

Activity Alliance – Written evidence (NPS0073)

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Activity Alliance is the leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity. Formerly known as the English Federation of Disability Sport and founded more than 20 years ago. As a national charity, we are funded by a range of sources, including Sport England for national and regional work.

Our membership and staff team offers an expansive mix of inclusion expertise across many sectors and specialisms. Insight and disabled people's lived experiences drive our work collectively to change attitudes and embed inclusive practice.

One in five of the population considers themselves a disabled person. As a large proportion of our society, every disabled child and adult deserves the right to be as active as they want to be.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were seeing the number of inactive disabled people reducing and attitudes towards disabled people's activity improving. Yet, disabled people were still twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people. Our insight during the pandemic paints a stark picture of the challenge ahead. We are seriously concerned about the potential long-term damage on disabled people. Our latest Annual Survey shows twice as many disabled people felt that coronavirus greatly reduced their ability to do sport or physical activity compared to non-disabled people.

Despite the pandemic set back, we strive to close the fairness gap. This is the difference between the number of inactive disabled people and the number of inactive non-disabled people as measured in Sport England's Active Lives Adult Survey¹.

It is not fair or right that disabled people are the least active in our society. We all have a role to play in addressing this long-standing inequality. We have listened to disabled people and urge decision makers to do the same. If we do not act now, we will witness inequalities widen even further, or unthinkably they may become irreversible. Prioritising disabled people is the only way to prevent this from happening. Every plan, every action and every penny spent must be tested against its impact on disabled people's activity.

www.activityalliance.org.uk

Questions

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?

1a. Local delivery is crucial to getting more inactive people, particularly disabled people more active. Most of our population starts being active on their own

¹ Active Lives Adult Survey 2019/20. Sport England (2020).

doorstep. Activity Alliance works with many local partners across all regions, who look to us for guidance and expertise. Greater improvement could be made if more local partners actively use our inclusion insight and resources to guide their delivery. Our research, insight and programme evidence how influential genuine inclusive local offers are. [Our 10 principles](#) for engaging disabled people highlights this in 'my locality'. These principles were created using our insight and they are considered by the sector to be instrumental in developing opportunities. Local delivery organisations could embed these principles in their work. Our resources suit those working at local level. More funding would be required to have greater reach and in more innovative ways.

1b. We are lead partner in the [Get Out Get Active \(GOGA\) programme](#). This is having extensive local and national impact and reaching the least active. The programme has an immense amount of evidence to share and learn from. This includes from its first phase (2016 to 2020) delivery that participants felt more engaged in their local community. They had an increased sense of pride in the contribution they make to their local community. 87% of all participants say that GOGA has had a positive impact on their engagement with their local community. 69% of participants six months after joining GOGA said they had made new friends in their local area as a result of their GOGA participation². This phase engaged more than 30,000 disabled and non-disabled participants, recruited 2,800 volunteers and supported 2,000 volunteers and paid staff. The programme delivered over 2,400 activities and a multitude of events across the UK, working with local delivery partners. Through GOGA we see how powerful sport and physical activity can be in encouraging community engagement and would urge the continued expansion of such programmes.

1c. Local leisure delivery is heavily influenced by contracts or partnership agreements between leisure deliverers and local authorities / councils. These arrangements have become too focused on financial performance over community needs. Sufficient financial and human investment must be ringfenced for reducing inequalities and more flexibility offered in contractual arrangements. Inclusive commissioning must become standard practice. This will require education and sharing of better practice with all local partners including local authorities, leisure consultancies, leisure operators and other bodies.

1d. Coordination could be improved by partnership working (with Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts, local sports clubs and charities etc.) being more explicit and resourced in local funding contracts. Also, facilitating joint funding bids with a strong focus on social return on investment and reducing inequalities.

1e. Encourage greater place-based engagement. Activity Alliance would welcome the opportunity to have greater influence in the Sport England Local Delivery Pilots and further engagement in local activation campaigns, like We Are Undefeatable. We supported Greater Manchester's That Counts campaign to embed inclusive communication principles and the campaign is a great example for accessible approaches.

