

Bristol Sport Foundation – Written evidence (NPS0149)

Q1. Why and how did you get involved with your organisation and in helping your target audience(s) to engage in sport and recreation?

My involvement with professional sport started in 1995 as a player with Bristol Rugby, where I experienced how effective professional sportspeople *could* be as a vehicle to engage individuals, families and communities. In those early days of professionalism, the opportunity to record or share real and lasting change was often missed as clubs rarely had access to systems that could help demonstrate the impact of their work.

As I reached the end of my playing career in 2005, I was offered the chance to restructure Bristol Rugby's Community Department and so combined a teaching and coaching approach to assess how rugby could support disadvantaged communities in the diverse City of Bristol. Fast forward 11 years, Bristol Rugby Community (now a registered charity) had won 10 All Party Parliamentary Awards (for Innovation, Best Practice and Social Inclusion) by demonstrating how participation in the sport of rugby union, combined with the values of the game could be utilised to elicit attitudinal and behavioural change disadvantaged individuals, families and communities.

In 2015, Bristol Sport was founded as a solution to the crowded and often conflicting professional sport sector offer in Bristol where professional clubs were competing for the same funding pots, sponsors and partnerships. Bristol Sport (<https://www.bristol-sport.co.uk/>) make efficiency savings by centralising the administrative functions (ticketing, merchandising, marketing, commercial rights, communications, HR, etc) of the professional clubs into one organisation, based at the same Stadium further, which in turn further simplifies the offer for fans.

Part of this vision was the establishment of Bristol Sport Foundation (BSF) (<https://www.bristolsportfoundation.org/>), which would provide a far wider choice of pro-sport **charities** for donors, patrons, sponsors, business, volunteers and key stakeholders. BSF also benefits from the autonomy from a single sport or governing body, enabling the charity to use and combine sport and physical activities by integrating over 20 traditional and non-traditional sports and physical activities to provide a wider, more inclusive and accessible offer for disadvantaged individuals, families and communities.

Bristol is a City of opportunity, culture, media and sport. However, you do not have to travel far across the City to see how the diversity that gives Bristol such life, manifests itself as fiscal and health inequalities. Furthermore, it is increasingly clear that COVID-19 has only served to widen these existing inequalities and so the challenge for key stakeholders, is to find new ways to form strategically aligned, cross-sector partnerships to combine the assets available to support disadvantaged communities*.

- those living in areas where health inequalities are greatest
- those living in low social economic wards
- those living with disability or Special Educational Need
- those who are socially isolated (especially Older People and those with broken or chaotic home lives)
- those living in black or minority ethnicity families

Bristol Sport Foundation works closely in partnership with Bristol Sport, Ashton Gate Limited (the facility provider) and the professional clubs, Bristol Bears rugby, Bristol City Football Club and Bristol Flyers Basketball, all sports have male and female pro-teams. We combine the unique assets available to us (as a group) to inspire more people to lead Active, Healthy and Happy lives.

Q2. What is your experience of working with young people to engage them in sport and recreation? What are the positives and negatives?

Overwhelmingly positive. 16 years after restructuring the rugby offer in Bristol, we understand the emotive power of professional sport, how to best utilise professional sportspeople, how to use and combine the values and ethics of each sport and how to use loyalty of the sporting brands to elicit positive change. How we can inspire people to live more active lives through access to elite facilities and matchday to engage, inform and/or educate large numbers of people.

Crucially, the engagement you achieve through these sporting assets is only an opportunity, a small chance to make a real difference in someone's life. Lasting change requires fantastic, well qualified charity/community staff, delivering well resourced, inclusive, fun and outcome-based programmes at consistently high-quality, day in, day out. Since founding BSF, we have significantly increased number of sports and physical activities we offer available which, in turn has significantly increased the levels and diversity of engagement.

Q3. What is your experience of implementing and monitoring duty of care and safeguarding obligations?

The safeguarding of **all people** that access our programmes or services, but especially **young and vulnerable people** is a huge responsibility that we take incredibly seriously. We operate minimum standards criteria (in addition to coaching and teaching qualifications, we require proof of employment history, right to work, enhanced DBS checks, first aid and photo ID. We also annually update our safeguarding policies and advice and provide targeted education and community CPD and training to best protect people who access our services, our staff and the charity as a whole. We also operate a two-coach model of delivery to ensure low pupil:coach ratios to best facilitate impactful learning and ensure safety.

Q4. Do you think it's important to engage parents, carers and the wider family as well? What experience have you had of trying to do this?

Crucial. Our current Sport England partnership work will specifically examine how we can best engage young people from disadvantaged communities to act as 'agents of change' within their family unit. Endemic and generational behaviours are very hard to change, in our experience attitudinal, and subsequent behavioural change is far more prevalent when the whole family engages in the programme.

Q5. How important are influencers, for example, high profile athletes, celebrities, or community-based role models? Have you had experience of mobilising influencers and who works best as an influencer?

As discussed, professional sports/players/brands/facilities are highly effective engagement tools. The media and marketing reach of Bristol Sport and Bristol Sport Foundation is significant and growing. Matchday attracts in the region of

25,000 people per game and is a highly impactful arena to celebrate progress, reward commitment and share messaging. Professional sportspeople often have large social media followings and so can be a useful medium to share content and message.

Q6. What could Government do more of, or differently, that would make it easier to engage and retain your target group in sport and recreation activities?

Health is the single most important factor for families in daily life (Sport England Active Lives Survey 2000), sport and physical activity can not only have a profound and positive impact on physical and mental health but have a subsequent impact on the number and severity of co-morbidities bought on by inactivity and poor healthy weight.

Health inequalities are amongst the most endemic and generation issues that we (as a nation) face. The health agenda MUST transcend the 4-year parliamentary cycles of government and become a long term cross party initiative (10years+ such as the new Sport England vision) with protected funding. Government should seek out new innovative sport and physical activity approaches that feature cross-sector partnership working (especially health and pro-sport sectors) where strategically aligned key stakeholders share expertise and commit assets available to them (funding, influence, permission) to benefit disadvantaged individuals, families and communities.

In our direct experience, the school setting is most efficient way to access large numbers of young people. The house MUST commit to funding the Physical Education and School Sport Premium (PESSP) in the long term (10 years+) as developing and sustaining a PE/SS workforce when confirmation of the PESSP funding is a last minute 1-year rolling agreement (what has happened for the past 5 or so years) - is **incredibly challenging**.

Equally, the Sport & Physical Activity sector must get better at recording and sharing the impact of their work. The sector must design and adopt technology-based solutions to capture more data, use academically rigorous health-based assessment frameworks to create actionable insight and better demonstrate the contribution made with a view to raising the profile of the sector. Anecdotally, we know increased activity through sport and physical activity is good for our physical and mental health but until we can provide information and data that stands up to academic rigour, we will not develop our understanding of the contribution made by the sector.

Educating disaffected young people is one of the best ways to facilitate meaningful and lasting change. The department For Education/Local Authority must increase the scrutiny of PESSP spend by schools to ensure quality and effectiveness and 'weed out' sub-standard or profit making providers.

Such is the size of the spend (predicted to be over £8.6bn per annum but rising fast) on preventable disease attributed to sedentary behaviour and poor healthy weight (such as heart disease and type2 diabetes), a preventative and long-term approach should be adopted where new innovative approaches are funded and evaluated for efficiency and impact.

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