

IFRCS51 Paul Whapham, Chief Executive Officer, Wales Hockey

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: Paul Whapham, Prif Swyddog Gweithredol, Hoci cymru | Evidence from: Paul Whapham, Chief Executive Officer, Wales Hockey

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

The budget reduction has caused major stress and operational challenges to our organisation. To credit Sport Wales, the absorption of the majority of the cut and the ability to only pass on 3.5% was welcomed and should be commended. However, we are aware that this is a short-term fix to a much larger problem. We have been dealing with budget reduction and effects of inflation since 2012 adding to the ongoing challenges facing Hockey in Wales.

These 3.5% cuts were in addition to the forced cuts which were applied to Hockey Wales as a result of the 2022 School Sports survey. Our NGB faced a 50% cut in its development funding and these extra cuts have deepened the impact on Hockey in Wales. Notable impacts have been

- 20% reduction in staff and recruitment freeze.
 - Continue with a no pay award for staff for the 3rd year. Enhancing the chance that qualifies, experienced staff will leave the sector.
 - Operational budgets reduced, therefore impacting the programmes delivered in schools and social-economic area.
 - Reduction in resources reducing the organisations capability to enable the Sport to be safe and inclusive
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- Increased fees passed onto international players who are trying to represent the country on the world stage.
- Increase in membership fees passed onto our current membership. Increasing the entry to sport and creating further barriers for those looking to increase their physical activity.

Furthermore, the due to the difficult Local Government settlement and the non-statutory nature of sport. Many if not all of the local authorities have reduced their sport and leisure budgets. This has had wide ranging impact on both our NGB and the community clubs operating in our Sport. As a sport we have seen. Significant uplift in fees and charges to access facilities, changes in opening hours reducing the opportunity to train and play matches. There has also been changes to maintenance and lack of up keep of already out dated pitches and change rooms, increasing the pace that these facilities fall into greater disrepair.

All of these factors have contributed to a reduction in program delivery to under represented groups and communities and increased fees to existing participants, adding an extra barrier to sport.

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

- Reduction in Staff – We have reduced our core staff by 20% and exploring whether we should make further redundancies.
 - Shared Service – Where possible we have entered shared service operations with others NGB's. Two examples would be finance and marketing, were we have pooled resources to 'buy' time and expertise of central staff at the WSA
 - Increased Reliance on Volunteers: Due to reduced funding for staff, Hockey Wales and local clubs have had to increase their reliance on volunteers to manage programs, coach teams, and organise events. We have also reduced the amount of events and competitions that we deliver.
 - Partnerships and Collaborations: Hockey Wales has pursued partnerships with private sector organisations, educational institutions, and local authorities to fill the funding gaps. Sponsorship deals and in-kind support have become crucial for keeping programs alive.
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- **Adapted Programming:** To cope with fewer resources, programs have been streamlined, with more focus on retaining core activities such as elite player development, while scaling back on outreach programs that target new players.
- **Increased Fees for Participants:** Many clubs have had to raise membership and participation fees to cover the costs of facilities and coaching, which risks excluding lower-income participants from the sport.

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)?

- **Long-term Loss of Talent:** Reduced funding for development programs and fewer coaches could result in a permanent loss of talent in Welsh hockey. The talent pipeline might dry up, and many potential players may never get the opportunity to develop their skills. Many may never start playing hockey due to the lack of opportunity or cost.
- **Venues and Facilities:** If community clubs or local authorities are unable to maintain hockey facilities due to reduced funding, some venues could close permanently. Once these facilities are lost, they are unlikely to be replaced due to high costs.
- **Loss of Expertise:** Fewer opportunities for professional development and career advancement could lead to experienced coaches, administrators, and technical staff leaving the sport for good, taking their expertise with them.
- **National Impact:** The cumulative effect on national teams and international representation could take years to recover, weakening Wales' standing in field hockey on a global scale.

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

Provide multi year funding and a move away from single year project funding that does not enable appropriate business planning and job certainty

Clearer guidance and working practice between the roles of NHS, Local Government, Sport Wales and Funded partners. Greater collaboration and shared working practice will improve efficiency, increase opportunities and provide greater impact.

A Systemic approach to leveraging community focussed schools program to enhance public access sports facility, especially in rural and under represented communities. Work closer with Sport at design phase to ensure new facilities are fit for purpose.

Provide an allocation of capital funding for the specific enhancement and upgrade of existing sports facilities.

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

- **Lower Socioeconomic Status:** Increased fees for participation and the loss of free or subsidised programs are likely to disproportionately affect those from lower-income families, preventing them from accessing the sport. This could deepen the inequality of opportunity in Welsh hockey, where wealthier participants are able to continue while others are excluded.
- **Women and Girls:** Women and girls in sport often face greater barriers to participation, and cuts in funding may worsen this disparity. If programs specifically targeting the growth of women's hockey are reduced, it could reverse progress made in gender equality within the sport.
- **Disability and Inclusive Programs:** Programs designed to increase accessibility for people with disabilities could be disproportionately affected by funding cuts. If specialised programs and facilities are scaled back, it could limit the opportunities for disabled athletes to participate in hockey.
- **Ethnic Minorities:** Minority groups, which often rely on community outreach programs to get involved in sports, may see fewer opportunities due to the scaling back of grassroots initiatives.

In summary, the impacts of the Welsh Government's funding cuts on Hockey Wales and the broader sector have been significant, affecting access to facilities, participation rates, and talent development. These changes have also had

unequal effects, particularly on lower-income families, women and girls, and marginalized groups. The long-term consequences could be profound if venues are lost, or specialist skills are eroded, creating barriers that may not be easily reversible.
