

## **Veterans Athletic Club – Written evidence (NPS0132)**

### **The role of Veterans Athletic Club**

#### **INTRODUCTION – RESPONSE TO CALL FOR EVIDENCE**

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

Without a National Plan:

- Development of sport and recreation will be too fragmented and dependent on individual initiatives which often target and reach relatively few people.
- Messages and strategies for boosting sport and recreation will not be integrated with those on public health, sports and physical education, public amenities, charity work and volunteering.
- Infrastructure requirements will not be strategically considered or coordinated.
- Adequate/affordable funding will not be agreed between local and national government.
- There will be no accountability for delivery and measurement of the benefits of an active lifestyle.

Conclusion there must be a National Plan for sport and recreation.

##### **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?**

- Define the responsibilities for delivery of the national plan by national government, local government, regional sports organisations, clubs, schools, leisure facility operators, event promoters both in general and for each sport
- Agree how the coordination between these organisations can be achieved and create a Sports Regulator function for overall delivery of the national plan, including the coordination between other organisations.
- In particular, define the roles of Sport England, Sport Scotland, Sport Wales and Sport Northern Ireland and integrate their initiatives within a national plan.

##### **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.**

- Make an active lifestyle the norm for a young child: walking, cycling or scooting to school if possible and including a Daily Mile in the school day. Make sport and recreation appealing by ensuring it is fun and available for all not just those who are good at it.
- Engage influencers to spread the message, for example use role models such as current and past sports people and celebrities who are active and fit.
- Do not limit responsibility for children's participation in sport to the schools' staff – involve sports organisations and clubs. Parents are highly influential. Many parents are Masters athletes and can be a valuable resource through leading by example.
- Include sport in the curriculum with the facilities and funding so that it can be delivered. For example, in athletics, young people enjoy simple gyms, trim trails and sports hall activities.

To illustrate that this doesn't flourish by accident: it needs leaders and motivators. Here is the personal experience of one of our members as a child:

*"At my unsporty boarding school, the house I was in only had the Department cup! One had to be inspired and driven to get out onto the games pitch on the edge of the cliffs on the North Sea coast in Norfolk. Very few enjoyed it. Children who were no good found it hard, and suffered. I was lucky because no matter the weather, I was driven, skinny and sport mad. For 'House matches' we had to get a lacrosse team together. The 'invisibles' came into their own. I remember encouraging these (possibly larger) girls to come and try it. One particular example was this BIG girl who ended up playing goalie for the school lacrosse team. She'd been ignored (dismissed if you like) by the games teachers. It took us girls to encourage, inspire, praise and support .... and how fulfilling did that feel."*

**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.**

- Start with education about the reasons why non-active people should lead more active lifestyles
- Train GP's and health professionals to include fitness as a component of patients' health and well-being
- Focus on walking, running, strengthening, conditioning and balance as the main thrust of starting adults on a journey towards an active lifestyle.

Encourage the formation of local groups which can offer guidance and support.

- Through GPs, clubs and organised activities, provide information, resources and support to facilitate weight loss for anyone overweight or obese
- Make it easier for everyone to adopt a healthy diet. For example, provide information and resources on nutrition.
- Tell everyone how to get started and where to go to for advice at each stage:
  - general health and well-being
  - which sport(s) to choose
  - how to progress
- Use websites, social media, webinars, smartphone apps and other tools to help and guide everyone. Use “negative” statistics to shock people into getting started and then to motivate them to continue through “positive” statistics.

Here is the opinion of one of our members who is a consultant psychiatrist:

*“Why turn away from the chance to add years to your life and quality to those years? A chance to feel better about yourself physically and mentally whilst enabling you to connect with others in your local community and others around the world. A chance to find new purpose and meaning in your life without having to see a therapist. An opportunity that could reduce the need for medication or visits to the doctor. A chance to eat normally without worry! This opportunity is on your doorstep right now, costs nothing, requires no pre-existing skills or experience and you can connect immediately with enthusiastic mentors who will give freely of their encouragement and support. Why not choose sport? Why not choose running? It would be silly not to.”*

Motivation is as much a challenge for adults as it is for children. If you live in an overheated room/bedsit, you are obese, badly/zero-to-speak-of educated, a single parent with two tiny children you are hardly positioned to be able to get out and exercise. You may take the first step by inspiration from a celebrity or from Tic Toc, YouTube, Jo Wickes etc, but to persevere is even harder on your own and this is where the sports clubs, social clubs, masters clubs (with maturity, wisdom, skills and time on their hands) may be able to step in.

