



S&PA Professional

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MEETING IN THE MIDDLE

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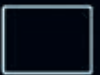
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"My work around the Paralympic movement absolutely first demonstrated, then embedded in me, the transformational power of sport and the higher purpose it can have in a social context." (p26)





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UPFRONT

EDITORIAL

► DeeDee Doke

2020 collaboration



The year ahead will be one of co-operation and partnership for CIMSPA as it seeks to get more and more people moving

A new year, and as S&PA Professional went to press, the UK had just voted for a Conservative government. What will 2020 bring the sport and physical activity sector? With no crystal ball to hand, the forecast at the UK government level is still mired in fog. However it is understood that Nigel Adams, minister of state for sport, is “happy” in the role to which he was appointed in July 2019, with insiders saying they “could see no reason why” Adams would leave the post under the new Conservative government.

At the same time, the new year’s

outlook for CIMSPA and its members, partners, constituents and customers is clear and bright, with the clarity of 2020 vision as your chartered institute powers up for an invigorated era of cohesive and constructive collaboration in a sector that too long has been broadly fragmented. Joined together by the mantra of ‘getting people moving’, all the sector players must fulfil their collective potential as the critical partner to our beloved NHS for preventative healthcare. The solution to many physical, mental and societal problems is in the sector’s hands – and CIMSPA has the power to create the workforce that

will bring the solution to life through quality assured standards and regulation.

2020 will be a year of co-operation, collaboration, resource and strategy consolidation for CIMSPA, and your participation is vital.



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S&PA News

A round-up of the latest developments in the industry



CIMSPA YOUTH PANEL TO ADVISE ON GEN Z AT ACTIVE-NET

Members of CIMSPA's Youth Panel will discuss the issue of Generation Z at active-net 2020 in March.

Following the theme 'Gen Z – What makes them tick?',

the conference will look at the behaviour, attitudes and perceptions of 16-24-year-olds to understand how the sport and physical activity sector

can engage with the demographic.

CIMSPA's Youth Panel was formed in mid-2018 and comprises a diverse group of young people aged 16-25

who are considering, pursuing, or already have a career in the industry.

"They have been brilliant," says Youth Panel chairman and Life Leisure Group CEO Malcolm McPhail.

"Not only have they helped to shape the CIMSPA strategy, both its vision and mission, they have acted as our advocates and consequently have put CIMSPA in front of a wider and younger audience through social media."

At active-net 2020, members of the Youth Panel will help operators understand how to engage with Gen Z consumers, who get their information, news and entertainment on their phones/tablets in constantly streamed, bite sized chunks.

CIMSPA Youth Panel member Fraser Ford is a community champion at Premier League football club Southampton FC.

The 22-year-old helps almost 2,000 pupils across the city to engage in physical activity, and he believes that the industry must adapt to a changing digital world in a faster way.

"Social media really is the best way of communicating with our generation," says Ford.

"I only skim newsletters or bulletins in my inbox, but if someone sends that information by Twitter, I read it. And I think most people my age are the same."

UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS

NHS EMPLOYEES ENCOURAGED TO GET ACTIVE IN ABERDEEN

Sport Aberdeen and NHS Grampian will work together to deliver a community wellbeing partnership in North-East Scotland.

The move is aimed at getting more NHS employees healthy and active through increased participation in sport and physical activity.

According to Government figures 131m working days are lost to sickness absence every year in the UK, with 14.3m days being due to stress, depression and anxiety.

To help increase activity among employees at NHS Grampian, more than 15,000 staff will have access to discounted memberships and support from the Sport Aberdeen Active Workforce programme.

Sport Aberdeen's programme is a bespoke fitness offering for public, private and third sector organisations.

Keith Gerrard, Sport Aberdeen director of healthy and active communities, said the partnership would value some of the most hardest-working members of society and hopefully create a ripple effect across the community.

"NHS Grampian employees are incredibly hard working and provide a hugely valuable service to the people of the North-East of Scotland," he said.

"It is our hope that this partnership approach will be adopted by other regions, helping to get as many people active across Scotland as possible."

It is the latest link-up between the organisations, as Sport Aberdeen already works closely with NHS Grampian to deliver a number of exercise referral programmes including Move More Aberdeen.

MESSAGE FROM CIMSPA CEO



TARA DILLON
ON HOW CIMSPA'S 2020 CONFERENCE WILL BE THE MOST INSIGHTFUL YET

The countdown is on to our annual conference. I'm delighted this year to welcome keynote speaker David Thomson, who will look to confront one of the key challenges of our sector. We continue to appeal to that very small percentage of the population who have made the decision to lead an active life. David will give us insight into how we can extend our reach to a much larger cohort of people – those contemplating activity but yet to engage.

Tim Hollingsworth, Sport England CEO, will also deliver a keynote address. Tim will share his vision of the future of the sport and physical activity (S&PA) sector along with an update of Sport England's ambitious strategy and how the organisation is investing in tackling inactivity across the country.

The UK's ever-growing gig economy is increasingly impacting employment practices in our sector. Therefore, we are particularly looking forward to hearing from leading HR consultant, Les Potton, who will provide an overview of how Matthew Taylor's review of modern working practices and recent case law is impacting both employers and self-employed personal trainers.

We will also be making a number of announcements at the conference, including launching chartered membership pathways for PTs, instructors and coaches to give them the status and credibility they deserve.

These are just a few of the exciting things we have lined up. It's shaping up to be our most insightful event yet, with something for all S&PA professionals. I look forward to seeing you there.

YOUTH ACTIVITY LEVELS ON THE RISE

Activity levels among children are on the increase, according to a new Sport England study.

The second edition of the annual Active Lives Children and Young People Survey shows that the number of children in England doing an average of 60 minutes or more physical activity per day has risen by 3.6% in 2018-19.

As a result, 46.8% of children and young people are meeting the government-recommended level of activity.

Figures also show that 57.2% of children are doing 30 minutes or more of extra-curricular physical activity, while 40.4% get their activity within the school day schedule.

The report is based on responses from over 130,000 children aged 5-16 in England during the academic year 2018/2019, making it the largest study of its kind.



UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS

VIEWPOINT

**MICHELE BRIDLE,
EXHIBITION
ORGANISER,
SPATEX**



WHEN 'GREEN' WATER IS A GOOD THING

A pool turning green is never a good sign but a pool promoting 'green' ways of operating and featuring equipment reducing its demand on energy certainly is.

Conscious of climate change, the depletion of the world's natural resources and the need to reduce the water leisure industry's dependency on plastic, we at Spatex feel we should be doing our bit to promote a greater awareness of the environment. Everyone can make a difference.

With that philosophy in mind, Going Green is the theme for the upcoming dedicated water leisure expo, Spatex 2020, to be held in January.

Not only will our event offer 'green' topics such as a variety of ways to generate energy savings from your swimming pools and how testing helps pools become 'greener', it will be a centre of 'green' event organisation approaches – including supplying recyclable lanyards, compostable containers and cutlery, minimal food packaging and providing recycling bins in the exhibition hall.

We believe so strongly in promoting eco-awareness that there will be a Spatex Goes Green networking event to reinforce the message.

Spatex will be endeavouring, wherever possible, to do our bit for the planet and encouraging our visitors and exhibitors to do the same.



NEVER STOP LEARNING, SAY AWARD-WINNING COACHES

By Colin Cottell

While qualifications are vital if coaches are to reach the highest professional standards, learning from the people you coach is every bit as important, according to winners of the UK Coaching Awards 2019.

Fresh from picking up her award for children and young people's coach of the year in London, gymnastics and multi-sport community coach Sasha Moore told *S&PA Professional* that personal development is key for coaches.

"Obviously the courses I have done are very important, but what has helped my professional development as a coach is feedback from the young people I coach," said Moore.

Referring to her work coaching gymnastics, she added: "If it is not something that they have enjoyed, then I will go away and look at how can we change this."

City of Glasgow swim team performance development head coach Danielle Brayson agreed, saying that

"every day is a school day" when coaching her 13-to-18-year-old athletes.

Brayson, winner of the talent development coach of the year award, added that social media also plays as much a part as keeping up to date with the latest coaching practices within the Scottish Swimming framework.

"With social media being so big now, it's pretty much impossible not to keep up to date with what is going on around the world," she said. "Then it is up to you to sift out what you think is important and not important."

Moore said she felt she could become a better coach with more communication between other coaches, which would provide opportunities to network and share ideas.

Sue Ringrose, picking up the coach developer of the year awards for her work in the horseracing industry, added that the key to coaches developing is enjoyment themselves.

"You have got to remember that learning takes place when people are enjoying themselves," she said.

UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS

VISUALLY IMPAIRED 'WANT MORE ENGAGEMENT'

Cycling, swimming and going to the gym are the most sought-after activities for people with a visual impairment.

This is according to a report from Metro Blind Sport (MBS), which looked at the attitudes, preferences and behaviours of its visually-impaired network with regards to physical activity.

The report, completed by 60 MBS members and 111 non-members, was conducted via an online survey. All participants were in some way already



engaged with sport either directly through MBS or through one of the charity's partners.

Key findings included that participants would most like to cycle (40%), swim (39.5%) or go to the gym (35%) as a form of exercise, while

almost three-quarters (71%) are achieving the chief medical officer's recommended 150 minutes of activity per week.

Factors that would increase participation included facilities that are closer to home, specialist coaching and somebody to attend an activity with.

Some 94% of participants feel more could be done to encourage participation amongst those with a visual impairment.

The research forms part of a wider Impact Report, commissioned by MBS, to examine the influence the charity is having on participation and to establish what more could be done to engage those with sight loss or a visual impairment.

CIMSPA ENDORSES SPORTS DEGREES AT EDGE HILL

CIMSPA has endorsed three sports management degrees at Edge Hill University.

BA (Hons) sports coaching and development, BA (Hons) sports development and management, and BA (Hons) sports management and coaching are endorsed against professional standards.

"This recognition is testimony to the university's commitment to ensuring students are provided with high-quality, research-informed, and relevant academic programmes which are underpinned by essential employability skills," said professor Andy Smith, from the department of sport and physical activity at Edge Hill.

The employability benchmark clarifies the job roles that students who complete the programme are qualified for.

Helen Hiley, education officer (higher education) at CIMSPA, added: "CIMSPA wants to create a respected and regulated sector, and that has to begin at the start of the workforce's professional development.

"We will continue to bring higher education institutions into partnership."

