

About Sport Wales

We are the national organisation responsible for developing and promoting sport and physical recreation in Wales.

Sport Wales is the main adviser to Welsh Government on sport and supports the delivery of its strategic priorities through the Vision for Sport in Wales and the Sport Wales Strategy. We work with individuals, clubs, organisations and national partners across a range of policy areas with the aim of creating an active nation where everyone can have a lifelong enjoyment of sport.

We also distribute National Lottery grants to enable sport in Wales to thrive, investing in grassroots sport through our community grants schemes as well as performance sport.

The key challenges

The major concern for Sport Wales is the detrimental impact that Covid-19 has had on children and young people's activity levels. Moreover, in addition to the physical health impacts of reduced sporting engagement, the social and mental health impacts could be extremely far reaching. What is most concerning in relation to this is the fact that we are largely seeing those impacts concentrated amongst existing underrepresented groups, thus compounding the inequalities we have long seen in society.

The national picture

As part of Sport Wales' role in monitoring activity levels in Wales we have conducted two separate national surveys during the pandemic period. The first survey was conducted at the start of the initial lockdown period, whilst the most recent took place in early October as some council authority areas started to enter local lockdowns.

The evidence across both showcased that children in Wales were seeing reduced levels of physical activity. In the first survey conducted in May we discovered that,

- 9% adults 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 was 14%.
- 26% report that their children are doing more activity since the COVID-19 restrictions, while 35% report that their children are doing less. Overall, this suggests a net reduction of 9 percentage points.
- Those children from lower socio-economic backgrounds appear to be experiencing the greatest reductions.

It is very clear that the pandemic has reduced children's physical activity levels, and that reduction is concentrated among groups who already face health inequalities and lower levels of physical activity participation. This presents the risk of a generational concern of increased underlying health risks to children growing up in Wales if this is not addressed over the longer term. In the immediate term, this break in exercise and the social and community engagement aspect that goes hand in hand with sport, also presents a very worrying mental health concern. We know that sport plays a crucial part in mental health outcomes and the personal and social development of children and young people. The limited access to those settings that young people in Wales have enjoyed throughout 2020 threatens to undermine that impact, causing greater strain on already under pressure health services.

The most recent data did show some positive movement, in that adults are more likely to report that their child/children are now doing *more* sport/physical activity outside of school than before the COVID-19 restriction were first introduced in March, (weekday: 31% more, 22% less. Weekend: 30% more, 23% less). For *weekdays* this is consistent across socioeconomic backgrounds, however, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to report that their child/children are now doing *less* activity on *weekend* days.

This evidence not only highlights the continued inequalities across areas of deprivation where children's physical activity is concerned, but the differential between weekday and weekends highlights the importance of a school setting to driving that activity. It showcases that the extended period away from school will have had a detrimental impact on access, opportunity and motivation to take part in physical recreation, but also the need to prioritise this setting in future endeavours to address these inequalities.

The solution

Sport Wales firmly believe that the most impactful setting by which to address these ongoing concerns relating to children and young people's physical and mental health are within the school environment. Our evidence shows that not only is this the most natural setting to re-engage children and young people, but it is the setting in which that very cohort of the population wish to increase their physical activity participation.

A cultural offer, operating every day from the end of the school day to early evening, creates a space and opportunity for the delivery of the enrichment offer integral to the new curriculum. This would not be an additional burden for the teaching profession, but rather an offer delivered by bringing partners with expertise into the solution. Examples would include national governing bodies of sport through their club networks, or local sport delivery teams engaging pupils in post-school activities. This in turn also creates the platform for additional outreach work by bridging the gap between that school environment and future activities in community and club settings.

The largest and most representative sample of pupil voice in Wales is undertaken through the School Sport Survey. The last time this research was conducted it captured the views, opinions and actions of over 120,000 pupils in Wales from over 1,000 separate primary and secondary schools. We know from this evidence that an extension of the school day would have a dramatic impact on pupils' readiness to undertake physical activity.

