



National Assembly for Wales: Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Inquiry into physical activity of children and young people

The Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) is the National Governing Body for the sport of rugby football in Wales. Our purpose and principal activity is to promote rugby, and to encourage more people to engage with the game, more often, with more enjoyment and success.

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1. What do we know about physical activity levels in children in Wales? How robust is the data on this issue?

1.1 Historically, there have been several different surveys undertaken in Wales to collect information on physical activity. This can be confusing for the sector, but also makes it difficult for benchmarking, viewing trends and comparing data.

1.2 Sport Wales' School Sport Survey' examines levels of sport and physical activity amongst school children in Wales. This is completed by pupils in schools across Wales. The last survey was undertaken in schools in 2015, with 116,000 children completing it. Although, this is a large sample size, there are concerns over how it is conducted and the robustness of the data collected. Sport Wales, as the national organisation with responsibility for developing and promoting sport and physical activity in Wales use this data with partners as an indicator of levels of activity, as well as assessing unmet demand. Rugby as a sport, has traditionally been a winter sport, and as such little rugby takes place in school's during the summer months. As the school sport survey is undertaken during the summer months, the WRU has challenged the validity of the information collated in terms of who is playing rugby, and indicating unmet demand. Sport Wales use this data to inform their work and to 'challenge' partners. This is frustrating as the WRU's own insight information does not concur with the information coming out of the school sport survey.

In light of the sector 'challenging' the robustness of the data, Sport Wales has recently sought feedback on the School Sport Survey. Following feedback received, it is understood some adjustments will be made prior to the next School Sport Survey taking place, which is due during the Summer Term 2018. Key changes are improving the child-friendliness of the survey, both language and length. They have also intermated that they will consider the timing of survey fieldwork. The sharing of the raw data to national governing bodies (NGBs) would be welcomed – for their own internal use and to facilitate better understanding of further layers of behaviour (even where the sample size does not warrant statistical analysis). Local conversations at regional level indicate the desire for more detailed tracking of all Young People in School, with a Unique Reference ID Code, so sport and physical activity offers can be targeted in a more effective manner, with cause and effect type evidence around the impact of interventions and projects to be tracked more specifically – something that as an NGB we would welcome and support. Overall, the WRU would welcome these changes to have more insightful and useable results and to have greater confidence in the robustness of the data.



2. Differences in gender-based attitudes towards, and opportunities for participation in physical activity in Wales.

2.1 The most recent school sport survey revealed that boys are still more likely than girls to regularly participate in sport and physical activity. 52% of boys regularly taking part, as opposed to 44% of girls. Whilst overall participation has increased, the gender gaps remains 'stubborn' across the sector.

Rugby in Wales has traditionally been seen as a 'boys sport', and participation numbers in the sport reflects this. Over the last few years, the WRU has worked hard to change perceptions and to offer more opportunities for girls to play the sport – developing an infrastructure across the workforce to support this. However, unfortunately gender-based bias still exists, and more needs to be done to challenge this from an early age. Within the school curriculum, much more needs to be done to ensure that physical literacy is embedded from an early age, and both boys and girls have lots of opportunities to take part in physical activity.

The WRU has recently undertaken consultation and insight with female rugby participants engaged in the newly developed Cluster centres. This indicates that rugby is bucking the trend of the traditional adolescent drop-off – with 30% of participants sitting in the 14-15 year old age bracket. Insight from this population sample tells us that rugby is attractive to this group of girls, due to the lack of expectation 'to be good'. There is no fear of failure and they won't get compared to peers, as is the perception for other traditional 'female' sports – all of which contribute to making them feel more comfortable to take part. However, rugby (and the wider sport/physical activity sector) still has a cultural issue to address, with the majority of female participants explaining that they regularly receive negative gender stereotype feedback from their network (peers and family).

The WRU strongly believe that positive role models are required to challenge gender-stereotyping and to inspire future generations of girls to take up the sport. The WRU has developed girls only cluster clubs which provide a 'safe' environment to allow girls to take part in rugby. The emphasis is on 'stage, not age', so that girls develop their confidence in the game, which will help them to stay involved with rugby. A key part of the philosophy of the girls' cluster clubs is also to engage with players from the Wales Women's team. This allows girls to understand and witness the 'rugby pathway' at first hand. It also supports the girls with challenging gender stereotypes, and seeing these women as positive role models, not just within rugby but also within their communities.

The media has a key role to play in challenging gender-based attitudes to sport, and to help champion and showcase women's sport. Over the last few years, there has been an increase in demand for women's sport within the media. This was witnessed at the 2012 Olympics, however much more needs to be done to profile women's sport and physical activity in the media.