1f. We must better prepare local workforce across many sectors to recognise their role in engaging disabled people in physical activity and sport. Activity Alliance's [Inclusive Activity Programme \(IAP\)](#) can be used to increase

² GOGA Evaluation Final Summative Report March 2020. Wavehill and Activity Alliance (2020).

competence and confidence of the workforce to better engage disabled people and those with long term health conditions in physical activity and sport.

1g. We must maximise the influence healthcare professionals have in localities. Empower local healthcare professionals with the knowledge and training as our insight continues to show that disabled people identify them as a trusted source.

1h. Local infrastructure must consider inclusion principles into active design plans. For example, cycling lanes should follow inclusion standards, ensure accessible pedestrian spaces and playgrounds. We need local spaces and places to empower disabled people with more choices and opportunities to be active with friends and family.

1i. Activity Alliance supports others to increase disabled people's representation within and across local communities, especially in decision-making. Co-production and co-design will be crucial to respond inclusively and accessibly.

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.

2a. Disabled children are less active than their non-disabled peers and experience more barriers. [My Active Future](#) released by Activity Alliance in March 2020, investigates the differences in experience and perceptions of sport and physical activity among disabled and non-disabled children. This includes their attitudes, enjoyment and participation, as well as their barriers and motivations. The findings reinforce the activity gap between disabled and non-disabled children. The report complements Sport England's annual Active Lives Children and Young People Survey.

2b. There is a need to reinforce inclusive childhood sporting experiences. This is right for everyone – those disabled in childhood but also those who (more typically) will go on to acquire their impairment/condition as adults. It is important to demonstrate inclusive sport at an early age to ensure that there is an awareness of the possibilities of being active later in life.

2c. Early reports from the Sport England [Secondary Teacher Training programme](#) evaluation, with over 60,000 student responses, indicates that pupils who feel included are more likely to have higher levels of confidence and competence in PE³.

2d. Across all demographic groups SEND pupils at Secondary Schools are reporting lower levels of inclusion, confidence and competence compared to their non-disabled peers at programme baseline⁴. Activity Alliance is committed to tackling such inequalities. Positive experience is often as much to do with feeling of inclusion and belonging as it is the activity itself.

2e. Since 2012, over 6,700 teachers, trainee teachers and school staff (predominantly from Primary schools) have taken part in [Inclusive PE training](#). Before the workshop, 5 in 10 participants said their pupils had access to high quality inclusive PE. This increased to 9 in 10 after the workshop. The key

³ Sport England Secondary Teacher Training Approach evaluation. Activity Alliance (2020).

⁴ Sport England Secondary Teacher Training Approach evaluation. Activity Alliance (2020).

benefit for children is increased participation and enjoyment of lessons and activities⁵. Our work with teachers demonstrates the need to embed inclusion principles within all education settings.

2f. In the future we must recognise that children with complex and profound needs require a more meaningful support offer in PE or school sport, in and out of educational settings.

2g. We must increase the use of targeted activity at transition points for disabled children and young people to counter the rates of drop off. Stronger collaborative networks should be encouraged to support a co-ordinated approach to getting all children and young people more active. Again, in all educational settings, in and out of school.

2h. There is potential to expand the workforce network to ensure positive outcomes. There is a need for this workforce to have an inclusive training and development offer to support this work.

2i. We urge the continued use and development of Activity Alliance's support in inclusive delivery within these settings. Our resources and bespoke support remain essential to a range of sectors. For example, the [School Games Health Check](#) with Youth Sport Trust.

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.

3a. We need to encourage the sport and leisure sector to look beyond standard demographics and take a person-centred approach in providing opportunities. Many organisations group inactive audiences by standard demographics. This can lead to assumptions about their behaviour, motivations and barriers to being active. For the sport and leisure sector to become truly inclusive for all, we must acknowledge this and treat disabled people as individuals. Everyone's life is influenced and shaped by many characteristics. This includes but is not limited to, age, race and religion or belief. Acknowledging intersectionality will help - the theoretical framework for understanding how a person's social identities connect and overlap.

