

British Masters Athletic Federation – Written evidence (NPS0062)

The **British Masters Athletic Federation (BMAF)** is the governing body for masters athletics in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is affiliated to UK Athletics, World Masters Athletics and European Masters Athletics. The Federation comprises 11 area masters clubs and associations who have over 5000 members. It regulates and provides national championships for anyone aged 35 and over and facilitates entry of members into international championships. Its interest in making this submission is to share its experience and views in providing athletics for older generations and to help in the aim of increasing the number of active older people throughout the nation.

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?

1.1 Leading an active lifestyle should be a lifelong process. For that to happen it needs to be integrated into a person's general lifestyle and is best nurtured, initially, locally where it's likely be cheaper, accessible, more frequent and carried out with family and friends. Unfortunately, opportunities to enter new sports and activities where you live tend to be very limited once you reach adulthood. 1.2 This shortcoming is a major barrier needing to be overcome to get a more active nation. It is right that there should be a significant focus on children and youth but the danger is that it will be at the expense of other key ages. Take for example the over sixties, very vulnerable and in great need of becoming more active as Covid19 has shown. Recently published ONS National Life Statistics show that in the UK healthy life expectancy is falling. For females it is now age 63.3 and males age 62.9. Life expectancy, however, is around a further 23 years for females and 20 years for males. The saving to the economy that could be made by deferring the age at which people need care by a few years by getting people to live an active lifestyle from their 50s deserves greater attention and investment.

1.2 Improved local integration into a more all age multi-sport and activity programme is a possible solution. Sport's governing bodies have tended to have concentrated on young beginners and developers plus the elite as that is where the funding is directed. As a consequence, reasonable structures are in place for many sports at a local level for youngsters through both through the club system and education. What is needed for those who fall outside this bracket is an integrated approach at a local level between the various sports clubs and organisations for better sharing of facilities, administration, fitness and conditioning coaching, shared events etc. Local authorities could possibly

facilitate this by establishing local sports councils where they could work with the clubs and other organisations to improve services for all ages provided through their own and school facilities outside school hours. Just putting together a directory of what is available and where you start a new sport or activity within a town would be a good start.

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.

2.1 Schools and teachers can help with physical development and acquiring skills through fun activities and an introduction to many different sports. But taking them to next stage so that they don't drop out when their education ends is possibly better handled by someone who has a passion for a particular sport or activity. Historically sports teachers with particular interests have recruited many youngsters into their personal sport and have got them to stay. Youngsters connect with that teacher at school with the connection continuing when they decide to try an outside club. It also happens with music and drama. A way forward could be to try to recreate that situation by enabling more opportunities for volunteers from sports clubs to run after school introductory courses and regular sports clubs. There are examples across in many schools where this is happening but it is not wide spread. Masters athletes are a good source for such volunteers.

2.2 Doing sport and activities with other family members also tends to create the glue for continuous involvement. Park run is a clear demonstration of this power. Running weekly with family, against all ages, trying to improve your own time, no strict rules and getting encouragement from everyone around in a local setting has all the right ingredients. It leads many into getting more involved in running and others improving their fitness to take into other sports. Families joining together can be witnessed in many sports and activity events staged by charities. The popularity of the parents race at school sports days is another example. Parent involvement, not just to help run an event, but also to participate makes for a good day for all. The BMAF finds this works with older adults too. Many competitors come with their adult children and even their own parents. Trialling and facilitating with start up funding some all age multi sport community sports organisations would be worthwhile.

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.

3.1 While most recognise the benefits of sport and exercise the numbers who intentionally engage in some form or other are disappointingly low. The experience of Covid19 provides an opportunity to change that attitude by being more specific moving the nation towards getting active to improve the immune

system, respiratory and cardio vascular system. A major campaign needs to be launched with the scientific evidence of these specific benefits and a message such as "don't stop exercising, stay healthy". The campaign needs to be overall but also targeted at the under-represented groups.

3.2 While the success of elite sports personalities has limited impact on motivating children and young adults into action, much greater effect seems to apply if the stories of elite sports participants are those who have overcome major challenges to succeed. The exposure that was given to Paralympians in the 2012 Olympics and servicemen through the Invictus Games has had an incredible impact on the disabled community with many disabled starting to engage with sport for the first time. This also seems to be true for older people (if he/she can do it at his/her age, I am sure I can). There is no reason why it should not apply for those in other under-represented groups. Every opportunity should be taken to publicise such stories as people seem to be able relate more easily to such people who are not celebrities. For example a Bristol based photographer who specialises in masters athletes over the age 60 in action has had her pictures on permanent display in several hospitals and has had them displayed in a main thoroughfare in Bristol for many weeks. She also had an exhibition at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. The pictures which might include a 65 year old lady who has had cancer doing the pole vault or a 92 year old man striding out in an 800m race have a big impact. She has been commissioned by the World Health Organisation for an exhibition at one of their conferences in Geneva because they believe they tell an important story, ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

