development of digital gyms that pay no overheads because their delivery is in the local park.

We wish the Select Committee well in its important work, thank it for taking into consideration our recommendations and encourage it to be bold, aspirational and forward thinking.

Selected Evidence

It is not our intention here to give an exhaustive list of references but rather to illustrate some of the work that has shaped our thinking. More evidence can be supplied if requested.

The BASES 'Expert Statement on Exercise and Physical Activity During COVID-19 Lockdowns and Restrictions' can be found at - https://www.bases.org.uk/imgs/bases_expert_statement298.pdf

Some of the work being conducted by the BASES special interest group on COVID-19 can be found at -https://members.bases.org.uk/spage-special_interest_groups-bases_covid_19_.html

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