

A Vision for Sport in Wales – Consultation Response



Background

The Welsh Sports Association (WSA) is the independent umbrella body that supports and represents the sport sector in Wales, including the National Governing Bodies of Sport.

The WSA understands the 'sport sector' to mean anyone involved in the business of sport and active recreation in Wales. Our role is to provide the collective voice for this sector and enable our members to become stronger, more successful and sustainable through providing a wide range of business support services.

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Overview

The WSA's vision is for a 'vibrant, active nation', and our mission is to empower our members to be stronger and more successful, contributing towards a society fit for the future. Ensuring that there are accessible opportunities for the people of Wales to be active through sport and physical recreation is key to delivering a generational shift in attitudes towards health and wellbeing.

We represent the deliverers and facilitators of a broad range of sports and activities in Wales including governing bodies, charitable trusts, private providers and local authorities, and are therefore grateful for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. The following is an amalgamation of responses received from our membership.

Consultation Response

We are proposing that the vision for sport in Wales should be:

"A nation where everyone has a lifelong enjoyment of sport"

The scope for the vision relates to:

Participating – Supporting – Delivering – Excelling

Section B – Vision Statement

Question B1 Do you agree with this vision for sport in Wales? No

Question B2 Do you have any comments on this vision for sport in Wales?

The sector often talks about "the power of sport". Arguably the main attribute of sport and physical activity is its energy – the adrenalin, exhilaration, passion, determination, enjoyment and fun. We believe that a vision for sport which inspires new audiences to recognise its benefits must be one which excites and captures the positive and attractive elements of involvement. The statement outlined undersells the contribution that sport could make to wellbeing goals and is also unlikely to elicit a behaviour change among those who currently do not enjoy sport. We also believe that the vision should reposition the perception of sport so that it is seen as being more accessible, more inclusive, more enjoyable and less about competition, elitism and exclusivity, in a way which is compelling, engaging and visual.

We appreciate that it will not be an easy task, but the draft brings sharp focus to the imperative for clear definitions of sport and physical recreation – in broadening the sporting horizon there is a danger of a lack of focus. When asked about their priorities for the new vision, over two thirds of WSA member respondents asked for clarity with regards the purpose of Sport Wales. For example, the Minister's statement referred to "walking" as a physical recreation. Without a definition or qualification of what "sport" means in this instance, there is a risk of misinterpretation of the other activities within the physical activity spectrum which currently sit within Sport Wales' remit of sport and physical recreation, particularly in the absence of the detail of the Health and Active Action Plan as mentioned in Minister's statement¹, which is yet to be published. The scale of the vision is such that we are drifting into non-traditional areas

¹ http://sport.wales/media/1926542/wg_statement.docx

where sport has not been and where others have responsibility and accountability. Sport can certainly contribute to wellbeing, but it cannot achieve this on its own.

We very much appreciate the difficulties in developing a single statement which encapsulates all that sport and physical recreation can offer and the need to please a multitude of audiences. While we applaud the ambition, it could be argued that the current vision is unrealistic in its aims as not *everyone* will want to enjoy pure sport, however, everyone *can* enjoy the benefits of being physically active through activities such as sport and physical recreation, and we believe the vision should be broadened reflect this.

It is the view of our members that increasing physical activity levels should be central to the vision and it has been suggested that it should be one “where everyone works more closely together to create a more inclusive and physically active nation - where people of all ages, ability and backgrounds can enjoy the many benefits that sport *and* physical activity bring at every stage in their lives”. There needs to be increased recognition of, and appetite for working with, the physical activity sector – for example parkrun would not be considered a sport, but it is one of the single biggest contributing factors in increasing participation within the last decade.

We agree with the four elements outlined within the scope (Participating – Supporting – Delivering – Excelling) and suggest that the Vision could be sectioned within these headings for greater clarity. In addition, the ‘elements of engagement’² help to provide greater understanding of the key areas necessary to improve participation, but they also point to the availability of choice via the variety of opportunity, and we believe that this should also be included within a vision for sport in Wales.

