

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

The challenges of reopening

p26

RESEARCH

Elite athletes: nature or nurture?

p30

PROFILES

Meet the lockdown heroes

p34

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 **CIMSPA**

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P O S I T I V E



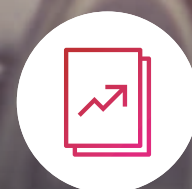
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5

Upfront

5 Editor's leader

News

- 6 Job vacancies level out in the autumn
- 7 Myzone launches #WorkOutToHelpOut
- 8 Shaping the future of fitness
- 9 CIMSPA AGM: sector at a crossroads

10

In depth

10-21 CIMSPA update

- 10 Sector perspectives
- 14 Are local authority operators up for the challenge?
- 17 CIMSPA launches ReTrain initiative
- 18 Places Leisure CEO Paul McPartlan
- 20 Digital transformation
- 22 **Agenda**
- Engaging the LGBT+ community
- 26 **Business**
- Demanding times for reopening
- 30 **Research**
- What makes an elite athlete?
- 34 **Profiles**
- Sector heroes during lockdown

39

Management

- 39 **Expert advice**
- Legal obligations for operators
- 40 **Workplace focus**
- Onboarding in a lockdown world

42

Tech toolkit

- 42 **Product round-up**
- The value of virtual

45

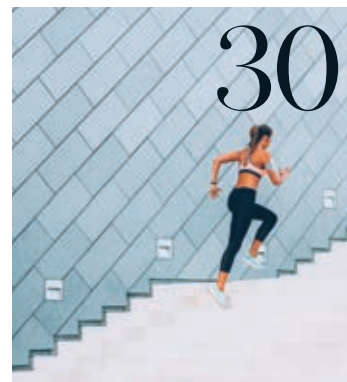
Last word

- 45 **Sport ambassador**
- Julie Davis, Clinical Research Network
- 46 **Sporting life**
- James Hope-Gill, Skateboard GB

20



30



34

"Plenty of evidence supports the role of environment, but genetic evidence remained elusive because of complex phenotype and the small effect size of genetic factors" (p31)



26

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UPFRONT

EDITORIAL

▶ DeeDee Doke

Lessons learned



Our industry has gained a lot of experience from coming out of lockdown

Here we are in the second half of 2020, and our daily lives continue to be influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, seven months after lockdown first came into force. So what have we learned? How do we prepare for a second or even third lockdown?

As a sector and as four nations, we need to be gathering our learnings and establishing a foundation for going forward and, like with a serious illness that has struck an individual, learn to manage our pain and the circumstances and conditions we find ourselves in.

Some positives: the sector has

responded beautifully in so many ways to new demands, requirements and restrictions. At the two gyms I attend, there have been uniquely different responses to different circumstances – one is part of a network and the other is a single, independently owned facility. But at both, I've felt safe, cared for and welcomed, and admired the attention to social distancing spacing. Frankly, I've enjoyed the social distancing in terms of there being no crush of humanity to bump into during an especially exuberant combat or HIIT class or aqua aerobics session. And it is simply so good to be back in a fitness facility!

As we go to press, we do not yet know if we will have to enter a second national lockdown or not. To survive, we must learn from our experiences these past months, apply those lessons, and turn them into advantages as we head into the unknown.



Contact us by
Twitter @SAPA_Pro
and email at
sandpa@redactive.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Editor DeeDee Doke

Assistant editor

Patrick Appleton

Senior designer Seija Tikkis

Production editor

Vanessa Townsend

Contributors Colin Cottell,

Dean Gurden, Sue Weekes,

Roisin Woolnough

Picture editor Akin Falope

Publishing director

Aaron Nicholls

ADVERTISING

Sales

020 7880 6230

sandpaprof@redactive.co.uk

PRODUCTION

Production director

Jane Easterman

Senior production executive

Rachel Young

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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CIMSPA ENQUIRIES

Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity
SportPark, Loughborough University, 3 Oakwood Drive, Loughborough, LE11 3QF

Tel 03438 360 200

E-mail info@cimsipa.co.uk

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CIMSPA

S&PA News

A round-up of the latest developments in the industry

JOB VACANCIES LEVEL OUT IN THE AUTUMN

By DeeDee Doke

Numbers of redundancies and furloughs have exploded across every area of work since Covid-19 erupted in the UK in March.

In the sport & physical activity sector, the numbers of job vacancies are levelling out this autumn after a tumultuous period through spring and summer, according to statistics released to S&PA

Professional by two of the UK's leading job search engines.

At the same time, recruitment in the sector has dropped significantly, along with other job sectors, since last year, says Lewis Dean of global job search engine Indeed. "Overall, 'sports' jobs are down -50% since their peak in February," Dean told S&PA *Professional*. "This is in line with the UK average: compared to last year's level, overall job vacancies on Indeed have fallen by -50%."

For personal trainers, for instance, "vacancies absolutely nosedived in March and April before starting to rebound in May through August", Dean noted. "However, overall personal trainer job postings



are down -43% year on year. This trend has been the case for all of these titles – gym instructor, gym manager, swimming teacher/ swimming instructor, lifeguard – steep decline at the start of lockdown before a gentle recovery since May."

Dean went on to say: "It was a similar trend for jobseeker searches for these jobs and overall searches for these jobs are down -16% year-on-year."

The role of gym instructor lost the least ground in terms of the numbers of vacancies year-on-year (-33%) than others in the group. Job searches for gym instructor roles also lost the fewest year-on-year on Indeed, with only a -9% drop.

Job search engine Adzuna is working in partnership with the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to provide job advert data, that gives a point-in-time estimate of all job adverts indexed in Adzuna's job search engine during the point of data extraction. As requested by S&PA *Professional*, its 2020 figures to date show that vacancies for the role of gym instructor, for instance, peaked on 15 March at 701, dropped to a low of 149 on 12 April before a steady climb back to 564 on 6 September.

The sport/leisure jobs in least demand generally through the Covid onslaught were gym manager and leisure assistant. The former fell from a peak of 57 on 15 March to a low of 0 from 3

May to 7 June, and has experienced ups and downs since to reach five job vacancies on 6 September. With 22 vacancies listed on Adzuna on 6 September, the role of leisure assistant has rebounded from a low of one on three occasions since 15 March, when there were 58 such vacancies.

In a slight contrast to Indeed's listings for personal trainers, Adzuna's findings reflect a continuing significant demand, peaking for the year at 2,153 on 2 February, reaching 1,918 on 15 March and falling to a low of 964 on 6 September. The number of PT vacancies began to drop steadily in early April.

As of 11 September, 69.3% – the highest percentage – of all vacancies for gym instructors were in London, the highest for gym managers at 25% in Yorkshire and Humberside, the highest for lifeguards at 32% in South-East England, 19% for personal trainers in South-East England and the highest percentage of job vacancies for swimming teachers at 35% for London. The North-West led in the number of vacancies for leisure assistants at 23.3%.

In terms of retaining existing staff, many leisure

UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS

MYZONE LAUNCHES #WORKOUTTOHELPOUT CAMPAIGN TO FIGHT COVID-19 IMPACT

By DeeDee Doke

Fitness wearable Myzone has joined the global fight against Covid-19 and its effects on physical and mental health, as well as the financial impact on gym and leisure operators.

With Myzone's #WorkOutToHelpOut, the company is echoing the UK campaign, #EatOutToHelpOut, that was aimed at encouraging consumers to go back to eateries with the government footing



part of the bill. However, the Myzone version has a decidedly healthy twist – encouraging everyone to go to their favourite physical activity outlet to work out.

Leisure clubs and gyms can create their own offers and exercise challenges around the campaign,

which can be waged with publicity and marketing assets, which are available at no charge from Myzone.

Myzone EMEA CEO David Stalker told *S&PA Professional*: “For me, this is a campaign for [the operators] to own – it’s a blank canvas. Come on you guys, don’t complain, do something!”

The company is also upping the ante for participation, with global challenges as incentives to get involved; Myzone is offering a \$25k (£19.6k) event with a number of prizes. Myzone owners can exercise anywhere, wear their fitness wearable and upload the data. The challenge runs between 1-31 October.

Local operators are encouraged to create their own special events to get energy and customers flowing through their centres.

“Through our engagement so far, we have had contacts from over 850 clubs [the UK, EMEA, APAC] either viewing or downloading assets from our website to use in promoting to their own networks,” a Myzone spokesperson said.

The spokesperson also emphasised: “It’s not selling Myzone; it’s being true to our values.”

Visit the website: www.myzone.org/work-out-to-help-out

operators have used the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) to furlough employees during the darkest periods of the pandemic. With CJRS coming to an end in late October, according to current government plans at press time, others are having to rethink their staffing and structure strategy.

At a recent conference, The Future of the Fitness Industry Summit (see p8), gym operators acknowledged that they would likely have to tighten their operations in the days to come.

Another said that the aim of his business would be to focus on retaining individuals they wanted to keep and not positions.

MESSAGE FROM CIMSPA CEO



TARA DILLON ON EMERGING STRONGER FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS

As we start to see the sector getting back to some semblance of normality, with the public returning to our centres after they reopened in summer, we are using this issue to reflect on the impact of Covid-19 and its implications for the future.

