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Hague, Nicola ORCID logoORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9541-4713>, Swain, Spencer ORCID
logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2191-0041> and Madigan,
Daniel J. ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9937-1818> (2021) NPS0075 - National Plan for Sport and Recreation. In:
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Goalball UK – Written evidence (NPS0075)

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?

We, Goalball UK, are a sport for people who are blind or partially sighted (visually impaired VI). It is challenging to engage Local Authorities due to the removal of localised services for children and young people. Sight-loss teams, understandably, focus on academic achievement but the loss of extended services means fewer opportunities for children and young people with sight-loss. VI is either “acquired” through an accident or disease and making contact with these potential participant is a challenge. Working with schools, both specialised and mainstream schools for those born with or who have acquired VI, will enable us to reach out and get young people involved in a more systematic and “life-long” way.

Academies and Multiple Academy Trusts often do not provide sufficient and equal opportunity to people who are disabled.

Devolving responsibility with consequential accountability for funding to Active Partnerships may assist, however there is an inconsistency in the abilities of these organisations to provide relevant information and sight-loss specific skills due to capacity. Similarly, National Disability Sports Organisations typically work with people who are already active.

Therefore engaging with larger charities, like Goalball UK, and their local groups, supporting specific groups may be a better way to engage locally and identify inactive people. This should be driven by partnerships and data – where VI people are and who best can support them into activity.

Other challenges faced are transport, particularly as VI players need a guide dog or a guide which has an impact on access to public transport. Spatial planning does not always have a club close to public transport routes leading to additional challenges. As a small niche sport, clubs are not always able to schedule time for VI players to play against competing sports which have higher numbers and thus provide more income. Finally, within the context of many VI people being unemployed, needing guide support, not being able to drive themselves and thus relying on public transport and then paying for access to clubs, there is an additional level of economic exclusion.

Goalball UK continues to engage with local communities successfully and make people active as part of our core business and this is one of our strengths. We have regularly done this over the past 10 years. We do this as we are respected within the community we serve; we understand barriers people face and work to remove them.

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.

In terms of people who are blind or partially sighted, they are often not provided with high quality PE or in some cases any opportunities to participate in PE or sport. Often students who are VI are excluded from PE. Often PE teachers are not fully empowered to include VI students in their lessons and if the students are in mainstream schools, the focus of the PE teacher is on those students without disabilities. Better and inclusive training should be part of the curriculum for teachers and specific times allocated to PE fulfilled.

We hear all too often Goalball UK provides the first opportunity for children and young people who are VI to participate in recreational and competitive sports. We have tried tirelessly to engage with School Games, BUCS and other organisations to provide opportunities but it is regularly deemed "not possible". Inclusion in sports remains a pipe dream as a result.

Without parental support children and young people who are VI often remain inactive. We help to remove this barrier through providing after school, weekend and holiday activity. As children typically attend schools with specialist resources they are 'taxied' to school and therefore afterschool activities are inaccessible.

More consistent engagement between schools and clubs is required to ensure an active pathway from school to clubs is created and maintained. This can be facilitated by Active Partnerships and using insight and data will support this and ensure accountability. If students enjoy sport at school and pathways to clubs are easy to follow with their chosen sport being available with guaranteed court time, as adults, they are more likely to continue to be active appreciating the social context and improved mental and physical wellbeing.

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.

We can only speak from our perspective. We have successfully engaged with people who are blind or partially sighted through forging strong and respectful relationships. There are no short cuts. In order to start new opportunities we engage with:

Local Blind Societies, local media outlets, local Schools, Colleges and Universities, local authorities and individual families. We work with the RNIB and other organisations in the VI community to promote our sport and to increase participation. In our case, we would also add albinism as a specific under-represented group. Through having a well-governed sport working with staff and volunteers with passion and integrity and ensuring an open and welcoming culture, we are able to address this important area of demographic inclusion. It has to be linked to urban planning with facilities and transport routes near traditionally under-represented communities, appropriate funding levels and qualified personnel to ensure participants enjoy the activity and want to return.

We are also working on improving the “face” of our organisation by ensuring appropriate policies and recruitment processes are in place. If participants know that they are represented in the decision-making and operational side of the organisation, they will feel “at home”. The example should be set by ALBs and funding bodies. Safeguarding is particularly important not just with those under 18 but all vulnerable groups and this remains a focus.

There is then a need to nurture the group and provide support in leading the

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?

From a Government perspective, these priorities remain pertinent and to be achieved e.g. all parts of government working closely together including the NHS. Improved coordination, particularly with the large number of NGOs, NGBs, government institutions is required to rationalise funding while ensuring improved return on investment. NGOs, in particular, should work closely with NGBs in delivering programmes and measuring outcomes. The education sector, in terms of research and providing sports science support, should also be engaged. Ideally a central database to manage information on active participants should be considered.

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?

Probably not but not having seen regular updates on progress, it is difficult to say. Part of the 2015 Sporting Future document was setting a baseline and using more accurate processes to capture data than the phone interview. This also depends on the definition of physical activity e.g. e-sports has grown significantly since 2015 and is this likely to be included? It also requires cooperation across all stakeholders to avoid duplicating participants.

