

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

CELG(4)-24-13 – Paper 3

Inquiry into participation levels in sport in Wales

Response from : Football Association of Wales and the Welsh Football Trust

### **Section 1: Background**

- 1 The Football Association of Wales is the third oldest association in the world, having come into existence in 1876. The FAW has governed football in Wales continually since that date. The FAW is a member of FIFA and UEFA and is one of the five associations that make up the International Football Association Board, the guardians of the 'Laws of the Game.'
- 2 The Welsh Football Trust (WFT) was founded by the FAW in 1996 and its objective includes: (1) encouraging more people to play football; (2) identifying and developing talented young players to support the future success of Wales' national teams in all age groups; and (3) developing more and better qualified coaches.
- 3 Participation, and more specifically increasing levels of physical activity in football, is a focus for the FAW and WFT.

### **Section 2: The extent to which the Welsh Government and Sport Wales are achieving the goals set out in the Programme for Government, the Creating an Active Wales action plan and the Vision for Sport in Wales with regard to participation levels in sport.**

- 4 Whilst realising our contribution to widen participation in football and increasing the number of sport coaches and elite athletes in Wales, the FAW and WFT do not have any hard evidence to comment on whether the Welsh Government and Sport Wales are achieving the goals set out in the aforementioned documents. Ambitious goals have been set and we trust that measures are in place to monitor progress.
- 5 In relation to encouraging participation levels in sport, we feel a need for Sport Wales and the Welsh Government to address the following issues:
  - i. Increasing the number of hours per week that children are engaged in physical activity in schools.
  - ii. A more varied and modern sport offer at schools to better engage girls and reduce participation drop-off in teenage years.
  - iii. Build improved links between schools and community clubs.
  - iv. 3G pitch infrastructure development.

**Section 3: The availability of datasets and statistics to measure participation levels in sport, particularly those disaggregated by equality strand and socio-economic groups.**

- 6 The School Sport Survey conducted by Sport Wales in 2011 indicates that football is the most participated team sport in Wales. The table below highlights the actual figures for each participation type:

Age group	Extracurricular participation	Club participation	Informal participation
Year 3-6 (age 7-11)	47,060	44,516	61,051
Year 7-11 (age 11-16)	38,162	39,896	57,242

- 7 The Active Adults Survey conducted in 2008/9 indicates that football is also the most participated team sport for adults (defined as 15 years and over) with approximately 320,837 participating and 129,330 being members of clubs.
- 8 The availability of datasets and statistics to measure participation in sport is important for the FAW and WFT as access to robust statistics will help both organisations to plan strategically by ensuring that time and resources are invested appropriately.
- 9 Currently, both organisations use existing statistics to identify trends. Current data, for example, suggests a drop-off in participation during secondary school and this evidence allows us to ensure that the game appeals to young people. Evidence also suggests that football has the potential to grow; more people want to take part compared to other sports.
- 10 Unfortunately, whilst Sport Wales data provide a basis to develop a picture of current trends in Wales, it does not provide a strong enough base to implement strategic action at local level.
- 11 The School Sport Survey, for example, is dependent on the ‘buy-in’ of schools and, as a result, the feedback varies from area to area. This ultimately leads to bias with feedback from some areas higher than others. This is naturally a concern given the diverse nature of Wales (e.g. rural/urban; access to facilities/lack of access, etc.). It should be noted that Sport Wales representatives are aware of this issue, however, and it’s encouraging to see the current survey is exceeding the numbers collated last time round. A discussion with those involved in the field also raises concerns around sampling methods for the Active Adult Survey.
- 12 Whilst the FAW and the WFT appreciate the efforts to encourage a greater response from schools by publicising the importance of this area of work, we feel that greater effort should be made to ensure that questions are tailored to the relevant audience. It is questionable whether children of seven years of age can understand questions on ethnic background or if they ‘consider themselves to have a disability or impairment.’ Whilst realising the importance of such

issues, the accuracy of this data may be questioned. The length of the survey is also a concern with some children spending 50 minutes to complete during the pilot.

