

Dr Kay Biscomb – Written evidence (NPS0084)

I am making this submission as an individual. I originally trained as a secondary school PE teacher but I have been an academic in HE for the last 25 years. I have been a club hockey player and have served on the committee of my club for over ten years and in my youth I was a club swimmer. I submit my commentary as I believe that there are some important questions and would like my opportunity to contribute. In this submission I will focus on some of the questions and identify them at the start of each section.

- 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.
- 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.

The answer to these questions is a multi-faceted approach but one area that I would like to draw attention to is the role and significance of media representation. Our research which has been undertaken over a number of years demonstrates that female athletes in particular are still marginalised in their representation in the British print media. If it is accepted that our exposure to role models in one form is through the print media then our research would demonstrate that there is a need for print media to become more inclusive and embracing of all forms of sport and physical activity from all groups and types of people. Our review of the representation of female athletes in a number of studies (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Biscomb and Griggs, 2013; Griggs and Biscomb, 2010 and Leflay and Biscomb 2020) has shown that since the 1980s the way in which female athletes are described and portrayed in the media has positively changed. Those messages are now less focussed on appearance and are more likely to focus on achievement and performance (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019) and that female athletes can be portrayed as authentic athletes in a period of accumulative success (Leflay and Biscomb, 2020). This is a positive message for girls and young women as they can be exposed to messages of achievement, performance and be given the opportunity of seeing themselves as authentic athletes. What is still astonishing is that although the ways in which female athletes are portrayed has change, how much coverage they are given has not significantly changed. The percentage of sports coverage of women has declined from 13.0% in 1984 to 6.2% in 2014. The range of sports that are covered has remained similar during this time period but the amount of space given to those sports has changed with football moving from 2.3% of coverage in 1984 to 51.3% in 2014, and the 2014 data set did not include any coverage of women's football (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). Actively trying to change the ways in which female athletes, athletes from a wider demography and a wider range of sports is one strategy that can improve participation through the association with role models.

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

The Sport England data set which is available on the web as Active Lives online is a very useful tool and allows researchers, organisations and individuals to be able to analyse the data collected. In any future strategy consideration should be given to keeping this dataset available and to keeping the capture of future data consistent to enable longitudinal work to continue.

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

This is a difficult question to answer and lies in a multifaceted approach. There are a number of organisations which exist with the intention of challenging some of these perceptions such as Women in Sport (<https://www.womeninsport.org/>), Sporting Equals (<http://www.sportingequals.org.uk/>); Activity Alliance (<http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/>), Pride Sports (<https://pridesports.org.uk/>) to name some and these are important organisations to continue to promote these messages and should continue to be supported. Tackling these issues lies in challenging behaviours (that relies on individuals who are prepared to do that), having relevant policies and documentation, using consciousness raising strategies (e.g. rainbow laces) and having champions both within and outside NGBs and organisations to drive this agenda forward.

The Equality Standard was established as a mechanism to assist with these agendas but our research demonstrates that whilst sports organisations have been proactive in this area to widen the appeal of their sports, with previously underrepresented groups, it is not clear how much of this work is from a direct result of The Standard (Dwight and Biscomb, 2018). The development of this research suggests that institutional cultural is a significant factor in this regard and potentially could be considered further as a potential strategy for challenge and progress. Furthermore, although many organizations had an aspiration to achieve Intermediate Level, very few have progressed beyond the Preliminary Level. The previous plans to produce a Sports Equality Alliance did not gain much progress and I wonder whether this is something worth revisiting at this time?

I represent Great Britain (BUCS - British Universities and Colleges Sport) on the European Universities Sports Association (EUSA) Equal Opportunities Commission. It is interesting to note that during my tenure on this committee the focus of action has been specific on gender and in my opinion, therefore, the British agenda on equality in sport is more advanced as it has widened to consider equality and equity in a much broader way than simply badging it as a single demographic.

- 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?

I think it is important that we have a national plan for sport previously the government had a laissez-fair approach to sport (pre 1950 approximately) but since then has recognised the importance of being more politically involved. The political engagement since that time I believe has benefitted both the progress of sport and the political agendas. Sport England, Sport Scotland, Sport Wales and Sport Northern Island are great institutions and have emerged historically from government involvement. It is important to have a position to be able to drive forward and influence this agenda. In contrast the USA has a completely different approach both with a minimal government involvement and a highly commercial agenda. We should continue with a national plan and this exercise is an excellent way in which the people can contribute to that.

References below:

Biscomb, K. and Matheson, H. (2019) Are the times changing enough? Print media trends across four decades. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. Vol. 54(3), pp 259-282.

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Griggs, G. and Biscomb, K. (2010) Theresa Bennett is 42 ... but what's new? *Soccer & Society*, Vol 11(5), pp 668-677

Leflay, K. and Biscomb, K. (2020): England's summer of sport 2017, *Sport in Society*, DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2020.1764538

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