

Engagement findings

Participation in sports in disadvantaged areas

1. Background

1. In February 2022, the Senedd's Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sports and International Relations Committee launched an inquiry into Participation in sports in disadvantaged areas.
2. The Citizen Engagement Team supported the Committee by facilitating a series of one to one interviews with grassroots coaches in Wales. Initial engagement plans included running 5 interviews and specific focus groups with relevant audiences, however, due to the breadth of evidence gathered from interviews it was decided on this occasion that additional focus groups would not add value to the inquiry. In order to gather enough relevant evidence the number of interviews also changed from the initial plan of 5 to 14.
3. This report summarises the Citizen Engagement Team's findings.

2. Participants

4. The Citizen Engagement Team worked with 14 grassroots coaches who work in disadvantaged areas of south Wales. The coaches interviewed work with a wide variety of people, including audiences within the terms of reference of the inquiry. These included:
 - Young people
 - Women and girls
 - Older people

- People with learning disabilities
 - Black and minority ethnic communities.
5. Engagement work focused on the voices of people with lived experience in disadvantaged areas of south Wales as the Committee incorporated visits to north Wales to engage with relevant audiences as part of the inquiry.

Organisations:

- Canton Rangers FC
- Stallion Boxing Academy
- Golf Wales
- Cricket Wales
- Black Swimming Association
- Clock Cricket
- Step into Sports Project
- Grangetown Pavilion
- Caerau Ely RFC
- Football Association of Wales
- Pembroke and Pembroke Dock ABC
- Sporting Memories
- Disability Sport Wales

We would like to thank all the participants for taking part in this inquiry.

3. Methodology

6. In April 2022 the Citizen Engagement Team facilitated 14 interviews with grassroots coaches across south Wales. Ten of these interviews took place virtually on Microsoft Teams whilst four were conducted face to face.
7. The objective of the engagement was to gather the views and experiences of coaches from across south Wales who have lived experience of supporting groups of people in disadvantaged areas to participate in sporting activities.
8. The format of engagement was largely comparable between sessions but varied slightly to meet participants' needs.
9. Participants were asked to discuss the following:
 1. What are the main barriers to participation in sports in disadvantaged areas and how do these intersect with other factors including age, sex and gender, socioeconomic status, geography, disability, and ethnicity?
 2. How effective are current interventions at increasing participation in disadvantaged areas?
 3. How should public funding be used to increase participation in disadvantaged areas?
 4. Are there examples of best practices, both within Wales and internationally, that Wales should learn from to increase participation in sports in disadvantaged areas?
10. Notes from each session are available to Members of the Committee and its staff upon request.

4. Key Themes

Cost of living:

11. One of the key themes that emerged during discussions was the ongoing and upcoming impact of the cost of living crisis. Many of the coaches interviewed pointed out that the cost of living crisis had a deeper impact on everyday life in disadvantaged areas and that this had a clear knock-on effect on participation in sports.

'I think we will see a huge amount of issues from the cost of living crisis. What comes first, do you eat or do you play rugby? £15 is huge for some families, kids travelling to away games – petrol costs are huge. It's bound to have a lasting effect.'

'If we continue to drive the price of sports up locally and do not reinvest the funds in the right way. I do think you will see a long term impact of this which ultimately affects young people being able to participate. Maybe not in young people wanting to take part in sports, but certainly in the number of volunteers who want to take part.'

12. Community sports clubs spoke about the increased cost of living and the additional financial implications attached to this, meaning that they had to increase membership fees which led to young people being less likely to participate.

'We charge £10 a head per month – from under 8s to the youth side. We have to increase to £15 this month due to costs going up; we can't afford not to do it'

'I think parents see that for £10 a month you get a training session and a game of football on a Saturday. Think issues around participation becomes more apparent when you get to under 15s where transport becomes a bigger issue, parents lose interest. Extra costs might affect those kids lower down the age range and they are sure to turn things like buying petrol to take your kids to games into a dilemma.'

The rent is ridiculous for the gym it's £1k a month, not including energy bills – how is that sustainable especially with what's coming up? There is no support from the government or council. How will that affect young people when I have to lift the cost? Especially in the area we live in? I'd love for boxing classes to be free... but that just isn't possible

Facilities:

13. Participants illustrated the impact that a lack of suitable facilities has on participation in sports. In some cases, this meant that certain audiences felt excluded from sports, in particular women and BAME communities.