Who is helping anyone to become active, needs to think holistically, not just get someone enjoying what they have started but to give them challenges to go for they are capable of. Not only does this develop the potential but it may also to solve physical and/or mental difficulties which were not responding to normal treatment.

Veterans AC is a Masters athletics club which provides competition and support to anyone over the age of 35 who is interested in athletics or running in the London area. Before coronavirus arrived, we had a membership of 635 people,

with 292 over the age of 60. We call ourselves "masters" or "veterans" - the two words are interchangeable in this context but the word "veterans" tends to confuse people outside the sport because the Americans have made this word refer to war veterans. There are some 20 masters clubs in the UK but Veterans AC was the first Masters club to be established in the UK in 1931, with competitions throughout the UK. Now it now holds all its events in the Greater London area, because there are similar clubs covering other regions. In our 90<sup>th</sup> year of existence we are expanding our activities in order to satisfy the demand from athletes for more competition.

We organise events for our members, to encourage sociable competition in track and field disciplines, road and cross country running and race walking. We welcome allcomers to these events, with no constraints on ability, age or any other criteria. Many choose to become members at minimal cost, when they see what we are offering. We are using a commercial promoter to help us run our expanding programme of events, which will include seminars and other activities to encourage more involvement and interaction. We have a social media channel for members to exchange information and advice. Through our website and newsletters, we report on, and celebrate, all members' participation in relevant events.

Abilities range from those enjoy competing but who still wish to talk at the same time, through to British age-group record holders, world age-group champions and several Olympians. We have members with various disabilities, but they all compete in our events just as any other athlete would and I have never seen any discrimination or lack of care for these athletes on the part of fellow athletes, officials or spectators.

Many of our members are using the pause in their lives in the last 10 months due to the pandemic to overcome their injuries, intensify their training and participate in virtual competitions to challenge themselves.

Some have personal stories which are truly inspirational, for instance:

- Our oldest member at present is 94 years old and looking forward to moving up to the next age group. As a sprinter, he travels the world to win European and World age-group medals. He realized that running was one of his strengths when he was able to outrun insurgents trying to kill him during the troubles in India in 1947. He has lived all his life since then in England, but he only started competing in athletics here in his mid-80's.
- One of our members is an "Ever-Present", which means he has completed every London Marathon since the event started in 1981. The first time he finished in 2:35:52 but he still does it in 5½ hours, including the year he had a broken arm.
- One of members, who is an M70 race-walker, was elected last year as the best overall male athlete of the year in 2019 by European Masters Athletics and was runner-up in the World awards.
- We have one member who is regular member of the British ultramarathon running team and gained a women's team gold medal at the last world 50k championships.

**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?**

The priorities are all-encompassing but that dooms them to failure in the modern world if no-one is given the authority and accountability to measure and deliver the required outcomes.

- Publicise the measures of achievement of these priorities and the extent to which they are being achieved
- Make the Sports Regulator responsible for progress with each priority

**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?**

- Include real statistics e.g. participation in events and use of sports facilities as well as surveys

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

- Ensure diversity in leadership and equal opportunities. Instigate monitoring programmes and audits.
- Ensure all governing bodies define policies and disciplinary procedures to deal with instances of non-compliance.
- Ensure someone at board-level is responsible for adherence to the policies and procedures, to whom all members of the organisation can appeal.
- Introduce meaningful awareness training to enable those involved in the delivery of sports activities to be aware of unconscious bias, and how to guard against it.

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

- Safeguarding policies updated to cover adults as well as children
- Appointment of welfare officers in sports organisations
- Resources and safeguarding training for organisers and officials
- Inclusion in risk assessments for club activities and events

**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.**

The challenge is to ensure that each sport operates effectively at all levels – grassroots through to the elite level.

- Set standards for governance and provide examples of best practice.
- Develop and deliver training courses for governing bodies.
- Introduce periodic audits of the governing bodies
- Provide funding for the Sport Regulator through a mixed approach via sport organisations themselves and government grants.
- Ensure the voice of the participants is heard

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