

Welsh Institute of Physical Activity, Health and Sport – Written evidence (NPS0101)

Written evidence prepared by Dr Kelly Mackintosh and Dr Melitta McNarry (Swansea University) on behalf of the [Welsh Institute of Physical Activity, Health and Sport \(WIPAHS\)](#)

1.1. The purpose of the Welsh Institute of Physical Activity, Health and Sport (WIPAHS) is to facilitate the active involvement of key audiences in the identification of important research questions related to the health and well-being of the Nation's future generations and to co-design research strategies to address them. To achieve this, WIPAHS represents a three-way partnership between Sport Wales, Wales's leading academic sport and exercise scientists across all eight universities in Wales and external stakeholders to increase the research capacity of Wales with the aim of promoting the health benefits associated with sport, physical activity and recreation. Our research has a clear real-world focus, with outcomes fed back into practice to improve health and well-being in the general public and clinical population. Within this remit, we are responding to Questions 2 and 5.

Question 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.

Introduction

2.1. Schools represent a cornerstone in the promotion of active lifestyles, not least because children spend the majority of their waking hours at school. However, the promotion of active lifestyles must go beyond Physical Education lessons, with the importance of leading an active lifestyle embedded within the curriculum and not seen as of secondary importance to engagement with STEM subjects. Furthermore, participation in sport *per se* should be dissociated from leading an active lifestyle so that children and adolescents understand that to be active and healthy you do not have to be engaged in sport.

Research Findings

2.2. Research currently feeding into ongoing work by WIPAHS found that primary school children could only identify moderate-intensity activity 33% of the time, with this actually getting worse in secondary school adolescents who correctly identified moderate and vigorous intensity activities only 10% and 46% of the time, respectively [1]. This lack of understanding is especially concerning given that behaviours and understanding track into adulthood [2]. One method observed to increase understanding of, and motivation to engage, in an active lifestyle was providing tangible visualisations of weekly activity levels. The majority of youth were found to use such visualisations for goal setting, with the objects themselves seen as prized possessions that should be publicly displayed [3]. This highlights how targeting children's understanding of being active rather than their activity

levels themselves may facilitate a greater, and more sustainable, engagement in active lifestyles.

Recommendations

- 2.3. The Education sector should focus on increasing children's understanding of what contributes to an active lifestyle, providing more guidance on the role of active transport and general movement for a healthy lifestyle and seeking to dissociate being active from being sporty.
- 2.4. The government may need to mandate the incorporation of lessons on active lifestyles within the curriculum. This may also require a change to teacher education, given that many teachers similarly lack an understanding of what constitutes an active lifestyle.
- 2.5. Further funding is needed for research to better elucidate how children's understanding of active lifestyles develops during childhood and adolescence and to identify strategies that increase understanding.

Challenges

- 2.6. Increased time within the curriculum to facilitate a greater understanding of active lifestyles will detract from time available from STEM subjects. However, improvements in the activity and health levels of children and adolescents is evidenced to be associated with improved cognition and academic attainment.
- 2.7. Ensuring that opportunities are available to engage in an active lifestyle irrespective of gender, ethnicity, geography or socio-economic status.

Question 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?

Introduction

- 5.1. At present, physical activity and sedentary behaviour surveillance are undertaken by numerous, predominately questionnaire-based, surveys, typically at a home nation level. The primary aims of such surveys are to identify at risk groups and monitor trends rather than specifically provide an insight into sport and recreation activities. Specifically, within Wales, key examples would be the [Sport and Active Lifestyles Survey](#), conducted in 12,000 randomly selected adults (aged above 16 years) as part of the National Survey for Wales, monitors and tracks participation levels among adults, as well as behaviour and trends in Sport. For children in school years 3 – 11 (7 – 16 years), the [School Sport Survey](#) has been conducted four times since 2011, providing an overview of participation levels in Wales. Other surveys, such as the [Health and Attainment of Pupils in a Primary Education Network \(HAPPEN\)](#) and [School Health Research Network \(SHRN\)](#) collate physical activity data for primary and secondary schools across Wales, respectively. As part of WIPAHS, we have initiated an annual surveillance programme for children aged 8 – 16 years, which is intended to align with the School Sport Survey that sought 120,000 children's responses. This is the first all-Wales device-based data collection, not least in children and adolescents, and will provide valuable information, examining issues

related to data linkage, logistics and participant acceptability. However, at present, there is no united approach across the four home nations or utilising wearable technology to gain more insightful data.

Recommendations

- 5.2. UK Parliament should seek to increase comparability between the home nations' prevalence and participation statistics.
- 5.3. Research-grade devices that monitor physical activity, and ideally sedentary behaviour, should be utilised on a representative sub-sample of population-level surveys to provide complementary information and, to some extent, ratify the information obtained through the self-reported data.
- 5.4. In line with the UK Chief Medical Officer's Physical Activity Expert Committee for Surveillance report, feasibility studies are required to develop consistent surveillance protocols for utilising device-based measures. Funding should be provided to enable these feasibility studies to be conducted.
- 5.5. Surveys should ensure that under-represented groups are captured. Individuals with disabilities should be able to report their activity accurately and be included as part of a representative sample of the general population. Similarly, surveys should be tailored for, and capture data from, pregnant and post-partum women.
- 5.6. Appropriate methods need to be identified for obtaining accurate information for under 5 year-olds, to achieve which further funding is likely to be required by researchers and technology companies.

Challenges

- 5.7. The harmonisation of multiple national surveys will require careful consideration to avoid the loss of information pertinent at the national level.
- 5.8. The balance of longitudinal data should be considered to be able to delineate trends and the impact on National Governing Bodies targeted survey priorities.
- 5.9. Integrating device-based monitoring into national level surveillance will be associated with an increased cost. However, the decreasing costs of such monitors, coupled with low participant burden, has enabled largescale population surveillance (e.g. UK BioBank).

We would be pleased to speak further regarding our response to either question.

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