WAVE MAKER OF THE QUARTER: SCE

Becoming employee-owned will enable staff at course provider Strength and Conditioning Education to be the best version of themselves, as **Graham Simons** reports

The Leeds-based business, which specialises in CIMSPA-approved strength and conditioning, and trains around 1,000 students each year, from independent coaches to staff from gym chains, recently underwent a seven-figure buy-out, supported by a loan from asset manager Mercia. The deal offers staff control of the business, and allows founder and CEO Brendan Chaplin to retain a minority share.

"We are very much a people business," Chaplin told *S&PA Professional*. "Our employees are at the heart of our success. Becoming an employee-owned company allows them to benefit directly from the success of the business and gives them a long-term vision for the future. Sports and fitness education is all about personal development –



helping clients to become the best possible version of themselves. The employee-owned business model empowers and motivates staff, so it seems like a really good fit."

Chaplin has worked with clients including Huddersfield Giants, British Tennis and England Golf, and recently with England netball players such as Natalie Haythornthwaite and

Rachel Shaw, and with UFC athletes including Marc Diakiese, while training staff from leading gym chains including David Lloyd.

Looking ahead, Chaplin says the firm is aiming to develop its UK network with new venues, and eventually to expand internationally.

■ Is your facility making waves in the industry? Get in touch at sandpa@redactive.co.uk

UPFRONT

MOVERS & SHAKERS

MAX ASSOCIATES

Max Associates has appointed **Rich Millard** as associate director. The role will see Millard responsible for supporting the leisure consultancy and management contract procurement organisation's visibility in the public sector. Millard recently retired from CIMSPA partner Places Leisure.

EMD UK

Marcus Kingwell FCIMSPA has joined CIMSPA partner EMD UK as the organisation's new CEO. Kingwell joins the UK's national governing body for group exercise from CIMSPA partner AoC Sport.

GILL SPORTS FOUNDATION

Former British hurdler **Perri Shakes-Drayton** has joined the CIMSPA partner GLL Sports Foundation (GSF) board. A

star of London 2012, Shakes-Drayton has been supported by GSF since 2008 and will become the second athlete on the board, alongside Susie Rodgers.

MYZONE

CIMSPA partner Myzone has made two senior appointments as part of its ambitious plans for growth across Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA). **Rachel Young** joins to take up the new role of director of business development (EMEA). Young will work with EMEA CEO David Stalker along with country heads and distributors to deliver the brand's strategy for growth across the region. Myzone has also appointed **Hubertus Effinger** as country manager of Germany, Austria and Switzerland.



GEDLING COUNCIL

Gedling Council has appointed **Carl Bennett** as head of service-leisure transformation.

Bennett has been busy working within football and various NGBs on inclusion-focused interventions.

He has been appointed to transform leisure and sport provision and address participation priorities within the Gedling area.

GYMPASS

Gympass has appointed two new senior partnership managers to help lead the UK expansion of its fitness facilities. **Jas Genesis** and **Gareth Welsh** joined the corporate fitness sales company in October, and will focus on forging long-term operator partnerships. The pair will work directly with **Eamon Lloyd**, who was made senior director and head of partnerships for the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands.

CONTRACTS AND DEALS

NGBS JOIN FORCES TO IMPROVE BOARD DIVERSITY

CIMSPA partner Sport England has partnered with UK Sport and recruitment agency Perrett Laver to address the diversity of boards in the sector. The pact will help identify and develop a pool of senior, experienced candidates from a variety of backgrounds including BAME, LGBT and others.

PREMIER GLOBAL LAUNCHES NUTRITIONAL PLAN

CIMSPA partner Premier Global NASM has created a programme to help fitness professionals provide tailored nutritional information to clients. The NASM Certified Nutrition Coach programme aims to help fitness professionals deliver effective, scientifically-based nutrition information for coaching plans.

PARKRUN AGREES PARTNERSHIP WITH MINI

MINI has signed a sponsorship deal with parkrun to promote and support the organisation. Launching the three-year partnership, MINI attended a parkrun event in Oxford – the home of MINI and where its new all-electric model will be built – where more than 440 parkrunners took part.

EVERYONE ACTIVE TO BREAK 200-SITE MARK

CIMSPA partner Everyone Active has announced partnerships that will see it surpass the 200 mark for the number of facilities within its operations. The operator has signed a new 15-year deal with Chiltern District Council and renewed contracts at East Herts and Fareham Borough Council for 15 and 10 years, respectively.

UPFRONT

Source:



FITNESS OF YOUTH

As the latest statistics from DataHub show, the largest increase in uptake in sport and physical activity from the under-16 group is for sociable workouts, such as Sh'Bam and Body Attack. While activities carried out on one's own experienced significant drops in participation, general gym and classic offerings such as aqua classes, aerobics and group fitness remained perennial favourites.

TOP 5 YOUTH ACTIVITIES WITH HIGHEST % DECREASE IN PARTICIPATION



950

CONSISTENT SITES
INCLUDED IN THE
ANALYSIS



TIMEFRAME:
LAST 12 MONTHS
(NOV 18 - OCT 19)
VS PREVIOUS
12 MONTHS
(NOV 17 - OCT 18)

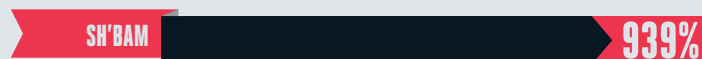


AGE RANGE:
16 AND UNDER

TOP 5 YOUTH ACTIVITIES WITH HIGHEST PARTICIPATION



TOP 5 YOUTH ACTIVITIES WITH HIGHEST % INCREASE IN PARTICIPATION



Source: All figures taken from DataHub sites between Nov 2018-Oct 2019 and Nov 2017-Oct 2018

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

Two winners on their success at the Future Fit Training's Legacy Awards, which rewarded individuals who are passionate about training and making a difference

Created to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Future Fit Training, the Legacy Awards saw 25 finalists each win a share of £75,000 worth of training and business support.

Before that, they had to face a 'Dragons' Den' style panel of judges and pitch their ideas, as well as explaining how they would use the prize to benefit the industry. Judges included CIMSPA CEO Tara Dillon, Myzone EMEA CEO Dave Stalker, Jubilee Hall Trust's CEO Phil Rumbelow, chair of the Transcend Awards Stephen Mitchell, and Future Fit's corporate development manager Debbi Moore, and head of education and training Tom Godwin.

"To have an influence we need to build relationships and rapport with our customers," says Dillon. "I saw an abundance of this among finalists and I applaud them; these people are absolutely the future of our industry."

Rob Johnson, founder and managing director of Future Fit Training, said the awards was an opportunity to give something back to the sector that had served the training provider so well over the last 25 years.

"Through the Legacy Awards we hope to encourage people who really want to make a difference to get involved in the fitness industry and to those passionate individuals already working in our sector to do all they can to bring about positive change."

Here we talk to two such individuals about how they plan to make an impact in the sector.



CELEBRATING THE FUTURE OF OUR SECTOR



JAINA MISTRY

(HELLO@MISTRYMISTRY.CO.UK)

Jaina Mistry (*above left*) is a mindset coach and professional speaker, who lives and breathes fitness and wellbeing. But it wasn't always so. In 2002 at the age of 17, Mistry suffered from Stevens Johnson Syndrome, a rare life-threatening illness, affecting only one in every two million people each year, triggered by an allergic reaction to penicillin. Within two hours of taking the medication she experienced severe swelling to her throat, sore eyes and angry skin blisters, which spread like wild fire on her body. She was burning from the inside out, and after 12 days in ICU, woke to learn she had lost 60% of

"I believe my experience of overcoming health challenges and sight loss is a gift that enables me to support, motivate and inspire people to lead healthier lives"

her skin, suffered visual scarring and severe respiratory damage. Within 12 months she lost her eyesight and underwent major surgery to remove part of her lung.

"For years I couldn't accept my lung condition and wouldn't acknowledge that changing my lifestyle would benefit my health. I didn't want to be seen as different and I let my lung condition control my life; it impacted not only my health but my social life, confidence and independence too," says Mistry.

But in 2010, after three admissions to hospital due to a lung collapse, there was a turning point.

"It was a much needed wake-up call. I realised I had to take responsibility for my situation if I wanted my quality of health to improve. So I followed my physiotherapist's advice and began to manage my condition better and live a more active lifestyle."

After a difficult search trying to find a personal trainer who was willing to work with her – many were put off by her unusual health condition – in 2011, Mistry started working with a trainer, starting with one session a week for several months.

"I absolutely detested it. I complained and moaned because of the discomfort,

but it was the drive to keep out of hospital and improve my health that kept me motivated," she says.

"But as I progressed, I noticed a positive change in my fitness and body shape, and my confidence and love for exercise began to grow. Everyday activities like climbing the stairs felt less of an effort as I didn't experience the uncomfortable breathlessness feeling I once had.

"Fitness is now my lifestyle and daily practice. It has changed my life beyond just a physical level; it has positively impacted my mindset, confidence, quality of life, choice of career and love for helping others."

Such is her passion for fitness and wellbeing, that Mistry qualified as a gym instructor in 2014. She is currently developing a training programme for fitness professionals to help them support and understand the needs of visually impaired clients. The idea was inspired by her own experiences of gym accessibility and the initial difficulty of finding a trainer to work with.

"My aim is to develop better understanding and awareness among fitness professionals and to inspire confidence to support this group. I hope to work with Future Fit Training as part of my legacy prize to create something unique, which I believe will make a positive impact on the lives of the visually impaired community."

In addition, Mistry is completing Future Fit Training's Nutrition and Weight Management Advisor qualification, with a view to becoming a nutritional advisor.

"I want to offer a highly tailored experience which empowers clients to make powerful shifts in their mindset, body and lifestyle. I believe my experience of overcoming health challenges and sight loss is a gift that enables me to empathise with others, listen well and to be fully present in

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE



the moment to support and motivate people to change the way they think about food and movement and inspire them to lead healthier lives.”

Winning the Silver Award in the Raising your Bar category at Future Fit Training’s Legacy Awards has been a dream come true, she says.

“It’s a great honour. I’ve met some of the biggest names in the fitness and leisure world and am now part of a professional platform thanks to my CIMSPA membership. I am looking forward to connecting with other members, learning and continuing to strengthen my knowledge.

“Winning this award has opened more doors of opportunity than I could have ever imagined. I’ve been introduced to incredible people who believe in my vision to increase diversity and inclusion in the industry.”

