

## **IFRCS05 Katie Thirlaway, Dean Cardiff Met School of Sport and Health Sciences**

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Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

[Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee](#)

[Effaith Gostyngiadau Cyllid ar Ddiwylliant a Chwaraeon | Impact of Funding Reductions for Culture and Sport](#)

Ymateb gan: Katie Thirlaway, Deon Ysgol Chwaraeon a Gwyddorau Iechyd Caerdydd | Evidence from: Katie Thirlaway, Dean Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences

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Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences delivers the largest portfolio of sport undergraduate programmes in the UK, including BSc & MSc programmes in: Sport and Exercise Science, Sport Conditioning, Rehabilitation and Massage, Sport Coaching, Sport Media & Broadcast, Sport and Physical Education, Sport Performance Analysis and Sport Management. The most recent UK-wide assessment of research (REF2021) rated 88% of our research as world-leading or internationally excellent.

The sports sector requires high technical skills and knowledge, with many roles (coaches, instructors, managers) needing graduate-level education and training. Funding cuts for sport could affect student recruitment and graduate opportunities. Watching, competing, participating, working and volunteering in sport is attractive to students wishing to develop during studies and secure employment after graduation. Any damage to the sector could make Wales a less appealing location of study

Wales is a successful sporting nation and Cardiff offers excellent facilities and opportunities for participating in and watching sport. Performance sport is the attraction factor but is not the largest employer. Community and participation sport and physical activity are larger employers, including not-for-profit trusts and private exercise and fitness businesses. The social return on investment in support is significant.

**1. What impacts has reduced funding had on your organisation and sector so far?**

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We collaborate with several national governing bodies in sport and are aware of their concerns about reduced funding. To a certain extent the impact of cuts has been masked, and possibly delayed, by the focus on the Paris Olympics and Paralympics. Our major concern is cuts to public and not-for-profit community sport organisations, who own and run the sport infrastructure that is critical for the long-term sustainability of our community sport, exercise and physical activity programmes.

The closure of facilities would have a devastating effect on the sport talent pipeline and the health and wellbeing of future generations. The value of sport to the economic and social cohesion of Wales cannot be over-emphasised, and our ability to compete on the international elite stage will be impacted by funding cuts.

The potential impact on the Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences & Met Sport is multi-faceted. Recruitment of Dual Career Athletes will be impacted if national governing bodies and sport teams cannot offer appropriate coaching and support services. Our support for non-student athletes, via the Talented Athlete Support Scheme, would be affected similarly.

In the longer term, students keen to work in the sport industry might be drawn to places where support is well-funded. We have c. 4,000 students currently enrolled on programmes in our sports portfolio, contributing to the economy of Cardiff during their studies (the economic benefit of higher education in Wales is well established).<sup>1</sup> We place students in sport settings across Wales and funding cuts could reduce the number of placements available.

From our civic mission work in the community, we have noted that a reduction in staffing across the sports sector has meant areas of Cardiff being under-resourced and unlikely to increase provision in future. As is familiar in many sectors, long-term planning is being undercut by short term funding cycles. The cycles and inability to carry forward staff costs in some instances means activities are short-term and intervention-based, rather than changing the system long-term to ensure movement and physical activity become the norm in daily life.

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly, U. and McNicoll, I. 2021. *The economic impact of higher education in Wales*. Cardiff: Universities Wales.

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**2. What measures have you taken in light of it, such as changing what you do and how you do it.**

We are supporting the sports industry through collaborations and partnerships around facilities, student placements and wider work-related learning opportunities. Students cannot be a replacement workforce but can add value. We have established our “Open Campus” approach to delivering Sport & Physical Activity education. Cardiff Met Open Campus is a collaborative way of working between staff, students and the community that delivers sport, physical activity, outdoor play, and health and wellbeing opportunities. It is linked to the shared ambition to develop Cardiff as a world-leading Capital City of sport, physical activity and health, and to Universities Wales’ Civic Mission Framework. What makes Open Campus sector-leading is alignment with the University curriculum. Free and paid for community activities and programmes on and off campus are linked to students’ degree outcomes, professional placements and research and innovation projects. In 2022-23, 9471 members of the community engaged with Open Campus. This included 41 primary, secondary, international and SEN schools, 25 from communities in deprived areas. Events included tennis, basketball, netball, hockey and dance, as well as community programmes. More than 900 students were involved in planning and delivery.