In relation to rugby, the recent airing of the Women's Rugby World Cup final on prime-time television was a 'gamechanger'. The New Zealand v England final was shown live on free-to air TV, with an estimated 2.6 million viewers.

3. The extent to which Welsh Government policies are aimed at whole populations and/or particular groups, and what impact that approach has on addressing health inequalities.

3.1 Historically, both Welsh Government and Sport Wales have developed policies which target particular groups/communities. These include Communities First, Calls 4 Action and several other targeted programmes. There has been little evidence of a 'joined-up' approach to these programmes, and it is therefore difficult to review data and measure the impact of these initiatives on addressing health inequalities.

3.2 Figures from the last School Sport Survey show that children from most deprived areas were less likely to take part in sport and physical activity, than those in least deprived areas of Wales. This demonstrates that more needs to be done to address health inequalities. Whilst, the School Sport Survey indicates that overall participation has increased, the deprivation gap has remained static. The Well-Being and Future Generations Act and the five ways of working need to address this agenda by adopting an integrated approach. Opportunities exist with the prospective Health Bill and Wales Well-Being Bond to address health inequalities. The WRU would welcome a more integrated approach with this being a core element of the sector agenda. Within the WRU, this area of work is now firmly embedded within the strategic priorities set for the next three years.

4. Barriers to increasing the levels of physical activity among children in Wales, and examples of good practice in achieving increases in physical activity, and in engagement with hard to reach groups, within Wales, the UK and internationally.

4.1 In 2013, the Schools and Physical Activity Task and Finish Group published its report 'Physical literacy – an all-Wales approach to increasing levels of physical activity for children and young people.' This had a single recommendation of physical education becoming a core subject in the National Curriculum in Wales. The WRU agreed with this recommendation, as instigating this would be a 'game changer' by providing more opportunities for young people to take part in sport and physical activity within school. This needs to be complimented by a physical literacy programme to support young people to develop the skills and confidence to enjoy sport. To allow this to happen, the workforce needs to be developed to make sure they have the right skills, philosophy and approach to support all young people in getting involved in sport and physical activity.



4.2 In relation to workforce development, the WRU has developed an apprenticeship programme which allows young people to undertake a level 3 sports development and coaching qualification. A crucial element embedded within the apprenticeship is the development of a positive inclusive coaching environment to support young people getting engaged in sport.

4.3 The WRU, working with the education sector has invested in developing a workforce which directly supports young people in secondary schools and universities to get involved in rugby. Currently, 58 of these are located in the top 20% most deprived lower super output areas (LSOA). Over the last two years, 56,000 boys and girls have been engaged with the school club hubs programme. A recent evaluation of the programme noted several successes, with a key one being the boost in the number of boys and especially girls who play rugby (since the start of the Hub programme there has been an increase of 10,000 secondary school girls that have now played rugby on the School Curriculum). This programme highlights how, having a dedicated and skilled workforce in place can have a positive impact on increasing levels of physical activity of young people. To ensure habitual long-term participation within the sport, a significant objective of the programme is linking participants with local rugby clubs/girls cluster clubs. It is estimated that 312 rugby clubs are linked to the programme. Providing opportunities to take part in sport outside of school, especially with their peer group helps to create a positive social environment, which helps to ensure young people stay involved.

Over the duration of the Hub programme to date, we have seen a number of positive case studies across Wales, demonstrating the wider benefits of rugby, not just on the levels of physical activity, but also improved behaviour in the school environment, impacting on educational engagement, as well as increases in self-confidence and broader life skills, such as communication and team work.

An example of this is highlighted by research recently undertaken in the Ospreys region by the University of Wales Trinity St David. They undertook a focus group in a cluster primary school with 7-11-year olds. Their research concluded that 15 children had joined their local rugby club as a direct result of participating in a rugby session with the local hub officer. 69% of the respondents stated that they felt there had been an improvement in their health and well-being '...I could run further without getting tired'. 45% of them stated that rugby had had a positive impact on them within the school, citing an increase in their levels of self-confidence.

4.4 Reduced funding and stretched budgets will have a negative impact, and will increase barriers to children taking part in physical activity. The WRU, as well as other sports are being requested to do more with less. This places challenges on the sport, as there is still a requirement for us to deliver and maintain current activities to our member clubs and other partners. Having the ability to forward plan is critical, and having only a one-year funding commitment from Sport Wales does not favour long-term planning.



With the introduction of the Well-Being and Future Generations Act and National Indicators for Wales, there needs to be a longer-term view on funding, front-line focussed target setting (as opposed to 'top-down') and integrated, robust data analysis. The WRU would welcome this change in approach.