'It's their basic needs aren't catered for in the facilities. There is nothing that tells a young girl that she doesn't belong in football than walking into a changing room and there are five stinking urinals and maybe one seated toilet where the lock doesn't work and the toilet seat is falling off and there are no

sanitary bins. Girls are telling us that when they're on their period, they won't be going to training or they won't be playing football'

'I think that having facilities in place and good accessibility is a major factor. When you are able to go into their communities it's a big help, cuts down travelling and increases participation. We have worked with refugees in refugee centres – basically running activities in places that are safe for them. Working in the community has made a massive difference, but there are some areas still where the setup isn't there and it's hard.'

14. Participants felt that the lack of suitable facilities was an issue that affected several different sports and was most prominently felt in disadvantaged areas.

'There is a lot of participation in Cardiff in football, from those disadvantaged areas. But I would say the main issue is the resources/pitches available'

'The pitches are run by the council and they are a dreadful standard, there are so many league structures. We all pay our annual fees to the park department. You hear there are £60k plus funds sitting surplus but they are never reinvested.'

'When I go and work in Newport – in Pill – there is such a lack of resources there, it's staggering. I think they have one community hall and getting a slot is impossible! This is an issue across Wales and for sure puts audiences off.'

'The cost of facilities is unsustainable, any pitches that are of any decent standard are either priced too high to hire out or there are simply no spaces left to book.'

Role models and volunteers

15. Participants spoke of the positive impact volunteer coaches and role models can have and the invaluable role they play in supporting participation in sports.

'If you offered me £10k right now or ten dedicated volunteers, then I would pick the volunteers every time. They are priceless and the unseen work they do in supporting participation in sports is unbelievable.'

‘One young kid came to us at 10-11 with a bit of an attitude and he nearly fell off the wagon a lot of times. He has turned things around, he is an undefeated fighter now. His mum pushed him and my coaches were there for him, he has talent but he wanted to mess around, the maturity in him now is incredible, he is now a role model to some of the other kids in there and has changed his life around. That’s what sports can do’

‘The hundred has been a huge thing for women’s participation. The ECB pushed it the same as the men’s game, they were on tv, in front of the public eye – we saw that it had a big effect on young people and women in particular’

‘As well as those local role models having inspirational and accessible role models help. Someone like Marnus Labuschagne who plays for Glamorgan we try and use them 100%. Marnus has just come from Pakistan and we work closely with the south Asian community. For example, he is facing Afridi, the Pakistan fast bowler this week and the interest has been massive. We are running an event in Grange pavilions in May as well. It helps when you have those world-class players young people can look up to’

16. Participants illustrated issues in sustaining support for some sports such as football, where large numbers of volunteers are needed to support participation. Participants agreed that there was a limit to how many young people they could support depending on the volunteers and coaches available.

‘We could run three under 6s teams, and three under 7s teams for example – but the simple fact is that we cannot get the coaches to support these clubs. For a large scale participatory sport like football, the amount of coaches you need to support young people is incredible, and it’s a constant struggle to find enough.’

17. All participants agreed that having the right role models in place within disadvantaged areas was crucial in enabling people to participate in sports.

‘I feel like I am more than their coach, you become a role model. Having positive role models is crucial to participation, especially at certain ages where there is a drop-off, 14/15-year-olds. You tend to lose kids from certain areas to alcohol, social circles change, crime and drugs. I have been there and done that.’

‘I always used sport as a way to engage with young people. It’s a great tool to occupy people’s time and improve people’s health. I am a big fan of giving

people opportunities in various sports. Without sport, I would find it difficult to conduct my job with young people here.'

'Participant A' has been falling through the cracks, 15 years old and should be in year 11 but out of school for two years. Coming to this MMA class has been life-changing, he had his first fight last week, and it gives him purpose.'

18. Participants felt that positive role models have a significantly positive impact on some groups, such as women and girls, black and minority ethnic communities, and people with disabilities.

'We have a girl from a local high school who runs peer sessions. The kids know her and love it; they come here just because she is here, and the numbers are huge. I doubt we'd have that otherwise. Having local expertise and role models is crucial in these communities.'

'A key issue for sure is around the importance of female role models, so whether that is female officials at the club or senior players helping out with the junior team or just seeing kind of female athletes on the telly or in the media. Still, that lack of visibility is a key barrier.'

'I think one of the most powerful things I've seen since is one of our programs is where you had a pool full of black or Asian swimmers and they're in one session. There was a black lifeguard as well. And it was just wow, it really hit home how little of that we have seen, and how important it truly is to support participation.'

