

British Canoeing – Written evidence (NPS0090)

British Canoeing is the national governing body for paddlesports in the UK, ranging from the recreational participant to the international athlete. Our key role is to protect and enhance the freedom to paddle and promote the interests of all paddlers. The purpose of British Canoeing is to inspire people to pursue a passion for paddling for health, enjoyment friendship, challenge and achievement. We are committed to protecting the places we paddle and securing fair, shared access to waters.

Summary:

- To get the level of investment that is required to significantly 'shift the dial', sport and physical activity must attract funding from across Government departments, not just DCMS.
- Places and proximity are absolutely critical. Access to active environments on our doorstep are the foundation stone for an active nation. Local, safe, accessible places to participate will provide the greatest return on investment.
- There needs to be a much greater understanding and commitment to support the growth in 'informal participation'. With the challenges presented by lockdown, participating locally, with family and in friendship groups has boomed during 2020.
- NGB's continue to have a crucial part to play in guiding where investment is made into sport and physical activity.
- If we are to insulate ourselves better from the risk of another pandemic and create a healthier more resilient society, the health of our nation has to take priority within a 'Green Recovery'. The urgent need to create a coordinated, cross department 'National Plan for Sport and Recreation' has never been greater in our history.

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. The Covid 19 crisis has brought into sharp focus, the clear need for us all to have access to places on our doorstep where we can be active and outdoors.
- 1.2. We now know that much more resource and investment needs to be committed to motivate hard to reach communities. The problems we face around inactivity and obesity cannot be tackled by 'sport' alone, and to that end there needs to be a realisation that funding to address these issues cannot be allocated solely through DCMS.

- 1.3. To build a truly active nation, there must be cross department involvement in delivering a national plan for sport and physical activity. This must include a firm commitment to work collaboratively to create the spaces for people to be active locally.
- 1.4. Reflecting on how we as a society have coped with the Covid 19 crisis and our current standards of health and obesity levels, the scope of Sporting Future strategy may not have been ambitious enough in preparing us for physically and mentally to face such a challenge.
- 1.5. The Government needs to commit a more radical and ambitious plan to get our nation active. There has to be involvement across departments, from DfT to Defra, DfE to DfH&SC, all contributing towards creating an active nation. It cannot remain the responsibility of a single department within DCMS to lead and meet all the challenges that physical inactivity presents.
- 1.6. If we are to really 'shift the dial' on inactivity and hard to reach communities, there must be greater accountability for the delivery of more challenging targets. A strong case could be made for a Secretary of State for Sport and Physical Activity to provide that oversight and accountability.
- 1.7. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme is a clear example of how funding could be targeted to benefit 'sport and physical activity', to improve how and where people are active in the countryside.
- 1.8. British Canoeing, British Mountaineering and the Ramblers have been working tirelessly to ensure that public access to the countryside via rights of way and navigation on water, are part of the new ELM scheme. Through its proposed new payment system, ELM has great potential to invest public money for public goods at a local level, on a regional level and also across a landscape or catchment. This investment could significantly affect how we are active in the countryside for generations to come.
- 1.9. It has however been a significant challenge making this case to Defra, to Ministers, Peers and to Civil Servants. ELM has the potential to be far more than just an agricultural scheme; it could fundamentally change how we as a nation interact, enjoy and understand our countryside.
- 1.10. Similar opportunity exists in the Environment Bill, to affect legislation to secure legally binding targets on access and engagement with the countryside. The Glover Review into National Parks and AONBs is another fantastic opportunity to address access to green and blue space to benefit even more people for health and well being.
- 1.11. NGO's like British Canoeing, The Ramblers, British Mountaineering and British Cycling have worked hard to make this case to Defra and to Ministers and to Peers, to represent the millions of people who this could bring great benefit to. Making the case for physical activity, for health and wellbeing should not have to be such a difficult undertaking when the benefits are so well evidenced.