None of us has ever experienced anything like this pandemic before. Yes, it has thrust unprecedented challenges upon us, but it has also forced us to be creative and to adapt and innovate. It has also made us question the way we work.

Being able to take a step back from the frenetic day-to-day activity in which so many of us have been immersed since the start of the pandemic will allow us to learn from this experience. And this, I believe, will help our sector to emerge stronger from the crisis.

So, in the CIMSPA News in this issue we share the thoughts of the two CEOs we have worked most closely with during the pandemic. We have had near-constant communication with both Huw Edwards of ukactive and Mark Tweedie of Community Leisure UK over the past months and I think it’s apt that we share their reflections on how our sector has performed during the crisis.

We also hear from operators across the UK courtesy of Leisure-net Solutions’ Industry Confidence Survey, as well as Paul McPartlan, the new CEO of Places Leisure.

Finally, we provide details of ReTrain, a new £1.5m fund to support employers with free training for staff to enable them to return to their roles or work in new ones so employers can continue to deliver sport and leisure services to their communities.

UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF FITNESS IN A POST-COVID WORLD

By DeeDee Doke

Making cleaning cool and recognising a changed pipeline of potential customers are two challenges that the Covid pandemic has brought to the fitness industry, as the sector rebounds from four full months of facility closure.

Panels of leaders from large and small fitness facilities told a Loughborough audience how ensuring that mandated hygiene standards

are met, and experiencing higher footfall in suburban areas than in central London locations have become part of the 'new normal' for the UK's gym operators. The September Future of the Fitness Industry Summit showcased the experiences of gym operators, personal trainers (PTs), sport event organisers and leaders from fitness products and retailers. NFG [National Fitness Games] organised the conference at Loughborough

University. CIMSPA was among the sponsors.

"The playbook's been rewritten a bit," said John Penny, managing director of premium health & fitness chain Third Space, in describing the pandemic's catalytic effects on fitness facilities.

Penny was one of three panellists representing large chains discussing how they have adapted their operations to survive. Joined on the panel by David Cooper,



co-founder of Gym Box, and Joe Long, director, UFC Gyms (UK), Penny shared insights about how his organisation closed its doors "before we were told to", and how it strictly adhered to its premium brand values in its online offering on Instagram. For instance, he said, out of

READER COMMENTARY

PLANNING REFORMS – WHAT DO THEY MEAN FOR PUBLIC SECTOR LEISURE PROVISION?

By Paul Cluett

From 1 September, changes to the Use Classes Order regulation mean retail and commercial units can be easily repurposed, paving the way for fitness facilities to move onto the high street and play a part in its reinvigoration.

The reforms are good news for the sector. However, simply relaxing planning restrictions is unlikely to result in a significant surge



of interest from facility operators in either the public or the private sector.

There are many reasons why high streets prove a challenging environment for leisure operators. High rents, business rates, restricted access due to parking challenges, all play a part. Add these to the fact that many high streets are not attracting the footfall of old, and it becomes clear that whilst this is a positive

move, it is not likely to drive significant change.

I believe out-of-town leisure facilities are still the key to addressing this country's health, social and economic needs. Destination leisure facilities also offer opportunities for multiple revenue streams, creating income-generating opportunities to support other community services in the local authority's remit.

That said, I accept that much of the UK's leisure stock is tired, no longer

serving the needs of the community. Maybe there is a model to be explored that incorporates smaller, satellite facilities on the high street that act as a 'feeder' to the out-of-town facility.

At a time when physical and mental fitness is hugely important to the health of the nation, any action by government that removes barriers to leisure development must be welcomed.

Paul Cluett is MD at leisure developer Alliance Leisure

UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS



the chain's 190 instructors, only four were selected to instruct online classes.

"We were strict about who taught on the channel... Perhaps we were a little bit draconian at first," Penny said.

UFC's Long said moving equipment around to allow mandated social distancing measures was a key challenge just before reopening. "We have a lot of equipment in the club," he said, so the team had to spend time figuring out "how we were going to keep it separate".

The pandemic has reinforced UFC's initial focus on positioning its facilities in retail parks, Long said. Just before lockdown, he said, UFC had been looking at taking a lease in the City of London. In retrospect, he was glad the company had not done so, given the significant numbers of workers not coming to their offices to work. "We would have been struggling," Long said.

Gym Box's Cooper said that the branches his chain has reopened are "coming

back better than we initially thought". However, two City-based Gym Box units are not reopening at this time.

For Third Space, customers who work out at sites in more residential areas are returning to their gyms. However, like other chains, footfall is not returning to their City locations. Penny said: "I think [Covid] changed the potential of our pipeline," meaning that growth ambitions may need to be more focused on suburban or residential areas instead of traditional business districts, such as the City.

Other conference insights:

- Gym owners say the Covid experience has helped them see they can operate at a leaner staffing level. However, they emphasised that decisions will be taken around "individuals, not roles", one said.
- Women's gym space StrongHer had to launch its business online instead of opening as a bricks-and-mortar operation as planned but has benefited from the loyalty of its virtual base post-lockdown.
- PT Linda Hoggins found when she launched her online offering that customers needed her "for as much as a counsellor in mental health as for PT".
- For weight equipment maker Eleiko, Covid brought a boom in consumer sales. High sales as consumers outfitted their home gyms have forced the company to hire 40 new staff, after the existing staff was working 16-18-hour workdays.

" BEN LUMLEY/PHOTO.CO.UK

SECTOR AT A CROSSROADS, DILLON TELLS AGM

By DeeDee Doke

CIMSPA CEO Tara Dillon called on the chartered institute's members, partners and the entire sport & physical activity sector to join forces to combat the ill effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked on its community at the organisation's Annual General Meeting on 16 September. The AGM was held as a virtual event.

In her impassioned call to arms, Dillon cited the ongoing collaboration between CIMSPA, Community Leisure UK and ukactive involving "a lot of work behind the scenes" that must continue in the days to come to secure the sector's future. She said: "There has never been a greater opportunity to consolidate" approaches, activities and support to take on the challenge of "understanding who we are".

Not only have CIMSPA members and partners and those of ukactive and Community Leisure UK benefited from the "work and support" the three organisations have been providing during the Covid crisis, she emphasised: "Our work and support... have been extended to the whole sector."

She went on to say: "We cannot in our desperation to survive forget how we are going to survive." Reminding the audience that people were at the S&PA sector's very centre, she said, "to lose sight of people... will stop our recovery". It was integral, Dillon said, in "building a better future for everyone, that we do recover together".

She also noted: "We, as a sector, are clearly at a crossroads... There will be casualties."

In other AGM business:

- CIMSPA membership stood at 15,800 in August, Dillon said, with 181 employer partners and 242 education partners.
- Life Leisure CEO Malcolm McPhail was voted in as a trustee for the next three years. Previously, McPhail has served the board as a senior independent director.



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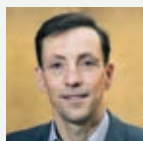
IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE



SECTOR PERSPECTIVES

The CEOs of CIMSPA, Community Leisure UK and ukactive share their ideas on what the sector can learn from the Covid-19 crisis and the opportunities for the future



MARK TWEEDIE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
COMMUNITY LEISURE
UK

Faced with an unprecedented crisis, the sector has demonstrated a can-do, tenacious approach. It has redeployed people and repurposed facilities to provide Covid-19 community response hubs. It has provided engaging digital and outdoor offers, including specialist intervention services, such as the GM Active Prehab4Cancer service.

It has committed to reopening facilities for communities as soon as possible, sometimes with significant financial risk. It has also been looking after the workforce, in many cases by topping up the furlough payment and creating opportunities for further professional development.

The sector's ability to respond to the crisis rapidly and collaboratively has

been remarkable. National stakeholders have worked together to develop technical guidance and training to enable Covid-19 secure reopening and to collectively lobby for relief funding through the #saveleisure campaign.

Operators have worked more closely than ever to share information/insights to resolve problems and maximise opportunities.

Managers and staff who have not been furloughed have worked exceptionally hard and, supported by suppliers, innovated to maintain levels of service using digital and outdoor formats during lockdown. They have also had to prepare ways of maximising service capacity while remaining Covid secure on reopening.

Working with their council partners, operators have gone to extraordinary lengths to minimise net costs to ensure services can reopen and remain sustainable. This is even though most still require emergency relief funding to guarantee sustainability given the costs and reduced income as a result of social distancing measures.

All of this demonstrates the sector's true potential to play a much bigger role in a combined public service effort to improve the nation's health and wellbeing.

With significantly reduced resources in the public sector, and with leisure being a non-statutory public service, the sector must find ways of delivering more and better outcomes for less to survive and thrive.

However, there is room for optimism. The sector has enormous potential and this could be the opportunity to

demonstrate, among widening health inequalities and increased demands on the health and social service systems, how it can help deliver the long-term preventative and cost-effective solution.

This way the sector can make the case for a greater share of scarce public revenue on an invest-to-save basis. At the same time, it must make the case for capital investment to refurbish and rebuild the 60% of public leisure facilities that are beyond their serviceable lifespan. It must also reconfigure facility estates to drive efficiency and reduce the need for service subsidies.