5. Physical activity guidelines and how we benchmark physical fitness in children.

5.1 The 2015 School Sport Survey stated that 48% of all pupils were 'hooked on sport', which is defined as exercising three or more times a week outside of curricular PE lessons. However, the Welsh Health Survey showed that only 36% of children were engaged in physical activities for at least one hour every day of the previous week. The difference in figures highlights some of the issues in collecting data, which have been mentioned previously. The 2011 'Start Active, Stay Active' report issued by the Chief Medical Officers states that all children and young people should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes and up to several hours a day. It is understood that the majority of children in Wales are not meeting this target.

5.2 The 2017/18 offer letter from Sport Wales for the first time included the indicator of 75% of young people and young adults being hooked on sport (undertaking three or more sessions per week) to monitor progress. There was no discussion with us on this prior to receiving the offer letter. No discussions have taken place on how they will capture this information. The WRU cannot be expected on its own to deliver on this target, although it is acknowledged that our programmes and work with partners will contribute to this target. The WRU Participation Insight team further challenge this notion of weekly regularity, outside of the school environment – as this is not reflective of the evidence and insight from cultural and societal norms. All futurology and generational trend data indicates that an increasing percentage of Young People, will need to experience sport and physical activity in a less traditional manner, in a more dynamic and sporadic way. This may look like an intensive 2-3 weeks of engagement, followed by more ad-hoc engagement. Sport Wales should be considering this insight when setting targets – and more importantly, consulting with frontline, operational staff who witness this behaviour and young people who demonstrate this behaviour to understand what a more effective 'Hooked *into* Sport' measure looks like.

6. Measurement, evaluation and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's programmes and schemes aimed at promoting physical activity of children.

6.1 This is an area that is lacking, as there is no effective measurement or evaluation in place to assess the impact of Welsh Government programmes and schemes aimed at promoting physical activity of children. Other sectors are much better at evaluating the impact of their work, and can provide robust evidence to determine the impact of their work and value for money. There is an urgent requirement to develop a robust 'system' which can measure the holistic impact of our work – to measure direct



participation, wider social benefits to participants, behaviour change of the sector, the ways of working, and the effectiveness of integration. Only then will we see real, sustained change.

6.2 A few years ago, Sported developed 'Sportworks' a shared impact measurement tool designed for sport for development organisations to deliver projects, fund programmes and make policy decisions. It quantified in monetary terms, the impact and associated cost savings of sport for development activities, which allowed organisations to effectively measure impact of their work and make a business case for investment. However, as the system is now 5 years old and they have recently made the decision to phase its use, whilst looking at the potential of developing a new improved tool.

6.3 The WRU is currently investing in a digital strategy across the business. This will support insight, customer care and analytics. In relation to the participation side of the business, robust data capture and management will be implemented to help shape our work, and measure performance against our strategy.

6.4 There is a need at a macro level, for Welsh Government and Sport Wales to work with the sport sector to agree on measures to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes/activities aimed at increasing physical activity levels. It would be beneficial to draw on expertise within the academic sector to support this work.

7. Vale for money of Welsh Government spending to promote exercise in children.

7.1 As detailed above, there is currently no system in place to measure the impact/effectiveness of Welsh Government Programmes/activities in this area. It is therefore impossible to assess the value for money of Welsh Government spending to promote exercise in children. The WRU believe that it is essential that a system is developed to measure value for money.

8. The role of schools, parents and peers in encouraging physical activity, and the role of Sport Wales, NHS Wales and Public Health Wales in improving levels of physical activity.

8.1 Children and young people have a myriad of influences in encouraging them to be physically active. Research suggests that parents and peers are strong role models and influence whether somebody gets involved within a sport or physical activity. Rugby is the national sport of Wales, and the rugby club is often at the heart of most communities across Wales. Developing a positive experience from an early age is therefore key. It is important that the role of clubs and activities across sports are included within this consultation, to ensure data is captured on the breath of opportunities and influencers across Wales.



8.2 We are aware that sport is now included with the Health Ministerial portfolio, but there is little recognition of the opportunities offered and the impact of our work on well-being and physical activity. As detailed in our response to question 6 above, having a 'system' in place which measures impact would help present our case, and would quantify the impact of the sector.

Other Information

The WRU is a member organisation of the Welsh Sports Association (WSA), and as such we endorse the response to this inquiry by the WSA. We also support their suggestion of providing more detailed feedback to the inquiry by way of a round-table discussion with representatives from across the sports sector.

For further information, please contact [REDACTED]