

Impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on sport

June 2020

1. Background

The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee is looking into the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on areas within its remit. For the purposes of this inquiry, the Committee is also looking at sport at both grassroots and elite levels.

Dafydd Elis-Thomas MS, the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism and Jason Thomas, Director Culture, Sport and Tourism, Welsh Government provided oral evidence to the Committee on 12 May.

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on 11 June:

- Brian Davies, Sport Wales;
- Dr Kelly Mackintosh, Swansea University;
- Huw Thomas, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA);
- Jonathan Ford, Football Association of Wales (FAW);
- Gareth Davies, Welsh Rugby Union (WRU); and
- Marcus Kingwell, EMD UK: The National Governing Body for Group Exercise.

A [transcript of the meeting](#) can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Members also considered written evidence. A list is provided in Annex A.



2. Immediate impact on sport and support for the sector

1. The WRU described the impact of COVID-19 on sport as ‘catastrophic’.¹ Sport Wales said that the impact has been ‘immediate and significant’ for the sports that were in the middle of, or about to start, their season.² Jason Thomas, Director Culture Sport and Tourism, Welsh Government told the Committee that ‘small clubs, large clubs are all closed and everybody’s looking for support to help them through this’.³

2. Sport Wales told the Committee that engagement with the Welsh Government has ‘increased significantly’⁴ since the COVID-19 outbreak and that it has been a good example of the ‘increased collaboration that’s been required during this period’.⁵ Similarly the WRU said that a silver lining of the pandemic has been ‘much improved communication’⁶ and the WLGA described the engagement as ‘exemplary’.⁷

3. The Committee heard that the FAW did have some concerns at the beginning of the pandemic that most decisions are made at Welsh Government Cabinet meetings and that ‘sport isn’t necessarily represented directly in that Cabinet with a Sports Minister’:⁸

‘So, there were one or two concerns that not necessarily somebody has got, let’s say, the back of football or sport at those Cabinet meetings. But we’ve been reassured that those briefings do happen beforehand.’⁹

4. Working with the Welsh Government, Sport Wales has repurposed a total of £8.5 million to support sport and physical activity organisations who are negatively

¹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 158

² CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 43

³ CWLC meeting 12 May, para 110

⁴ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 13

⁵ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 13

⁶ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 138

⁷ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 15

⁸ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 136

⁹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 136

impacted by the pandemic and also help them 'to thrive and support people in Wales to enjoy being active in the future'.¹⁰

5. Sport Wales is running a £550,000 Emergency Relief Fund for not-for-profit community sport. As at 22 June 2020, support has been provided to 295 clubs in Wales, totalling £543,944. Sport Wales explained that it had repurposed funding from existing budgets to create the fund:

'The truth is that will have an impact, if we spend all that on recovery out of this situation, for when we have recovered out of it, because it will no longer be available to us, because we'll have spent it.'¹¹

6. The WRU has provided an additional £1,000 to each of its member clubs.

7. The Committee heard that not all parts of the sector have had access to financial support. Sport Wales told the Committee that some of the self-employed people, for example instructors, may have fallen through the gaps.¹² EMD UK explained that many self-employed group exercise instructors have found the UK Government's Self-Employed Income Support Scheme difficult to access for various reasons:

'Group exercise might be a part-time employment for them rather than full time. They might have come into it in the last 12 months, in which case they don't have the financial records to prove the case of their previous earnings and profits, or they might be running it through a microbusiness, in other words, a limited company, and are therefore not allowed. So there are a great many self-employed people here of various types who have not been able to claim anything...because they're not entitled to any financial support, and you have to wonder whether they will still be here again when they're allowed to start teaching classes in their community settings.'¹³

8. The Mackintosh Lawn Tennis Club also commented on this problem, writing:

'The UK Government and LTA (*Lawn Tennis Association*) have provided financial support to self-employed coaches through Self-Employment Grant scheme, and Coaches Grant scheme - however, this amount is