Looking to the future, the sector must continue to clearly articulate the potential to deliver across wider public policy objectives with an invest-to-save rationale.

It needs to maintain the exceptional partnership spirit the crisis has generated to achieve a clear consensus around its proposition. This is one that improves health and wellbeing above leisure and

physical activity, and strikes the optimal balance between efficiency and effectiveness.

This can pave the way for an investable national leisure strategy backed by the government and national, regional and local partners, including Sport England, CIMSPA, ukactive, Community Leisure UK, CLOA, NGBs and activity partnerships.

Such a strategy can provide a much-needed national vision for leisure, with clear, common and accountable outcomes, including quality-assured early intervention/prevention services with flexibility to meet local approaches and outcomes. ▶

“Operators have gone to extraordinary lengths to minimise net costs to ensure services can reopen”

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE



HUW EDWARDS
CEO, UKACTIVE

We're really proud of our membership and the way that organisations have come together with the common goal of protecting our sector. It's also been so important to work closely with our partners at Sport England, CIMSPA and Community Leisure UK, to show the united voice of our sector in the most challenging of times.

We've seen true collaboration with our operator members, from the smallest to largest, which means we have been able to get on-the-ground feedback and expertise based on their specialisms, and they've supported our representations into government.

What we've witnessed throughout this crisis is how strong the collaboration has been between public and private operators.

For example, the pandemic has led to an even greater appetite to share data. It's vital we can report on data from both the public and the private sectors, so we can give the best possible picture to the decision-makers. We are now able to mobilise with greater agility.

We've also seen an improved focus on standards and a growing professionalisation. As a result, we've taken huge strides on health and safety as well as the standards we set ourselves across a range of societal issues. We want to work with our partners to set the highest possible standards for our customers and we want to be fully inclusive for everyone in our communities.

This crisis has shown us that the value proposition for our sector is not

as strong as we would want. We must continue to make that case collectively. We need a fundamental change in the way that physical activity is valued.

We will only show our true value by continuing to reach for high standards, and crucially by revealing the long-term, positive impact the sector can have on every single person.

Any facility or supplier closed is a tragedy, as is the loss of jobs, but we have to be realistic that the sector will not come out of this crisis unscathed. Our immediate priority is helping our members' facilities to reopen and stay open. We must focus on influencing decision-making in government to minimise future closures – either as

part of localised lockdowns or national closures generated by a potential second spike in Covid-19. Alongside this, we must focus on the financial support that is required, and there remains a considerable amount of work for our team to do to ensure that our members receive the support they need to survive.

We have the chance to reconsider how the sector represents itself in a post-Covid world. We all have a duty to re-evaluate our long-term value and how we speak about our sector. The big question is, how seriously do we want to be connected with the health agenda, beyond rhetoric? How far do we want to drive the professionalism of our sector, working with CIMSPA to enhance our reputation and truly reflect everyone who uses our services?

The future of our industry is as a national health service – we can't dance around this – we are serious about being closer to health agencies, and that needs change and commitment.



TARA DILLON
CEO, CIMSPA

Let's look at the positives. If there is one thing that this

crisis has confirmed, it's that collaboration works. CIMSPA, ukactive and CLUK have worked more closely together than ever before and we have spoken with one voice throughout the pandemic.

As a sector, our voice has been as loud as any other. We've been acknowledged as a sector in our own right – we'll discuss negatives later – and we should be encouraged by our increased profile in the corridors of Westminster, in the media and of course through our members, although I'm acutely aware this has not resulted in all of the outcomes we wanted.

However, despite being heard by government, it is clear our impact is still not understood, either centrally or locally. And despite any increase in profile, we are still not considered an essential service, not even as essential as a coffee shop or a pub. And we need to ask ourselves why. Have we got our value proposition right?

Here's where I think we have work to do. We know, and regularly state, that we can help reduce the burden on the NHS, reduce crime, increase health and wellbeing in deprived areas of society, increase educational attainment and so on, but our messaging and our brand identity are at odds with this.

Is our impact on health really a strategy or just rhetoric? Looking at the images we continue to portray, our sector looks elite, expensive and often

“We need a fundamental change in the way that physical activity is valued”

inaccessible. The brand belies the promise. While we say we intend to have a society-changing impact, I often see margins through members driving our purpose. What happens in practice doesn't always reflect what we tell ourselves and others. And these mixed messages have left us wanting.

We have data, evidence and practice to share but our message is diluted. We talk about social value, but few people beyond the sector understand what this means. We need to simplify our message, demonstrate our economic impact and the return on investment that we offer and the value we provide.

We need to translate our data in something tangible to show the impact of investing in physical activity, as the latest figures from Sport England and Sheffield Hallam University show:

- Every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity generates nearly £4 for the English economy and society
- £3.6bn worth of savings generated by the prevention of 900,000 cases of diabetes
- £450m saved by preventing 30m additional GP visits

Right now, local authority CEOs are looking at which services they can raid to save the services they must protect. For them, we are a cost they could do without. Would the above facts move us into the 'must-have' list? We all know the answer to that. So, let's refocus the message and make the change we've been promising, collectively.

These are not just soundbites: these figures are saving the country a fortune. The power of our sector should be widely understood and means getting behind the health agenda.

To achieve this, I believe we need to come together as a sector behind one single strategy, and each industry body, sport and operator must agree its role within that strategy. Sport England have called it places, people and purpose. Three key messages, three areas of impact, three things the sector and government can sign up to. It's a start.

So, this is my pledge: to work with the organisations that we have collaborated so well with to develop an identity and purpose, with two or three key messages that are understood, valued and that attract investment.

We are a prime sector for the invest-to-save model, but we need people to sit up and listen. I pledge to

work with those who can make a difference. We came out of this together and we need to work as a collective now. This requires leaders who understand behaviour and societal change, are prepared to challenge those who believe that the change is too hard, and who can do so with honesty and integrity.

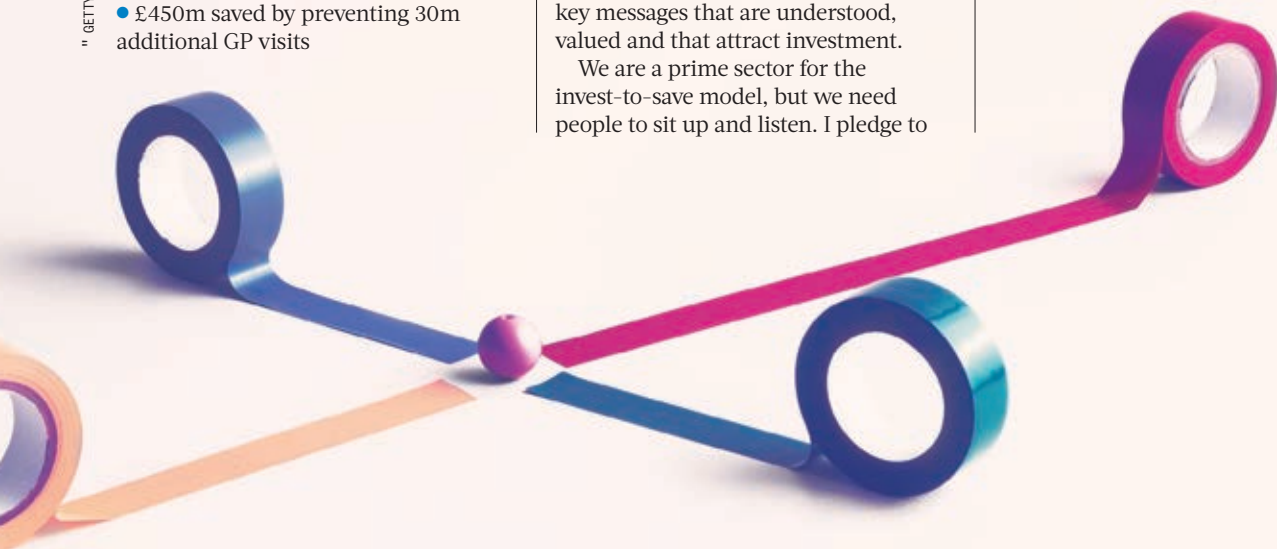
If you want to run facilities to make money, then go for it, but if you want to run facilities for change, then mean it.

Public sector leadership has the fight of its life ahead and we have the ability and opportunity to disrupt normal lines of thought. I honestly believe that the opportunity to finally move to an essential service is greater now than ever.

As Andy King, CEO of Link4Life, says: "It's time for a new federal approach that is placed-based, is efficient at national change but as effective as local trusts."

I'm in, are you? 