Section C - What we can be achieved by the vision

Question C1. Do you agree that delivery of the vision for sport in Wales will:

- **Improve people’s wellbeing, self-confidence and motivation to participate through activities that are fun and sustainable**
- **Provide people (with) the skills to reach their potential and achieve their goals**
- **Support communities to flourish by creating opportunities for everyone to join in**
- **Promote Wales to the world through our sporting success**
- **Accelerate our action to remove all forms of inequality**

Answer: No

Question C2 Do you have any comments on this section?

Again, there is ambiguity in the suggested outcomes. Statements such as “**Provide people (with) the skills to reach their potential and achieve their goals**” and “**remove all forms of inequality**” can perpetuate the controversial notion that sport is a panacea for all the world’s ills.

² http://sport.wales/media/1922960/elements_of_engagement_-_overview.pdf

Achieving the outcomes above can be *helped by* the vision but it will not solely lead to their successful delivery. For example, whilst we recognise the impact that Wales' sporting success has on showcasing the country on a global stage, again we would consider that it not the responsibility of sport in Wales alone to do so. In setting it out as a primary outcome, there is a risk that the accountability for such will be given to a diminishing sports budget, which already has significant expectations placed upon it. We agree that sport can contribute to the well-being agenda, but it is as part of a collaborative approach with other sectors so suggest that the statement be prefaced by "help to..." rather than "will".

Although it is good practice to provide activities that are 'fun and sustainable', it is unrealistic to state that all activities will be sustainable due to reliance on external funding. Also, in relation to the ambition for sport to be affordable, there needs to be a recognition that some sports will always bear a higher cost, especially those which require specific specialised equipment.

While reference is made under 'guiding principles' to WBFGA, the draft Vision should be mapped against the Act at this stage. There needs to be a much clearer statement around measuring and sharing the impact that sport can have on meeting the objectives enshrined within the Act, which is broader than the well-being objectives.

The move to outcomes-based funding by Welsh Government and its funding bodies mean that the sector must speak their language. We believe that the WBFG objectives should feature prominently in the stated outcomes of the new vision for sport in Wales, in order to help demonstrate the role that sport and active recreation plays in the wider delivery of wellbeing, and further reinforce the need for continued investment.

We have to work more closely with wider partners so that they become ambassadors for increased physical activity. One member has suggested emulating the work that Stonewall has done to help remove barriers within the LGBT community through using the concept of "allies".

Section E - Work, invest, learn and succeed together

Wales has limited resources and many of our communities are economically disadvantaged, but by working together we can ensure everyone has a lifelong enjoyment of sport. To achieve our vision sport will need to build active and purposeful relationships at every level with education, health, local government, other public sector organisations, business and the third sector.

We will:

- seek new partnerships to meet the needs of our diverse communities
- invest and deploy our resources collectively and sustainably
- maximise the use of our facilities by opening them up to others
- ensure children and young people develop a wide range of skills
- encourage children and young people to have a broad range of sporting experiences
- develop more multi-sport opportunities
- identify and nurture high-performance athletes and coaches
- celebrate the impact of sport on individual people, communities and the nation

Question E1 Do you agree with this section of the vision? No

Question E2 Do you have any other on this section?

At the outset, this element recognises the funding challenges and yet the expectation placed upon the sector is to do considerably more. To be able to deliver this the sector requires the tools for the job. In not addressing this first and foremost, this whole section is placed in jeopardy. We must use investment to help leverage other funding opportunities, and ensure the sector has the skills and capacity to create and develop partnerships.

While we understand its aspirational intentions, we do not believe that the statement that ‘We can ensure **everyone** has a lifelong enjoyment of sport’ is realistic and achievable. Some members have found the tone to be quite ‘tell’ and suggest that it should be replaced with working in partnership. There also needs to be a recognition of the contribution provided by existing partnerships and deliverers, not always an emphasis on new ones.

We would welcome a collaborative approach to developing multi-sport opportunities, as opposed to the draft vision stating ‘we will develop more multi-sport opportunities.’

Whilst the final point on celebration of impact is welcomed, the role played by impact should be much broader. For the sector to be able to truly reflect its wider impact, embedding the understanding of the need for robust and accurate data is pivotal, both from an economic and social perspective, and will require a shift in culture in terms of how we collect, analyse and present data if we are to prove our return on investment.

