

Alex Pierce – Written evidence (NPS0029)

I would like to sincerely welcome the National Plan for Sports and Recreation committee's decision to open this inquiry for submission, into what is an extremely crucial and generational issue for not just society currently, but for society in the future. I am a final year Politics student at the University of Sheffield and using insight obtained from both academic research and significant and unique lived experience within university and community sports, I have constructed the following arguments to help aid the inquiry:

1. Question 2 in the call for evidence references **children and young people** being encouraged to participate in sport and recreation **both at school and outside school**. When producing a potential plan for improved participation in sports and recreation for young people and school children, **university students must be included in this**.
2. Regarding Question 6 in the call for evidence; tackling racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism **starts with education** which needs to be clearly defined and **incorporated into a national curriculum**, with all relevant bodies **working together on the same strategy**.

The inclusion of university students when planning for increased participation for children and young people in Sports and Recreation:

1. There is currently a **mental health crisis facing UK university students**, which has been severely exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. One outlet for students is the participation in Sports and Recreation, which is proven to help alleviate mental health problems, and offers students not just the chance to improve their physical and mental wellbeing, but also their social, teamwork and leadership skills. According to the 'Higher Education Sport Participation and Satisfaction Survey' by Sport England, weekly, **43% of students don't participate in any form of exercise at all**. The report concluded that the groups less likely to be involved in the participation in sports are "**women, older students, those with a disability and Black and Asian students**".
2. From personal experience in university sports, there are clear barriers to entry for team sports, with these mainly being **ability, accessibility and cost**. As a result of these barriers to entry, students from certain demographics like some of those mentioned in paragraph 1, may suffer **disproportionate mental or physical health problems** and will undoubtedly have a contrasting university experience to their peers. A solution to this can be achieved through the use of the 'The Civic Network' organisation, working in collaboration with the UK Government and Sport England, to create **a clear strategy across all Universities in the UK**, outlining initiatives to increase participation in Sports and Recreation, specifically focusing on **women, older students, those with a disability and Black and Asian students**. Moreover, universities and their facilities could act as **anchor institutions**, to promote community sports in their respective local areas, collaborating on schemes to widen

participation **not just for university students, but for local young adults who aren't in any form of education.**

3. **I recommend that this inquiry includes university students within the scope of children and young people, when planning for a potential National Plan for Sports and Recreation.** This could be achieved by all relevant parties collaborating together to ensure a **clear and consistent strategy is produced**, with common objectives and timescales in place. Furthermore, the creation of a **'educational sports and recreation journey'** in the form of a roadmap would be extremely beneficial, ensuring that from **primary to university education, there is uncomplicated and easily accessible information**, showing the main challenges for children and young adults as they get older, with ways these challenges can be tackled.

The need for education and a combined national strategy in order to tackle racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism:

4. In the past few years in the UK; cases of racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sports **have increased** in some cases. Within UK Football specifically, according to the anti-racism organisation 'Kick it Out', there was a **42% increase in hate crime** last season, which has led to the appointment of UK's first **dedicated hate crime officer based in a football unit.** 'Sporting Equals', the UK's leading charity for racial equality and diversity in sport found that within British Sports, **83% of people from BAME backgrounds have experienced discrimination** in some form.
5. **Education is paramount** in tackling racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sports. Despite the introduction of 'Citizenship' (one of its aims was providing citizens with the "critical capacities to weigh evidence before speaking and acting") and it becoming a statutory subject on the British curriculum in 2001, the teaching of the subject has been seriously undermined, given academies do not have to follow the National Curriculum (3/4 of all UK secondary schools are academies). The topic of reforming 'Citizenship' has been looked at previously by the Houses of Lords 'Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement', who concluded that it had been left to **'degrade to a parlous state'**. With cases of hate crime rising within sports, it is **abundantly clear** that a **revised and more ambitious approach to the civic dimension of sport is needed to combat discrimination**, which is **not exclusive to primary and secondary education.** This could be achieved by a reform of citizenship, or a new mandatory topic to teach in conjunction with citizenship or physical education, but needs to be clearly defined. **Collaboration between relevant organisations and the Government on strategies and campaigns is essential** in order to tackle racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism.
6. **I recommend to this inquiry that education and re-education across not just schools, but all sports clubs, at all levels and age groups is essential to help combat racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism within sports.** To highlight the

urgent need for reform in tackling discrimination, in the Government's 2015 sports strategy report: 'Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation', in an 84 page document, **transphobia, misogyny and ableism were not mentioned once, with racism and homophobia being referenced only twice respectively**. Anti-discrimination, sports and education organisations along with the government **need to collaborate to introduce a mandatory curriculum**, that is introduced in **all forms of education and sports clubs in the UK**, which is regularly updated and reviewed.

Concluding remarks:

7. Undoubtedly, in the creation / reformation of segments of a National Sports and Recreation Plan, there are going to be significant challenges, which will be heightened given the COVID-19 pandemic we are living through. However, if implemented successfully, it gives the Government the opportunity to **improve the mental and physical health of millions in the country, as well as strongly tackling all forms of discrimination. It is time for tangible actions, rather than words.**
8. If the committee has any further questions about this submission, I would be happy to provide clarity if required.

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