

PET(4)-08-12 : Tuesday 15 May 2012

P-04-368 Promote Physical Activity and Health in Further Education Colleges



Response to the National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee consultation on P-04-368 Promote physical activity and health in Further Education colleges

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Background

Diverse Cymru is an innovative new organisation in the Welsh Third Sector, created in recognition of the realities faced by people experiencing inequality in Wales.

Diverse Cymru promotes equality for all. We believe that we can work together to challenge discrimination in all its forms and create an equitable future for the people of Wales.

Diverse Cymru aims to make a real difference to people's lives through delivering services that reduce inequality and increase independence; supporting people to speak for themselves and to connect with decision makers; creating opportunities for participation and development; raising awareness of equality issues; and inspiring people to take action against inequality.

Our current services include direct payments, self directed and independent living support, befriending and advocacy. We produce information resources, run a service user involvement project and co-ordinate volunteer placements. We facilitate forums and groups that work on various issues, from improving disability access to equality impact assessments. We provide consultancy services and deliver a range of training courses on equality related topics.

We are happy for our response to this inquiry to be published and would be pleased to present further oral evidence if this would be of use to the committee.

Consultation Questions

1. Do you feel that the action called for is reasonable and/or feasible?

We agree that requiring Further Education institutions to take action to actively promote participation in physical activities is reasonable and feasible. Existing promotional materials and activities such as prospectuses, freshers fairs, websites, and information packs for new students could easily be adapted to incorporate further information and promotion of physical activities programmes. Therefore this could be achieved without placing a significant financial or administrative burden on Further Education Institutions.

However we feel that any such promotion must clearly be subject to equality duties and therefore should include addressing both provision and barriers to participation for people from protected characteristic (equalities) groups, in particular for disabled, BME and LGBT people and for women. Further information regarding these barriers and methods of overcoming them is provided in response to question 3.

2. If so, what in your view is the best way of promoting and/or increasing physical activity in further education institutions?

As mentioned in response to question 1, we feel that integration of physical activity promotion into existing promotion opportunities would be the most effective and least resource intensive method of ensuring consistent and wide-spread promotion of activities.

Additionally tutors and/or lecturers could promote opportunities to learners at the beginning of each academic term.

Any promotion should be mindful of the need to ensure inclusive opportunities and promotion. The petitioner themselves states that further education institutions should have a “*well-structured, inclusive and fun programme that unites, includes & adapts to the needs of the learners.*” In order to be able to unite and include learners there is a need to address equality issues regarding participation in physical activity and the culture of racism, homophobia, disability and gender segregation in sports in general, which actively excludes individuals rather than includes them. Therefore we believe that all promotion of physical activity within further education should include both anti-discrimination information which promotes the positive contributions that people from different backgrounds and abilities can make through sport, and information on sports and activities that are accessible to disabled people and those that are available to mixed genders.

3. What are the barriers to promoting and/or increasing participation in physical activity in further education institutions?

A large number of sports, particularly the most popular, such as football, rugby and cricket, segregate women and men into separate teams, and in many cases there is no women’s team where there is a men’s team. This segregation contributes to societal prejudice, such as feelings that women are physically weaker than men and not capable of participating in sport at the same level. It is essential that further education institutions both ensure that there is provision for women’s teams alongside men’s teams, and also ensure that mixed gender sports are promoted to both genders as equal participants.

Inclusion of trans students should be ensured and promoted, as gender segregation within sports can be a particularly complex area regarding transsexual students and whether they qualify for competitions within the men’s or women’s sports and insurance. At a practice, non-competitive level the gender identity of all trans students should be respected, yet many staff will not be aware of this and therefore require guidance on dealing with these concerns. Regarding competitive entry into sports trainers should be supported to enter sensitive discussions with sports professional bodies, without disclosing personal information about any trans participants.

Regarding BME participation in physical activities it is vital to ensure that cultural and religious considerations, such as ensuring that the timings of activities do not clash with religious observances and that adaptations can be made for cultural requirements, such as women-only swimming sessions.

Regarding disabled people’s participation, there are a range of issues, given the vast spectrum of impairments. Some provision should be made for specific disability sports, with links to local or national disability sports organisations such as Disability Sports Wales. Sports such as boccia should be provided where there is a lack of sports that disabled learners can participate in. However consideration should also

always be given to adaptations that can be made so that disabled learners can participate alongside their non-disabled peers, in order to achieve inclusion and unity, rather than further separate disabled learners. For example disabled athletes could train alongside non-disabled athletes in track and field sports.

Across the protected (equality) characteristics it is essential to actively challenge all discrimination and prejudice displayed by both participants and spectators. Many groups across the protected characteristics participate in sports far less than others, due to their experiences and/or fear of prejudice and discrimination. This fear is further heightened by cases such as the recent racism cases in football and the tragic suicide of Justin Fashanu due to homophobia and racism in football. Therefore active policies and tackling discrimination and prejudice in physical activity is required in order to ensure that all learners feel included and able to participate without fear of discrimination.