The impact of reduced investment in facilities cannot be understated. It is only through collaboration and early intervention with developers and planners that we will make any headway, as has been seen by the

success of the 3G collaboration Group. There is now an opportunity within the vision to embed the need for collaboration at all levels – from community multisport facilities to the sharing of elite best practice and learning by cluster governing bodies to cross sector, multi-outcome partnerships.

We welcome the commitments to “*ensure children and young people develop a wide range of skills*” and “*encourage children and young people to have a broad range of sporting experiences*” but suggest that established sporting pathways are not necessarily sympathetic to these aims. More must be done to support schools in identifying potential across all sports, and in signposting to the broad variety of opportunities available within community settings.

For the vision to be delivered, access to school and education facilities is vital, therefore the sustainable development principles (ways of working) of the WBFG³ are very relevant (Long-term, Prevention, Integration, Collaboration, Involvement). Funding bodies across government MUST lead by example in evidencing the tangible benefits of collaborative and integrated working for it to have any hope of cascading through the sector. One of the key indicators would be to ensure that other accountable bodies sign up to this Vision as an integral part of their own commitments to delivering wellbeing.

³ <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/future-generations-act/?lang=en> p.7

Section F - Creating experiences that are welcoming, fun and safe

This section of the vision contains the following text

To achieve our vision, we need to acknowledge that individually people feel very differently about sport. Our vision commits us to reach out to everyone including people who do not consider themselves as sporty and create new experiences that are relevant to them. We also need to make sure our welcome extends to everyone and any activity connected with sport such as volunteering, officiating and supporting.

We will:

- encourage people to get involved by making their first step into sport easy
- create a welcoming and inclusive environment so people stay involved
- focus on creating fun experiences especially for children and young people
- involve families as a way of encouraging everyone to get involved
- look after each other and ensure everyone involved is protected
- create spaces where people feel safe to join in
- value the contribution that everyone has to make

Question F1 Do you agree with this section of the vision? YES

Question F2 Do you have any comments on this section?

The WSA believes that we all have a duty to ensure that, in encouraging children and vulnerable adults to participate in sport, we do our utmost to ensure that they are safe. This duty of care is fundamental in the development of sport and active recreation and our members are committed to ensuring that the participants in their activities are both safe and enjoy their experiences.

We support any moves to increase the availability of and access to inclusive sporting opportunities and welcome any support in encouraging families to get involved. Again, we believe that this should include a cross-portfolio approach from government in highlighting the benefits of physical activity, particularly in terms of working with employers to demonstrate the positive impact on mental and physical wellbeing and its influence on productivity – not just from participation but also from a volunteering perspective.

There is also the opportunity to engage with wider audiences, such as within the workplace to get more people involved in activity and volunteering. Sport Wales has previously delivered a Workplace Challenge Programme, we would welcome any evaluation of this that could inform future delivery opportunities.

For this element of the vision to be delivered effectively and sustained in the long term, there must be a commitment to providing support through training; opportunities to collaborate, network and share best practice; and the relevant data and insight to identify and evidence emerging trends and requirements. The sector also needs to unite behind the diversity and opportunity that currently exists, and work together to help signpost activities.

If we are to increase opportunity and choice so that we can encourage more diverse participation, relevant support should be given to all sports, regardless of size, and should be based on outcomes delivery. We should also ensure that we fully understand the landscape of sports delivery – the activities of many private providers and those not in receipt of public funding are often not captured in any participation datasets.

Section G - Develop opportunities that are local, visible and inspiring

The vision contains the following text

To become a nation where everyone has a lifelong enjoyment of sport we will need to provide more opportunities, across a wide range of activities, throughout Wales. We will need to target resources, think innovatively and work together differently. The opportunities we develop must reflect the needs of local people. They should also fully utilise local facilities and the natural environment and tap into the resources of the community.