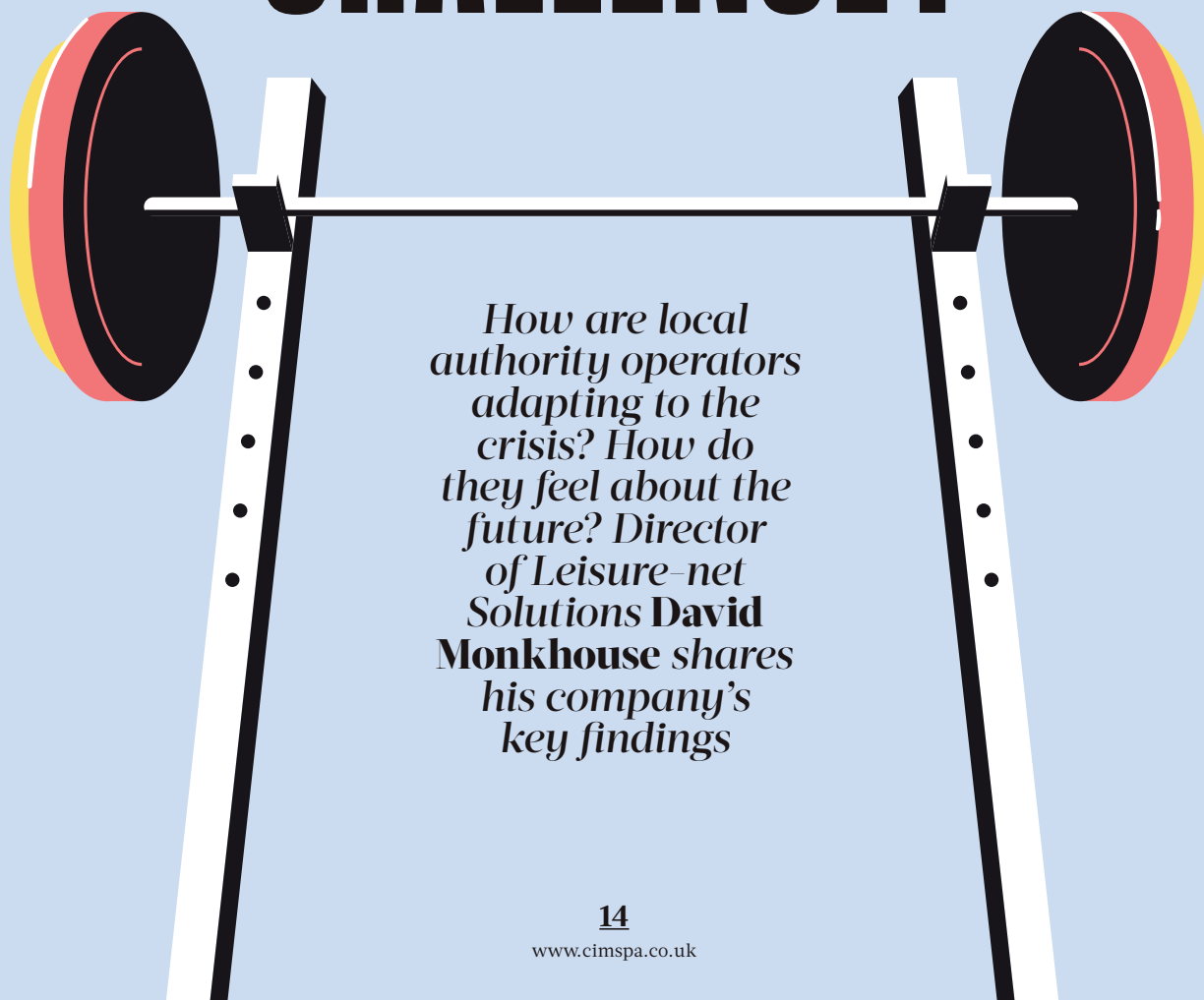
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IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

UP FOR THE CHALLENGE?



*How are local authority operators adapting to the crisis? How do they feel about the future? Director of Leisure-net Solutions **David Monkhouse** shares his company's key findings*

It's a challenging time for the sector, particularly for operators who are trying to keep facilities open and run programmes and services while having to adhere to social distancing regulations, while operating with a reduced income.

Faced with such challenges, Leisure-net Solutions contacted 90 local authority leisure operators in August for the six-month follow-up to its Industry Confidence Survey to understand how they are responding and their thoughts for the future.

One of the positives to come out of our research was just how well industry organisations such as CIMSPA, ukactive and Sport England have performed during this crisis. Operators have valued the collaboration, the sharing of experiences and resources such as CIMSPA's Stronger Together digital hub and the ReOpen initiative for the safe reopening of sport and physical activity sector facilities.

It explains why satisfaction with the support and advice received from these bodies has been consistent, with a striking 100% of external partners (organisations operating more than two contracts on behalf of local authorities) describing themselves as 'extremely happy'.

Among the trusts, almost half (49%) were 'extremely happy', while 44% were 'quite happy' with the support they received. Finally, of the local authority respondents, 27% were extremely and 60% were quite happy.

And the sector would like this support to continue, as these comments from respondents show:

"The continued support of leisure industry bodies would be useful as we phase back our centres and activities safely... sport and physical activity is significant to the health and wellbeing of our communities."

"The fitness/leisure industry needs to become more united if it is to survive and thrive. There is a big opportunity now for an industry body to take the lead on forming the future of how we all recover."

"The fitness/leisure industry needs to become more united if it is to survive and thrive. There is a big opportunity now for an industry body to take the lead"

RESPONDENT, Leisure-Net Solutions follow-up survey

LONG-TERM IMPACT
All operators said they have been very much affected by Covid-19 – all of the external partners, 93% of trusts and 73% of local authority providers. When considering the long-term impact of the pandemic, leisure trusts appear to be most worried about their businesses, with 33% of them saying it will be very significant in the long term, in comparison to 25% of external providers and 20% of local authority providers.

In the medium term, 67% of trusts, 50% of external partners and 47% of local authorities believe their businesses will be hugely affected by the pandemic.

There are still huge question marks about the future. As one respondent put it: "A lot of uncertainty remains on the impact of Covid, particularly surrounding longer-term financial impacts, and those on the local authority – who knows what will

What the operators have to say:



Scott Rolfe, Chief Executive Officer, Halo Leisure

As an operator within the trust

sector the challenges we face cannot be underestimated and, like many in the same position, I believe that we still have a long road ahead before we feel any form of confidence with the market and our potential ability to fully recover.

Like all organisations, we have lost significant resources since the lockdown and now we are gradually reopening; the necessary measures in place to support social distancing will clearly have a negative effect on our income generation and the speed of our overall recovery.

The closure of the government's job retention scheme at the end of October is also a real concern and in a way feels like a ticking time bomb as we face the dilemma of when it is best to remove our colleagues from furlough, even if we do not have services for them to deliver straight away. I fear the result may well lead to increased job losses, as many across the sector aim to balance costs with reduced delivery and subsequent revenue in an attempt to remain sustainable.

Given the positive messages around physical activity promoted by the government over the past few months, it would seem rational and prudent to provide funding for a sector in dire need of short-term assistance as we have seen across the arts and food retail sectors.

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

happen in six months' time. I believe we're very vulnerable if there's a second wave. If not, and if we remain open, we will likely recover quite quickly."

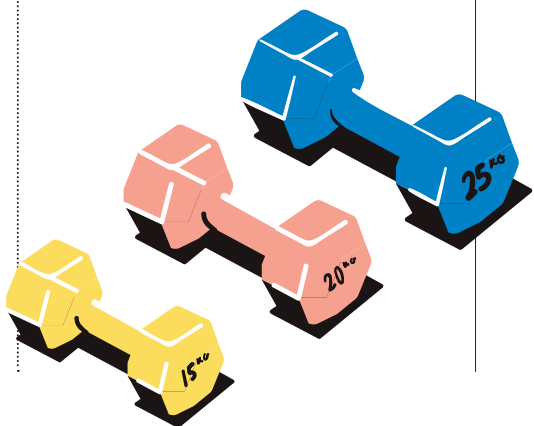
It is interesting to see the steps operators are taking to adapt to the new conditions. Unsurprisingly, almost all (96%) are operating at reduced capacity and 84% are using online-only bookings. Around two-thirds (68%) have introduced new digital offerings, while another 65% have or are considering the temporary closure of sites and/or services.

And while most operators have reduced their opening hours (82%), some (9%) have extended their hours of business. Staff redundancies are a reality for 46% of operators, while 26% are looking at closing sites or services permanently if they have not already done so.

Some respondents believe these new conditions call for new ways of working. "We will have to invent our own new norm and build from there," said one.

"While the impact has been severe, the positive is that it has challenged us to bring in new ways of working and technology that will be a positive for the future," said another. 

To order a copy of the report, contact davidmonkhous@leisure-net.org



What the operators say



Malcolm McPhail,
Group CEO, Life
Leisure

I'm aware that a number of people in the sector believe leisure trusts need to get their act together in response to this crisis, but there are actually fundamental reasons why they are finding it so tough.

The leisure trust is probably one of the most fragile business models there is. We are allowed to make a profit, but not too much – as that would be frowned upon by our local authority partners and the likes of the Charity Commission. It's a flawed business model that leaves trusts exposed and particularly vulnerable to a crisis. Even before the pandemic, a lot of trusts were not making money, so it is no surprise that they have become victims of Covid-19.

In addition, our main partners are local authorities that are under more pressure than most to balance the books, and as a non-statutory service, we are first in line for cuts.

It doesn't help that trusts have no particular identity. The man on the street doesn't have a clue what we do. I find it hard enough to explain our role, and I've been working for a trust for 13 years. We fall between the cracks. We are health and fitness, health delivery, sport and more. I don't know what the answer is, but it's something we need to work on. Brand identity is everything.