¹⁰ Sport Wales written evidence

¹¹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 55

¹² CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 56

¹³ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 164

significantly less than coaches would usually earn. The UK Government Self-Employment Grant scheme is calculated based on average profits from the last 3 years - whilst tennis coaches work all-year round, the vast majority of income is generated from March-August, therefore the Grant Scheme provides an unfair calculation for seasonal workers.¹⁴

9. The Committee heard that leisure trusts are also facing significant financial concerns. Welsh trusts are continuing to incur an average of around £222,000 in monthly costs (excluding costs recovered through the Job Retention Scheme and any negotiated expenditure reductions), while losing an average of £420,000 of income per month.¹⁵ According to Community Leisure UK (Wales):

‘There are significant concerns around the financial viability after the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ends in October with 70% of Welsh trusts reaching an “insecure” position in the next 6-9 months. Alarming, within nine to twelve months from now, 90% of Welsh trusts will have become “non viable” or be in an “insecure” position.’¹⁶

10. Sport Wales said that its support funds ‘can only help; they’re not going to solve the issue’.¹⁷ The WLGA was also concerned about the economic impact on leisure trusts, stating that:

‘...the real fear is...even after the lockdown eases, people won't immediately return in the numbers they once did to these kinds of indoor sporting activities. From a local government perspective, therefore, we are certainly looking very closely at a position where leisure centres have been placed into trusts or other arrangements, with an anticipation that there will be some calls for these services to return back to the authority, with the incumbent costs that come with that. Likewise, if the authority is still delivering services in-house, those authorities will be taking direct financial hits. So, it is a challenge that, whatever your position is in the 22 authorities—it's something that will impact us all, I think.’¹⁸

11. The WLGA also said that the fact that some leisure centres are being used as treatment centres for COVID-19, and that those arrangements may continue after

¹⁴ Mackintosh Lawn Tennis Club written evidence

¹⁵ Community Leisure UK (Wales) written evidence

¹⁶ Community Leisure UK (Wales) written evidence

¹⁷ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 57

¹⁸ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 49

leisure centres are allowed to reopen, needs to be 'factored in and considered as part of any recovery plan'.¹⁹ Community Leisure UK (Wales) wrote:

'Some of these repurposed leisure centres have already been told they will not return to their original purpose before the end of this calendar year. This significantly limits organisation's possibilities to operate and generate income, as in some cases the repurposed sites account for 40% of the usual income.'²⁰

12. The Committee also heard that there will be significant economic impact at club level, including football and rugby. The FAW explained that domestic football in Wales is very reliant on match-day and clubhouse income and without it 'there will be some definite economic impacts that they will have to reassess their business models to understand how it works'.²¹ The WLGA said the fact that a significant amount of sport clubs' income comes from social activity, rather than sport activity, means that the easing of the lockdown will not 'necessarily solve the financial challenges that may be governed by a different set of lockdown guidance'.²²

13. In terms of high-level football, the FAW said that money from the broadcasting market should enable it to survive.²³ Professional rugby on the other hand is 'taking and will take a huge hit'²⁴ according to the WRU. The Wales v Scotland Six Nations match at Cardiff's Principality Stadium was postponed by the WRU the day before it was due to take place on 14 March, resulting in the governing body taking a '£10 million hit'.²⁵

14. The Committee heard that grassroots level sport is likely to be hardest hit. The FAW said that there are 'massive financial difficulties ahead'²⁶ and that there would probably be 'fewer clubs at the end of it'.²⁷ The WRU explained:

'In the short term, if you're looking over the next six months, then a very, very high percentage of our community clubs have reserves to survive

¹⁹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 31

²⁰ Community Leisure UK (Wales) written evidence

²¹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 154

²² CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 59

²³ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 153

²⁴ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 161

²⁵ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 158

²⁶ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 155

²⁷ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 176

that period. The concern then, of course, becomes if we go further into 2021.²⁸

15. The Committee also heard that the effects of the current crisis are hitting women's football harder. The FAW warned that the women's game could be 'completely torn up on the back of this pandemic'.²⁹

Our View

Sport at all levels is feeling the immediate and significant impact of COVID-19. The sector took matters into its own hands by suspending some sports in Wales, including rugby and football, before the UK Government effectively banned large sporting events.