3b. People are motivated by different things, not by their impairment. Disabled people are infinitely variable and there is no single solution to increasing their activity. Our research tells us that two-thirds of disabled people are not particularly enthused by the 'hard-edged' concept of sport. We know they are not necessarily aspiring to become overly competitive. [Our Motivate Me report](#) indicates tapping into motivational messaging like have fun and get fit, be healthy and active, will have better impact.

3c. Enable a sector that works collaboratively. Support organisations to work in partnership, tackling challenges collectively. We should avoid silo activity in supporting disabled people to go from inactive to active. Increase the sharing

⁵ Sainsbury's Active Kids for All Inclusive PE evaluation 2017-20. Activity Alliance (2020).

and learning. More testing pilots that allow room in the funding and time, so to adapt programmes early on, if something is not having the greatest impact.

3d. Not all approaches are digital and those who in most need must not be left behind. While we recognise the huge potential of digital engagement in activity, especially as we recover from the impact of COVID-19, we must also be conscious of the digital divide and find ways to reduce it. The current situation has exasperated digital inequalities, with 9 million people who struggle to use the internet independently being left behind⁶ [UK Consumer Digital Index, 2020]. Being unemployed, retired, disabled, living on a low income, no or few qualifications: these are the biggest predictors of being on the wrong side of the digital divide. Our [expertise in inclusive communications](#) can support this change and help organisations.

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?

4a. Activity Alliance fully supported these five key outcome priorities and ensured that our work contributes to these wider societal outcomes within our last strategy and operational plan. Our concerns are around the openness of methods used and, in its transparency, to capture more succinctly the priorities' impact. There could be future improvement in understanding the quantitative and qualitative data within these priorities and then share it better within the sector. Collecting this data should be made as accessible and inclusive as possible to ensure everyone can input, especially in understanding 'individual development'. This will assist and enhance future planning with specific information on key demographic groups.

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?

5a. The Sport England Active Lives Survey data provides us with a regular and robust dataset of self-reported measures. This is integral for us to track the activity levels of disabled people and understand the fairness gap on a national level. The level of detail on the number and type of impairments is useful, as is the clear demonstration of the link with wellbeing and community outcomes. It would be beneficial to include the data for type of impairments in the accompanying dataset rather than in the online tool. The online tool works well for queries: but allowing for grouping different variables of people types e.g., disabled and female, disabled and BAME would be useful. The list of activities for participation is extensive though perhaps doesn't reflect low impact/ informal activities/ activities that take place outside of a formal setting that many disabled people can benefit from (especially during the pandemic).

5b. The addition of the Active Lives Children and Young People survey has helped us understand the activity levels of disabled children. We were pleased that the disability question was standardised across year groups this year. It was

⁶ Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020. Lloyds Bank (2020).

still unclear what led to the lack of difference between disabled and non-disabled children in the 2019/20 report, when other research has shown differences in participation. More information on the sample of disabled children (e.g. types of impairment, type of school) would be useful.

5c. Ensuring that measures that capture activity levels and participation can be used by other organisations and programmes in a standardised way will be important. The current short version of the activity level question is quite lengthy and often not used consistently, particularly when researchers need to consider accessibility of the survey or work in unusual settings. Coproduction and testing with disabled people would help with this for future revisions.

5d. Better working together with diverse organisations (including health and social organisations) in a consistent way where data can be quickly pooled from organisations will allow us to see the impact of the sector compared to the national picture.

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

6a. We need to increase disabled people's intersectional representation at all levels and within all communities, especially in decision-making. Co-production and co-design are crucial for real change.

6b. The [Social Model](#) of Disability should underpin all work. There is clear evidence that disabled people's enjoyment of being active is prevented by many externally imposed barriers⁷. Disabled people should feel they belong, with meaningful opportunities across all areas including leadership, workforce, built environments. One-off programmes that fail to fully embrace the principles of inclusion should be avoided.