There have been plenty of calls for the industry to come together and unite in the face of the pandemic, but that's impossible if leisure trusts continue to be regarded as second-tier operators, as some believe is the case. Not only

is it wholly inaccurate – trusts have some of the UK's best leaders and facilities – indeed Life Leisure's very own Stockport Sports Village won club of the year at the 2018 ukactive Awards – but such thinking prevents the sector from aligning to a shared philosophy so we progress in the same direction.

Finally, and there's no way of putting this nicely, we have been completely abandoned by central government. Putting pubs before health and fitness? Please! Prime Minister Boris Johnson has even hired a PT to help him lose weight after contracting Covid-19. The government needs to start walking the walk. It's a disgrace and considerably disrespectful to our superb industry.



Paul McPartlan,
CEO, Places
Leisure

There is no doubt that this pandemic has tested, and will continue to test, the models of all operators in the leisure sector. At Places Leisure we will be reviewing our central cost model and finding innovative ways to adapt to the new delivery that includes a virtual offering, alongside a traditional face-to-face one.

Thankfully, our investment in the digital arena has been significant over the past 12 months and this will now help us.

However, as a traditional bricks and mortar, face-to-face delivery sector, we will inevitably have to say goodbye to a large number of employees, and until our ability to deliver anywhere close to capacity returns, our costs have to be in line with revenue received.

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE



RETRAIN TO GAIN

CIMSPA's new ReTrain initiative gives employers the funding to train staff and equip them with the skills for new roles

CIMSPA has launched a new fund to help employers train their sport and activity workforce in a further move to support businesses to recover following lockdown.

Known as ReTrain, the £1.5m training initiative has been funded by the National Lottery through Sport England. It is designed to give employers a helping hand as they navigate their way through this new way of working with a potentially reduced workforce. A recent survey conducted by CIMSPA found that up to 6% of those of who work in the activity sector are planning to leave – that represents some 30,000 sports and physical activity professionals. In addition, other staff may not be in a position to return to work yet.

The ReTrain bursary scheme will

provide free training for staff to equip them with the skills to take up new roles and plug any gaps that operators may be experiencing in their workforce due to the loss of employees.

All training provided through ReTrain will be delivered by accredited CIMSPA Training Provider Partners. The initial focus will be on courses that lead to new CIMSPA-endorsed qualifications to help businesses recover after lockdown, with support for courses that deliver CPD points planned for later in the year.

As part of ReTrain, CIMSPA has partnered with the Royal Life Saving Society UK to provide £400,000 of lifeguard training. This will help to meet the urgent need for the training of approximately 11,000 new lifeguards, allowing swimming pools to open safely.

“As the sector continue to reopen,

CIMSPA and Sport England wanted to ensure that any lack of qualified staff doesn't become a blockage or additional financial burden. ReTrain is a major investment in addressing this and helping employers to plug any skills gaps they have, enabling them to continue providing this vital service to the public,” says Spencer Moore, CIMSPA's director of strategy.

The scheme follows the recent launch of the ReActivate online training platform. Also funded by Sport England, the CIMSPA-commissioned initiative is designed to equip anyone working or volunteering in the sport, fitness, leisure and physical activity sector in England with the knowledge and skills they need to confidently return to work or restart their coaching activity, as we emerge from the coronavirus lockdown. 📺

To access ReTrain, employers are invited to identify their skills gaps and apply to CIMSPA for the free training at www.cimspa.co.uk/retrain

INITIAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

Qualifications that are endorsed against the sector's professional standards, for example:

- group exercise Instructors
- gym instructors
- personal trainers
- swimming teachers
- lifeguards
- sports coaches
- pool plant operators
- Sites in England in areas of socio-economic deprivation
- Employers with a CIMSPA, Community Leisure UK or ukactive partnership

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

Healthcare can play a much bigger part in the sport and physical activity sector, as Paul McPartlan explains

After 15 years in healthcare, Paul McPartlan has returned to the sector as CEO of Places Leisure. Despite the current challenges, there are huge opportunities for the industry, he says.

"I'd like to think that my journey could inspire others in this sector who want to progress that anything is possible," says McPartlan, whose varied career began as a lifeguard in 1990 and has spanned leisure, hospitality and healthcare.

"Having spent the past 15 years in healthcare, it's great to come back full circle and see just how vibrant the industry is," he says.

A former national operations director at Nuffield Health, and having held roles at GenesisCare and BMI Healthcare, McPartlan says that the sport and physical activity and healthcare sectors can learn a great deal from each other.

"When I left leisure to join healthcare, I was able to influence change, especially around customer insight and the choice agenda. In a similar way, the governance and data-driven aspects of healthcare can be really important for sport/physical activity as we move away from traditional ways of working and use real-time data to make more informed decisions."

Places Leisure's status as a social enterprise was a key consideration in McPartlan's decision to join the organisation, he says.

"I feel very honoured to be leading the Places Leisure team. Under the umbrella of Places for People, we are really making a difference to the communities we serve, and we are in this for the long term. We are essentially a bricks-and-mortar, people-led business but this global

pandemic has tested us to see how we can own a slice of that digital space, which will be essential for our survival."

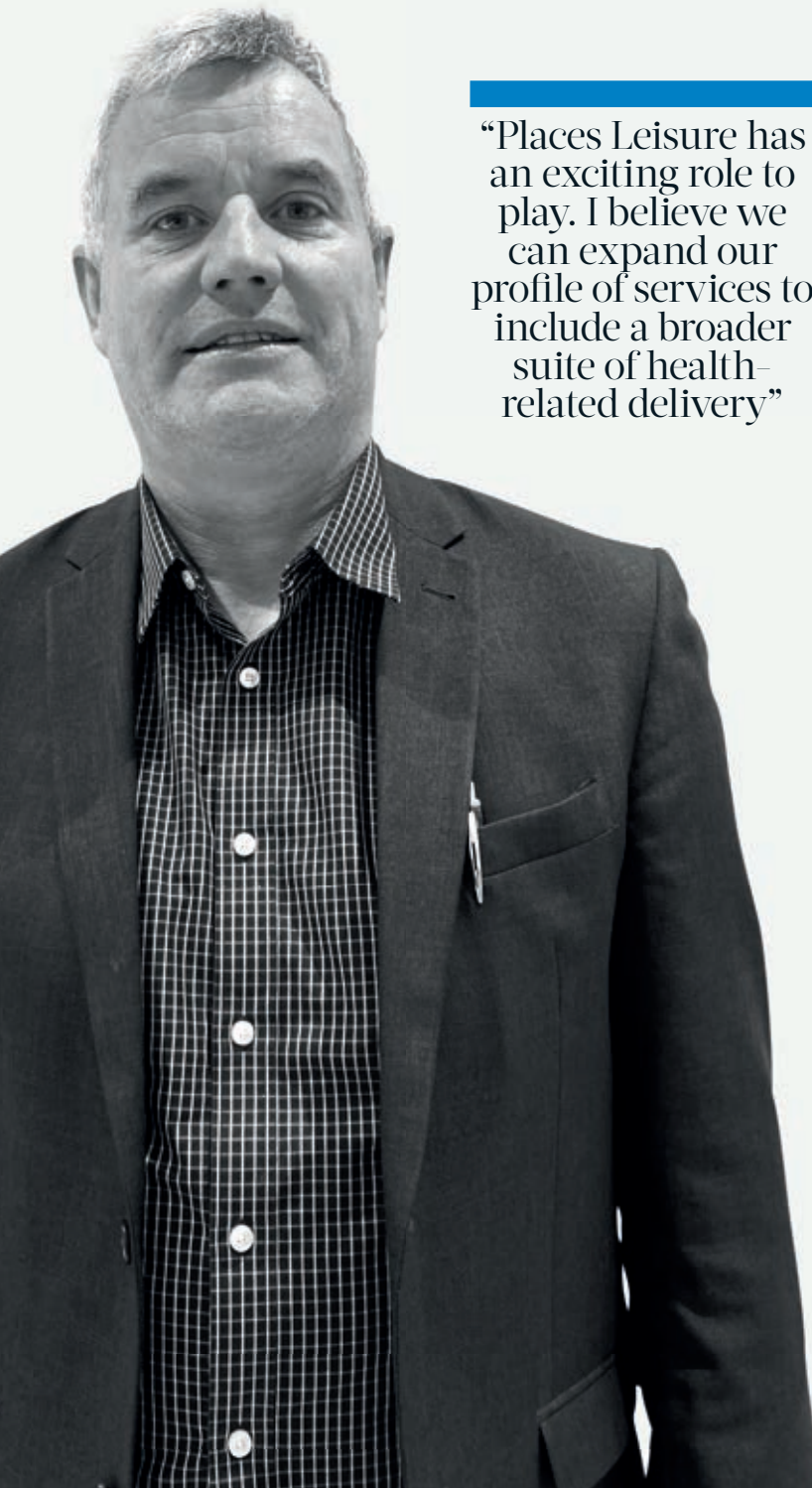
He admits it's certainly a challenging time to take up the new role, but he is upbeat about the future of the sector, believing there are immense opportunities.

"I firmly believe that once we navigate through the next few months, we can emerge stronger, more focused and ready to deliver positive outcomes for our people."

However, he says that for this to happen, the sector has to accept that change is inevitable.