Support for the sector

The Committee heard that the sector is facing a considerable financial impact which could threaten the ability of sport at all levels to return to a pre-pandemic normal.

We welcome Sport Wales' prompt financial support for sport and physical activity organisations who are negatively impacted by the pandemic via its Sport Resilience Fund and Emergency Relief Fund. The Committee would like an update in September with details of how the allocation of the £8 million resilience fund was distributed and how Sport Wales' activity over the coming years may be impacted given that the support schemes came from existing budgets.

We also heard that not all parts of the sector have been able to access the available support schemes. For example, we heard that the UK Government's Self Employed Income Support Scheme is unsuitable for self-employed instructors and coaches because they might not have three years' worth of accounts or might be running classes as a microbusiness. The Welsh Government should intervene to ensure all those working in the sector are eligible for financial support.

Leisure trusts are also facing significant financial challenges. These trusts play a vital role in delivering sport and physical activity services in Wales and we must ensure that they survive this crisis. Similarly, we heard that grassroots level sport

²⁸ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 160

²⁹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 156

is feeling the impact of the pandemic. Sport clubs are often the only surviving hub of the community³⁰ and it would be very sad to see fewer clubs at the end of this pandemic. Both leisure trusts and community sports clubs are reliant on income through trading, which has come to a stop. Easing restrictions for sport and exercise activities may not resolve the financial challenges that may be governed by a different set of guidance relating to social activity. The Welsh Government should therefore be prepared to extend the necessary public support to ensure the survival of community sport.

We are concerned that the pandemic is having a negative impact on women's football. Women's football in Wales has grown by 50% in the past four years. We sincerely hope that this valuable inclusion work is not undone and recommend that Sport Wales' financial support should be focused on organisations facing the greatest challenges.

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should lobby the UK Government to ensure that the Self-Employed Income Scheme is revised so that no self-employed people in the sport and physical activity sector fall through the gaps.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should work with local authorities to consider the support available for leisure trusts and be prepared to extend the necessary public support to ensure the survival of leisure trusts and community clubs.

3. Physical activity

16. A survey carried out for Sport Wales has found that while the overall levels of physical activity have not shifted significantly during the lockdown, 34% of Welsh adults say that they are doing more at this time than before the restrictions, while 33% say that they are doing less.³¹ However, there are noticeable variations within and between certain demographic groups.

17. Among adults from higher socio-economic backgrounds, 39% say they are doing more activity and 32% are doing less, meaning that there has been a +7 percentage point increase in activity. However, for adults from lower socio-

³⁰ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 159

³¹ <https://www.sport.wales/media-centre/latest-news/2020-05-27-inequalities-gap-has-grown-during-lockdown/>

economic backgrounds, 29% are doing more and 33% are doing less, meaning that there has been a -4 percentage point decrease among this group.³²

18. Witnesses were concerned that the gap in physical inactivity between social classes is widening. The EMD UK said:

*'So, while the, if you like, middle classes—the ABC 1s—have been doing more physical activity, developing and engraining that as a habit, those from the poorest backgrounds are doing less, and I'm worried that they will then be making that into a habit as well. So, we have quite a divided picture.'*³³

19. The survey results suggest that the divide is also present among children. While 9% of adults overall report that their children are doing no physical activity or exercise on a typical day at the moment, for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds the figure is 14%. Overall, 26% of parents said that their children are doing more activity than usual during lockdown, while 35% report that their children are doing less. However, only 23% of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds say that their children are more active than usual, compared to 36% who say they are doing less.³⁴

