

MY WELSH SPORT _THE CONVERSATION

CHWARAEON A FI _Y SGWRS

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

FEBRUARY 2018

BACKGROUND TO THE CONVERSATION

To inform the development of a vision for sport in Wales, a national conversation entitled My Welsh Sport_The Conversation has been facilitated by Sport Wales from October 2017 to January 2018. This report outlines how this process was conducted and summarises the key emerging themes arising from the responses.

METHODOLOGY

I am delighted to report that around 600 people participated in 'The Conversation' through:

- A questionnaire on My Welsh Sport website
- Comments submitted directly by email/post
- Five stakeholder events held across Wales in Treforest, Cwmbran, Llanelli, Llandudno and Aberystwyth
- 2 Moderated Twitter debates
- 15 small group conversations with under-represented groups who deem themselves as non-sporty, facilitated by Barod
- Structured conversations by Sport Wales staff with a range of people and organisations;
- Stakeholder meetings with, CEOs and Council Leaders
- 7 internal Sport Wales workshops

Individual feedback themes and key points arising from each contribution received were collated and recorded. These were then classified into broad thematic areas. Within each of these areas, the available comments were analysed for any emerging consensus and weight of opinion, with significant minority and alternative views also taken into account. This report presents a synthesis of this analysis and is to be read as an overview and reflection of the feedback received across all stages of the Conversation.



SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Role of sport	4
Driving access and participation	5
Strategic planning and collaboration	8
Investment, cost and support	10

ROLE OF SPORT

“ Emphasise the positive impact of sport in driving general well-being

Sport is widely seen as linked with the well-being agenda, both from the organisational and practical viewpoints. The sports sector welcomes the increasing emphasis on the public health role of sport in building a healthier population through physical activity that is enjoyable and sustainable. Many were hopeful that the undoubted health benefits of wider sport participation would provide an impetus for more funds for sport, or at least protection of the existing funding, given the likely positive return on investment in building a healthier nation for the future.

Others, mainly less active, thought the emphasis should be more on the lifestyle benefits accruing from increased physical endeavours rather than directly focusing on the less tangible and longer-term public health benefits. It was fully recognised that the holistic concept of well-being embraces areas of physical and mental activities that most people would not class as sport (such as walking and yoga), as well as sporting activities undertaken for fun and enjoyment.

“ Sport as a driver of individual development

As well as driving physical and mental well-being, many see sport as being a means of developing as a person, through teamwork, resilience and building social skills. Although this applies to all ages, this aspect was seen as being particularly important in the formative childhood years. Those that participate in sport will learn how to work with others for the good of the team, to respect rules and laws, to engage socially with others even in a competitive environment, to watch out for others that may be less able than themselves in their team, be inspired by new role models and learn how to win and lose, all while doing something that they enjoy.

In adulthood, the balance would then shift away from competitive team-based sports and more to activities that can be undertaken individually or in smaller groups, while still building the social, mental and physical skills associated with sport participation.

Within performance sport, many see a chance to bridge the gap with community sport, increase the pool of potential high performance athletes and keep the pool as large as possible for as long as possible. There is also a shared ambition to focus on developing people, not just winning medals and to encourage collaboration to support the development of performance athletes.

“ Sport's role in national pride

Large sporting events bring the nation together unlike any other type of event. Although much of this is passive following, it has a key role in building interest in sport, providing role models for school children and making a positive economic contribution to the nation.

However, wider feedback on any indirect benefit accruing from sport as a spectator activity was largely muted. It was mainly restricted to seeing inspirational role models in individual sports, with little comment that enjoying watching top-class sport could be a means of driving interest in recreational participation.

“ Wider definition of sport to take account of new activities

There was a wide range of views and frequent questioning on what constitutes “sport”, including whether a definition is attainable and whether it's important at all that there is agreement on this.

The consensus views were that physical activity is equally as important as what would be generally deemed to be sport when dealing with the well-being and health agenda; and that the definition of sport need not be contiguous with what contributes to general physical health.

