

Dr Kyle Ferguson – Written evidence (NPS0025)

Response from Dr Kyle Ferguson Reader in Sports Coaching and Management at Ulster University

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?

Reliance of sporting organisations on public sector funding is matched by the growing dependence of government on 3rd parties to deliver their development agenda. Elements of the current funding structure pits organisations against one and other, in this situation organisations who are in a position to minimise reliance on one funder by obtaining funding from a range of sources are faced with capacity pressure to successfully scope and bid for grants, prior to the servicing and reporting on funding. Some organisations adopt their activities to attract funding but retain conflicting core business objectives.

A Clusters approach has proved successful in sports innovation adopting natural locations (such as play parks) as hubs for research and development to encourage new ideas, concepts, technologies and products to be developed and or tested. This process involves a close cooperation between sporting groups, universities, government and businesses. EU funding has enabled a number of clusters to develop in Europe to enhance sport performance, stimulate sport participation/active lifestyle and accelerate business (development). See <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/news/iv-epsi-conference-sports-innovation-city>

These evidence-led co design processes provide a platform to develop a range of sport related activity. Nevertheless, the absence of a population level evaluation model for sport for development restricts the sectoral ability to demonstrate value, in direct contrast to physical activity and performance sport. The lack of a confirmed baseline from which to measure success is compounded further by an inability to identify areas of strength and weakness with regards current evidence from which to build.

The current sport related environment in the UK is complicated by a lack of common language creating ambiguity between the sports sector, general public and public sector. There is a need to clearly articulate and define the differing elements within the sporting sector. There is an evolving three-point pathway within the sport related sector, where traditional sports development (the sporting system) has expanded to tackling access inequalities (inclusive sports) as part of a broader policy agenda to engage with the hardest to reach using sport as a medium to tackle societal development needs (sport for development and behavioural change). The absence of clear guidance to support the transition (individual and organisational) through this process creates a task-oriented sector restricting its overall outcomes potential. The ambiguity further

complicated by sports broad definition in policy which defines sport as one all-encompassing discipline rather than three interlinking elements.

The cross-cutting nature of sport spreads its use across a variety of government outcome agendas. It is further limited by the short-term nature of funding and impeded by the need for delivery groups to chase funding rather than work towards a

Clarity of purpose with clear and agreed parameters are required to ensure the value of sport can be both recognised and measured, otherwise projects may be duplicated and potential restricted, which ultimately negatively impacts effectiveness and efficiency.

The absence of a formal voice for sport for development organisations, together with the lack of a coordinated evaluation template, results in a perpetuation of project-based activity, pitting organisations against each other in search of non-sport related funding, as opposed to promoting sectoral collaboration.

The competitive advantage gained by funded bodies / clubs in managing funded programmes should be valued and learning disseminated as part of all large funding programmes. Consequently, larger sporting organisations (who have been successful in attracting public funding) could act as mentors to the smaller (unfunded groups) as part of an in-kind contribution to the sector. This would in turn improve the sector as a whole and leverage greater benefit from the original funding. Indeed, the larger partner may also generate intangible benefits as a result of involvement with the smaller groups reducing the burden on the funder.

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.

The use of technology to engage with children specifically and with generational support (parents / grandparents) has been proved to be successful. Introducing technology based activities within play park settings. Introducing city challenges linked to schools activity or a mile per book voucher or city v city, school v school

Building a coherence between school-parent-child is vital to promoting and encouraging sport and recreation at a young age. Bringing parents (gurdians, grandparents or older siblings) into school PE class or after school activity is one option. Research has shown that parent's awareness of physical activity guidelines is limited as is their awareness of their families own activity levels. Further some parents require support to understand basic children's development games which they could play with their child, a programme could be developed in class to reinforce healthy choices both in school and at home. See

<https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/11217986/Main+Report+LR.pdf>

Technology can be adopted to encourage activity for both children and their supporting adult. Technology exists to then track and monitor activity to allow

low-cost mortifications. School games can be gamified and located in play park settings – see <https://www.fieldlabs.eu/ulster/>

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.

The importance of a bottom-up flexible co-design approach headed by trusted leaders within a safe appealing structure which provides access to a multi-agency offering were the key elements of success across the case studies. These elements align with six common themes within sport for development research, that of: role models; multi-level engagement; participatory approaches; safe spaces programme design; and transfer to locals.