20. Commenting on the decrease in physical activity participation among children, Dr Kelly Mackintosh said:

*...the inequalities have just widened—they haven't got the garden space, for example. It's perhaps, in some cases, where there's more children per household, a lot harder in terms of managing home schooling, but also integrating not just the activity associated, but the specific skills moving forward in that.*³⁵

21. Swim Wales was also concerned that children (and adults) are currently missing out on the life skill element of learning to swim.³⁶

³² <https://www.sport.wales/media-centre/latest-news/2020-05-27-inequalities-gap-has-grown-during-lockdown/>

³³ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 190

³⁴ <https://www.sport.wales/media-centre/latest-news/2020-05-27-inequalities-gap-has-grown-during-lockdown/>

³⁵ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 33

³⁶ Swim Wales written evidence

22. In written evidence to the Committee, Sport Wales said that it is essential that the impact of a decrease in physical activity among children is tackled as part of the new curriculum and return to a school environment.³⁷ Weightlifting Wales called for 120 minutes a week of mandatory physical education in primary and secondary schools in Wales.³⁸

23. The Committee also heard that female participation in physical activity has been slightly up since the lockdown.³⁹ Dr Kelly Mackintosh described this a ‘a real positive that we should cling on to and also to use as a positive to transfer beyond, post lockdown’.⁴⁰ According to Dr Mackintosh the increase could be attributed to how exercise is taken during lockdown because there is less social interaction and feelings of insecurity.⁴¹

24. EMD UK, Dr Kelly Mackintosh and Sport Wales⁴² called for more research into what is behind the changes in participation. EMD UK warned against trying to find single answers, saying ‘it’s more nuanced than that, and it is worrying that the social inequalities might be increased through this particular situation’.⁴³ Dr Mackintosh said:

‘We need to use time now, in terms of what it is that is widening the gap. We can probably make intuitive guesses, but what is it that actually meant that females increased their participation, for example? And if we can allude to that, then that’s something that we take forward and try and implement into future strategies.’⁴⁴

25. The World Health Organisation has highlighted the importance of physical activity in reducing the risk posed by COVID-19. It says that regular activity:

³⁷ Sport Wales written evidence

³⁸ Weightlifting Wales written evidence

³⁹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 27

⁴⁰ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 34

⁴¹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 34

⁴² CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 28

⁴³ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 190

⁴⁴ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 38

'can reduce high blood pressure, help manage weight and reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and various cancers - all conditions that can increase susceptibility to COVID-19.'⁴⁵

26. Dr Kelly Mackintosh told the Committee:

'In terms of as much as we know at the moment, there are links, when you're responding to a respiratory virus, that, hypothetically, if you were starting off with a greater baseline of fitness level, greater capacity to respond to the body's demands, you are going to be more likely to respond better to something that then affects that particular—your lung function, for example.'⁴⁶

27. The Committee heard that one of the positives that was immediately evident as the UK went into lockdown was the importance placed on physical activity by the public and the UK and Welsh Governments. Community Leisure UK (Wales) wrote that the 'pandemic is the first time that national governments across the world have publicly recognised and highlighted the benefits of physical activity'⁴⁷. Dr Kelly Mackintosh explained that 'it's really pushed that key message' that physical activity is 'important enough to allow you out of the house'.⁴⁸

28. Going forward, Dr Mackintosh told the Committee there should be a focus on how to take those positives and translate them into new behaviours.⁴⁹ According to Sport Wales:

'...there's an opportunity here to build on that directive effectively given by Government, and we shouldn't just expect it to continue in those areas where it has increased. Clearly...there are some groups where it hasn't increased and has probably gone backwards, and those gaps are in danger of widening. So, the sooner we can get some financial security for the future, so that we can help those who've rediscovered activity continue it, and help those who've yet to find it to find it, then the better for our nation.'⁵⁰

⁴⁵ <https://www.who.int/news-room/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyathome/healthyathome---physical-activity>