JOSEPH BLEETMAN

(INSTAGRAM @BLEETMANFITNESS)

Two years ago, Joseph Bleetman was plagued by mental health problems.

“From the age of 14 to 16, I suffered with anxiety and depression. I found it difficult to speak to people and to be happy within myself. I was searching for external short-term stimuli for internal problems,” he says.

At 16, Bleetman got into weight training, which had a positive impact on his mental health.

“I wanted an outlet for my inner frustrations. Fitness became the building block that helped me change my life. It showed me that discipline and courage can help me overcome issues and thrive as a young man.”

It also led him to pursue a career in the fitness industry; the 18-year-old is

“This award will enable me to build a career, fighting mental health and social isolation by encouraging youngsters to engage in physical activity”

undertaking a Level 2 gym instructor course with Future Fit Training.

Bleetman won the Gold Award in the Raising Your Bar category at Future Fit Training’s Legacy Awards, which recognised the positive and innovative industry ideas presented by Future Fit Training graduates and trainees. He was the youngest person in the final.

Judges were impressed not only by how Bleetman had used fitness to transform his own life, but how he plans to use physical activity to help other young people overcome mental health issues and lead them on to self-progression exercises that are not taught in the current education system.

“Social media pressures are associated with mental health disorders, which have grown among adolescents. It is caused by the stress of maintaining followers and likes on social media, while comparing themselves to unrealistic body images,” he says. “But the mood and confidence-boosting effects of exercise can change the lives of teenagers for the better.

“I have experienced this, and the award will help me to have a positive impact on others, fighting mental health and social isolation by encouraging youngsters to engage in physical activity.”

Bleetman is also launching a YouTube account called The Student Butterfly Effect in the near future. [A](#)

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

LEADING FROM THE FRONT

Mark Baker and Holly Peck from HorizonSport explain why focused leadership is more important than ever

How often do you hear people say that we've moved on considerably in how sport is run in this country? They are right; we are benefiting from new values and fresh approaches to senior succession, from diversity and the impact of powerful planning.

Evidence of this can be seen both in the many years of leadership diversity and the new faces at organisations such as UK Sport, Sport England, England Hockey, England Netball, the FA, RYA, CIMSPA, RFL to name but a few.

Programmes such as the UK Sport International Leadership Programme, and Sport England's Get on Board programme are helping to increase talent and diversity in the sector. But why is this so important for the future of sport in the UK? And how can focused-leadership help?

The Sport Governance Code shines a light on the leadership deficit in the sector. In some areas this might be a lack of diversity – a 'blazer-wearing' approach to succession. In others, it identifies the vital need for brilliant focused leadership performance to

meet significant sport ambitions. Noticeable changes that are taking place include the improvement of governance of top-team decision-making.

This maturity of governance is going beyond having the basic elements of appropriate structure, diversity of the decision-makers, right values, standards, conduct and policies. It is about the top team being fully capable and aligned on strategy and delivery, capable of well-managing the tension between ambition and resources.

Focused leadership, with well-governed succession planning and investment in leadership performance development is crucial to success.

"Teams under focused leadership are more collaborative, highly motivated, and ultimately more successful"



Focused leadership is a set of observed behaviours, values and capabilities with the observed outcomes being brilliant leadership performance.

These leaders can integrate knowledge and skills of sport development, sport governance and individual leadership impact. They

appreciate the difference between rules, principles and values and consciously choose their identity as a leader. They lead great planning processes that ensure alignment of the team to the organisation's targets, strategies and vision.

It's noticeable that such teams are more collaborative, highly motivated, and ultimately more successful. The top team understands the people and resources required for the future, and the leadership regularly checks that. Continual personal leadership development is a given.

We are already reaping the benefits of focused leadership and evidence of the amazing outcomes that focused leadership and diversity delivers are all around us. But think how much more we could achieve if we had more focused leadership in the sports sector. We could be even more ambitious and deliver some amazing potential.

We have big targets on the health of the nation, on continual participation, and on creating a more productive and happier society. And we need focused leadership to hit these targets. Focused leadership in the sports sector matters more than ever. What are you doing to develop your leadership skills? [🔗](#)

For more information on the sports leadership performance specialists, visit www.horizon-sport.co.uk

IN DEPTH

Q & A

SUSIE BENSON

As corporate partnerships executive Scotland, Benson will ensure CIMSPA's work aligns with sportscotland's corporate strategy to support and strengthen the sporting workforce North of the border

HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE SECTOR?

I've always had a love for sport. As soon as I was old enough, I took my coaching qualifications for sailing, windsurfing and kayaking. I had a great job as a watersports instructor at the Scottish National Watersports Centre in Cumbrae during my school and university holidays, but after completing an honours degree in Physiology and Sport Science, I fell into the world of recruitment. After a year recruiting within property and surveying, I moved into the sports



sector with a volunteer management role at Glasgow 2014, a home Commonwealth Games, which had been a dream of mine since a child. I joined the coaching and volunteering team at sportscotland after Glasgow 2014. As a partnership manager, I supported a number of sportscotland's projects in the sports sector. Most recently I've been working at Triathlon Scotland as coaching development manager with responsibility for providing support for coaches to develop their skills across all levels of the coaching pathway.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THIS NEW ROLE?

As soon as I found out about the role and how it supports a variety of organisations in the sector, I knew I wanted to be a part of it. I really want to play my part in professionalising the sector to help give the people involved the recognition they deserve as being true experts in their field.

WHAT SKILLS DO YOU BRING TO THE ROLE?

Having been involved in the sport and physical activity sector for more than 25 years – either through my career or Tumble Tots as a toddler – I have a huge passion for the sector which drives everything I do. My main skillset, however, lies in developing relationships with people and the ability to gain a

strong understanding of their needs in order to provide expert support.

WHAT DOES YOUR NEW ROLE ENTAIL?

My role focuses on supporting all of our employer, higher education, training provider, sports governing body and commercial partners based in Scotland. I will manage the relationship between CIMSPA and these organisations and provide bespoke support. My role is jointly supported by CIMSPA and sportscotland, which means I will provide a vital link between the two organisations to ensure the success of our long-term partnership here in Scotland.

HOW WILL THE ROLE BENEFIT CIMSPA IN SCOTLAND?

My role will help link CIMSPA with the sport and physical activity landscape in Scotland. Having a dedicated member of staff based in Scotland not only helps with some of the geographical challenges we face in Scotland, but also helps navigate key differences including how funding is allocated, how organisations operate, the networks shared across the country and how our qualification structure operates. This vital link between Scotland and the rest of the UK will also help to share knowledge and experiences. 

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

MR MOTIVATED

David Thomson, keynote speaker at the CIMSPA conference, will show delegates how to achieve their goals through hard work, bravery and taking strong decisions

CIMSPA is delighted to welcome David Thomson as a keynote speaker at this year's conference.

As a global leader in the fields of persuasion and influence, Thomson will give delegates an alternative view of how to engage with the audiences they find so difficult to reach.

"Fifty per cent of the population know they need to exercise, but need cajoling. With the benefit of his unique skills and experience, David will give us a refreshing view of how we brand ourselves as a sector and use our influence to attract those who could benefit so much from the services and expertise we offer," says Tara Dillon, CEO of CIMSPA.

Thomson is a Napoleon Hill certified instructor, a qualified life coach and one of only 19 trainers personally trained and endorsed by Dr Robert Cialdini to teach his POP (Principles of Persuasion) workshop. More than that, his 20-plus years of study have seen him pull multiple modalities together for the very first time in what's being heralded 'the DNA of sales'.

Thomson's 12-week transformation course helps participants to increase their sales and grow their businesses. Covering all of the essential facets of sales, the course covers positive mental



attitude, negotiation, influence, fact finding, framing, neuro-linguistic programming, opening, pitching, memory, Socrates and closing. For the past year David has been honing and perfecting the delivery of his programme in an interim role for the British Standards Institution globally. The results have been staggering, with up to more than 40% uplift in sales.

It's taken a lot of grit and determination for Thomson to get to where he is today. Born on the West coast of Scotland in what was titled by Sky News 'the worst village in Great

"David will give us a refreshing view of how we brand ourselves as a sector and use our influence to attract those who could benefit so much from the services and expertise we offer"

TARA DILLON, CIMSPA CEO

Britain', he had an abusive childhood and little education, but joining the British Army at the age of 16 proved to be a turning point in his life. It was here that he realised that expert training and self-discipline were his path to success.

After the army, he gained exceptional business experience as a mortgage consultant. Thomson worked hard to understand the products he was selling and within two years he was the company's top selling broker. From there, he went on to set up his own business selling insurance. It was soon turning over £1m. Within three years it was worth £4m.

Thomson's story wouldn't be out of place as a Hollywood blockbuster. His is a tale of a fight against the kind of adversity most of us can't imagine. Of a boy who chose to change his stars, and who did it for himself. And at its most basic level, of right triumphing over so much more than just wrong.

That he now lives life on his own terms, that he's a shining example of someone who gives back to the communities he serves, and that he delights in teaching others to tread their own path too, is just a part of what makes him a true inspiration. 

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

REVIEW FINDINGS SET TO BE ANNOUNCED

2019 annual review findings taken from the RD Dash digital platform will be unveiled at the CIMSPA & Quest NBS Conference

The CIMSPA & Quest NBS Conference in February will explore the theme of 'working together to improve the sport and physical activity sector's future'. A packed, one-day agenda will host more than 20 breakout sessions, organised into seven streams, delivering a range of valuable content, including expert speakers, case studies and interactive sessions.

Quest, the UK Quality Scheme for Sport and Leisure, managed on behalf of Sport England by Right Directions, will unveil results from the 2019 annual review, taken from its new digital platform, RD Dash, at the conference. During the RD Dash session, part of the CIMSPA Management breakout stream, Gill Twell, Head of Operations at Right Directions, will advise how to use this platform to gain actionable insights.

Right Directions has developed the RD Dash to enable operators to analyse their Quest assessment performance online. All assessment reports have been uploaded to the platform, which is hosted by leisure intelligence repository, DataHub. This means organisations can

benchmark themselves against national and group data.

The RD Dash and the Quest Annual Review are both part of a drive by Right Directions to modernise and improve the Quest scheme. Quest operations director, Caroline Constantine says: "Our new insight package supports operators to think differently about service delivery and to work smartly, identifying areas where they can achieve the most impact and deliver a greater return on investment."