- 1.12. Places to participate in sport and physical activity are the absolute foundation to creating an active nation. Policy makers and funders must be more flexible in how they define active environments. Access to water for paddling and swimming has supported tens of thousands of new participants in 2020, but improving infrastructure and facilities to support this activity is extremely complicated.
- 1.13. At a local level, rarely does accessibility of waterways feature in planning. For example, Rights of Way improvement Plans favour paths and cycleways, rather than paddle trails or places to swim. While access to green space is so important, blue spaces must not be overlooked as valuable active environments.
- 1.14. At present, less than 4% of rivers have a clear right of access for recreational users. This is a significant barrier to participation and must be tackled across Government Departments.
- 1.15. Sport and physical activity must also not be underestimated in its ability to tackle other crises within our society, such as climate change and the degradation of our natural environment.
- 1.16. The natural world is the foundation of our health, wellbeing and prosperity. People's personal connection to nature is declining as it becomes a less frequent part of our daily lives. Lack of access to nature is a significant factor in health inequalities. Health harm from climate change is increasing and will affect people living in more deprived communities most, where there is also less nature. Evidence tells us that children in deprived areas are nine times less likely to have access to green space and places to play.
- 1.17. People protect what they love, but they only love what they know. By enabling people to be active in nature, by creating places for them to be active outdoors, on our waterways and rights of way, we can increase people's understanding and appreciation of the natural world. This in turn will help support the Government's ambitions within the 25 Year Plan for the Environment

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.

What does positive experiences for children and young people mean to you?

- 2.1. Active children are happier, healthier and more resilient. Activities like paddlesports, that take place in the outdoors offer unparalleled opportunities to help develop independence, resilience, connection to nature and to promote wellbeing and health amongst our young people.
- 2.3. It is likely that a positive experience in sport is one that leaves the young person inspired and keen to return. Providing children and young people

with the opportunity to experience safe, fun and purposeful paddling activities can play a major role in helping build the foundations for an active society, shaping their relationship with movement for life.

- 2.4. There must be a recognition that providing positive experiences is far wider than school provision. Many young people have positive experiences in sport and active recreation through uniformed youth groups, national and local youth charities etc. Furthermore, our insight tells us that many young people are introduced into paddlesport through their families.

3. *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?*

- 3.1. When launched, *Sporting Future* was considered an ambitious plan for sport. It was great to have Outdoor Recreation recognised and the phrase '*Sport and physical activity*' reflected in its title. This has begun to help to change the perception of 'sport', away from just being focussed on traditional means of participating on pitch and court.
- 3.2. In hindsight, looking at how we as a society have coped with the Covid 19 crisis, our current standards of health and obesity levels, the *Sporting Future* strategy was not ambitious enough in preparing us for physically and mentally to face such a challenge.
- 3.3. Many of the same stubborn habits that surround inactivity still persist; we are still struggling to tackle inequalities, especially around BAME and lower socio economic groups. It is these groups that have been hit the hardest by the pandemic and so on reflection maybe the 2015 strategy was underwhelming in its scope.
- 3.4. We now know that much more resource and investment needs to be committed to motivate hard to reach communities. These problems cannot be tackled by 'sport' alone, and to that end there needs to be a realisation that funding cannot just be allocated from DCMS. To really build an active nation, there has to be cross department commitment and accountability, matched by a far greater commitment to create the spaces for these people to be active locally.
- 3.5. The Covid 19 crisis has brought into sharp focus, the clear need for us all to have access to green and blue spaces near to our homes. It is evident that access to green and blue spaces is not spread equally.
- 3.6. Waterways run through all of our major towns and cities. While tens of thousands more people found paddlesport and outdoor swimming in 2020, many more are still unable to make use of this valuable resource on their doorstep due to the lack of clarity surrounding legal rights.
- 3.7 The question around the right of access for recreational users prevents millions of people from taking to the water for enjoyment and exercise.

While Sporting Future may have made great strides forward in improving the quality of places to play and participate, it did little to appreciate and fulfil the potential of our outdoor spaces, like rivers, that are a free 'natural health service', within walking distance of a great majority of our population.

- 3.8. While Sporting future cannot be deemed a failure, it has demonstrated that to really shift the dial on public health and physical inactivity, the Government must be far more ambitious and radical in future strategy.

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

- 4.1. Active Lives provides a good source of consistent data on key metrics however there is limited qualitative data gathered.
- 4.2. More data around motivations, barriers, influences and behaviour of participation around recreational and 'informal' activities would be of great benefit and enable us to engage more effectively with different audiences in future.
- 4.3. British Canoeing insight shows that there is an increasing number of participants taking part in paddling activity as a regular form of leisure and recreational aspect rather than the more traditional sport and competitive element. We're seeing trends of more informal participation that focuses around well being and enjoying the outdoors. The top reasons for participating is to enjoy the outdoors, relax and destress, for adventure and to spend time with others.
- 4.4. By gathering more qualitative data we have been able to develop campaigns and information that engages with new audiences through SEO led content and digital campaigns.
- 4.5. Launching 'Go Paddling' as a customer facing website in 2019, specifically targeting new and independent recreational paddlers who engage with paddling more informally, has allowed us to reach new audiences outside the traditional setting.
- 4.6. Offering better guidance, education and inspiration that is relevant to their interests has supported new audiences. The site offers guidance, education and inspiration to keep them engaged, making it easy for them to find out everything they need to know, how and where they can paddle.
- 4.7. In just 18 months this website has seen a growth in users in over 400% during the summer season and is on average visited by 78% new users per month. This new approach through digital engagement has contributed significantly to an overall growth in our membership base of 60% and within 2020 new recreational paddlers joining has increased by 219%.