Sport was seen by some as being restrictively based on competition, to the detriment of the social and personal benefits that can be derived from sport in its wider sense. There was also some significant concern that the word “sport” had restrictive and possibly elitist connotations. Some participants in physical activity would not see what they're doing as a “sport” and would feel looked-down-upon by others who might be doing the same activity but in a more competitive guise.

Distinct from the concept of “sport”, the concept of “physical literacy” was widely referred to by those working in the sector as encompassing both sport and well-being; although to the less active the concept was more readily understood as physical competency.

The two main practical issues around the definition of “sport” were the impact on Sport Wales as a body that has the word in its name; and the effect of the precise definition of “sport” on which physical activities would thereby be eligible for sports funding.

DRIVING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

““ *Role of schools in fostering sport participation among children*

There was widespread agreement that sport must start young, with schools seen to have a pivotal role in building physical literacy and driving participation across all children. There was strident criticism of a perceived downgrading of sport and PE within the formal school curriculum across the primary and secondary ages, with seemingly less time being devoted to sport and physical activities than in the past.

Many saw that schools had a key role as introducers and enablers of sporting and physical activity, being the only chance that many pupils will have to learn the benefits of well-being, to build their physical awareness and to sample different sports. This placed a unique onus on schools to nurture interest in a range of sports and to give pupils a grounding in the rudiments of sport. This was especially true for organised team sports, where schools are best placed to provide appropriate participation opportunities across the whole range of sporting ability.

Schools were seen to have a duty to create an atmosphere in which participation in physical activity would be what everyone should be doing on a regular basis. This led to strong support within the sector for strengthening the impact of mandatory sport sessions within school hours. However, this wasn't always echoed by those with less enthusiasm for sport, some of whom traced their antipathy back to past compulsion at school in sports at which they did not excel.

Given the key role of schools in driving life-long interest in sport, it's imperative that the teaching staff involved are sufficiently well trained in physical and sport education and can deliver an inspirational sporting experience tailored to each pupil's ability and progress. This is more acute at the primary level, where there is a need for teachers to receive more training to deliver a wider understanding of the links between health, obesity, fitness, well-being, activity and sport.

““ *Access to more opportunities at the local and community levels*

The dearth of facilities in their own locality and in their own sport is a key concern across the sector, both in terms of their own participation but also in enabling them to attract new participants. The impact of this is to reduce the range of sports available close to home, with a consequent reduction in choice for potential

new entrants, for whom convenience is of crucial important.

Often, it's not just an issue of facilities, it's also the lack of local voluntary infrastructure, suitably competent coaches, sufficient Sport Wales or national governing body (NGB) support and the necessary quorum required for some team sports. There's also a strong perception in the more rural areas that, despite the more populated areas having better access to built sporting facilities, there has been little effort in delivering compensatory local provision or assistance.

There was widespread advocacy of a community hub model, where local provision would be enhanced by LAs, schools, clubs, health boards and community organisations in an area working together to share access to facilities, resources and coaches. How this works would inevitably need to vary by area, possibly driven by incentivised funding for working together. There would also need to be some area-based strategic overview to address significant gaps in local provision that would not be resolved simply by getting existing clubs, facilities and participants to work together.

““ *More opportunities for widening participation in sports at the intro levels*

There are numerous perceived obstacles to getting started in sport. The competitive nature is a significant turn-off for many, in that they do not want to be embarrassed in front of more able participants. This is particularly the case for team sports, where widely ranging skill and commitment levels can create frustration and disillusion as well as being organisationally challenging.

The steep fall-off in sporting activity during later school years and afterwards is a significant concern. While some reduction is expected, there is a distinct lessening of opportunity to continue with participation after full-time education, with more effort needed to participate, increased personal costs to be incurred and a divergence of needs between elite, competitive and recreational participants. Many commented that parents of young children who were keen to continue their own participation in sport were being frustrated by the lack of childcare facilities at sporting venues and too few activities for adults that could be undertaken at the same time and place as the children.

The perception among many was that there's a widespread belief that it's too late to start a new sport in adulthood or in later years, given the gap in skills and experience that would need to be bridged. This is where welcoming access to a new sport can often provide a gateway to enable someone to start afresh.