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

Governing bodies collectively need to address this led by sports ambassadors and key influencers from MPs to leaders in UK Sport and Sport England to NGB board members and CEOs. A centrally led campaign needs to be introduced. There needs to be a whole plan to promote the activity of marginalised groups who may not otherwise participate due to these unacceptable practices. However, discrimination is learned at home, places of worship, schools, higher and further education, social and sports clubs. Ideally including approaches to non-discrimination and human rights should be included in the school curriculum as well as be mainstreamed in any qualifications offered in sport (coaching, technical officials, administration, medical etc.) in order for the qualification to be accredited. Codes of conduct should be developed and implemented systematically. Where possible, subsidised training in these areas should be

provided to smaller NGBs. Governing bodies who consistently fail to deal with these incidences should be held to account by funding bodies.

There should be increased funding at grassroots (Sport England) and High Performance (UK Sport) to those organisations who explicitly support marginalised groups. For example, inadvertent discrimination may be perceived in funding allocations. In the recent funding announcement by UK Sport there were no Paralympic Sports given the new 'Progression Funding'. Goalball UK did not receive any funding as the strategic importance of the sport (solely for those who are blind or partially sighted with concomitant challenges) was not sufficiently recognised. This will likely lead to a disconnect between grassroots development and high performance with funding not being available for NGBs to build on strong grassroots support and develop the elite potential of their teams and athletes. More consideration of social impact should be included in funding criteria.

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

An independent, centralised body needs to have responsibility for this and act as a regulatory body across all sport and recreation bodies. Independent means also independent from UK Sport and Home Nations Sports Councils. This should include establishing national standards to independent investigation and sanction powers as well as to assess NGBs continuously against identified targets.

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.

As a sport which is not funded by UK Sport, Goalball UK faces significant challenges, especially as a Team Sport. The ethos of UK Sport is changing slowly as the previous CEO said that funding would only be achieved if Goalball won a medal at the World Championships. However, without investment this is almost impossible for a team sport, especially a Paralympic team sport catering for VI persons who face additional barriers to their full participation. Currently Goalball has a smaller participation number and but fills a small, yet important, part of the marketplace. If no-one is to be left behind, some additional support on the basis of equity should be allocated to Para sports.

Currently UK Sport funds no team sports for people who are blind or partially sighted. We are receiving no funding for the 2024 Paris cycle although our women's team has recently beaten the reigning World and European champions in the last major competition; they have narrowly missed out on Tokyo qualification. With support from UK Sport, the IBSA World Games will be hosted in Birmingham, 2023. However, with uncertainty associated with funding, it is not clear whether GB teams will compete as our philanthropic funders are not in a position to support us in the high performance arena. Goalball is the only team sport for female visually impaired athletes in the Paralympic Games. This approach will unfortunately have a negative impact on the legacy of hosting the World Games and losing an opportunity to qualify directly for the 2024

Paralympic Games capitalising on home ground advantage. Potential participants will not be enthused by seeing the Goalball event with GB teams and therefore see role models who may attract them to take up the sport seriously.

9. What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?

There are various issues which are applied by other countries but the overall approach needs to be tailored to our local scenario. These include PE in schools as an obligatory subject, building strong club structures which include participants with and without disabilities, focused funding, collaboration between the NGO and NGB sectors supported by government at all levels, building a strong coaching culture with a focus on coaches being trained in talent identification and clear pathways for athletes with potential to move to the elite level. There should also be increased cooperation between NGBs e.g. racket sports working together to offer "come and play opportunities". In many countries, the basic sports at school are athletics, gymnastics are key to assist children to develop their musculo-skeletal systems, movement, balance, hand-eye coordination etc. Participation can also develop soft skills which often are not emphasised in the formal school curriculum leading to teamwork, innovation, thinking out of the box and problem solving – all key skills demanded by employers.

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

Ideally yes but one which allows some flexibility for NGBs as we are focused on delivery of our core functions but Goalball UK is certainly committed to getting more people to play, to support those who play and to deliver on greater inclusion, diversity and with appropriate support, medals. Such a plan would help to guide us as well as the funding bodies and the criteria they use. However, the 2015 plan may suffice currently with some updates required given experiences of COVID and BLM. Having a plan is one thing but finding ways to support NGBs and other stakeholders in implementation would really help us all move forward together particularly with the coordination of government entities bringing their commitment and strengths to the process. There is a myriad of NGOs out there which also need coordination and there may indeed be space for rationalisation as some funding they receive may be better directed to NGBs. Again, having a plan is great but monitoring progress, adjusting targets, identifying barriers and creating examples of best practice will support us all better to achieve the identified outcomes (not just outputs).

About Goalball: visual impairment is the largest disability group within the umbrella of disability or Para Sports. Currently there are 360,000 registered persons with a visual impairment in the UK (against an estimated 2 million) but only 11% participate in at least 30 minutes of physical activity per week. There is significant scope to increase engagement and in so doing, to reduce the national health bill, increase self-confidence, lay the foundations for teamwork and discipline.

Goalball was developed after World War II to rehabilitate soldiers whose sight was affected. In the lead up to the 2012 Paralympic Games, Goalball UK was

established in 2010 to manage the sport and prepare a men's and women's team for the Games due to the opportunity presented for automatic qualification of teams from the host nation.

Goalball is a standalone sport as it is not related nor comparable to any other sport for persons with or without disabilities. We have to generate all opportunities from within the charity – attracting and retaining participants in development, talent and elite supported by volunteer coaches and technical officials. From initial research undertaken by York St John University, for each £1 invested, a return on investment of £4.31 is achieved.

29 January 2021