

Mark Dudley – Written evidence (NPS0024)

INTRODUCTION

I am Mark Dudley, a level 2 hockey coach.

I have coached for approx. 17 years at my local community hockey club, 11 years at the county hockey association and for the past 3 years as a volunteer at my local secondary school.

QUESTIONS

- 1. How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts, local sports clubs and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?**

ANS: This is the area where most needs to be done. Over the years I have approached my local authority on a number of occasions for financial support to expand sporting opportunities. Invariably I am told there is no money. On one occasion I got a small amount of support from the local authority for a project but it was a tiny amount compared to the relatively modest aim (a sub £20k project). There is certainly no indication that my local authority has anything like the funds to put enough money in to my club to provide an increase in participation. Large scale projects like constructing a second hockey pitch or building a club house, i.e. projects that actually would increase participation, are far, far beyond their ability to help.

The biggest single issue (in my opinion) facing my club is access to facilities. In our case there is only 1 hockey pitch in the town – the nearest is 10+ miles away in another town that hosts a rival club and is also at full capacity.

The pitch is on the premises of a local secondary school. It was built with lottery and govt money (not sure if local authority or education at the time) and was one of those deals where the school had a "Community Sports Centre" built on site – the school had the facilities and so did the community. The school then became an Academy and all the assets transferred to the school. This has fundamentally changed the relationship. The school no longer has any interest in supporting community sport and makes no effort to support the hockey club. The sports centre is now a café first, to generate revenue, and a sports centre second. If there are staff issues the school simply closes the entire centre, including access to the pitch on the basis that they must have one of their staff there "for insurance purposes" despite the fact that the hockey club can access the pitch without recourse to the centre (there are toilet issues

but that's all) and has its own insurance. The school would not open the sports centre just for hockey outside when in the pandemic the inside sports facilities couldn't be used) on the basis that it would cost more to run than they get from income. During the pandemic the school has also taken the view that no "outside" organisations can be allowed on school premises, which apparently includes the hockey pitch, even at weekends, even though the school are not using it during the week – I include the previous as examples of where there is no "Community" aspect now to the sports centre.

Essentially then there is now no "community" facility. This has been transferred to private ownership via the Academy process. This greatly complicates such things as funding maintenance and upgrades to the pitch and infrastructure such as floodlights. The Academy has an expensive asset that it sees as a large cost that is far from a priority but now it is private there is nowhere else for the club to go.

As the pitch is now in private ownership this also complicates such things as the club trying to expand. The club explored the possibility of funding a clubhouse next to the pitch. This would have increased revenue and interest and improved the experience for players and especially parents at junior sessions. Legal advice was not to do so as there would be no security of tenure as the land ownership was now with the Academy and in future might change. This question of tenure also made it all but impossible to get any grants from e.g. Sport England.

The crucial problem with increasing participation is in the facility. There is enough interest but the number of players that one hockey pitch can support does not allow a club to grow large enough to generate enough funds to procure a second pitch. There is a reliance on grants and external sources. Critical to this is money raised at social activity.

2. How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

I coach in an after-school hockey club. This is an area of good practice. The hockey club provides a coach to the school to support ex curricular sport – the local rugby club does the same. The school actively seeks to partner with local sports clubs to provide extra sports after school.

An area where this is difficult is that the club is constrained by school bus timetables. Parents can't afford or are unwilling for children to use non-school buses, so the club is necessarily quite short in duration.

I feel the biggest single blocker for increased participation is again access to facilities. Players are not allowed on to the pitch to just play and have fun and enjoy themselves – thus building a love of the sport. As a country we are now obsessed by health and safety and safeguarding and of course the potential for litigation.

This means that coaches / teachers must be present. You will need the advice of a psychologist to confirm this but it seems instinctively right that there is a significant difference between an activity that you choose to do and are empowered to do and one that you are directed to do, or permitted to do. Children aren't discovering and developing sport on their own anymore and so that sense of ownership of their and their friends' activity is seriously diminished.

In many countries, especially those with very cold winters, indoor hockey is a very popular sport. This game is played on the same size hall space as handball. Indoor hockey is not as popular in the UK (handball hardly at all) and one reason is that in general sports halls in the UK are too small. A 5 badminton court hall – pretty much the norm, is not big enough for adult indoor hockey. A small increase in size of sports halls would open them up to 2 more sports.

It should be noted that sports halls are a major problem. Halls are almost all always fully booked with 5 a side football. This suggests that there is plenty of adult sports participation but there could be much, much more if there was more indoor space.

3. How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

Hockey runs a successful "Back to Hockey" program with support to clubs, designed to encourage back adults who stopped playing the sport when young.

MY experience of ethnic minority players is that for a lot of young black males sports is seen as a way out of poverty (the Freakonomics model) and so only professional sport is of interest. Other than that, many other groups see little value in sport – professional qualifications are more important.

Less affluent people are less able to afford leisure full stop. Maslow's hierarchy of needs explains it well. If you are struggling to feed and heat your flat you are not thinking of where the nearest sports club is.

4. *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation*, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?

No idea what this is

- 5. Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?**
- 6. How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?**
- 7. What can be done to improve and implement effective duty of care and safeguarding standards for sports and recreation actives at all levels?**

See my answer at 2. If anything, there is far too much emphasis on safeguarding and not enough on playing sport and being part of groups and communities who also want to play the same sport. Fear of injury, fear of discrimination, fear of paedophiles, fear of being sued, fear of upsetting anyone is crushing any spontaneous enjoyment of sport for the sheer joy of running around and competing.

- 8. What are the opportunities and challenges facing elite sports in the UK and what can be done to make national sports governing bodies more accountable? For example, accountability for representing and protecting their membership, promoting their sport and maximising participation.**

In my experience the National Governing body is worse than useless in supporting grass roots sports. They are only concerned with producing enough elite athletes to perform well internationally and keep their funding. The National Body seeks continually to push the effort and work down on to clubs and voluntary organisations such as county associations but wants those organisations to structure themselves in a way that is only aimed at producing elite players. There is no concern for long term participation of non-elite players or for growing the sport. England Hockey is only interested in National Age Group players and then adult international players.

- 9. What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?**

Belgium started an ambitious programme to increase sports participation and drive improvement and it has shown huge dividends in hockey (and other sports). It was well known 10-15 years or so ago that even though Belgium were nowhere near the top table in international hockey you could get a full time job their coaching hockey as the govt was funding positions. Belgium now has significantly more participation and consistent international success

Equally, in Spain, facilities are generously funded by Govt. Again, Spain does not have the international success of England but generally has better facilities.

In the Netherlands there is very little school hockey but it is the country with the most players. Children are expected to finish school and go to a local sports club to play their sport of choice.

**10. Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation?
Why/why not?**

Yes because of the recognition that sports participation has a positive effect for the whole country, especially the NHS and mental health. As such it is in the national interest to have a healthy sports culture. There is no point having a plan or a department for sport unless it comes with significant funds to grow sport. Football can look after itself but all other sports need financial help in terms of making facilities available and having an adult at those facilities for safeguarding – even if not a coach.

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