- 13 It should be noted that the FAW and other Governing Bodies have started working with Sport Wales to review the questions included in these surveys. It seems that the growing needs of various organisations outweigh the importance of providing a user-friendly questionnaire. Indeed, there appears to be an unwillingness to move away from what has been done over the years.
- 14 The FAW and WFT benefit from a close working relationship with members of the Sport Wales Research Team. This is important and further thought should be given to engage with other Governing Bodies. This is something which is currently being considered.
- 15 It is our hope to enhance the level of information collated through the School Sport and Active Adults surveys. Whilst the Active Adults Survey provides a breakdown for those involved with the indoor and outdoor game, a further breakdown of formats of the game in different local authority areas would allow us to take strategic action. We are interested, for example, in identifying and learning about those who play 5-a-side, futsal, 7-a-side and 11-a-side.
- 16 Another issue to consider is that the School Sport and Active Adults surveys are both conducted approximately two years apart. Whilst we understand the amount of work associated with these surveys, we are still unable to determine how many people participate in football (and other sports) in any given year.

**Section 4: The opportunities and barriers to sports participation that exist for different groups of people, including by equality strand and socio-economic groups.**

- 17 Whilst evidence suggests that those participating in football belong to different social grades, it is acknowledged that some groups - including women and BME groups – have experienced barriers in the past. As a result, a number of initiatives have been established to ensure that people from different ages and backgrounds receive an opportunity to play the game and this with limited resources. The following provide a flavour of developments/progress made:
  - I. A series of football coaching courses designed specifically for mothers.
  - II. In August, Wales will host the UEFA Under 19 European Championships in West Wales.
  - III. The Deaf Futsal National Squad will train for the first time in July.
  - IV. In 2012, 3.4% of registered players in Wales (11 years old and over) were from a BME background. This figure has increased from 2.3% in 2010.
  - V. Six new Senior BME teams including 90 players recently registered for the Cymru Refugee Football League.
- 18 A key challenge for football moving forward is the need to provide sufficient and suitable venues to sustain and increase participation levels. The increase in costs of pitch hire - a 193% increase

in fees for pitches and changing rooms owned by Cardiff Council according to a BBC report – is likely to lead to a negative impact on participation levels.

- 19 The need for better facilities is also a major barrier. The FAW are currently in the process of investing €3m in 3G pitches across Wales. Further investment from other organisations – the Welsh Government and Sport Wales particularly - would certainly go some way towards developing the work with minority groups and increasing participation levels.

**Section 5: What are the links between programmes to develop sport in Wales and other Welsh Government initiatives to increase physical activity.**

- 20 The first phase development of Dragon Park (The FAW's National Development Centre), situated at Newport International Sports Village, has been funded with investment from UEFA, the FAW, Sport Wales and FIFA programmes. Sport Wales also invest funding into grassroots football through the WFT.
- 21 Despite our close working relationship with Sport Wales, the FAW and the WFT are eager to collaborate with the Welsh Government to ensure a closer working relationship.
- 22 There are opportunities to develop even further and ensure a better link between sport and community development initiatives. Project FUTSAL for instance is an initiative that has been designed by the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the WFT and is funded through the Ireland Wales Inter Regional IVA Programme 2007-2013 under the theme of Sustainable Regeneration of Communities. The FAI, WFT and local education providers have teamed up to provide a unique opportunity for people who are unemployed and out of formal education to get involved in an innovative project designed to help them back into the workforce. The overall aim of the project is to provide education and work opportunities for unemployed people and to influence and assist community regeneration via employment and volunteerism.
- 23 This Project FUTSAL initiative is an example of how football (and other sports) can be used as a social tool to address other Welsh Government strategic aims. Football is already working with a number of hard-to-reach groups and it is a proven tool which can be used to engage with people from different backgrounds.

**Section 6: The impact of the Olympic and Paralympic legacy, the Ryder Cup and other high profile Welsh sporting events and achievements on participation levels in Wales.**

- 24 There is no evidence to suggest that the above mentioned high profile events have had any impact on football participation. It is more likely that other domestic and national football events could impact participation, although this probably raises the need to monitor impact more effectively.