We have put additional focus on specific areas of Cardiff based on health inequalities and, similarly, our research has focused where the need is greatest. Recognising the difficult circumstances, we are taking a systems approach to focus on strategic changes as much as possible, rather than piecemeal delivery of activities within communities. We are also looking to source additional funding from external sources.

**3. To what extent will these impacts be irreversible (e.g. venues closing, or specialist skills being lost rather than a temporary restriction in activities)?**

Venues closing will have a significant impact on the social, physical and mental health of communities. Physical activity is critical for the health of the nation and young people. The loss of facilities and access to outdoor activity would have a significant impact on availability of sports and activities, removing diverse choices for individuals to participate. Longer impacts could compound health issues and mean a complete restructuring of the performance sport landscape.

Major sporting events are of significant value to Wales, and the nation has considerable experience in hosting such events. Since 2010, we have hosted both

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the men's and women's UEFA Champions League finals, world championship boxing matches, an Ashes test and the Ryder Cup. In 2028, we will co-host the men's UEFA European Football Championship.

Sporting fixtures, be they national Six Nations matches or smaller events, bring visitors to Wales to spend money and then return later as a tourist. Aside from large stadia, our outdoor spaces lead to significant sport and physical activity participation and event tourism. These include the Wales Coast Path, the three National Parks of Wales and our five National Landscapes (previously known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

#### **4. What interventions would you like to see from the Welsh Government, beyond increased funding?**

We need to value sport and recognise the role it plays in the health and wellbeing of the nation, through attracting our communities to engage in sport and physical activity and through bringing visitors into Wales to contribute to the economy.

In difficult economic circumstances, Welsh Government could promote systems working to bring sectors together. This would allow for mapping of the system nationally, regionally and locally. In some instances, we replicate structures where we could work in partnership with other UK bodies. This could reduce administrative and operational costs, releasing funds to be invested directly into facilities, clubs and communities.

Any interventions need robust evidence gathering before, during and after their implementation. For example, we need to have a better understanding of the impact of increased sedentary behaviour in Wales over the last ten years if we are to better understand the impact of cuts in the next ten.

#### **5. To what extent do the impacts you describe fall differently on people with protected characteristics and people of a lower socioeconomic status?**

Sport is costly for junior athletes and their families. For successive Olympics, the proportion of Team GB athletes from elite private schools outside Wales has shown that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less able to

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engage and succeed in sport.<sup>2</sup> If facilities are closed and funding for equipment reduced, then Wales will be at a significant disadvantage.

Our work has historically focused on areas of deprivation, and this will continue to be the case. However, research from Public Health Wales notes that sedentary behaviours are more prevalent in affluent areas of the city. We do not have the resource to cover all areas of the city, and it would be a concern if other organisations cannot provide that support due to funding pressures. Similarly, we have attempted to create a team that can the pathway from the first 1,000 days (pre/post-natal) to aged 60+ activities, but full support requires a robust network of organisations.

Free Swimming Initiative has not been affected, and we have been able to continue to deliver weekly splash sessions. However, we have noticed more requests for funding from specific community groups and charities, especially for women and girls.

Beyond the funding cuts, the continued pressures on the cost-of-living are having a huge effect on access to swimming and aquatic activities. Schools are still under pressure, even with the support we provide, and people are still unable to afford swimming sessions or lessons. The committee should note our work with Swim Wales, which found only 16% of children in Cardiff could swim and a range of concerning indicators across Wales.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Grierson, J. 2024. *Third of Team GB athletes for Paris Olympics educated privately*. London: Guardian.

<sup>3</sup> Cardiff Metropolitan University. 2024. *Cardiff children's swimming ability lowest across all of Wales, as new initiative formed to tackle participation barriers*. Cardiff: Cardiff Metropolitan University.

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