Quest will also host three breakout streams at the conference, focused on topics linked to Quest NBS modules: Engagement, Operations and Customer Service. Interactive sessions will be led by a host of inspiring speakers and experts.

In the Engagement stream, Quest will deliver three sessions exploring how facilities and teams engage with their communities.

Quest's Operations stream will comprise

two sessions that will offer ideas for better performance in the Environment and Customer Service modules; areas where facilities scored lowest in 2018.

In the Customer Service stream, Quest will deliver three sessions identifying strategies to improve customer experience. This will highlight practical approaches to underpinning every aspect of the business to enhance the customer journey and experience.

Shining a light on the best practices and learnings in the sector, the streams will focus on how to improve efficiency, effectiveness and quality of service.

In one of the sessions, Mike Hill, director at NBS and Leisure-net Solutions, Lisa Forsyth, director of Max Associates and Simon Shibli, professor of sport management at Sheffield Hallam University will look why some

leisure centres are twice as efficient as others.

75%

Data showed that 75% of facilities have friendly, helpful and knowledgeable staff

Source: Quest Annual Review 2018

■ The CIMSPA & Quest NBS Conference will take place on Thursday 27 February 2020. To book visit <https://www.cimspa.co.uk/conferencehome/book-now>



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IN DEPTH

AGENDA

By Patrick Appleton

Meeting in the MIDDLE

Growing in stature and influence within the sport and physical activity sector, aggregators are quick to dispel any fears that their ambitions are ones of self-interest. But not everyone is convinced...

An increase of 55% for the same service, 12 months apart. No self-respecting business would agree to that. Or would they? It is a situation a number of letting agents have found themselves in recently, with reports of one property aggregator hiking prices year-on-year with little in the way of an improved service. In Cumbria, one business had enough and delisted their services as the £15,000 annual investment had become too much – £1,200 was the monthly payment, while the office rent was £800.

Just as the housing market has seen the aggregation model grow from a helpful hand into a tool with insatiable demands, the worry is that the leisure sector could be on the brink of blindly falling into a similar trap.

When an industry steps into the unknown there will never be a consensus that this bold new approach is nothing but beneficial for everyone. Dissenters are a product of uncertainty. So it comes as little surprise that in the case of sport and physical activity, the issue of aggregators is a topic that has split the sector in two, with battle lines drawn clearly between the forces of change and those who support the status quo.

Prevalent in industries such as food and drink (JustEat), recruitment (Indeed) and travel (Booking.com), aggregators are intermediaries selling gym

classes or memberships online – for a wide range of operators – in return for a financial cut of those sales. The leisure industry is reluctant to welcome them with open arms, viewing the prospect with trepidation.

Humphrey Cobbold, CEO of Pure Gym, is firm in his beliefs that aggregators are a viable threat to operators' sustainability.

"There is a risk that operators cede too much

control to aggregators in our industry," he tells *S&PA Professional*. "That is why I have been vocal in encouraging operators to think very carefully what they are doing.

"It is not bad management to experiment or try something new. However, I think it is bad management to sign long-term – one-to three-year – contracts across the whole of an operator's estate and effectively sign over control of

"It is not bad management to experiment or try something new. However, I think it is bad management to sign long term – one-to-three year – contracts across the whole of an operator's estate and effectively sign over control of members to a third party"

HUMPHREY COBBOLD, PureGym CEO

members to a third party.

"It almost never makes sense to cede control in that sort of way to a third party. Just ask hotel operators how they feel about the amount of control they handed over to Booking.com."

As a budget operator, Pure Gym perhaps has most to lose from such a situation as they rely on monthly memberships as the lifeblood of their economic model. ▶

IN DEPTH

AGENDA

However, there are views just as firm as Cobbold's at the opposite end of the spectrum. Duncan Jefford, South-East regional manager at Everyone Active appreciates the Pure Gym CEO's stance but doesn't agree, as his organisation's business model and relationship with aggregation is quite different.

"There are legitimate concerns that you could cannibalise your own market share, but that hasn't happened for us – instead it has brought Everyone Active into an exciting new marketplace," says Jefford of Everyone Active's partnership with Gympass, a B2B aggregator.

Both Jefford and Gympass CEO Pietro Carmignani say the agreement – which began in October 2018 – has worked well so far and expansion looks likely. The organisations agree that their pact works because each understands what they want to gain from the venture.

Gympass is a content discovery platform that offers employees of its

partner companies the opportunity to exercise in 2,000 gyms and studios in the UK. It has a presence in more than 8,000 cities across the globe. Subsidised pricing means a more affordable offering for workers and its motto on the corporate side is aimed at engaging company employees in physical activity, creating more active and productive people.

Speaking to *S&PA Professional*, Carmignani explains that the Gympass approach is focused on three basic components of the business model. The operator, the corporation and the end user. "We help bridge the gap between these large organisations that want to provide and invest in physical activity for their employees," he says.

"Usually, the fitness operators struggle to reach these large organisations. I think we are in a good position to help those operators to find these people who have never accessed to the gym before."

According to Gympass analysis, some 80% of individuals that it brings to the

fitness market are first-time users who have never had a gym membership before. With less than a fifth of the nation currently registered as active gym members, Jefford welcomes the extra footfall provided by the aggregator. But it will not detract from Everyone Active's fundamental operations, he says.

"15% of the nation are active gym members," says Jefford. "We are finding that Gympass are bringing in people who aren't that, so we are getting new members. We want as many people to use Everyone Active facilities as possible, and from both points of view we are really happy with our membership."

"The rise of boutique gyms has meant that customers now want more variety, which the Gympass offering can provide. Our bread and butter is still monthly memberships, but having the extra people in our gyms is great."

On the operators' side, this is key, says Carmignani. Such partnerships bring incremental users from an untapped market – the corporate market – because of a commitment and investment in physical activity from the companies.

Steve Scales, client services director at ukactive, says: "This issue has been polarising for the sector over the past few years. It is key for ukactive to support the industry, including opportunities for growth, as well as supporting members with information and guidance on ways in which to engage new audiences and support business growth. We will continue to support and consult with all parties involved to ensure we continue to make more people, more active, more often."

In the business-to-customer market aggregation is a wide-ranging affair, with some aggregators setting different prices and using different models. The scope for bad practice worries Cobbold,

"It's normal to have this fear of new things, and some people don't want the innovation to be in place but we are only 15% of market penetration in the UK. There's a huge opportunity to increase the size of the pie here and bring new people to the market"

PIETRO CARMIGNANI, Gympass UK and Ireland CEO

8,000

Gympass has a presence in more than 8,000 cities across the globe

who argues that the “untapped market” is a cover for some aggregators to get a stranglehold on the market to the extent that they can fix prices to benefit themselves mainly.

He says that on evidence, the untapped market “is true only to a limited degree” and that in time, the reduced yield paid by aggregators “negates the impact” of extra volume to an operator.

“Therefore, operators can find themselves worse off as a result of aggregators being in the market – especially if the market is more rather than less mature, and if an intermediary is allowed to get strong in a market and reduces the money it pays operators over time,” warns Cobbold.

The consumer benefit is obvious – a combination of lower pricing models and greater choice of the activities and locations available to them. Although Cobbold and others in the low-cost gym market are apprehensive, aggregators such as ClassPass are quick to put operators at ease from any concerns they might hold.

Like Gympass, the US company offers access to more than 20,000 fitness studios and gyms all over the world. The platform allows individuals to search for classes convenient to them, with consumers billed on a fixed monthly rate. In the case of ClassPass, the ‘commission’ is only taken when a booking is made using their system, rather than a flat-rate set fee.



How it works

- A leisure operator sells bulk amount of memberships to the aggregator at a discount
- 20% discount of the usual membership – £50 becomes £40 a month
- The aggregator tries to sell this to corporate companies by promoting health and wellbeing, workrate productivity etc and offers it to companies at a discount price
- The company will pay 50% of the gym membership, subsidising it – so £20. The individual will pay the other half – £20. This means they are getting a £50 membership at £20 effectively, which will entice them into the gym
- The aggregators get the corporate company to effectively underwrite half of the gym membership, which gets more people coming into gyms through the aggregator/ company advertising and marketing of the healthy lifestyle

“It is completely free to partner with ClassPass,” says Mandy Menaker, marketing manager at ClassPass. “We take a very small percentage of every reservation booked through our system, but there is no cost for an operator to list its classes and work with us.”

ClassPass argues that its business model helps fill excess capacity that

would otherwise go unused. For example, a cycling studio class might go ahead having filled only half of its 40 spaces directly. The aggregator, through its host platform, works to help fill those 20 spaces by advertising them on its programme and takes a percentage of the sales it facilitates.

“Without ClassPass, the class would still run and that would be 20 chairs of zero revenue,” Menaker explains. “We work with studios to book those spots that wouldn’t fill organically. While the rate may be slightly discounted, it’s important to note that many studios end up offering similar discounts through their seasonal sales and packages.”

She adds that studios have the right to manually price their classes at a higher rate if the sole aim is to increase profit from each reservation booked through the discovery platform. Operators can also limit the amount of ClassPass users. Recently valued at \$600m, ClassPass continues to grow and is an indicator that although aggregators haven’t quite made their mark on the UK market yet, it is only a matter of time.

“We’ve built this place where anything works,” founder Payal Kadakia said in an August interview with the *New York Times*. “Our job isn’t to prescribe. It’s to give you all the options so you can choose and have access to what you want to do.”

However, not everyone is convinced. An article in *Atlanta Magazine* reported that users and studios had “mixed” feelings about the platform, with some studio owners complaining that customers using their services via ClassPass were “price-driven” and unlikely to return. ▶

IN DEPTH

AGENDA

Meanwhile, users understandably praised the frictionless booking process, access for non-members and variety, but the price-ranging system has been criticised. At the lower end of the scale, seven 'credits' allows for two classes per month and costs \$15 (£11.40). At the higher end, it costs a user \$199 per month for 130 credits, or 43 classes.

It has been reported that at times, irate customers presented their concerns over pricing or limited access, which was previously limited to three visits per studio, to the operators. The article quotes an operator who says such instances "can be frustrating" and that for the studios, "there is not much we can do to address these issues".

ClassPass has acknowledged the noise and lifted studio limitations, but for the likes of Cobbold the customer concerns – which have included monthly subscriptions rising by a whopping 90% in 2016 – are unsurprising. Eventually, operators in the UK will experience similar, he says.