Socio-economic Status

19. Whilst factors such as the rise in the cost of living had a profound impact on participants from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, other themes also emerged.

'We play some clubs from the more affluent areas who have both parents and grandparents there an hour early. Our kids don't have that luxury; it's like we need a culture change in society.'

'It's an unfair playing field for our kids. Playing rugby against these other clubs is one of the only times these kids will be playing on level playing fields whether that be health, education or even life expectancy.'

'Golf has a perception of being an affluent sport. We work with clubs around membership figures, and support clubs to access funding to buy clubs to loan to people from those backgrounds that aren't as affluent. A lot of work going on to make clubs welcoming and accessible but it's not easy and it's a work in progress.'

20. Many of the interviewees noted that it was clear that people's socio-economic status could affect their ability to participate in sports and that it was crucial to work on keeping sports accessible.

'I have seen kids that have had to sit out – and it's horrible to see kids/mums not being able to take part because they can't afford it. How is getting defined by your postcode fair? Sport should be a level playing field'

21. It was also noted how some inner-city communities had bespoke issues that affected people's participation which included crime, culture and religion.

'There are clear tensions in disadvantaged areas of the city which affect participation. There are loads of issues when teams go and play in rival areas of the city. We have seen stabbings take place, and young people are too scared to go and play a game of sports due to the gang culture of the city.'

'Swimming is a sport that needs more support. It's a postcode lottery as to whether people have the money or whether they come from an affluent background or because of the community they live in.'

There are clear barriers for women in inner-city communities and these are massively different to other areas. Culture and religious factors play a big part. For example, a big thing for Asian women I work with is needing their own space to play sports. The interest is there, but the foundations of support aren't.

Funding

22. Participants spoke of the need for more targeted funding to support disadvantaged communities, with several interviewees noting that funding often felt like a postcode lottery.

'Lots of money is directed to BAME communities, but Ely for example is not classified as a BAME community but those kids are still there. It's a postcode lottery even in disadvantaged areas. Cardiff is so multicultural that funding should just be pan-city. There are poverty issues across the city.'

23. Some participants commented on the difficulties faced when applying for funding.

'Participation in Grangetown and Butetown has always been free and that is key for this area. We will never let money be an issue for young people not to take part. This means we have to constantly find money/funding to make things cost-neutral. It's hard work and you have to jump through hoops.'

The long term benefits of shorter-term funding aren't seen. The funding bid we made had so many hours put into it and several people told us it was a no brainer, local community organisations supported our bid but just didn't tick a certain box and ended up rejected. Why can't potential funders come out and see the impact'

24. Participants suggested that funding be directly given to communities rather than a 'middle men'. Participants raised concerns over management fees and having managers 'parachuted in' to run sports projects who weren't familiar with the community.

'Members of the community want more money to come directly to them and cut out organisational management fees. Stop always giving money to the same organisations, it needs to come directly to communities.'

'Funding needs to be weighed up, but more local money would be good. There needs to be a local analysis of areas before organisations that are great at writing bids keep getting the money. Re-analyse the conversation and things would improve.'

'Stop giving money to certain organisations all the time. I had a phone call pre-Christmas from an organisation that had funding to deliver here. They had no local knowledge and that's a big problem.'

Accessibility

25. Participants spoke of barriers faced in accessing sports. Specific groups of people, including women and girls, older people, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities had specific issues when attempting to participate in sports.

Women and girls:

26. Several participants noted that a lack of safe spaces for women and girls, and the use of negative language when talking about women and girls participating in sports were clear barriers.

'We've spent the last four or five months consulting with women and girls from across all areas of the game - from grassroots, all the way up to the top of the game about their lived experiences and some of the key things that are coming out is fear of judgement. They don't like training and playing when all of the boys' teams are watching them because they're lacking in confidence.'

'It's the comments from parents of the opposition that really annoy them and really make them feel like 'Oh my God, I don't belong here. I feel like an alien.' And the parents don't mean anything sexist with it, they will say things like 'oh look, they've got a girl on their team'. 'Oh, didn't the girl do well' and that just comes across as really patronizing for them.'

'When we're talking to senior women, they are telling us 'stop calling us ladies call us women'. It's far more powerful. It's more empowering. Language really matters and subtle changes can have a big impact.'

'It's about creating a safe space – I work with women who have been abused and there is a lot of work in those initial stages to get participating. I use disco music and have turned it into a disco boxing session – they love it. But in the wider context, it's about making people feel comfortable and not putting up any barriers'

27. Participants agreed that more work is needed to make sports participation more accessible for girls and that wider traditional and cultural issues still cause clear barriers in some sports.