"We should be the architects of that change and not have it imposed upon us. Relationships are going to be even more important, as is transparency, openness and a common goal with our people and our clients. Our purpose and structure allow us to work more closely with our local authority partners, in a transparent way, with an open book and a desire to share risk, but equally share upside. We must work harder to recognise the vital service that we offer and how important the whole sector will be to support communities both physically and mentally."

The sector must collaborate more, challenge harder and accept that it needs multi-decade contracts and investment to really flourish. And to be viewed as an essential service, the sector has to improve its delivery of data and outcomes, he adds. It's vital that it continues on the journey to be even greater professionalism, and McPartlan has been impressed by the positive changes in the workforce that he has seen so far.



“Places Leisure has an exciting role to play. I believe we can expand our profile of services to include a broader suite of health-related delivery”

“I’ve been blessed to work with a number of inspirational leaders. My first manager, Mike Birch, was the consummate professional. He taught me that attention to detail, people empathy and a quality approach will reap rewards. I’ve been impressed with how the career pathway in our sector has become structured and more professional. The opportunities for training and further learning have never been more evident. Having visited a number of our centres during my first few weeks, I’ve seen so many talented individuals just starting out and their career prospects are literally endless,” he says.

“CIMSPA will continue to play a hugely important part in ensuring we train and support our workforce. It’s likely that we will see high unemployment figures over the coming months, and we should regard this as an opportunity for people to re-train and follow a professional pathway in our industry.”

With a passion for leading, coaching and driving people, McPartlan hopes his broad experience can challenge the status quo and find innovative ways in which both Places Leisure and the sector can improve even further.

“At the moment, we have to survive to have a future, so all of our efforts are directed at decisions for the next six months, enabling us to remain a trusted partner and secure employer. Once we do that, we should probably move away from a contracting position of making a good margin on one contract, to off-set a loss in another. This is an outdated and broken way of working and we’ll need our local authority partners to help us get to a position of ‘open book’ relationships, accepting a working margin and then a share of upside to invest back into the communities we serve,” he says.

“Places Leisure has an exciting role to play. I believe we can expand our profile of services, perhaps to include a broader suite of health-related delivery, maybe delivered by us, maybe by partners and others. In addition, we have to be prepared to look at a payment-by-results agenda; we can learn from healthcare and stand by our ability to really effect change.” 

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digital working took on a whole new meaning in March when the Prime Minister locked the country down. Here, Kieran Charles, Tendring District Council's (TDC) Sports Facilities Business Manager, explains how they adapted to rapid change

IN AT THE DEEP END

Tendring District Council in North-East Essex has three standalone leisure centres as well as three dual-use sites catering for very different audiences – from areas of deprivation to better-off towns of retired couples.

Kieran Charles had only been in position for a month when the facilities were forced to close. As good fortune would have it, he had been selected specifically to bring about change to the council's leisure business.

He explains: "They brought me in with a fresh pair of eyes to review

leisure in its entirety. This included everything from re-evaluating systems, membership packages, marketing and centre refurbishments to operational procedures and quality management systems (QMS), and provide consistency across all sites."

Charles' 13-year background and experience with GLL, where he progressed from an administrative role to a post at general manager level, served him well.

He says: "The ambition was to digitalise as much as possible, upgrading our customer management

system, adding an 'at home' joining function, and having a single communications hub for our 200+ staff.

"As far as digitalisation goes, with Covid-19 we had no option but to quickly move things forward so that we could get clear communications out to staff about procedure changes, as well as to customers, to let them know our plans for supporting them during lockdown.

"It's been a big upheaval, but with the help of Right Directions we have transformed our leisure business."

GETTING IT RIGHT

Management services provider Right Directions' staff communications hub (powered by StaffMIS) enabled Tendring to have one port of call for all its leisure team's comms.



Charles says: "Rather than just a folder in the office, we have an online system that enables us to quickly and effectively talk to our team. Everyone – from the cleaners to the duty managers – has access, and because it's tailored with our One logo, staff feel it's more personal, so have taken an interest. Around 80% of our leisure team are already actively engaged.

"We don't need to email our teams any more. It's all done via the platform and means we can monitor who's read the posts and procedure changes and taken part in any training.

"If necessary, we can also 'force' updates, so in effect the team can't move on until they've read the information. This has been

particularly important for Right Directions' Covid guidance, as it's being continually updated."

When lockdown hit, Right Directions was already helping Charles create a consistent QMS for the leisure facilities, as well as the accompanying processes and procedures.

"This has been uploaded to the hub, so all staff have instant access. I knew what a fantastic benefit it could be for the business; I just needed to introduce it to the others at TDC, so they could also see how it could work for us," says Charles.

STITCH

According to Charles, one of the most valuable aspects of Right Directions' support has been its leisure management accident analysis tool STITCH, which enables TDC to benchmark itself against the industry.

According to Charles, STITCH really came into its own as the sites began to reopen: "At first, we were changing assessments daily, even hourly. We reopened the gyms, swimming, fitness classes and for swimming clubs. But being at the height of summer we wanted to get junior members back too, so have managed to reopen junior gym sessions, aqua classes and family swimming.

"Each time something opened we had to adapt our risk assessments,

removing old information and adding new details. Right Directions provided us with a pandemic management procedure document where we posted the control measures to inform staff, but we also used these to write marketing communications to customers, personalising it to explain how we would be looking after them.

"We embraced all these systems as much as we could, learned a lot of lessons in a short space of time, and it worked very well for us. The staff and our customers felt safe, followed the rules, understood why they were needed and were just pleased we were open again!

"As far as they were concerned there was nothing more that could have been done."

MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTIONS

"The Covid-related support from Right Directions – risk assessments, pandemic management procedure, Covid clinics, re-mobilisation plan and one-to-one help putting it into practice – has been the biggest success of all to date. Right Directions grabbed the bull by the horns and pulled together so much support for the industry. We've been very lucky to have been a part of it. I had been in my job for less than a month when the sites started closing, so to open with such positive feedback has been amazing.

"The Covid clinics were the starting point. We'd been told to close – now what were we to do? Everyone was in the same position; we were in the wild, but with 150 others, all sharing information and supporting each other through Right Directions' clinics.

"Right Directions are the easiest people to work with – down-to-earth and supportive, especially during Covid-19 when they've been on call at all times; they honestly do care, both professionally and personally." 

"The Covid clinics were the starting point. We'd been told to close – now what were we to do? Everyone was in the same position"

AGENDA

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

By Dean Gurden

Engaging LGBT+ community



The physical activity and gym world needs to do more to ensure everyone feels welcome



As the lockdown eases and gyms, sports clubs and leisure centres attempt to entice us away from our Zoom workouts and home-made gyms, it's a good time to ask where the LGBT+ community figures in all of this activity.

Sadly, data on LGBT+ participation in physical activity and sport is woefully sparse. The last major study, 'Sport, Physical Activity & LGBT', was commissioned by Sport England in 2016. This referenced a survey of that year by the National LGB&T Partnership, which found that 55% of LGBT men and 56% of LGBT women were not active enough to maintain good health, rising to 64% among those who identified as other than male or female. Ultimately, the report found that 'comparatively little action has been taken to address engagement of these communities'.

According to Hugh Torrance, executive director at LEAP Sports Scotland, the situation has improved, but there is still much more that could be done. "Unfortunately, what we still see consistently reported are high levels of disengagement or exclusion due to the experiences people have had, or due to perceptions they have of a particular sport," he says. "This is supported by Europe-wide research by Outsport last year that found over a third of LGBT+ people had not been active in any sport, physical activity or gym attendance in more than a year."

For Torrance, the starting point for turning this around is simply letting LGBT+ people know that they are welcome. "It could be anything, from running or aligning to a specific campaign or putting links or information on your website or notice board," he says. "Visibility also means ensuring that diversity is represented in advertising materials, which helps people to see others who look like

Board-level representation

Sport can be a bit of a bubble, admits Lou Englefield, director of Pride Sports, and it is not helped if there is a lack of diversity at the top where the major decisions are made. "If we only have people on boards who, for example, have done very well in a particular sport or participated in some other way, then we tend to be very inward looking," she says.

Englefield talks from personal experience. "From serving on boards myself, I know that I bring a different perspective," she adds. "And in commercial terms, we bring an understanding and appreciation of new markets for sport and physical activity. In trying to reach out to the heart of communities it's important to have boards that reflect and understand those communities."

Lisa Wainwright, CEO of the Sport and Recreation Alliance, heartily agrees. "Quite simply, without diversity any decision made at a senior and board level will fail to be truly inclusive and reflective of our society," she says. This is not just an issue for the LGBT+ debate, but is also true for gender equality, BAME representation and inclusiveness for disabled people.

"What we still see reported are high levels of exclusion due to the experiences people have had"

AGENDA

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

them, and can help facilities feel welcoming and inclusive. This could include a variety of body shapes and sizes or those who look visibly different from the norm."

Torrance singles out trans people in particular, and points out that there are many practical questions they may have in advance of accessing a gym or a fitness centre. "This could include changing facilities and toilets, information on accessing classes, or any relevant policies," he says. "Taking the time to consider the answers to these questions and having that information available is a great starting point."