Returning to the issue that has blighted vendors in the housing market in recent years, developments could see charges raised year-on-year regardless of inflation rates. As previously mentioned, the Cumbrian property business owner disagreed and queried the growing rates, to which the reply came that the price could indeed be reduced – by removing some listings. This was clearly an offer to reduce the service, rather than a price cut. It is such power that Cobbold and others fear. "There are very clear reasons why the leisure sector should be wary,"



20,000

ClassPass offers access to more than 20,000 fitness studios and gyms all over the world



90%

Customer concerns among ClassPass members in the past have included monthly subscriptions rising by a whopping 90% in 2016

Cobbold begins. "Most importantly because of the change in the business model implied by aggregators. The fitness industry in general relies on a monthly subscription model, whether it is an annual commitment or a rolling monthly membership.

"We all know that this subscription model is very important as it gives certainty of revenue. The aggregator model 'breaks' the subscription model because operators typically get paid per visit rather than paid a monthly subscription. I don't know many gym operators who would trade a subscription for pay-per-visit model ... but that is what gym operators who sign up to this are doing. Operators should be wary of this 'breakage' in the traditional model."

Jefford understands the viewpoint, and agrees to an extent. "There are reasons for the smaller gyms to be concerned, as they live on memberships alone," he says.

"Without ClassPass, the class would still run and that would be 20 chairs of zero revenue. We work with studios to book those spots that wouldn't fill organically"

MANDY MENAKER,
ClassPass marketing manager



However, Everyone Active's regional director adds that the aggregation model is one to be harnessed and cultivated through savvy negotiations and an understanding of what both parties are trying to achieve.

"Some aggregators are better than others, definitely," says Jefford. "Giving an aggregator the upper hand in negotiations is absolutely the wrong move. As for bad practices, there are some aggregators who have used negotiations to try and monopolise the market and fix prices below an economically viable rate. It's fair to say it's easy to see why we didn't choose them. The operators should set the price – once you allow the aggregator to set the price you're in big trouble."

Jefford says that the leisure sector is treading the same path as more innovative industries, and points out that utilising tools like the aggregation model has been in other sectors for some time.

The concerns are unlikely to recede, but as aggregators continue to grow in visibility so, too, will the industry learn to understand what is on offer and whether it is good for business on a case-by-case basis. Although confined to speaking about the B2B market from a first-hand viewpoint, Carmignani feels that aggregators – provided they are thorough, upfront and fair in their methods – can only play a positive role in getting the nation more active.

"Overall, as with any new business in the market, it attracts questions and worries about how it works and how it fits in, and the challenges that the people might face," he says. "It's understandable that people might have concerns about innovation from within the industry."

Gympass' UK and Ireland CEO explains that discussing the goals of all

"The rise of boutique gyms has meant that customers now want more variety, which the Gympass offering can provide. Our bread and butter is still monthly memberships, but having the extra people in our gyms is great"

DUNCAN JEFFORD, Everyone Active South-East regional manager

stakeholders before entering into an agreement is key. He also says that for aggregators to allay any fears an operator might have, test periods and simplified cancellation processes offer an opportunity to show this is a reciprocal partnership based on merit. Carmignani speaks from experience.

"What we usually see is, after the pilots and the tests and we run the numbers, that the incrementality is more than 80%, the majority of operators will stay," he says. "And they will stay for the long term, because we are proving with the numbers we are doing the right things."

"It's normal to have this fear of new things, but we are only 15% of market penetration in the UK. It's only a few people that have access to gym membership, so there's a huge opportunity to increase the size of the pie and bring new people to the market."

In a mature market, this would amount to "cannibalising each other", Carmignani agrees but he is adamant that getting more people active has to be the aim for all stakeholders in the leisure industry.

"If you were talking about a market

with 80/90% of market penetration such as some fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) or whatever, ok, it is eating the other's pie," he concedes. "However, in this scenario, with the fitness industry it's a huge opportunity to dramatically increase the number of people who are getting active so we are here to help."

On the corporate side, millions of employees in the UK are believed to be inactive. Gympass' goal, and a motivation for others, should be to change that, Carmignani says.

"We are talking about people who are not doing anything for their health, and that will give the burden to the NHS in a few years' time," he says. "The mission that we have is pretty clear – we have to get this four million as an example to start getting active. Nobody is touching the market right now, so [as aggregators] we think that we are doing the right things here to get these new people active."

"That is a clear focus for us – to increase physical activity levels and address ones that are not previously active before. We are breaking down the barriers of exercise by giving them affordable membership rates because the companies are investing in that." 



IN DEPTH

PROFILE

By DeeDee Duke

HIGHER

A year has gone by since Tim Hollingsworth OBE took over the reins at Sport England, but his enthusiasm for the role and the challenges ahead certainly haven't waned

CALLING

When Tim Hollingsworth OBE talks about sport and physical activity (S&PA), a spiritual fervour infuses his commentary. Phrases like “a higher purpose” and “the transformational power of sport” reflect his perspective that those who organise, manage, coach and play sport have something of a calling to fulfil the possibilities it offers.

Now a year into his tenure as Sport England's CEO, Hollingsworth has a broader church in which to apply his passion than he did previously at the British Paralympic Association (BPA).

But he hasn't so much left his old stomping grounds as instead built a bridge between that much-loved turf and his new territory. “The link to my previous job – to which I remain passionate, very proud and very committed to in many ways – is that the [BPA] and my work around the Paralympic movement absolutely

first demonstrated and then embedded in me, the transformational power of sport and the higher purpose it can have in a social context,” he says.

During an hour-long conversation at his London Bloomsbury office, where the furniture is positioned differently than it was when his predecessor Jennie Price was the occupant, ‘transformation’ is a key theme. He explains: “We could see within the Paralympic movement the way in which the positivity, the sport and the excellence of the sport had the ability to challenge perception and perhaps change the way that we as a nation... start to think, feel and behave about disability.

“And that higher purpose became a fundamental driver for me as an individual and as a leader.

“So,” he continues, “I absolutely see that mirrored now in the potential that Sport England has to not only be a provider and a grant giver...but to be an 🌟



“While S&PA
in this country
works really well
for some – indeed
it works brilliantly
for the majority –
it does not work for
others, and there
are very stubborn
inequalities
that exist”

IN DEPTH

PROFILE

CV: Tim Hollingsworth

- CEO, Sport England
Nov 2018 to present
- CEO, British Paralympic Association
July 2011 to Nov 2018
- COO/Director of Policy & Communications,
UK Sport
March 2005 to July 2011
- Director, HBL Media
Jan 2002 to March 2005
- Head of Corporate Communications, Granada
Jan 2000 to Dec 2001

organisation that is proudly relentless around trying to transform the lives of people through sport activity, attaching social benefit and higher purpose to the business of playing sport and being active."

And relentless it must be in a complex societal environment where government and individual inertia can take hold too easily – as people get their adrenaline rushes from punching buttons and riveting their gaze at screens. To date, Hollingsworth's public talks have highlighted the commitment of Sport England to look at new ways of increasing the national population's engagement with physical activity – there's not to be any resting on one's laurels, even after a reported increase of 1m people taking part in physical activity since 2015.

Asked to elaborate, he says two "very clear" trends were evident: one is that "we're living through the era of digital transformation" and another is that "while S&PA in this country works really well for some – indeed it works brilliantly for the majority – it does not work for others, and there are very stubborn inequalities that exist...

The single biggest factor is social economics.

"Fundamentally, we have a system in which the better off you are, the easier it is to take advantage of it," he says.

And if the vision is that "everyone should have the opportunity to be active regardless of their age, their background, their ability", Hollingsworth emphasises, "we need to create a sector that supports that".

Underscoring his call to evolve the sector to an equal access arena, he says: "That's a reason to change... to recognise that something is in there that

is ingrained now, because these stubborn inequalities have been seen over a long period of time, that we have to think differently about."

Dealing with inequality of opportunities for all is the parallel challenge of getting the sector up to speed with the hectic, technology-obsessed modern world. "In my view, we live in a world that's outpacing the sector," he says, suggesting further that the digital transformation underway actually poses serious competition with S&PA for people's time.

"It has brought an immense competition for alternatives," he says. "So we have to...realise the true barrier to someone playing one sport is not the other sport or another way of being active; it's people doing something else altogether."

In addition to the competition of activity available online, identity – especially for young people – is linked to an online presence, while S&PA is manifested in the material world, Hollingsworth points out. "How do we make what we know to be the important, vital brilliance of playing sport and being active have a presence

in the online world that increasingly young people are occupying? We have to think about that without knowing what the answer to this is," he says. "We have to come up with the 21st century version of what sport is."

Collaboration among existing players in the S&PA space is a given requirement for the sector to find its footing in the world Hollingsworth describes. However, it's time to join forces also with those he calls "unusual suspects", he says. An example of collaborating with "unusual suspects – or people we would normally not think about working with" is a partnership between Sport England and the National Trust.

It's not a partnership based on financial arrangements but "here's an organisation with a huge amount of land and a huge amount of people who enjoy using that land" but didn't "feel they had the expertise or the resource or the capacity to maximise the opportunity for people to be physically active – whether that's riding a bike, going for a walk or a run or a swim", he explains.

In the first six months of 2020, Hollingsworth's plans for Sport England include looking at its internal culture and "how we develop a clear set of values and behaviours that can not only absolutely dictate how we behave with each other internally, but can be visible and recognisable externally". Campaigning and advocacy along certain inclusion themes will also take up his time.

With Sport England's five-year strategy reaching its finish line in 2021, 2020 would seem about the right time to begin examining how that approach will play into a new phase and what new directions, if any, might be in store. From what Hollingsworth says, the current focus on the five desired outcomes identified first in the

government's 2015 'Sporting Future' document and subsequently in Sport England's 2016-21 strategy will remain sharply in view.

"We don't see a massive change from that focus. Those five outcomes [physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development, and economic development] are hugely important and the right way to focus attention; they absolutely speak to people's fundamental belief in what sport & physical activity can do, how it can provide people with those greater benefits that are not just about being fit."

Also, Hollingsworth adds, the sector has spent "an awful lot" of the last four years "learning about what works and what doesn't, seeking to find ways to overcome barriers, make them work and behave differently". He continues: "And we are on that journey. So it would be quite wrong to say, 'Let's rip it up and start again'."