⁴⁶ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 108

⁴⁷ Community Leisure UK (Wales) written evidence

⁴⁸ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 109

⁴⁹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 109

⁵⁰ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 115

29. Similarly, the WLGA said that there is ‘a societal mindset change happening at the moment and there are certainly opportunities for increased participation if there is the resource to deliver it’.⁵¹ The WLGA explained that most of the support provided by local government for sport and physical activity is ‘discretionary spend’ in terms of responsibilities under various Acts, saying that:

‘you can imagine a scenario in a future austerity programme, where council budgets are squeezed such that we are unable to continue the support that's currently there for all sporting activities.’⁵²

30. Weightlifting Wales said that ‘local authority gym facilities have become easy targets over the years of austerity, due to the fact they are not statutory services’ and called for this to be changed.⁵³ Community Leisure UK (Wales) also called for support for operators of public leisure, sport and physical activity facilities and services.⁵⁴

31. Witnesses highlighted the economic and fiscal benefits of increasing activity levels. EMD UK said problems related to physical inactivity across the UK are currently costing the economy billions of pounds a year. It called for the sport recovery plan to be focused on the health benefits ‘to make the country more resilient to future infections and other public health crises’.⁵⁵ Dr Kelly Mackintosh said ‘if we can decrease any impact on the NHS and Public Health Wales then that’s a positive’.⁵⁶

32. Community Leisure UK (Wales) called on the Welsh Government to ‘develop a national wellness system to improve the nation’s health and wellness and reduce demand on services’ and to ‘use the wider determinants of health to enable a whole-system approach to improving health and wellness’.⁵⁷

33. The WLGA also discussed the ‘intrinsic link that exists between sport and physical activity with health outcomes, and how important the sustaining of that agenda is going forward as we come out of this pandemic’.⁵⁸ According to the WLGA, this underlines their argument that public health functions should sit with

⁵¹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 119

⁵² CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 119

⁵³ Weightlifting Wales written evidence

⁵⁴ Community Leisure UK (Wales) written evidence

⁵⁵ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 180

⁵⁶ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 109

⁵⁷ Community Leisure UK (Wales) written evidence

⁵⁸ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 105

local authorities as they used to historically, and as is the case in England. Huw Thomas told the Committee:

'I've spoken to many petitioners in England who speak very positively about how there is a much greater societal understanding that is therefore reflected in policies collaboration in general and specifically with this crisis between councils and health boards and spend priorities now that public health sits with local government.'⁵⁹

34. The FAW also called for greater cooperation between the health and sport sectors, stating that it has 'long campaigned Government departments to ensure that we work together' and that this may be the 'catalytic opportunity':

'...because if you bring those together, that is where we can have great power. And if the health service and the health sector turn around and say, 'Right, we want everybody to be active now, because of the benefits and because of the help with future pandemics and the spread of this disease and tackling this disease'—that could be a massive message that could hit home with a lot of people.'⁶⁰

Our view

On 23 March people across the UK were told to stay at home, except for very limited circumstances including exercise.

Equality

We welcome the importance placed on exercise by the Welsh and UK Governments during this pandemic. However, we are concerned that some groups have become less active since lockdown and that these habits could become entrenched. We cannot assume that people will return to previous levels of activity when restrictions are eased.

We are also concerned that the gap in physical inactivity between social classes seems to be widening and that the gap is also present among children. It is vital that further research work is done in this area to understand what is responsible for the changes in participation, especially among children, and the findings

⁵⁹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 113

⁶⁰ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 188

should be reflected in the Welsh Government's recovery plan and support for the sector.

Public health

We heard that there is renewed appreciation of the benefits of being physically active and that there is an opportunity to build a healthier, more active Wales. Doing so would make people more resilient to infections and relieve pressure on the NHS. The Welsh Government should therefore consider how it continues its efforts to highlight the benefits of being physically active and ensure that there is sufficient resource in place to enable more people to be more active.