96% of pupils say they would like to do more sport

When examining the primary barriers to why more children and young people are not being more active the results all indicate that an extension of the school day would have a substantial impact.

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- 35% of pupils would do more sport if they had their friends with them.
 - 30% would do more sport if they had more time.
 - 20% would do more sport if activities were easier to get to.
 - 9% if they didn't have to go home immediately and 8% if they didn't have to catch a bus.
 - Other issues included cost (22%) and availability of equipment (13%).
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We can see how every barrier identified is resolved through community schools who engage sporting groups to utilise school facilities beyond the scope of a traditional school day offering. Creating these opportunities in a school environment removes the barriers to inequalities. The opportunity is cost free and universal to the pupil. It is often as simple as the school gates closing and no alternative transport offers leading to children being restricted in their access to physical activity, culture and wellbeing initiatives. This is a prime example of the new curriculum promoting equality of opportunity in Wales at a point where inequality of activity is an ever increasing concern in light of Covid-19, especially as a potential second wave and localised lockdowns become more prevalent during a winter period.

What is positive is that there already exists evidence of community focused schools engaging in high-quality practice. Examples such as Ysgol Bae Baglan expanding the use of school assets to engage the community, highlighted in the [Estyn Community School Report](#), showcase where this approach can work. That offer consists of a *'wide array of cultural activities, sporting programmes and the extension of the school day helps the school to develop a relationship with the community and allows local people to benefit from the school facilities.'* Estyn estimated that around *'forty-five clubs and organisations use the school's facilities. This means that, on average, around 350 members of the community regularly participate in activities on the school site.'* Some of the benefits identified include,

- Improved community relationships and greater mutual respect between citizens within the locality.
- Improved access to resources that support pupils' education and wellbeing out of school hours.
- Improved awareness of and access to support for parents and families.
- Greater sense of belonging, ownership and pride amongst pupils in relation to their school community.
- Raised aspirations for pupils and members of the community.
- Improved attendance in the secondary phase.

Not only does reimagining the school day and use of school facilities answer the drastic challenge of reversing the damage Covid-19 has had on children's physical activity, it also provides several other benefits. We've seen the success of sporting engagement in schools driving the development of wider skills through the Young Ambassadors Programme.

There are almost 6,000 Young Ambassadors in schools, colleges and universities across Wales. 19,000 Young Ambassadors have taken part in the programme across its 10-year history. In a survey of Welsh Young Ambassadors, 96% of them said that the programme had given them more confidence, while 98% felt it had improved their leadership skills. Engaging the Young Ambassador network in an enhanced school day, we can build on existing work and create a future workforce with skills developed through social engagement and volunteering that enhances not only the sport sector, but education and employability. With [recent ComRes data](#) showing 30% of adults and 44% of those ages 16-34 seeking to volunteer in sport in the next 12 months, we know this is a sector primed for growth.

The bold commitment to a physical literacy informed curriculum has to be realised in practice. It is widely recognised that to develop a lifelong enjoyment of sport and physical activity individuals need to be physically literate. Physical literacy can be described as *"the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life."* (Whitehead, 2016). It has always been the case that the focus on physical activity and wellbeing in the new curriculum would need to be matched by informed action, and support from a wider field than the teaching profession. This approach to a reimagined school day expedites the commitments to a new, community focused curriculum.

Furthermore, it provides expanded child-care and economic benefits at a time where families need the most support. It can also be a catalyst for community regeneration by engaging a range of stakeholders in the delivery of a sport and culture offer around the traditional school day.

Developing an enhanced approach to the school day that could work for all children across Wales is something we would be supportive of seeing the Welsh Government reviewing and piloting. This should be undertaken in collaboration with the education sector but wider community partners such as Sport Wales, the

sport sector, the arts sector and local government. At Sport Wales we will be bringing together key stakeholders across different policy portfolios in the coming weeks as part of a roundtable education policy approach. We believe this will be an important first step in this process.