It has been about 15 months since Sport England unveiled its professional workforce strategy, 'Working in an Active Nation', which handed the reins of driving training and professional development in the sector to CIMSPA. Among the goals set for CIMSPA are to have 50% of the sector's workforce in CIMSPA-accredited continuous professional development by 2021 and, also in 2021, all S&PA sector training providers endorsed

and quality-assured by CIMSPA.

Asked for his perceptions of CIMSPA's progress so far, Hollingsworth says: "I think the leadership with Marc Woods as chair and Tara Dillon as CEO have engaged on that agenda very well... Our investment in CIMSPA is reflective of our belief in the organisation as well.

"There's still more to be done," he adds, "but in terms of understanding

the professional workforce and...

how that relates to coaches and administrators, how it relates even to those in the volunteer sector who are working alongside them, that's the direction of travel, and I think it is positive." 🙌

Tim Hollingsworth will speak at CIMSPA's 2020 conference in February.

"How do we make what we know to be the vital brilliance of playing sport and being active have a presence in the online world that increasingly young people are occupying?"



IN DEPTH

CASE STUDY



3,348% increase in membership. Membership usage rising by 1,048%.

Direct debits income increasing by 1,233%. These are the kinds of statistics leisure centre operators dream about. They are also the very real stats reported by the Ravenscraig Activity Centre in Scotland following a refurbishment and overhaul of its offering.

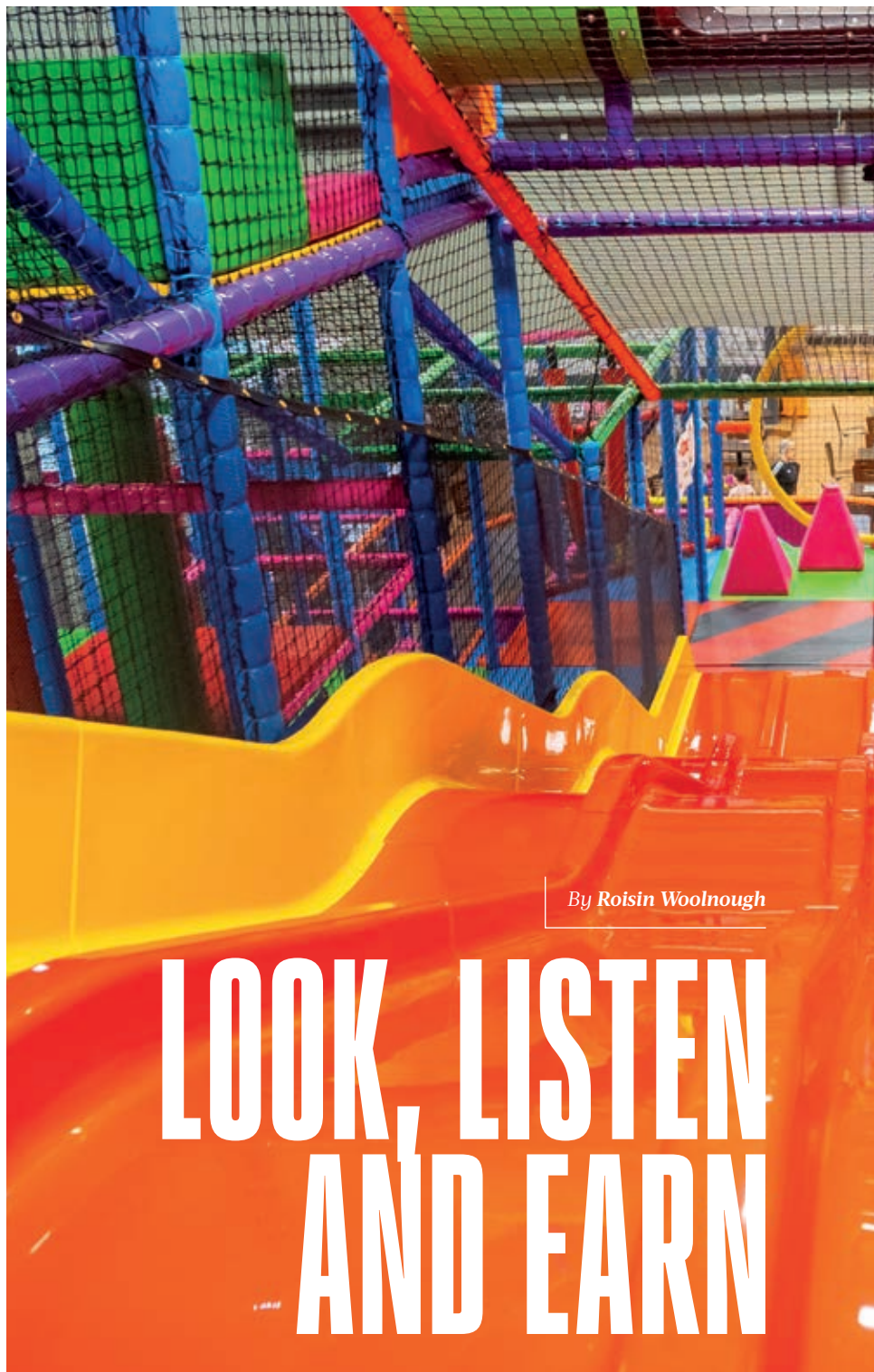
What makes these figures even more impressive is that the site had been earmarked for potential closure as it was in need of a facelift, was heavily subsidised and running at a loss.

Ravenscraig Activity Centre is one of 10 leisure, cultural and community sites operated by Inverclyde Leisure on behalf of Inverclyde Council. The trust has reported a 75% increase in income and 51% rise in membership over the past few years, with the Ravenscraig site being one of its biggest success stories.

So how did this transformation come about? It started in 2014, when Inverclyde Leisure appointed Alliance Leisure – both CIMSPA partners – as a development partner. The aim was to review the 10 sites and come up with a sustainable development plan to revitalise existing facilities where necessary and provide a more diverse offering tailored around the needs and wants of the local community.

“We were approached by Inverclyde Leisure to work with them as a development partner to grow participation, grow more activity and sustainable leisure development,” says James Foley, commercial director at Alliance Leisure.

A key part of the partnership was coming up with solutions that both met the needs of the community and would generate ongoing income for the trust. Against a backdrop of austerity and ever decreasing funding, Inverclyde Leisure knew it had to take a proactive,



By Roisin Woolnough

LOOK, LISTEN AND EARN



£500,000

The £500,000 investment at Lady Octavia Sports Centre has resulted in a 570% increase in fitness memberships

change-focused approach to any development plans.

“It needed to be commercial and sustainable,” says Foley. “It is great to drive forward participation but the physical activity agenda and sustainability have to go hand-in-hand.”

The first site to go under the microscope was Ravenscraig Activity Centre, a dryside site that was running at a deficit of £65,000. They wanted to save the site, if possible, so looked at how to turn it around and make it profitable.

“We focused on understanding the business and identifying opportunities to improve performance,” says Foley. “We also studied drivers for physical activity and identified local health needs, all of which helped us to generate the product.”

Alliance Leisure went out to the local community to find out what products and services people wanted from the centre. It wanted to reach out to and draw in people that weren’t physically active and weren’t existing users of the site, as well as current users.

To do this, it carried out user and non-user surveys both in the centre and in the community in areas of high traffic, such as in supermarkets and at bus stops. As well as asking people what they wanted from the site, the survey also asked people what products and services they would pay for and what they could afford. This information was critically important as the trust

At leisure centres in Scotland’s West Lowlands, adopting a community-centric approach has paid dividends for both customer and operator

IN DEPTH

CASE STUDY

“It’s about creating a sustainable offer and programming and pricing it in a way that is appropriate to the local community it serves”

JAMES FOLEY,
commercial director at Alliance Leisure

operates in some areas of high deprivation and wanted to ensure its services were accessible to all.

Foley says making services affordable is key to sustainability and therefore key to the success of the development programme. “It’s about creating a sustainable offer and programming and pricing it in a way that is appropriate to the local community it serves.”

Kieron Vango, CEO of Inverclyde Leisure, agrees with Foley that sustainability and affordability were two central drivers and that getting them right has enabled them to reach a much broader audience than previously. “We operate in areas of high unemployment, with people on lower incomes so we had to make it affordable. We now have something for everyone and to suit all budgets. We’ve diversified our model and our brand, whereas before we were a one-stop shop with one price and a small menu for members. We now have a £9.99 price point and are probably the most affordable gym in Scotland.”

A really popular new feature is the Fitness for Less gyms, which have attracted people who couldn’t afford the previous, more traditional offering. As well as the low-cost gym, the site now has a soft play facility, XHeight Climb,

food and beverage provision, including party rooms and a Costa café. The front of house area, services and changing facilities also got an upgrade. Not only that – seven or eight jobs that otherwise would have been lost have been saved and a further 30 new jobs created. Some of those jobs are related to physical activity, such as climbing staff and personal fitness trainers, while others are in the café and reception area.

And importantly, as Foley says, keeping the site open meant that the community still has access to the centre. “The community didn’t lose an asset. We were able to reinvigorate participation, whereas if we had removed the facility, we would have created a barrier to participation just as we are, as a society, trying to encourage people to be physically active.”

Vango agrees: “That facility wouldn’t be there now if it wasn’t for the model and it’s doing fantastically well. Feedback has been fantastic and we’ve got people using it who have never used a gym before in their lives.”

If leisure operators are to do what Inverclyde Leisure has done and create financially viable services that enable more people to be active, then Foley says they have to stop operating along traditional models. Segmenting out the offering in the way that Inverclyde Leisure has done in terms of design, programming and pricing, is not standard practice in the sector but has proved hugely successful. “Looking at the whole offering and being able to segment it to the audience in the most effective way is unusual,” says Foley. “What you often see is an approach to designing leisure facilities that is formulaic – gym, swim and fitness.”

After the success of the Ravenscraig site, Inverclyde Leisure and Alliance Leisure turned their attention to two other sites: Lady Octavia Sports Centre and Boglestone Activity Centre. It

In numbers

RAVENS CRAIG ACTIVITY CENTRE

Member Club Live: 3,348% increase
Member usage: 1,048% increase
Direct debits income: 1,233% increase

LADY OCTAVIA SPORTS CENTRE

Member Club Live: 570% increase
Member usage: 57% increase
Direct debits income: 176% increase

BOGLESTONE ACTIVITY CENTRE

Member Club Live: 458% increase
Member usage: 76% increase
Direct debits income: 316% increase

INVERCLYDE LEISURE

Membership has risen by 51%
Net income has risen by 75%



would have been easy for the trust to replicate what it had done with Ravenscraig, but it wanted to follow the same method as before and create a development plan that was based around the needs of the local community. It also wanted the various sites to complement each other, rather than mirror each other.

