

Chris Birch – Written evidence (NPS0069)

Chris Birch - Hockey Player/Coach/Umpire/Club Development Officer

I have been involved in hockey for over 30 years and one of my prime goals is to get more people playing the sport and actively recruited new players from the age of 4 to over 50 years old. I have been awarded local, national and European awards in recognition of my efforts in getting people into Hockey at grassroots level.

QUESTIONS

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?

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.

Role models and exposure to sport on media greatly influence and encourage young people. A classic example was the 2016 Olympics. As a hockey club development officer I utilised the Olympics to help promote Hockey locally. These activities were enhanced with GB winning gold. Providing sport specific coaching in schools ideally by local clubs has the greatest impact in growing sports participation. Working with the local authority to run inter school sports events again had a significant impact. Schools are the area of most significant impact. All undertaken sessions at youth clubs but these are not as successful.

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 is a diverse sport however at high level there is still some sexual discrepancy, but this is beginning to level out.

Providing opportunities for wider participation is the first step. In hockey we provide Flyerz hockey for disabled people, rush hockey – a simplified form of hockey for those not yet confident enough to play the regular game. Confidence to participate in the first place is the most difficult hurdle to overcome.

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?

They are the correct parameters but difficult to measure in a quantitative way.

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

It relies on governing bodies for their information but this does not really include casual participation.

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

Awareness and the calling out as not acceptable is primarily what needs to be done within clubs. There are challenges for clubs in engaging some minority groups "Where do you start?" and individuals then putting in the effort to pursue these leads when identified.

Negative stereotypes that exist outside of the sport eg "Hockey is a girl's game!" do not help. Some are perpetuated by competing sports for participants. Sporting resources are limited particularly at peak times (evenings and weekends) so although there may be a desire to offer more forms of a sport e.g. in hockey Rush, walking or Flyerz hockey there may not be pitch space at a suitable time (for participants or facilitators) for the activity to go ahead.

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

In hockey I find the level of duty and care and safeguarding particularly high. A good thing from the participants perspective but can be off putting for some otherwise capable volunteers.

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.

The demand for watchable "live" sport from media has dramatically increased with the proliferation of sports channels. The polarisation of finance between the more commercial sports and those relying on grants, sponsorships and self-financing from within their participants. The sacrifices made to compete successfully at an elite level are becoming less socially acceptable. We want "medals" but do not want the carnage of failure.

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?

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

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