We will:

- develop new activities that are easily available at a local level
- create more opportunities for beginners and returners
- enhance the visibility of sport through emerging technologies and social media
- actively promote opportunities to people and communities with low levels of participation
- develop approaches that will inspire and support people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to achieve their goals
- build an inspirational and highly skilled workforce, both paid and voluntary
- promote our local champions and our national heroes as role models

Question G1 Do you agree with this section of the vision? YES

Question G2 Do you have any comments on this section?

This success of this entire section is predicated on the availability of robust data and insight and the development of commercial approaches to satisfying consumer demands. Without an understanding of current and future needs at a local level, it will be impossible to develop and deliver opportunities which are relevant and sustainable. We also recognise that participation figures are not indicative of enjoyment levels, so measurement tools which consider subjective outcomes must be explored.

We agree that there is a need to develop new opportunities but would also like to see acknowledgement of the contribution of existing activities, and enhancement of these where successful. We would not want to lose sight of the need to keep those already active within sport engaged.

While we welcome the acknowledgement of moves to become more customer focused in terms of addressing local needs, we caution that words must match the deeds. According to a WSA member survey on national sporting bodies, only one in three is satisfied with their level of knowledge and skill around business development. We believe therefore, there must be a commitment to improving the skills of the sector in responding to consumer demand, and in supporting sporting organisations in Wales to develop their resilience through improved capacity and capability.

We believe that more should be done to increase the diversity of the workforce at all levels so that we can properly target hard to reach communities, taking a cross sector, multi-outcome partnership approach so that we can ensure maximum value for money in delivering opportunities.

Section H - Ensure sport is accessible, inclusive and affordable, leaving no one behind

The vision contains the following text

We recognise the more we reduce barriers to people getting involved in sport the greater chance we have of achieving our vision. We must ensure that sport is accessible to everyone, and that organisations delivering sport represent, involve and reflect the diversity of Wales. To achieve our vision we are going to have to reach out to people who are not engaged in sport to better understand what is stopping them getting involved.

We will:

- continually seek feedback from people who are not involved in sport on how to meet their needs
- invest in communities and groups of people with low levels of participation
- develop opportunities that respond to the needs of people in a changing society
- make it as easy as possible to participate in a range of activities throughout life
- deliver programmes that develop people as well as create champions
- work to tackle discrimination, achieve equality and promote a culture of fair play
- develop more innovative activities that are low cost
- embrace a sharing ethos, especially where equipment is needed

Question H1 Do you agree with this section of the vision? YES

Question H2 Do you have any comments on this section?

Fundamentally, we believe that sport needs to be simpler to access.

There also needs to be clarity around language here – “*not engaged in sport*” could mean many things - from low levels of participation (once a week) to those who are completely inactive. Renewing the vision for sport provides a unique and much needed opportunity to aid the understanding of the role and accountability of sport within the broad physical activity spectrum. As was reinforced in the Minister’s statement, we believe that reaching the inactive is beyond the responsibility of sport alone, not only requiring a commitment to collaboration and integration with the activities of other government departments such public health and communities, but also a fiscal contribution in terms of their budget allocation. The more we extend our reach beyond core sport, the more our budgets and financial assets are compromised in diluting the resources available, and this risk must be recognised and mitigated.

There also needs to be recognition from funders/policymakers of the effort involved in reaching beyond core audiences to those “*not engaged in sport*”. This requires significantly different tactics and focused research and insight, so that resources allocated are suitably proportional to the outcomes generated.

We would also call for clarity around the expected role of sport - is it the sector’s responsibility to deliver core sports to as wide an audience as possible, using public funding to subsidise and or support/access for those sports and in those areas where there are barriers to participation, or is it to address and deliver wider public policy objectives such as reducing inequality, tackling obesity and improving mental wellbeing, increasing skills and employability thus reducing poverty, and supporting cohesive communities thus tackling social isolation?

Few sports organisations in Wales are set up to deliver beyond the former and for the latter, there needs to be a realism around capacity and capability, given the current reductions in funding against increased expectations.

Not only are we asking sport to become more commercially viable, we are also asking them to focus their efforts on increasing the participation of the disengaged, particularly among deprived communities.