6c. For far too long disabled people have faced misconceptions and presumptions on what is and is not possible, including in sport. We need to move the shift out-dated views on disability. Our insight shows a lack of understanding could be causing long-lasting barriers for disabled people, leading to inactivity. For the least active audience in our country, people's attitudes can make or break activity experiences. We must ensure disabled people are not seen only in sport as elite, 'inspirational' achievers. Disabled people deserve the right to be seen in all promotions, especially in the media, without judgement or expectation. Not every disabled person can or wants to be a Paralympian. The focus needs to be on being active in whatever way that person wishes to be, rather than an unrealistic aspiration.

6d. Disabled people's equal access to activity must have broader merit and a central place within the wider discussions concerning civil society and inclusion in policy areas: Public health, Employment and Welfare, Health, Transport, Social justice, Education, the proposed [National Disability Strategy](#).

6e. Inclusive campaigns with positive representation is key. Activity Alliance leads the way in encouraging better [inclusive marketing and communications](#). We urge sectors to fully utilise and promote this expertise to ensure that a strong consistent voice for disabled people can be applied across sport and activity.

⁷ Understanding the barriers to participation in sport. Activity Alliance (2012).

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

7a. Removing barriers that prevent deaf and disabled children from being fully included into everyday activities, including sports and recreation, can also be effective in preventing abuse. The available UK evidence on the extent of abuse suggests that disabled children are at increased risk of abuse. Having multiple impairments appears to increase the risk of both abuse and neglect. Deaf and disabled children are up to four times as likely to be abused as non-disabled children. (Sullivan and Knutson 2000). Anecdotal evidence shows that disabled children often face social barriers that can lead to safeguarding issues.

7b. Organisations must include disabled children in their policies and practices and ensure they are completely equal to non-disabled children. This inclusive practice must be at the heart of any organisation responsible for safeguarding children and young people, at all levels.

7e. Effective collaboration with the right experts and inclusion specialists. A good example is [The Ann Craft Trust](#) is a national charity which exists to minimise the risk of abuse of disabled children and adults at risk. The Child Protection in Sports Unit helps improve safeguarding and child protection practices within sport organisations, to ensure all children and young people are safe while participating in sport.

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.

8a. There is evidence to show a reduction in the number of talented disabled people available for pathway identification. NGBs can address this by improving their inclusion strategies, policies, workforce knowledge and pathway development. Ensuring inclusion, equality and diversity is thought about from grassroots upwards. This alongside truly understanding the breakdown of their members and knowing how to regularly monitor the data, accessibly and inclusively. We have seen this improvement in some sports, leading to more disabled people seeing their sport as a 'sport for them'.

8b. An ongoing challenge is the Paralympics does not receive the same level of funding as the Olympics. The player's impairment always dictates who can progress to elite level, to fit into tight classification structures. This reduces the number of sports talented disabled people can play at elite level.

8c. Collaborative working with partners across the sector to ensure robust accountability measures are in place. NGBs need to acknowledge and learn from historical failings to ensure safeguarding, welfare and inclusion is embedded throughout their organisation from strategy to delivery. There needs to be a code of ethics that all NGBs must commit to and held accountable for. All staff and volunteers, who are responsible for working directly or indirectly with athletes, must undergo training around athlete welfare, safeguarding and inclusion to ensure a person-centred approach. This way they can maximise participation and improve everyone's enjoyment, while retaining people in the sport.

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?

9a. We have worked with many other countries, who draw in our expertise to improve their inclusion in sport. In recent years, we have received interest from many countries wanting to use our skills or resources to develop their own. Canada is a great example to look to. They approached us to learn and share our Lead programme which supports organisations to self-assess their offer for disabled people under a range of key themes. To help drive improvement in their own country, the representatives in Canada secured significant funding.

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

10a. Yes, a national plan is useful, but it needs to be truly inclusive and prioritise those who need investment the most. Sport and activity's power to change lives cannot continue to be a marginalised interest area in government policy. It needs to part of wider policy plans and discussions in civil society and inclusion, such as Public health, Employment and Welfare, Health, Transport, Social justice, Education, the proposed [National Disability Strategy](#).

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