Jamie Hooper, senior equality and diversity manager at Sport England, concurs, and points out that assumptions will be made if gyms and leisure centres fail to be overt in their messaging. "We know in the trans community in particular that if an operator doesn't say they are trans inclusive, people will presume they're not," he says. "So, it's not going to hurt to state on your website if your staff have had LGBT+ inclusion training or if you offer a particular session time that's specifically open to LGBT+ people."

Hooper also highlights the issue of coaching. "Everything is led by qualifications, which can be a real barrier because it creates a coaching network and culture where people feel as if they need to have lots of continuing professional development [CPD] training and qualifications to deliver inclusivity," he says. "There's CPD training on every single type of disability, ethnic minority, faith or orientation, when actually a lot of it is just going back to basics and

asking a few questions to the people who are in front of you."

As Hooper points out, it's simply about getting a quick understanding of what people can and can't do, and if they're having a good time or not.

Lou Englefield, director of Pride Sports, also agrees and points out that with mental health being a big issue for people in LGBT+ communities, sport and physical activity are very much used as a way of managing mental wellbeing. "There's a huge move at the moment around how we integrate good practice in supporting mental health into coaching," she says. Being aware of trigger points is vital, she adds. "For example, if you don't challenge discriminatory language or behaviour in your coaching sessions, it can have a major impact that on people's mental wellbeing."

From tackling the issue of suitable changing facilities for transgender people to simply having somebody suitable on a gym's reception who can engage, understand and support LGBT+ people at what is often their first port of call, there is much the sport and physical activity sector can do better to welcome this community.

Unfortunately, a lack of confidence or fear of getting it wrong is an all-too-common barrier that often leads to inaction, believes Torrance. "And sometimes in the absence of anything clear, poor decisions can be made," he says. But ultimately, if you're ever in doubt, he always urges sport and physical activity providers to go to the source. "Just ask LGBT+ people themselves what they want and need," he says. 🏳️



Mind your language

What's in a word? Quite a lot actually, according to Jon Holmes, senior home page editor at Sky Sports, and the network lead and founder of Sports Media LGBT+. "I believe language is really important because it's one of the few visible signs that's going to make somebody feel they are welcome in a particular space," he says. "The wording that sports clubs, organisations and facilities use to convey their messaging to welcome in new people or to make existing members feel as if they're truly included is vital."

And talk to anybody that works in the field of diversity & inclusion and they will tell you that you sometimes need to be specific when you are trying to welcome in particular demographic groups. "You need to make sure you're hitting certain points in the wording of your flyers, advertising and media coverage to make people really know they're included," adds Holmes.

"I think it's something that clubs and organisations are beginning to understand more. I've also seen a growing awareness among governing bodies, certainly recently with Pride, that putting out a very specific comms message that talks to the LGBT community and the different parts within that community itself, whether it's the trans community or non-binary people, has a big impact on those demographics."

But it is a change that has to start from within, says Holmes. Thankfully, Sports Media LGBT+ has produced a useful 14-page resources pack called *Rainbow Ready* (bit.ly/rainbow-ready) to aid press, media and PR officers working in sport. As well as offering guidance on how to use gender-neutral language, it urges the use of certain phrases, such as 'sexual orientation' instead of 'sexual preference'.



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IN DEPTH

BUSINESS

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

By Dean Gurden

Ask providers about their experience of reopening after lockdown and one word keeps cropping up: challenging



It's the same for operatives big and small, public or private sector, boutique or mainstream. In what has always been a fiercely competitive sector with tight margins, it hasn't helped that confusing messages from government and delays in getting the thumbs-up to reopen have only added to the difficulties.

For a large operation, such as CIMSPA partner Everyone Active, with almost 200 leisure centres nationwide, the biggest challenge has been the sheer variety of sports, exercises and facilities it offers.

"We run thousands of different activities and each one has had to be restarted in a new way that is Covid-19 secure," says group development director Ben Beevers. "And although the government is starting to give us a bit more notice, sometimes we're not sure exactly when a lot of these have been given the green light, so it naturally becomes challenging to get everything covered as quickly as possible."

Beevers paints a generally positive picture for relatively large activities where centres have had good lead-in times and been able to pre-empt what they believe the control measures will be.

"As a business we've done our work well in second-guessing what the government's expectations were going to be," he says.

"So we'd already made the assumption that we needed two-metre gaps between every bit of kit in the gym and pre-emptively altered everything to accommodate this. But you never know for certain until it's formally

announced, so there's certainly been some tweaking."

Martin Franklin, CEO of CIMSPA partner Les Mills, agrees that reopening has been challenging, but adds another word to the formula: professional.

"One thing that's really impressed me in the facilities of our partners I've been visiting is how professional they are in approaching their obligations to create clean and safe environments. Yes, it's challenging, but I think we always knew it was going to be so."

What hasn't helped, however, is trying to come back from lockdown in the summer months.

"July and August is probably the worst time to remobilise a leisure centre, as it's usually a quiet period with everybody on holiday," says David Hendry, managing director at sport, leisure and culture consultancy Knight,

Kavanagh & Page.

He's hopeful that things will pick up through the autumn, as people try and get back into some sort of sense of normality and with the schools having returned.

For a boutique operation such as Victus Soul, based on the edge of the City of London, it has been particularly challenging.

With a large part of its clientele based on footfall from offices, co-founders Pete Smith and Paul

Trendell are also keeping

their fingers crossed for a busier autumn. "Yes, reopening in August was awkward because that's traditionally our quiet time, although in some ways, that wasn't a bad thing in getting things ready," says Smith, "but we're hopeful that September and October will be much stronger."

And being a boutique operation has its advantages, adds Trendell.

"We run thousands of different activities and each one had to restart in a Covid-19 secure way"

Public sector

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson, leader of Portsmouth City Council and chair of the Culture, Tourism & Sport Board, paints a rather grim picture for the public sector, with just under half of facilities still closed.

"Public sector leisure centres and gyms work on very small margins and any funding they've had from government hasn't touched the sides," he says.

"The government announced that it would match income lost to the equivalent of 75p in the pound minus 5% variable, which on the face of it sounds positive, but actually we can't apply that to the contracts we deliver to trusts or for-profit operators, so it's not actually helping the leisure sector at all," Vernon-Jackson says.

He estimates the need for a £700m to £1bn bailout to protect public leisure and deliver on the likes of the government's obesity strategy.

He also points out that 60% of the public leisure estate has passed its due date for major refurbishment, and the facilities often tend to be small, lacking in corridors and unsuitable for social distancing.

"They just don't meet general public expectations," he says. "And consequently, a number of places have converted their sports halls into the gym facilities, but these have squeezed out other activities, such as badminton or judo."

"You can access our studio without actually touching anything," he says, "especially if you don't need to use the changing rooms and don't bring anything with you. You have your own equipment, never share, everything is deep-cleaned after you've used it and, as a boutique, we have far fewer people coming through the doors each day than a large gym."

IN DEPTH

BUSINESS

In fact, Trendell believes that boutiques can probably offer better training experiences in these conditions because they often have more space and fewer people to an instructor. "I don't think we're yet in a position to necessarily charge for this," he says, "but I do think that's where boutiques will need to go to justify their business model in this 'new normal', because our business model is definitely designed to work at greater than our current 50% occupancy."

With its nine London-based studios, CIMSPA partner Ten Health & Fitness is another relatively small operator whose clients are predominantly white-collar office workers. With few staff back in offices in London and footfall in the West End alone down by something like three-quarters, director Justin Rogers explains the rationale behind its staggered openings.

"First, we opened three neighbourhood studios where there

was a reasonably high residential population," he says. "We also worked really hard to stay in touch with clients, which helped us learn where there were definite geographical areas of appetite. So the Notting Hill studio was one of the first to open, along with our Mayfair studio."

But Rogers agrees that very few businesses in the gym and boutique sector are viable under the social distancing strictures. "We understand the need for it, but nobody built a business model based on 50% capacity," he says. "So, it's about mitigating the

"I believe the pandemic has forced us to be digital in a much more effective way"

situation as best as possible. Having restructured to take out as many overheads as we can, we've also pivoted the business to offer a blended approach of online and in the studio."

It is a path being taken by many private operators. As Everyone Active's Beevers explains: "I believe the pandemic has forced us to be digital in a much more effective way. We've realised we have to provide something outside of the centre as well. Classes that people can do at home will continue to be part of our offering and we have to keep moving fast in terms of getting new activities up and running."

So the challenges are set to keep coming. As the UK continues its attempts to quell further regional Covid-19 outbreaks, nobody knows what the future holds as we move into winter and the flu season. One can only hope gyms and leisure centres will continue to reopen and stay open in a way that is safe and beneficial for all. 

Demand and membership

So has the dreaded scenario played out where customers freeze or cancel their memberships and stick to their homemade lockdown gyms? It would seem not, for some operators.

With around 95% of its almost 200 leisure centres now back open, as many as 74% of Everyone Active's members have returned, according to group development director Ben Beevers. "Most of the rest have frozen their memberships with the view that they may come back quite soon afterwards. We've actually seen a really big turnout for most activities from the moment we reopened. Golf, for example, went crazy as soon as we resumed."