We would also contend that “continually” seeking feedback from those not involved in sport on how to meet their needs will require significant support. In addressing this issue from a business context, how would the sector know how to reach these hitherto unknown audiences if they are not currently engaged? Rather, we believe it is the responsibility of the sector to use evidence and insight to produce and deliver engaging and relevant activities in which audiences/consumers in Wales wish to participate.

Further consideration needs to be given to the detail of this section on terms of whether the statements are the role of sport in Wales or the role of Sport Wales for the sake of clarity of interpretation.

Section I - We will take risks, be bold and entrepreneurial

The vision contains the following text:

Our vision for sport in Wales is radical but achievable. Everyone can have a life-long enjoyment of sport but only if we do something radically different. We recognise the many things that sport does well but we will need to take risks, be bold and be entrepreneurial if we are to reach everyone.

We will

- develop new experiences for people who are currently not interested in sport
- creatively maximize the use of our natural environment
- use emerging technologies to deliver new sporting opportunities
- think big and work across boundaries
- set challenging targets for high performance programmes and what they can achieve
- think entrepreneurially to create new commercial and cooperative opportunities
- increase our income streams so we can have an impact on more people
- look to the future to ensure sport remains relevant

Question I1. Do you agree with this section of the vision? YES

Question I2. Do you have any other comments on this section?

Since the inception of Sport Wales almost half a century ago, sport in Wales has achieved considerable success from its well-intentioned public funding. However, in light of the diminishing public purse, the continued success of the sport sector in Wales will be dependent on achieving significant behaviour change in becoming less reliant and more resilient. This is not just about reaching new audiences but also in consolidating existing reach and ensuring long term sustainability.

With 80% of WSA members stating in response to a members survey that they “don’t have the capacity to undertake business development events or fundraising to grow their income”⁴, it MUST be recognised that these changes in behaviour and the acquisition of the necessary skills will not happen overnight, and that the implementation of any new funding models are sympathetic to the change process.

We strongly welcome the statement that there needs to be a bolder and less risk averse approach to increasing participation, and this needs to be reflected in the actions of Sport Wales, particularly in their funding approach. This will require a change in culture which needs to be embedded throughout the sector.

For this element of the vision to be successful we look to leadership from Sport Wales, both in supporting sports deliverers to acquire the necessary skills to become more resilient, and in leading by example in its own commercial endeavours and use of innovative technology. The evidence raised within “Acting Today for an Active Tomorrow” clearly demonstrates the vital need to consider the role of technology and how sport will be delivered and accessed in the future.

We look forward to an early response to the recommendation within the Sport Wales Independent Review to establish an agreement between Sport Wales and the WSA on who is to lead the commercialisation programme for NGBs, and strongly suggest given the outcomes-based delivery focus, this support is extended beyond just governing bodies to any delivery partner in sport.

⁴ WSA Growth & Resilience Programme for Sport in Wales 2018

The sector would also welcome the provision of relevant insight in terms of identifying new and emerging best practice for increasing efficiencies and opportunities, and in supporting the sector to demonstrate its return on investment, thus maximising its attractiveness to potential partners and investors.

We believe that a good starting point would be to identify those sporting organisations already achieving impact without significant public investment such as community foundations and private providers - for the sharing of best practice and knowledge transfer and to enable their activities to be scaled up where appropriate.

Section J - Our Guiding Principles

Our Guiding Principles

As part of the consultation we will be continuing to consider what guiding principles should underpin this vision. These need to sit within the broad framework of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 but (must) be relevant to sport.

We are proposing that our guiding principles should reflect a real ambition to

- **Tackle inequality**
- **Act ethically**
- **Use resource wisely**
- **Demonstrate exemplary governance**

Question J1 Do you agree with these guiding principles? YES

Question J2 If any, what other guiding principles do you think should underpin the vision?

- A commitment to developing the resilience of the sector
- A commitment to collaboration in order to reduce duplication, maximise efficiencies and share best practice.
- Embedding the principles of the WBFGA from the offset, not just as an afterthought.
- A commitment to creating impact.
- A commitment to creating a team of allies from other sectors who can advocate the role of the sector in contributing to a better society.