Cooperation

We also heard that there should be greater cooperation between the health and sport sectors. We believe that Welsh Government can lead the way in setting out a strategy to improve the physical health of Wales. We urge the health and sport sectors to work together to make the most of the possibilities.

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government's recovery plan and financial support for the sector should to tackle the widening gap in physical inactivity within and between demographic groups.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should lead conversations with representatives from the health and sport sectors to set a long-term, joined-up policy direction for physical activity and public health.

4. The return of sport

35. Sport Wales explained that several groups have been established across the sector to look at the return to sport, 'split into, effectively, indoor sports, outdoor sports, facilities, and elite and professional'.⁶¹ In terms of the level of return, the Committee heard that sport is 'going to be different to the norm for the short term and that's what these return-to-play protocols that the groups are looking at are considering'.⁶² According to Sport Wales, the overall message from stakeholders is that they understand the public health messaging and do not

⁶¹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 85

⁶² CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 98

want to impact negatively on the good work being done, 'but they do need to see a pathway to some level of return'.⁶³

36. Across the UK, there are different sets of regulations and guidance in place on the phased return of sport. For example, outside tennis courts reopened in England on 11 May, but they remained closed until 22 June in Wales. The Committee received a number of consultation responses about the continued restriction in Wales and the impact this had on the sport and individuals. One respondent wrote:

'I am writing to you as the father of an elite junior tennis player. My son, is currently the number 1 ranked player in the United Kingdom at Under 12 age group. Although he is working remotely with his fitness and tennis coaches, he is being severely disadvantaged in comparison to players in England, Scotland and the rest of Europe at the moment because of the current guidelines on playing tennis, and the availability of public tennis facilities.'⁶⁴

37. EMD UK explained that the law on participatory sports is clear on the differences in different parts of the UK but that the differences are not always understood by the public, stating 'that there's a requirement to keep reinforcing those messages and get as much clarification and joined-up thinking in advance'.⁶⁵

38. The FAW was also in favour of joined-up thinking, saying that the current inconsistent approach causes 'some concerns as to when we can resume sport—hopefully, at the same time across the whole of the United Kingdom'.⁶⁶

39. Similarly British Dressage Wales wrote:

'Whilst I fully understand the need for the Welsh Government to move at its own speed on this issue, as part of a UK wide organisation, the disparity of conditions and restrictions, makes it very difficult to coordinate activities and competitions across the UK for British

⁶³ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 98

⁶⁴ Written evidence submitted by an individual (COV19)

⁶⁵ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 201

⁶⁶ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 208

Dressage, and it would be very helpful to have some alignment between Wales and the rest of the UK in this areas of concern.’⁶⁷

40. Jason Thomas, Director Culture, Sport and Tourism, Welsh Government told the Committee that the phased return for elite sport is an area where engagement with the UK Government could be improved:

‘...when it comes to elite sports, DCMS at the UK Government level, they've asked UK Sport to lead on preparing some protocols for a phased return for elite sport. So, they've produced a draft report, which effectively sets out four phases, with the end point being a return to full participation, the first phase being training. Just in terms of the engagement on that, though, there is good engagement with Sport Wales and UK Sport. We would like to see better engagement with DCMS before they issue these requests to UK Sport, so we can input at a higher level.’⁶⁸

41. In terms of a return to spectators being present at sporting events, the FAW called for a definition of ‘a large crowd’, explaining that 500 people in a 2,500-seat capacity stadium with social distancing measures ‘could be and should be permitted’.⁶⁹ The FAW would like to work with the Welsh Government to ensure that a ‘one-brush approach’ to large gatherings is not adopted.⁷⁰

42. On the subject of working with the Welsh Government, the WRU raised the importance of ensuring that the Principality Stadium is maintained as a ‘beacon’ in attracting major events, highlighting its economic benefits as a ‘major attraction in Wales’.⁷¹ It explained:

‘the concern, of course, moving forward, is once we've lost events this year, will we be successful in ensuring that they come back, and indeed that we're successful in ensuring other events come as well?’⁷²

43. Conwy County Borough Council also called on the Welsh Government to ‘promote that sport is safe and accessible when possible’. In its written evidence, it

⁶⁷ British Dressage Wales written evidence

⁶⁸ CWLC meeting 12 May 2020, para 117

⁶⁹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 229

⁷⁰ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 229

⁷¹ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 185

⁷² CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 162

expressed concern that people might not want to return to gyms and exercise classes:

‘When we return to normality, it may be that people are less likely to re-join gyms and exercise in classes and group settings for some time, they may have become over dependent on online fitness workouts, and may feel safer undertaking these in their own homes.’⁷³

44. Similarly, the FAW commented that ‘the trust needs to be there, especially when you're talking about team sports and contact sports, and we've got to obviously build that trust up’.⁷⁴

45. Community Leisure UK (Wales) also said that there is a role for the Welsh Government to support public leisure and sport operators ‘in addressing the public perception of safety and managing expectations of how services and facilities will be different upon reopening’:

‘This will influence how quickly customers will return, which in turn will impact business viability and recovery. It is suggested therefore that Welsh Government develops a national campaign to build public confidence and raise realistic expectations about engaging with newly reopened businesses and public spaces.’⁷⁵

Our view

The Committee heard that a number of groups have been established to look at the return to sport but that it will be a while before sporting activity returns to pre-pandemic levels.

Differences across the UK

We heard how the different approaches to easing lockdown across the UK is affecting sports and individuals. When it comes to elite sports, we agree with the call from the FAW for sport to be resumed at the same time across the whole of the UK. It is vital that the Welsh Government is represented in any discussions directed by the UK Government’s Department for Digital, Culture and Media on

⁷³ Conwy County Borough Council written evidence

⁷⁴ CWLC meeting 11 June 2020, para 187

⁷⁵ Community Leisure UK (Wales)

the return of professional sport to ensure that there is as much alignment as possible.

Guidance on mass gatherings

Sporting events can now take place behind closed doors, with spectators unlikely to be allowed in for a long time to come. However, we are calling on the Welsh Government to develop guidance for restarting spectator sports as soon as possible to enable sport organisations to prepare and put the necessary measures in place. Clubs in Wales are often very reliant on match-day income and without certainty on this issue they are likely to face significant financial challenges. We also agree with the call from the FAW for the Welsh Government to define a 'large crowd' and that applying a broad-brush model should be avoided given the different sizes and types of sporting venues.

Leadership

The Principality Stadium hosts a number of major events every year. It is essential that Wales continues to attract these events which help sustain the hospitality and tourism sectors. As we emerge from this pandemic, we urge the Welsh Government to promote Cardiff as an outstanding destination for major events.

We also heard that the Welsh Government, when it is possible to do so, should promote that sport is once again safe and accessible. As restrictions ease, people may feel nervous about returning to the gym or playing contact sports. In order for us to emerge from this pandemic with an emphasis on being active and to give sport facilities the economic kickstart that they need, we need to build public confidence and encourage people to return to their clubs and gyms.

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should provide details to the Committee of its engagement with the UK Government in relation to a joined-up approach to the return of sport.

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should issue guidance on mass gatherings for sporting events, which recognises the unsuitability of a broad-brush approach. This guidance should be developed in collaboration with sport governing bodies and facility providers as soon as possible.

Annex A – List of written evidence

All consultation responses can be viewed on our website.

The following responses were submitted by either an organisation or an individual in a professional capacity. All other responses were received from individuals in a personal capacity so their names have been removed in accordance with our privacy policy.

Reference	Organisation
COV05	Weightlifting Wales
COV26	British Dressage Wales
COV29	Swim Wales
COV30	Sport Wales
COV34	Mackintosh LTC
COV47	Community Leisure UK (Wales)
COV50	Conwy County Borough Council