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

- 5.1. A stronger commitment needs to be made to utilising quotas on boards to target other areas of diversity. This does not necessarily need to be a requirement of funding, but a move towards replicating the success of the gender quota on board.
- 5.2. Research is required into the impacts of intersectionality when working with NGBs and other sporting organisations, and help them to understand how multiple identity factors can reinforce lack of access to sport and physical activity, and prevent engagement at the grassroots level. This will help make delivery programmes more effective in engaging with and retaining people from diverse backgrounds.
- 5.3. Knowledge and understanding must be improved of the needs, barriers and impacts of sport and physical activity on LSEG communities. As people from LSEGs often have other compounding factors, such as living with a disability, understanding more about what works for LSEG communities in sport and physical activity, alongside a better knowledge of the impacts of intersectionality, will lead to a more effective programme of delivery in the future.
- 5.4. There needs to be a most robust and universal method for reporting and resolving cases of abuse and harm to people, based on any of the protected characteristics. The current systems in place vary too much between individual sports, and many people in the sporting community feel that there is not a system in place to protect them from such abuse. Lots feel that the experiences they have are 'not severe enough' to warrant involving the police, for example, and the process via their own governing body is not suitable. In order to remedy this issue, Sport England could be providing a universal service and process for this.
- 5.6. There needs to be greater opportunities to identify and place role models in the public eye. There needs to be more support available for NGBs and other sporting organisations to identify and centre these people within their sporting communities.

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

- 6.1. As called for within the NSPCC's 'Close the Loophole' campaign, the Sexual Offences Act should be reviewed in order to make sports coaches legal positions of trust. At present, only people such as teachers, care workers and youth justice workers are legally in a position of trust, meaning it is against the law for them to have sex with 16- or 17-year-olds that they supervise. This means that if adults working in any other setting, such as sport, have sex with children aged 16 or 17 who are under their supervision, it is not currently a crime, even if the adult has a significant level of power, responsibility and influence over the child.
- 6.2. In November 2019, former Sports Minister Tracey Crouch announced that the then Department for Culture Media and Sport and the Ministry of Justice had agreed that Position of Trust laws would be extended to sports

coaches, however this has not been enacted in legislation to date. The current legislative provisions do not do enough to protect children involved in sport.

- 6.3. Greater centralised support for National Governing Bodies around duty of care and safeguarding standards to encourage standardised recording methods and data analysis would help to understand the welfare landscape across the sports sector. Such centralised support could also provide an opportunity for sports to have a collective voice in working with public bodies, statutory agencies and other partners, effecting improvements in welfare standards more efficiently.
- 6.4. Greater targets as conditions for funding should be applied to welfare and safeguarding standards and funding should be specifically allocated to these areas to ensure this work is appropriately resourced.
- 6.5. More work is clearly needed to implement recommendations made in Tanni Grey-Thompson's Duty of Care Report published in 2017.

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

- 7.1. There is definitely a case to be made for an overarching National Plan for Sport and Recreation, particularly to assist in securing support from other Government departments such as Defra, DfT, DfE and DfC&LG.
- 7.2. If sufficiently prioritised within government then a national plan would help to align strategic priorities around sport and public health across government departments which would be beneficial.
- 7.3. However, it will be critical, given the imminent release of a new Sport England 10 year strategy, to ensure that the two are aligned and as with any government strategy, the proof will be in the delivery and implementation.
- 7.4. It would also be critical that a cross department plan had accountability for its delivery, so a strong case could be made for the creation of a Secretary of State for Sport position within the Cabinet.
- 7.5. If we are to insulate ourselves better from the risk of another pandemic and create a healthier more resilient society, the health of our nation has to take priority within a 'Green Recovery'. The urgent need to create a coordinated, cross department 'National Plan for Sport and Recreation' has never been greater in our history.

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