'More work needs to be done than just the marketing and attraction of the game, and that goes for all sports. Improving the environment is crucial to making women feel safe and happy. Some sports still live in the past and it needs to change.'

'Ladies' Day in golf clubs is a good example. That might have worked in the 1950s when none of the ladies worked, especially the affluent ladies. But in today's society that is no longer suitable. So having sport delivered at the right time is a massive barrier to women wanting to play golf. So a lot of our work has also been looking at moving Ladies' Day and making it workable for modern standards.'

Older people

28. There was a consensus that participating in sports has a positive impact on older people. Participants who worked closely with older people commented on the negative misconceptions surrounding older people, the need for activities to be flexible, and the need for positive role models as key issues.

'I think we realised, especially post-Covid, that the older generation was not comfortable in participating. I think it's important that older people feel that they are not excluded from sports just because they are old, no matter what the setting.'

'Older people feel forgotten and that needs to end. Some people think they shouldn't take part and that's a cultural problem. I think that taking part in sporting activities helps loneliness and gets them socialising. From talking to older people, the key thing is to not be too prescriptive, sports should be fun.'

'The beauty of a game like Clock Cricket is they are improving their core strength, having fun and interacting with others. We find the isolation you see in care homes dreadful for older people's confidence. Lots of them might have played sports in the past so why can't they now?'

'We work with a lot of people with dementia. A lot of the older generation are isolated and aren't included anyway, and we go in for an hour, we see them smiling, and laughing. They're doing gentle physical exercise without realizing it. Age should not be a barrier to participation.'

Ethnic minority communities

29. Participants spoke of the historical negative experiences of ethnic minority communities when participating in sports.

'The adults that we have worked with have long memories and remember bad experiences in swimming for the rest of their lives, which in turn influences their children. It's about breaking these barriers.'

'It's clear that leisure centres for example often struggle to engage with some communities, and we see that with the people we work with – they can feel intimidated by going as it's such an unfamiliar place. There is work that needs to be done to break down these historical barriers.'

30. Participants noted the lack of participation in some sports resulted in some poor life skills.

'95% of black adults and 93% of Asian adults do not swim. Why is that relevant? Well, a high proportion of the BAME population live within 1 kilometre of waterways, so lakes, reservoirs, canals, rivers, you name it. It's above the national average. And this is the same community that has very little or no water safety knowledge.'

31. Participants suggested that whilst participation in some communities was high, there was a wider issue around pathways available for young people from ethnic minority backgrounds to continue their journey.

'I'd say that in Cardiff, the participation within minority communities is pretty high. You have boxing clubs, football clubs, cricket clubs etc, all with good numbers participating. I'd say there was a wider issue when it comes to pathways, they aren't accessible for people from these communities.'

'Pathways are harder for BAME communities to develop in sports. I see cost again is an issue here and is something that needs looking at. Why stop at participation – where are the pathways?'

People with disabilities

32. Participants felt that barriers for people with disabilities were emphasised when attempting to participate in sports and many potential opportunities were not available due to lack of accessibility.

'How society looks at disabilities is they tend to define you. My aim and the mindset of my participants is that it doesn't. Society needs to stop setting up walls and barriers that do not ultimately need to be there.'

'When it comes to disability the playing field is so unfair. Depending on your disability you just won't get the same opportunities. Even something simple as popping to the shops/going to the pub has so many barriers... so you can just imagine the barriers in sports – accessibility, toilets, need for carers etc.'

'There is a lack of support from the governing body. Last year they pulled out and removed all support for inclusion. It's not good enough. Inclusion shouldn't be a box to tick'

5. Best practice for the future

33. Participants were asked to think of best practices, both within Wales and internationally, that Wales could learn from to increase participation in sports in disadvantaged areas. Participants gave several examples successful of current interventions, partnerships, and best practices, with several suggestions, made that would improve participation:

- Increase opportunities for young people to attend coaching courses and develop peer to peer mentoring.
- The importance of partnership work was highlighted, with specific examples given around the impact having the support of organisations such as Learning Disability Wales, Glamorgan Cricket Club, Football Association of Wales, and Sported had on local participation.
- The need for governing bodies to recognise the value of inclusion and not treat it as a tick box exercise
- More participation projects to be delivered within the local community with the need to develop local facilities to support these.
- The need for local expertise to be used when engaging with disadvantaged communities.