At Lady Octavia Sports Centre, the decision was made to modernise the 16-station gym and extend it out by 60 stations following the Fitness for Less approach. Changing areas were updated, as was the reception area. The £500,000 investment has resulted in a 570% increase in fitness memberships.

The Boglestone Activity Centre also now benefits from a Fitness for Less gym, plus a large children's soft play area, a sports zone with a basketball



10

Ravenscraig Activity Centre is one of 10 leisure, cultural and community sites operated by Inverclyde Leisure

30

new jobs created as part of the redevelopment at Ravenscraig Activity Centre

and sports pitch area. And again, the outcomes are impressive: an over 450% increase in membership to the centre in just a few months. CIMSPA member Andrew Hetherington, operations manager at Inverclyde Leisure, says the results far exceeded their expectations. "We have overachieved on all three sites in terms of projected user numbers, membership base and therefore, income. Every project has not only been successful, but has overachieved."

Foley says the success is largely due to the fact that redesigns were all based around community needs, both in terms of physical activity and pricing. "Inverclyde Leisure has a very good understanding of both its current and potential users, and the price points that stimulate engagement," he says. "The trust created a gym with a user-led pricing approach, which has driven this phenomenally successful project." 

IN DEPTH

TECH

INFORMED DECISION MAKING

Data has become a valuable tool for leisure operators to understand the customer and provide a service based on that, as Sue Weekes found out

The era when gym operators and sports clubs made decisions “by gut-feeling” is over, says José Teixeira, head of customer experience at Portuguese company SC Fitness. “Now we use data to take action,” he says.

Data analytics allows businesses to be closer than ever to their customers. It helps them to understand their behaviours, likes and preferences. In the competitive sport and fitness sector, it will be increasingly key to retention, as well as winning new customers.

SC Fitness, which owns clubs across the brands of Solinca, Pump and One, is one of those to recognise this and has established a business intelligence department and also employs analysts. “Management teams are more conscious of what you need to do to succeed, and in the actual hyperconnected world we have a lot of data to process and to find what customers want,” says Teixeira, who has noted the rise in organisations in the industry hiring new talent in areas such as data analysis.

His own job title is also indicative of the importance being placed on better

understanding customers, a critical aim across all sectors. Three-quarters of organisations surveyed by Gartner increased their customer experience (CX) technology investments in 2018 with customer analytics one of the biggest investments.

Adam Coombs, marketing director at tech company Perfect Gym Solutions, says it is early days but explains that consumer use of technology for fitness is one of the factors forcing clubs to adapt and transform. “They are just

coming to terms on how to utilise the strong data points they have now within their business models,” he says. “This requires a bit

of consulting on our end, but we’ve seen some positive results in using class recommendations to inform about fitness experiences and the churn predictions not only to feed strong retention metrics and insights, but flipping that funnel around and using the probabilities of long lifetime value (LTV) members to





“This enables them to react more quickly to business trends and create new, targeted experiences that don’t rely on guess work; think Amazon and Netflix”

DR PAUL BEDFORD,
owner and founder, Retention Guru

be used in look-alike-audiences on customer acquisition platforms.”

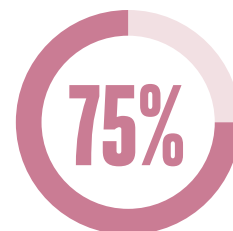
For example, the software’s reporting function enabled the il fiore health centre chain in the Netherlands to make more data-driven choices regarding its online marketing. By isolating the members with the best attendance stats and looking at their member profiles, the club could target people who were similar to the members who valued their club the most, leading to higher conversion rates.

Dr Paul Bedford, also known as the ‘Retention Guru’, recently supported the creation of Lifestyle Fitness’s digital retention journey, to help new members feel comfortable on joining. “We set up trigger-based emails, including videos covering everything from how you enter the club to how to log on and book a class, what happens in the class and what to bring with them, so they won’t feel out of place,” he said. “The programme boosted member visit frequency from 1.7 to 2.2 a week within just six months.

Bedford adds that at the far end of the scale, operators are using artificial intelligence (AI) to identify valuable customers and group them by similar behaviours. “This enables them to react more quickly to business trends and create new, targeted experiences that don’t rely on guess work; think Amazon and Netflix,” he says.

The sector is likely to see a rise in AI-based tools to aid retention and among the frontrunners is CoachAi, an AI companion that uses behavioural science to help people achieve their health and wellness goals.

It will automate communication and an ongoing conversation with individual members but the developer can also provide the club with high-level information on its overall population. “For example, when members start the conversation with CoachAi we can



According to a survey of businesses, three-quarters of organisations increased their customer experience (CX) technology investments in 2018 with customer analytics one of the biggest investments

Source: Gartner

maybe say ‘70% have self-identified themselves as high risk’,” says CoachAi CEO Shai Neiger.

CIMSPA partner Inverclyde Leisure is among the users of CoachAi and says it will form part of its “ongoing digital customer journey” to help improve retention.

SC Fitness has a partnership with InovRetail, a retail IT company, which is helping it to achieve its number one goal: extending the client’s lifetime membership. Teixeira says that among its most interesting findings from analysis has been that the industry underestimates the importance of lack of usage.

“Members usually have a good frequency in the first months but steady decline after that,” says Teixeira. “In terms of activities, we found that people who attend group classes have higher frequency usage and therefore are more easily retained. In terms of average lifetime membership, we also observe significant differences between age/generations, having contracts, or having physical evaluations. Based on that, all of our focus was in developing tools, in-club or off-club, that maximise the variables that we know help retention.”

TECH TOOLKIT

PRODUCT ROUND-UP

ENHANCED WORKOUTS

Take a look at the latest ground-breaking equipment that can put your facility ahead of the rest



Let's get Fisikal

Fisikal is helping personal trainers and studio operators digitise their operations with its new business management solution. It aims to put an end to paper-based records and manual data collation, enabling business owners to focus on and professionalise front-of-house delivery. Fisikal claims it can be up and running in a couple of hours. The solution provides real-time operational visibility while a set of reports covering financial status, client engagement and bookings provides instant feedback on business performance. The solution is available via a subscription service from £75 per month. All functionality is available to all subscribers but can be activated or deactivated as required.

Price: From £75 per month
<https://fisikal.com/studio/>



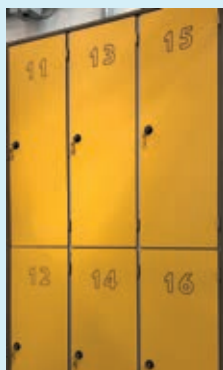
TRIPLE THE FUNCTIONAL POWER

The new Auster System aims to triple the power and scope of a gym's functional zone. It combines dynamic resistance training and gymnastic exercises with traditional suspension training courtesy of its clever anchor design. The patented dual-carabiner on the Auster Anchor allows different attachments to be clipped and unclipped with ease with users able to choose from Power Straps, Dynamic Bands and Power Rings, or a combination of them. The bands bring an extensive range of dynamic resistance exercises to the gym floor and allow any exercise to be easily progressed or regressed. Meanwhile, the rings allow members to take training intensity up a gear, helping to develop pull-ups and dips and increase workout options. All carabiners and adjusters are made from aerospace-grade aluminium.

Price range: £170-£340
www.austerfit.com

WATERPROOF LOCKER BOOSTS GREEN CREDENTIALS

Changing room specialists Crown Sports Lockers has introduced a waterproof locker which aims to enhance hygiene while meeting the mounting demand for environmentally green solutions. In development for some time, the carcass is constructed from recycled plastic and doors impregnated with an antibacterial agent preventing MRSA and e-coli growth. The manufacturer uses sustainably sourced timber throughout its product line. At the end of 2019, Crown Sports Lockers was accredited by The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an endorsement that allows the made-in-Britain manufacturer to strengthen both its own and its clients' environmental credentials.



Crown's FSC accreditation confirms that its suppliers have sourced wood and associated products from FSC-certified sources.

Price: on application
crownsports
lockers.co.uk



DEDICATED DEADLIFT PLATFORM

Eleiko has extended its sound and vibration reduction (SVR) range to include a platform specifically designed for deadlifts. Deadlifts have a significantly smaller space requirement for safe lift execution when compared to weightlifting moves like the snatch and clean & jerk, so by developing a smaller deadlift platform, it aims to help its customers maximise and use space efficiently. It is two-thirds the size of the SVR platform designed for weightlifting but other elements remain unchanged. It features the 11-gauge custom-shaped steel frame and wood deck with an inlaid rubber strip to protect the platform, bumpers and discs from damage. Eleiko's multi-layered technology in the platform addresses the challenges facilities face due to the noise and vibration from lifting weights.

Price: to come
www.eleiko.com/svr

SUPPLIER'S VIEW



LEONIE WILEMAN,
CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER,
PREMIER SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS LTD
ENHANCING THE CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Technology is ever prevalent in today's leisure industry, so why isn't it being used to its full potential? Used correctly, technology can make the client journey simple and stress free. This is therefore the key to ensuring clients and staff alike have a positive overall experience.

The client journey starts from the moment they search for and visit your website. That means you must ensure your website is easy to find, easy to navigate and is mobile-optimised. With the continued popularity of smartphones, more and more clients will be looking and booking classes on their pocket-sized computers, indicating that your website needs to show correctly on their device.

As technology is all about streamlining processes, the client experience should be made just as easy. That includes personalised booking confirmations that outline details to the client, right through to an automated feedback request link once they've walked out the doors. So why do so many businesses make this a chore for clients by manually sending complicated emails that hide vital details?

Incorporating tech on-site also enhances the client experience exponentially. Security terminals can provide fast track access to those with a membership, while reception can capture client personal information at check-in with tablets that record client marketing preferences and medical information. This not only means clients spend less time waiting but enables staff to recommend gym programmes or memberships based on previous preferences or bookings.

Yet many businesses are missing a trick by not implementing more tech across the board. If not grasped with both hands, the leisure industry could be left behind by an ever-changing landscape of tech users who will go elsewhere for a more personalised, seamless experience.