3.3 Unfortunately sport can be a little blinkered with governing bodies paying little attention to those outside their key targets. Opportunities to give exposure to adults who fall outside the governing bodies pathways and motivate the public at large are regularly missed. For example, bringing a major masters championships such as the World Masters Athletics World Championships (WMA) to the UK could give a major boost. In recent years the UK has acquired a good track record in bringing major international championships and games to the country but has ignored opportunities such as this. The WMA championships attract up to 10,000 masters athletes from age 35 to 100+. They are open to all without any qualifying entry standard. Competition is in 5 year age groups. The UK has an excellent record at these championships which gets little if any recognition. At the last championships in Spain in 2018 the UK was the number one nation with 704 athletes taking part, all self funded. They won 80 golds, 66 silvers and 57 bronze medals. UK masters currently hold 95 world age records. Other sports are likely to have similar success stories. It would be hugely beneficial and would motivate many if it were public policy to encourage and support governing bodies to bring major championships to the UK for these under represented groups. The cost of putting on a WMA championship would be less than £250,000 with every chance that its income would enable it to break even.

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?

4.1 There can be no doubt that the new overall strategy and these outcomes are the right priorities with a move towards a greater focus on the individual and behavioural change. Unfortunately, implementation of specific strategies to bring about these outcomes has tended to remain dependent on most of the sports and activity organisations that pre-existed the new strategy. Buy in from those organisations does not seem to have been sufficient to produce the significant shift needed. This has been compounded by the fact that there appears to be no relationship between the Active Lives Survey measure being used and the activities of the organisations it is hoped will bring about change. The UK sports world appears to be adopting the approach that creating an active nation is peripheral to their reason for existence. By contrast new initiatives that have largely come about because of the new strategy such as Fit Villages in Suffolk appear to be delivering with the activity of individuals central to the initiative. This suggests that a programme such as Fit Villages needs to be widened to Fit Districts, Fit Towns, and Fit Counties where the individual is at the centre. Sports organisations and clubs can run alongside providing some services but more focussed on the next tier of activity needed to keep people active for the longer term.

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?

5.1 The data collected appears relevant to the desired outcomes and gives a good high level picture of the demographics as a whole and attitudes of individuals.

6. How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?

6.1 Increased education of all involved, both participants and officials. Ensuring that there is equality of opportunities.

7. What can be done to improve and implement effective duty of care and safeguarding standards for sports and recreation activities at all levels?

7.1 Increased awareness of what is required by all and not just those in charge. Unfortunately, ever increasing requirements that become burdensome can cause many to start ignoring those requirements or for volunteers to walk away. In many instances we have reached the tipping point where more is becoming less and in particular is contributing to less volunteering. The ability for more proportionate responses according to particular circumstances of an organisation or an event could result in improvements.

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.

8.1 The main challenge at the elite level is that sport has become a job and there is a disparity between the high earning potential of a few compared to the lesser rewards for the also rans. The fusion of celebrity and employment also makes managing elite sports difficult for governing bodies who rightly need to be accountable. Much of the difficulty arises from the athletes being effectively under a quasi-employment contract and management being employees whose continued employment is dependent on the results of those over whom they have limited control. Probably a standard set of best practice for management and athletes across all sports where government funding is being provided would help.

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?

9.1 Comparing one country with another is not always advisable. Weather, levels of poverty, the political climate and culture are huge factors. What is particularly interesting is that in a number of other countries where there has been state intervention to improve activity levels, research has tended to direct them towards the 60+ as they have recognised the impact of ageing on their economies. Following the Seoul Olympics South Korea introduced a daily sports vitalisation programme with public sports clubs and a national fitness award. Particular attention has been given to the 60's and 70's with government employed sports practitioners spread throughout the country. In 2015 53.8% of the over 70s participated in sport up from 35.2% in 2007. Japan introduced the term life-long sport in 1990 with a basic sports plan for all. Specific programs were developed aiming at non-sports participants with elderly sports and body exercise promotion projects. In Germany, there are various programs comprehensively run by the German Olympic Sports Confederation - "Healthiness from Age 50", "Exercise Network 50 Plus", "Exercise Program 70 Plus", "Active and Fit". In addition, programs and projects for elderly are run by state-level sports councils.

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

10.1 Yes. In the same way as there is a National Curriculum for Education, it would seem, from what other countries are doing and what is working, that a National Curriculum for Sport and Recreation for Life would establish a common platform from which individual sports and activity organisations could work either taking on some of the responsibility or complementing that national standard. The Curriculum could be part of a national plan delegated out to regional/county/local organisations to take responsibility for ensuring that an appropriate programme is available for all in their locality. Currently the system

is fragmented and, if the aim is to make the nation active, a national plan is needed.

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