“**Remove barriers to participation among under-represented groups**

Some demographic groups have much higher perceived or actual barriers to sport participation than others. These barriers must be identified and addressed, otherwise the goal of equality of opportunity will never be achieved.

Girls and women will often find it more difficult to access opportunities for many sports, with the increasing organisational integration of men and women's sports only going some way towards addressing this. Many women highlighted childcare challenges or having to choose to focus on their children's sports to the detriment of their own possible participation. Some women and girls also mentioned social and image issues, leading to a reluctance to participate if not already fit enough.

Access to sport by disabled children and adults is perceived to be very patchy in many areas and across most sports, especially with accessible changing rooms and direct access to the sporting facility often lacking. Also, disabled sports provision is too often geared towards competition, with less support for enjoyable recreational participation and general physical activity.

Access to sporting opportunities is lower in the more deprived areas and among the lower socio-economic groups. The key factor is cost, with some sports needing significant investment in equipment or participation fees; and also the ancillary costs of travel, childcare and leisure time, all of which combine to form a significant barrier to accessing sport for those on low incomes, be they adults, parents or children.

There are some specific cultural issues around BAME access to sport that make participation and success much more of a challenge, such as very few role models in some sports, timing of activities, privacy during participation, appropriate dress, language and racism barriers, empathy from fellow participants, culturally-aware coaches and suitable changing facilities.

Issues regarding LGBT access to sport are coming to the fore, needing to ensure that sexuality or gender identity aren't barriers to participation. The gender-neutral issue will need to be addressed, given that most sports are currently organised by gender.

Middle-aged and older people will inevitably participate less than the young. Nevertheless, there can still be some effort in reducing barriers to their participation by emphasising the social and health benefits and the non-judgmental and non-competitive nature of many sports, allied to wider opportunities for purely recreational participation. A particular concern is the cumulative effect for those who are faced by more than one of these barriers, which to the individuals impacted can soon become insurmountable when they're combined together.

“**Making sport safe**

The issue of personal safety in sport took many forms. At a practical level, many are dissuaded from participating in sport if they're not comfortable in the environment; for example, ill-equipped or culturally unacceptable changing facilities. Others highlighted the small risk of accidental injury inherent in most sporting activities. Wider societal concerns were also acknowledged, mainly regarding needing to ensure the safety of women and children in particular from intentional threat or harm by others.

“**Drive awareness and promotion of sporting opportunities**

The positioning, marketing and promotion of sporting opportunities is seen as a strategic role across local authorities, clubs, the national governing bodies and Sport Wales. Awareness of the range and benefits of sporting endeavours on offer is deemed by many to be inadequate. A key stage is the transition from full-time education to adulthood, where maintaining interest is most difficult and many cease to participate in any sport.

Another key issue for many is family involvement, where many children don't see their parents partaking in any sport. The danger is that children can then be subconsciously persuaded that recreational sport is mainly for children, while adult sport is only for the elite and highly competitive minority.

Many feel that sporting opportunities aren't widely publicised at all or that the route into joining a club isn't made sufficiently straightforward. There is also no central point where they can access comprehensive and tailored lists of which opportunities are available in their area, which is at the very least what people expect given the opportunities of social media and wider technological means of communication.

The most productive route to driving sport take-up among adults would seem to be to focus on the physical activity, the lifestyle benefits and the personal

challenge, allied to the social aspects and the general enjoyment arising from the effort. It also needs to emphasise that even a moderate increase in physical effort is good for personal health and well-being, regardless of the standard achieved in the sporting field. In contrast, too much emphasis on being competitive or needing to join a team would be counterproductive for many.

The commercial sector needs to be considered as a partner in some way as well. With many opportunities for physical and sporting activities at private health clubs, workplace facilities and elsewhere, it would seem odd for a promotional drive to encourage take-up of sport to exclude any reference to commercial provision.



STRATEGIC PLANNING AND COLLABORATION

“*Collaboration across bodies and sports*”

The most common overarching refrain across the consultation was that much needs to be done to enhance co-operation across the sector to drive ease of participation and value for money, links between elite and community sports, LAs and NGBs, schools/colleges and clubs.

