

Written evidence submitted by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

EVIDENCE TO THE DCMS SELECT COMMITTEE CONCUSSION IN SPORT INQUIRY

The Government is pleased to respond to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's inquiry into Concussion in Sport.

Background

The Government recognises the importance of reducing and managing the impacts of concussion in sport. The safety and wellbeing of everyone taking part in sport are absolutely paramount, as highlighted in the Government's sport strategy, "Sporting Future".

The Government expects sports to do all they can to protect their players as a fundamental part of their duty of care. National Governing Bodies are, rightly, responsible for the regulation of their sports and for ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to protect participants from harm, including serious injuries.

Many organisations are already actively working in this area. This includes sports organisations (such as the Sport and Recreation Alliance, who led on concussion guidance for education settings in 2015), non-governmental organisations (such as Podium Analytics, who are aiming to significantly reduce the incidence and long-term impact of injury in sport through technological and scientific solutions), and player associations, who are often at the forefront of concussion education and support for professional players.

However, it is clear that a better understanding of concussion is needed, particularly around the links between health, dementia and sport. DCMS ministers are keen to understand more about what is being done to mitigate concussion and brain injury, and how effectively sports are looking after the welfare of players.

These points were made at a cross-Whitehall ministerial meeting on Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) attended by the Minister for Sport and Tourism on 25 January. The meeting was a forum for departments to set out what they were doing to address issues around ABI. Set against this context, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport convened two roundtables in February 2021 to explore the issues in sport further.

DCMS Concussion Roundtables - February 2021

The first DCMS roundtable on 2 February involved current and past sportspeople, and gave a valuable insight into the culture around - and effects of - concussion in sport. DCMS is grateful to those current and former sportspeople who attended the first roundtable. The many heartfelt contributions gave a valuable insight into the experiences of those who have suffered the consequences of brain injury and concussion, either personally or as loved ones. Attendees did acknowledge that sports were now taking concussion more seriously and players were now more likely to admit to being concussed. That said, there were concerns around culture, promoting safety for children, differences between amateur and professional levels, and education amongst players.

The second roundtable on 25 February was attended by chief executives and medical officers from various sports, along with selected academics, plus the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England. Discussions reflected on the suggestions made at the first roundtable and explored what work was underway within sports. DCMS is again grateful for all of the positive contributions made by attendees. These highlighted the benefit of sharing best practice protocols and ideas between sports, and working together to improve safety for male and female players at both grassroots and elite level sport. Sports were encouraged to report back with their recommendations.

The two roundtables demonstrated that sports are committed to taking safety issues seriously. There may be commonalities across the sector, but it is for each sport to determine the best protocols for their sport. The roundtables also reflected on the differences in how concussion affects men and women. The different physiology and the impacts of concussion on female athletes must be considered by sports as they look to tackle this issue.

Further action

DCMS has identified the following three priority areas for future work, where government intervention can have the most impact on improving player safety:

- 1) **Research** - Bringing together sports/National Governing Bodies to share best practice on their concussion protocols and increase sector-wide engagement on concussion/brain injury in sport, including developing a single best-practice guide where possible.
- 2) **Education/Health** - Increasing player awareness of concussion issues for both adults and children, so that participants (and parents) can make better informed decisions when playing contact sport. This will include work with the Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care on measures on the front-line.

- 3) **Technology** - Identifying and enacting technological solutions to help reduce instances of concussion in sport, using Government's convening power to find solutions.

DCMS will hold further meetings and conversations to get input from all relevant organisations in order to make a difference. The department will also appoint a senior external adviser on concussion in sport, to provide ministers with expert advice on the subject.

Private organisations and NGOs are also encouraged to work with sports on this crucial issue. These organisations may become valued partners in making significant progress in enabling sport to become as safe as possible for players.

DCMS welcomes the Select Committee's interest and looks forward to the results of their work in this important area, which will add valuable evidence to this debate.