

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – Supplementary written evidence (NPS0030)

I write in response to your request to follow up on one or two questions which arose when I, together with my colleagues from the Education and Health departments, attended the evidence session of the Select Committee on a National Plan for Sport and Recreation on 2 December last year.

I know I speak for both Graham and Mark in expressing how pleased we all were to have had the opportunity to take part in the session. I hope the noble Peers can see that we are working together toward a common aim in terms of sport, recreation and physical activity for people from all backgrounds.

You wanted to know more about how we aim to tackle discrimination after I had referred to a recent meeting concerning this subject. On 17 November 2020, the Secretary of State held a roundtable with key football stakeholders to discuss the future of football. Topics discussed included governance, sustainability, supporting women's football, improving diversity and tackling discrimination in the game. Representatives from the FA, EFL, Premier League, the National League, Professional Footballers Association, Women In Football, Football Supporters Association, Kick It Out were present as well as former FA chair David Bernstein. This roundtable initiated an ongoing discussion on the important issues facing the game.

You asked how we would tackle the issue of diversity within national governing bodies, membership organisations and other sporting bodies and what leverage we have to effect change. Since its launch in 2017, the joint UK Sport and Sport England "Code for Sports Governance" has set out standards expected of sporting organisations in receipt of public funding, including around diversity. The public funding provides our main lever. The implementation of the Code has seen a move towards gender equality on boards, with women now accounting for 40% of board members across funded bodies (up from 30% previously). Four years on from its launch, the Code is being reviewed to look at areas where it would benefit from further development, including around equality, diversity and inclusion.

This work sits alongside ongoing joint activity by UK Sport and Sport England to help increase diversity on sporting boards, being carried out in partnership with recruitment specialist, Perrett Laver. Perrett Laver is responsible for identifying and developing a pool of senior, experienced candidates from a variety of backgrounds including black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME), disabled and LGBT+ to help organisations develop more diverse boards. Since the start of the project, 84 candidates have been recruited and are now available for appointment, with six having already been made and many more expected.

You also asked us to expand on how we work together across government and how we coordinate all the separate initiatives. The range of initiatives represents the high level of interest and investment from across government to support people to be physically active and take part in sport. Many of these initiatives are co-funded or co-delivered by government departments, for example DCMS, DHSC and DfE all support the delivery of the School Games. Whilst nationwide programmes, such as the £320m per year Primary PE and Sport Premium are delivered nationally, it is important to fund initiatives which focus on specific population groups, geographical areas, or support specific government priorities. In my experience, each is tailored to the community they are aiming to support.

For school sport, these initiatives are brought together under the School Sport and Activity Action Plan (2019). DCMS, DfE and DHSC have shared interests in supporting more children and young people to be physically active, which takes a highly collaborative approach. The action plan also supports collaborative working by ensuring clear links into existing government strategies such as DHSC's Obesity Strategy and DCMS' *Sporting Future* strategy. When launched it was very well received with widespread support from stakeholders for our high-level objectives. We continue to work closely with the sport and education sectors on the action plan.

A cross-government officials' working group continues to meet weekly to report on progress against the action plan and to understand emerging issues. We jointly committed to publishing a follow-up Action Plan, however, this has been postponed due to Covid and we will review the timing of an updated plan in light of the latest events.

A key challenge has been to support children and young people to maintain physical activity levels through COVID restrictions. Our coordinated approach has allowed us to support schools through sharing of new, high quality resources from the sport sector to support remote learning and to help sport providers to provide activities safely to children through lockdown. Examples include primary and secondary remote resources through #ThisisPE, webinars and virtual after school clubs.

The main point I'd like to make clear is what we are working to achieve. We want to keep people active and get those who are not active enough, more active - this is primarily driven by the work on the cross-government sports strategy '*Sporting Future*' working alongside various partners including as mentioned above, our fellow government departments. Beneath the headline strategy there are a large number of parts looking at the roles of Sport England, schools, communities and a huge list of sometimes overlapping partners.

The effects of COVID have played an undeniable role in delaying some initiatives and reprioritising others. It has also had a deteriorative effect on the general fitness of the population as we have tried to live in new ways to avoid spreading the virus. Once the pandemic begins to abate and we are able to look ahead, we have a huge task to pull the nation out of its lockdown habits and help embed a more physically active way of living for people from

all backgrounds.

As I mentioned at the evidence session, as the covid situation improves and we return to some form of normality, DCMS will be looking to refresh the 2015 strategy and a substantial part of this will involve countering the impact of the pandemic. We are fully aware of the magnitude of this task as people's sporting and exercising habits have been badly hit. This task will be supported by the launch of Sport England's new 10 year strategy 'Uniting the Movement' on Tuesday 26 January. The strategy will help the country recover from the coronavirus pandemic and set a positive agenda in providing opportunities for people to exercise over the next ten years.

We remain fully committed to working well across Government and with all our external partners to bring the fitness and activity of the nation back to previous levels and then improving further still.

Ben Dean, Director, Sport, Gambling and Ceremonials, DCMS

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