SWIMMING SMARTWATCH

Garmin has introduced the Garmin Swim 2 GPS swimming smartwatch that can be used in the pool or in open water to monitor heart rate while also tracking distance, pace, stroke count and distance per stroke. The open-water swim mode uses built-in GPS for swims in lakes, oceans or rivers while those who prefer swimming in the pool benefit from advanced features such as drill logging, timed rests and pacing alerts. The watch automatically uploads to Garmin Connect, the online fitness community where users can analyse their activity, track their progress and create custom workouts. The Garmin Swim 2 features up to seven days of battery life in smartwatch mode, up to 13 hours in GPS and optical heart rate (OHR) mode and up to 72 hours in pool and OHR mode.

Price: £219.99 **www.garmin.com**





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WORKPLACE

FOCUS



*Rather than only monitoring children's physical activity, shouldn't we be also measuring mental health too, asks **Sheila Forster***

LOOKING AT MORE THAN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

2 019 marks the third full year of Sport England's Active Lives Survey, which replaced the Active People Survey in 2016. One of the key differences is that the ALS introduced, for the first time, the capacity to monitor how active children are, as well as adults.

This is a great step forward. Countless studies have shown that regular physical activity has a positive impact physically, mentally, emotionally and academically.

However, alternative studies have argued that physical activity is dropping in children. For example, a 2019 study by the British Heart Foundation showed that children become less active each year of primary school. Measuring and monitoring children's physical activities is therefore key. But it is of limited use. And this is because it is a process – not an outcome.

By measuring only physical activity, we are measuring the process, but we are not measuring whether, and to what extent, it is bringing about desired outcomes such as better physical and mental health, improved fitness, energy levels and academic performance.

We are doing the equivalent, for example, of simply counting how many statins are being taken and not whether our cholesterol levels have declined.

Additionally, measuring physical activity tells you only one thing – how

“Fitness assessments and mental health monitoring are quick and easy to carry out”

much physical activity you are doing. But there is a lot it doesn't tell you.

For example, it won't tell you:

- how healthy you are
- how fit you are
- your physical literacy or physical competence
- your levels of mental health.

Because it has been shown that physical activity can bring about these outcomes, for example, if a child's physical activity has gone up, we can assume perhaps their physical literacy has too. But this is a big leap.

Equally, there is not always a correlation between increased physical activity and mental health.

Mental health is an immensely complex subject, and for children, particularly adolescents and those going through puberty, there are many pressures which can affect mental and social health.

So if we want our children to be fit, physically literate and mentally healthy,

we need to measure these directly. This would give us the ability to monitor our children's health and development in the areas which matter.

Crucially, it would also provide us with good insight into what programmes are working and what aren't.

This is relatively straightforward – the National Child Measurement Programme, which measures obesity, has managed to consistently measure children's BMI at Reception and Year 6 across England since 2007.

Fitness assessments and mental health monitoring are quick and easy to carry out and can provide a wealth of useful data. They can provide key information about the affect of teaching programmes, and a detailed understanding of natural strengths and weakness. For children, they can provide new understanding and motivations for PE and physical activity.

At policy level, data about children's health and fitness can provide key insights for understanding health patterns and trends, and data to support and design interventions.

The most common criteria for success is if a process achieved the desired outcomes. But measuring physical activity alone does not do this. It simply records the process by which we hope to achieve the outcomes – without noting if those outcomes have been achieved.

We all want children who are mentally healthy, physically fit and able to achieve their best. But if we aren't measuring these, how do we know if they are? 😊

***Sheila Forster** is managing director at Fitmedia. **Alex Scott-Bayfield**, director of strategy and operations at Fitmedia, contributed to this article*



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KEYNOTES



Tim Hollingsworth
CEO, Sport England



David Thomson
Behaviour change expert

BREAKOUT CHOICES

CIMSPA CONTENT

Business of fitness stream

Latest trends and developments impacting and changing the fitness industry.

Education stream

How our regulation and standards focus enhances a great sector workforce.

Management stream

Tackling the management challenges identified by insight research.

QUEST NBS CONTENT

Engagement stream

Issues, pathways and solutions for our sector.

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LAST WORD

SPORT AMBASSADOR



Reflecting on his career in the sport and physical activity sector, Swansea Council's Dave Osborne says the industry has become a very different place – and it's for the better

TIMES ARE A-CHANGING

I've had the time of my life in this sector. It's been a wonderful career and I have never once woken up in the morning and not wanted to go to work.

It started in the summer of 1974 when I got a job at my local swimming baths at Port Talbot to get a bit of cash to go to uni. My plan had been to go on to teacher training, but I decided that I liked what I was doing and thought: "Let's see where it takes me." In the end I stayed and here we are.

My background was as a competitive swimmer – club and regional – and a water polo player. I started as a lifeguard, then I worked as a swimming teacher for about 12 months, then I became a supervisor.

I'm retiring on 31 December. Initially, I didn't want to stop working here, but because of recent changes and the outsourcing of the facilities, the parameters have changed. I've earned my retirement, so the changes have come at the right time, really.

When I did my professional qualification at the start of my career, CIMSPA was called the Institute of Baths and Recreation Management. Not only that, but the organisation has developed into one that encourages membership, careers and training across the sector – it has become more embracing, especially of people at the

lower end of the organisation – it encourages you to join, rather than validate a qualification. With the older qualification, we were more back office than front-facing. You now need to be more business-focused, because it's about providing a service as well as functioning as a commercial entity.

Customer expectation is much higher, too. I can't honestly say I'm a big believer that the customer is always right, but it is important to always find a way forward. Communication is a necessary tool to get the best out of everybody and everything.

Over the years, I've learned that it's worth asking people what they want, rather than giving them what you think they want. One of the major things that has changed in my time is an increase in participation among older people. Age is not a barrier any more and they appreciate the benefits that exercise and wellbeing can bring. Older people embrace the social aspect, too – Christmas events and weekends away.

I would like to think I've been a conduit for many people who have participated in sport and for some who started work in the leisure industry. I'd



"I've learned it's worth asking people what they want, rather than giving them what you think they want"

like to say thank you to those who have given me help and friendship in my working life. I've had some great times, worked with some great people – it's been a pleasure to come to work. 🧡

Dave Osborne, leisure operations manager at Swansea Council was speaking to S&PA Professional's Roisin Woolnough



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LAST WORD

SPORTING LIFE



Souleyman Bah, para athlete, motivational speaker and contestant on The Apprentice 2019 explains how setbacks have always made him more determined than ever to succeed

DISABILITY DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A BARRIER

WHICH SPORT IS YOUR FIRST LOVE?

It was football, when I lived in Africa up to the age of six. Watching incredible footballers on TV like the original Ronaldo [Luís Nazário de Lima] and David Beckham made me want to succeed at football. But with my visual disability, that dream quickly faded.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO ATHLETICS?

It was a way of making friends. When I moved to the UK, my English was non-existent and I found it hard to communicate, but one way I could have fun with my friends was by racing around the playground and on sports days, which helped to increase my confidence. It wasn't until year 7, when I broke the school sprint record, that I was urged by my P.E. department to take it up seriously, and so I did.

WHEN ENTERING ATHLETICS, DID YOU HAVE A MENTOR?

My most important mentor has been the world record holder and fastest ever visually impaired person to grace the track – Irish sprinter Jason Smyth. His determination and incredible success was a massive motivator for me

“A winning result is a powerful motivator and gives me pride in what I do and for those I represent”

and a huge lesson that my disability should not stop me pursuing sporting success. His performance in the 2012 and 2016 Paralympic games stamped pride in me.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT ATHLETICS?

My favourite thing about athletics is not only the ability to grow and improve my physical potential but also the opportunity to battle it out with other athletes for a position on the podium. A winning result can be a powerful motivator and gives me great pride in what I do and for the people I represent.

WHAT'S THE HARDEST CHALLENGE YOU HAVE EVER FACED?

My hardest challenge was battling a serious hamstring injury. For most athletes, such an injury would signal the end

of my sprinting career but I did not give in to this. Two years of persistence, rehabilitation and patience ensured I was ready to compete again.

WHAT IS THE MOST BRILLIANT MOMENT OF YOUR SPORTING CAREER AND WHY?

It was not only representing my country at the Paralympic School Games in Brazil (2015) but coming away with a gold medal. As it was my international debut, it was more than I could have imagined and marked the beginning of my professional sporting career.

WHAT IS THE FUNNIEST INCIDENT IN YOUR SPORTING CAREER AND WHY?

It was during a 2014 competition where the different groups of racers were being called up for their heats and I heard my age group being called, but when I looked at my competitors at the start line, they were all female. I had not listened to which gender was being called up; I quickly walked away, but still suffered the jokes from my friends.

WHAT WOULD YOU REGARD AS YOUR THEME TUNE AND WHY?

My theme tune would have to be *Monster* by Kanye West, as it never fails to pump me up before a race. 🎧

Souleyman Bah was speaking to S&PA Professional's Graham Simons



LAST WORD

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This issue... Making sport for everyone

Research from McKinsey, Harvard Business School and Credit Suisse has shown that companies in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity are 35% more likely to have financial returns above the industry average. Meanwhile, the same analysis reports that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15% more profitable. As the recent 'Diversity in Sport Governance' report conducted by CIMSPA partner Sport England, UK Sport and Inclusive Boards shows, the sport and physical activity sector still has much to do on diversity issues.

Over half (55%) of people from BAME backgrounds said that they would be **more likely to participate in sport and physical activity** if they had access to **online information** about local opportunities



38%

Over the coming decades, it is estimated that by the year 2051, **over a third (38%)** of sports participants will be from BAME backgrounds



40%

Research from the Sport and Recreation Alliance found that **four in 10 (40%) of BAME respondents** said that their experience was negative, compared to **14% of white British participants**

30%

Growth in sports such as **cricket** - with a 30% increase (543 clubs) in women's teams - and **cycling** - which has welcomed 800,000 new female participants since 2013



Among sports volunteering, South Asian females are underrepresented as **6%** account for the female population yet **only 3% are volunteers**

Ethnic minority volunteering in the sport and physical activity sector is **below** that of the wider population

85% WHITE BRITISH

11% BAME

4% WHITE OTHER

Activity level rates

69.3% active

The most active region in England is **Bristol**

57.9% inactive

The least active region in England is **Northamptonshire**

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**Stuart Russell, Health Club & Spa Manager,
Crown Spa Hotel**



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