It was generally agreed that bodies and organisations should expect that they will need to collaborate with others in the sector and to actively seek out opportunities for doing so, in some cases as a condition of some of their funding. At a practical level, this can include sharing changing facilities, opportunities across multi sports, introducing other sports, planned sharing of playing fields. There was also a consensus that the funding and governing bodies should provide top-down strategic guidance on where there needs to be more collaboration on the ground.

Much of this theme of collaboration is covered elsewhere in this section and paper, given its importance and relevance for delivery at all levels.

“*Efficient use of costly facilities*”

Publicly funded sporting facilities are expensive and are widely believed to be rarely used to their full potential. The examples that were cited most often were school sporting facilities that were often not available for use by local people outside of the few hours that the school needed them. Schools should be encouraged to use them after hours for extended sport activities, ideally with late buses laid on. Afterwards, given that the facilities have been provided and are being maintained from the public purse, it was almost seen as axiomatic that they should then be available for local use to the wider community and local clubs.

There were various proposals regarding how extending the use of public facilities could be made to work. Most saw that it wasn't the school's place to arrange this and that there would need to be some appropriate cost-recovery or commercial arrangement run by the local authority. There should also be some strategic planning of use, to enable access by existing clubs while also providing new arranged activities to attract those that aren't currently club-based, more akin to a leisure centre model.

“*Long-term planning for greater certainty*”

There were many comments regarding the transient nature of some funding, with a need for greater annual stability of funding and a long-term vision for individual sports and how different demographic groups are

being targeted and encouraged. A vision for sport in Wales demands a strategic and planned approach to funding over several years. Facilities need to be planned, development projects need time to come to fruition, clubs need time to grow and prosper, elite investment needs long-term security.

However, there was a contrary view by some that funding needed to be more agile and provide the option of short-term funding boosts, for example in emerging areas needing boost or seedcorn funding, otherwise the sector would lose some of its vibrancy.

“*Enhancing the role of colleges and universities*”

The FE and HE sector has some of the most advanced facilities and academic sporting expertise but they aren't always used sufficiently collaboratively with the NGBs nor community clubs more generally. They are well-placed to function as local centres of excellence for their wider area, working in collaboration with the rest of the public sector and complementing the local authority (LA) provision.

Colleges operate at the cusp of physical activity, with students enjoying their last unfettered access to a wide range of top-class sporting facilities but without the element of compulsion there was at school. Given colleges' generally extensive facilities across most sports, many students use this opportunity to try new activities and there is scope for promoting wider community access to this kind of taster provision.

FE and HE colleges are key providers of training for sporting leaders and coaches, in particular teachers. With the emphasis on getting a more highly trained cohort of coaches across the sector, it was felt that colleges should play more of a role in providing such structured training for both voluntary and full-time coaches, provided that funding can be secured from elsewhere. The FE and HE sector is willing to collaborate more closely with Sport Wales, NGBs and LAs to capitalise on their expertise and facilities to the wider benefit of the community.

While the importance of specific sports training for coaches was undisputed, the need for sport-based education in sport administration is less clear, given the need for wider skills around business, finance, marketing, technology, law and management.

“ *Clarify Sport Wales’s role across the sport sector*

Sport Wales is widely seen as being best placed to be the enabler for the sector in driving collaboration and innovation across all sporting and public bodies in Wales and at all sporting levels. Much is expected of what Sport Wales can deliver.

It is seen as having a long-term planning and strategic co-ordinating role in the delivery of sporting provision and excellence across competitive and recreational sport in Wales. It should also represent the interests of the sporting sector to the Government and ensure as far as possible that the benefits of sport funding are highlighted.

Along with individual NGBs, it should own insight and intelligence across the sector, to identify gaps in provision but also to track user journeys across sports and the extent to which the nation is participating more in some kind of physical activity.

What is less clear is the view on what Sport Wales’ role should be regarding elite sportsmen and sportswomen and how this balances with its responsibilities for providing funding and encouragement for grassroots sport and generally more recreational sporting activities.