Flexible individual approach

Pre programme, gathering of data and sharing of knowledge at a stakeholder and participant level is key to building relationships and is reflective of, the foundations required for implementing outcomes-based approaches to delivery (Friedman 2015), of particular relevance, to NI and Scotland its new outcomes-based policy framework. This process facilitated community level understanding of purpose and reinforced common values across different settings. The adoption of a flexible person-centred approach places the young person at the centre, as an active participant in their own development. As a means of '*getting the participant through the gate*'.

Multi agency structure

Successful projects break down the multitude of multi-agency offerings by coordinating an individualised multi agency approach, prioritising community outcomes over organisational outputs.

Non-statutory organisations offer an alternative pathway for these young people acting as a trusted conduit to access a range of multi-agency support services within a safe environment. Similarly, these projects bring together a range of stakeholders to empower participants to challenge behaviour by strengthening the physical, social and cultural infrastructures. Support is offered even when it requires those involved to go beyond their remit to facilitate support.

Successful programmes have harnessed local cultural resources in the pursuit of positive outcomes at a community level, creating change which successfully transitions activity from in-group (Micro) to outreach activities across the wider community (meso). The difference made is demonstrated through the forging of a commonality amongst those involved. However, transition beyond the safe confines of this sporting environment and / or local community to demonstrate impact across society is not clear, this requires more than simply investing money, the absence of a clearly articulated supportive action at a policy level limits the ability to challenge behaviours across the macro environment. The ability to make change is influenced by the environment, policy and traditional individual behaviour. The absence of positive action at any of these levels will prevent macro success.

Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?

Data collection must focus on both quantitative and qualitative analysis, retaining monitoring, evaluation and research. Too often sport moves towards insight as a means to evidence value rather than an agreed population wide research tool.

The development of a national measurement tool for each element of sport (sporting participation, sporting performance, sport for development) alongside organisational delivery effectiveness and efficiency will add much value to sports evidence base.

The national focal points model used in the EU (HEPA and WHO) on physical activity could be replicated with regional focal points across the UK. If each has a clear purpose and provided with an agreed population level monitoring tool which is supported by regular networking and education this would aid data capture.

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?

New Zealand – Have introduced an evidence based policy – Balance is Better Philosophy to promote young people to play sport. It's based on ensuring programmes are focused on children having fun, being challenged, to develop and improve participants, provide support to be part of a team/group and enjoy time with friends.

Holland have introduced a golden triangle whereby expert sports researchers work together with elite and grassroots coaches and with business entrepreneurs to find solutions to elite sport issues and or wellbeing and health issues – For example the ProFit Fieldlabs <https://www.fieldlabs.eu/ulster/research-and-testing-studies/>

Ireland and Northern Ireland are working to establish an agreed physical literacy statement similar to the work in Canada and Australia, which provides those involved in sport, physical activity, health and education with agreed purpose and principles from which to develop activity across and within their sectors.

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

Yes, an evolving sporting landscape constructed with three overlapping elements:

1. The **Sports System** recognised as participation in organised sport extending to elite performance;
2. **Inclusive Sport** which use targeted generic interventions to promote opportunities in sport by breaking down barriers to access for underrepresented groups potentially providing a pathway to transition into the sporting system.
3. **Sport for development and behavioural change** which use a collaborative partnership approach to make an individual behavioural difference (sport to achieve a change outside of sport) using a

bespoke approach, as noted by one delivery agent 'Participation in sport to improve quality of life'.

Policy requires specific sub strategies for sport for development to target real issues identified annually – such as is the case with Erasmus Plus Sport within Europe which promotes sectoral collaboration, supported by specific, sport for development funding and informed by needs based proposals and research.

There is a growing promotion of the power of sport to achieve broad outcomes (sport for development and behavioural change), while investment tends to be in value for money sporting activities (inclusive sports) due to the value for money criteria prioritised in evaluations.

The ability to agree common purpose and align community need with policy direction requires enduring action, at all government (and organisational) levels. As part of a process which supports interaction in a joint top-down and bottom-up manner (Höglund and Sundberg 2008). Decoupling the generic and country specific policies will aid future research into both effectiveness and efficiency of sport for development.

Agreed evaluation to evidence value, long term outcome-based targets, with flexible approach to investment rather than funding, core investment in key leaders and programmes rather than funding against outputs. Model for those organisations receiving investment to support and mentor non funded groups.

25 January 2021