As regards wider physical activity compared with organised or competitive sport, the prevalent view from the sector is that Sport Wales should focus on fostering competitive/organised sport and sporting-related physical activity as its contribution to the population’s overall health and well-being.

While sport is in a good position to benefit financially from any potential investment in preventative health, the well-being agenda is wider than sport, so the existing sport strategy should not veer unduly towards physical activities that would not reasonably count as sport. Some others, however, thought that Sport Wales should actively embrace the activity agenda much more, believing that the “sport” tag was too restrictive and exclusive.



INVESTMENT, COST AND SUPPORT

“ *More investment in facilities* ”

There is much demand from within the sector for more public money to be spent on developing and refurbishing sporting facilities, especially from those who participate in sports that are more reliant on formal facilities. This is one of the key areas where strategic planning across the country is urgently needed, possibly in conjunction with the school provision alluded to earlier.

However, given the public funding constraints, the sector recognises that large scale new investment in built facilities is unlikely, so comments have been offered elsewhere on how the existing facilities could be utilised more efficiently.

“ *Maximise use of free outdoor facilities.* ”

Many sports lend themselves naturally to using informal outdoor facilities, individual physical activities, with equipment and kit the only significant investment needed. There were some suggestions that natural outdoor facilities could be used more extensively for some sports, given the lack of built facilities in the more rural areas, or that participants could be encouraged to switch to activities that are more amenable to outdoors.

While this works in some cases, mainly around physical activity rather than sport, it clearly cannot be a general solution to the lack of built facilities.

“ *Direct cost of participation is a significant barrier for some sports/groups* ”

There is widespread concern at the cost of being active in sport, with many seeing this as the main barrier for many from the more disadvantaged communities, with some needing to opt for a particular sport because it's not as costly, or not able to consider taking part in any sporting activity.

The participation costs incurred by clubs and organisations vary considerably by sport and by the cost of facilities in each area, with some adverse comments on these costs and whether they could be ameliorated.

There was much more feedback on the total costs incurred by participants, with initial capital outlay for equipment and kit, the travel and training costs and contribution towards facilities hire. The key concern was the barrier to access that this creates among those

on modest means, often those for whom the need is greatest health-wise and who face similar barriers in participating in any leisure activity. There was tacit acknowledgment by some that a nominal charge, however modest, is often more effective in generating and retaining commitment than totally free access at the point of use. The belief is that people place more value on the activity if they must pay to participate. Looking at the elite level, the sector is uncomfortable with the thought that some potential top sportspeople of the future could be lost simply due to the cost of participation when young.

“ *Develop use of technology within sport* ”

There was a general view that the sport sector needs to improve its use of technology across performance, administration and marketing. In individual development, the use of personal fitness monitors is becoming more prevalent but across a sport, cohort or team there needs to be more innovation in wider data capture so that overall progress across the sector can be monitored.

Administratively, data capture on needs and provision across the sector is seen as deficient, with NGBs, LAs and clubs often lacking in insights into what the public want and how the existing range of activities on offer can be tailored to respond to user needs. Technology needs to be much more widely used in publicising opportunities for participation, with little apparent co-ordination at present across facilities and bodies in collating what's available in a way that end users can access easily in one place.

“ *Provide support for group leaders and coaches* ”

It was widely recognised that staff that lead and coach at clubs and schools need access to much more support from the sporting and educational authorities, given their key role in driving interest, inspiring participation and raising standards, as well as securing a safe environment for all.

The view from the sector is that sport in schools should always be delivered by trained sport teachers but the belief is that this is not always the case and that this can only be to the detriment of the pupils.

With much of the coaching at clubs being delivered by volunteer staff, the level of support and training offered to those that coach others represents a key investment in the future well-being of the sector. Support for leaders and coaches across schools and clubs is seen as one of the key issues to address, given that they need access to training and development and the sector needs to fund this out of existing funding streams.

Improved strategic planning across the sector to sustain and replenish the existing valued voluntary coaching provision is urgently needed, as well as much more recognition across the sector of the key work of local leaders and coaches in providing direct support and encouragement to participants.



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