As for group exercise class attendances, Beevers is adamant that the

demand is there, but unfortunately they are running at about 60% occupancy due to social distancing rules. "We've also implemented a new booking system for the gym and are running at about 30% of our normal capacity there," he adds, "which is actually quite busy, compared to initial expectations."

Martin Franklin, CEO of Les Mills, admits to having had higher expectations: "The August reopening probably caught more people on the hop than we predicted."

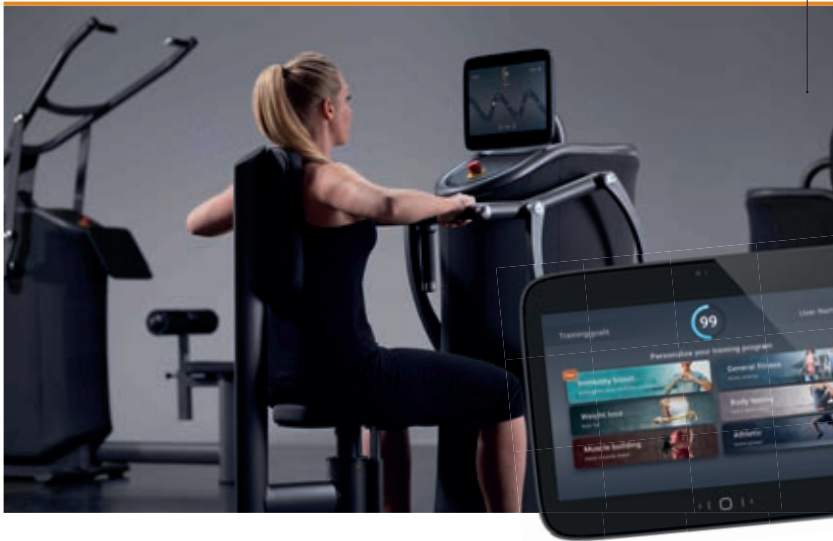
Les Mills has attendance rates of around 35% of pre-coronavirus levels. "I suppose we were expecting nearer the 50-60% we've seen in Germany," says Franklin. He's hoping for 60-70% of normal attendance in the next few months.

Across all of its different activities, people putting their membership on hold at Les Mills ranges from 8% to 40%. "But even with August's attendance of around 35%, we're still seeing membership and direct debit runs from our partners of around 70% to 80%," says Franklin.

But there is still much work to be done, says David Hendry, managing director at Knight, Kavanagh & Page. He points out that it's been easier during these initial months of re-openings for operators to target the low-hanging fruit of regular fitness members. "The bigger challenge will come as providers target people who have perhaps been at risk or shielded and attempt to get those people back in a way that is safe and secure," he says.

ADVERTORIAL

EGYM UK



STANDING TOGETHER TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Whilst we wait for a vaccine, physical activity is the world's best defence against infection. Now is the time for the physical activity community to unite together and deliver a solution that supports the government objective to slow the spread of Covid-19 and protect lives now and in the future.

Here, Kerstin Obenauer, Country Director, EGYM UK, explains how EGYM is playing its part in building resilience against infection through the provision of scientifically-based automated programming.

If we are to become a key partner in the government's health strategy we need to be able to evidence that our products, services and workforce are fit for business. This means being able to demonstrate an ability to service a significant percentage of the population and drive positive health outcomes. Right now, this means helping the nation to boost immunity through



controlled, scientifically based exercise prescription. Our attention needs to shift from just helping people become fitter and stronger to helping people live a longer, more fulfilling life even in the midst of this pandemic.

This is why EGYM is investing in the development of automated programmes that drive specific health outcomes. Our latest addition is Immunity Boost.

Immunity Boost is a 30 minute, scientifically based, strength training programme specifically designed to strengthen the body's defence against many types of infection, including Covid-19, whilst protecting against the negative effects of overtraining.

To maximise the training effect, Immunity Boost provides the optimal intensity to promote the release of as many protective myokines – hormone-like messenger substances that have a protective and rejuvenating effect on the immune system – as possible

without triggering the 'open window effect' where the immune system is weakened, short-term, post training.

The programme also includes intraset pauses. This means, every 5 repetitions in a 15 repetition set a short rest period is factored in. This decreases the exertion and elevates intramuscular blood flow, protecting against a suppression in the immune response.

Designed to be completed at least twice per week, the 12-week programme is split into four training phases which ensure that the user progresses at an effective, safe rate firing up immune responses whilst protecting against the negative effects of over training.

If operators are to cater for a wider demographic of 'healthseekers' rather than those who simply want to become fitter and stronger, suppliers need to develop products that support gym floor trainers to be able to do this effectively and safely. This is exactly what we have done at EGYM.

Immunity Boost joins Metabolic Fit – a training programme designed to avoid or control diabetes, as a pre-programmed option on EGYM's Smart Strength Series. A modified version is also available via the EGYM Branded Member App.

EGYM offers a range of payment solutions, including the provision of reconditioned equipment, to help operators access solutions.

For more information about Immunity Boost visit: <https://egym.com/uk/workouts/trainingprograms>

EGYM

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit our website: www.egym.com/uk

IN DEPTH

RESEARCH

IT'S A TOUGH ROAD TO THE TOP

A woman in athletic wear is running up a wide set of white stone steps. The background is a wall made of blue-grey rectangular tiles arranged in a diagonal pattern. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor or well-lit indoor environment.

What makes a person successful at sport? Their environment? Their natural abilities? Or is it drive and determination and the repeated honing of a particular skill? Roisin Woolnough investigates

Malcolm Gladwell, in his bestselling book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, says: “Ten thousand hours is the magic number of greatness.” According to Gladwell, greatness requires thousands of hours of repeated practice. One of the central assertions of the book is that if a person practices enough (now known as the 10,000-hour rule), they will gain mastery of that skill, whether it’s a sport, chess, playing an instrument or anything else.

Of course, the idea that ‘practice makes perfect’ is hardly new. And few people would disagree that in order to become a top footballer or marathon runner or tennis player or athlete in any other form of sport, it is going to require a great deal of hard work and hours of dedication.

However, new research by Qatar University, ‘Nature Vs Nurture: A groundbreaking research into genetically influenced metabolites in elite competitors’, disputes the idea that practice, practice and yet more practice will take people to the top in sport. After conducting a study into genetically influenced metabolites – a metabolite is a substance formed in or necessary for metabolism – in top athletes, researchers found there is a genetic predisposition for elite athlete performance. In other words, some people are born with the ability to compete and win at the highest levels. The odds are already heavily stacked in their favour.

Dr Mohammed Elrayess, assistant professor at Qatar University’s Biomedical Research Center, carried out the research, which the university claims is the largest ever genome-wide association study. Speaking to *Tes* (formerly known as *The Times Educational Supplement*), he says the results show that it is not a level playing field – some athletes are genetically predisposed to do better because of a genetic variant in a gene that codes for the enzyme fundamental to steroid function. “The superior performance of elite athletes has long been considered an outcome of interaction between gene and environment,” he says. “Plenty of evidence supports the role of

“We found that high-endurance athletes have the genetic variant that gives them an extra kick”

DR MOHAMMED ELRAYESS,
assistant professor at Qatar University’s
Biomedical Research Centre

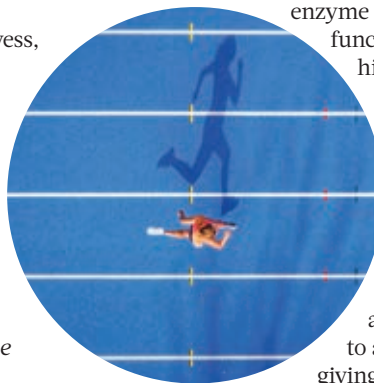
environment, but genetic evidence remained elusive because of complex phenotype and the small effect size of genetic factors.”

Previous studies have found genetically influenced metabolites in non-athletes, but Elrayess says this new study identified others. “Among these, the most interesting was a genetic variant in a gene that codes for the

enzyme fundamental to steroid function. We found that high-endurance athletes have the genetic variant that gives them this extra kick. I believe this is a very important finding because for the first time there is concrete evidence that there is a genetic predisposition to an enzyme that is giving an advantage to elite, high-endurance athletes and, especially, in relation to steroids.”

Qatar University says the findings have huge implications for the world of sport and sports science. First, because they offer another biomarker for anti-doping agencies to refine their screening methods. Secondly, because sports federations could use genetic screening for metabolites to identify fresh talent and to then tailor training regimes according to a person’s individual genetic make-up. “Our ongoing work has also indicated that one of the genes involved in endurance is related to the size of the heart muscle, and so you can imagine if you are genetically predisposed to have a larger heart than you are going to benefit more from the exercise, giving you greater VO2 [oxygen uptake],” says Elrayess. “You will run for longer without losing your power.”

However, Dr Steve Ingham, a performance scientist, leader and



IN DEPTH

RESEARCH

author, whose books include *How to Support a Champion: The art of applying science to the elite athlete*, disputes Qatar University's claim that the research is groundbreaking. "I am not particularly convinced that the research adds an awful lot," he says. "It could have some important implications eventually but there is not just one gene that will up athletic performance. However, there will be a tipping point when this conversation changes, as our understanding of genetics improves."

Ingham says that athletes need to have a number of DNA variants in order to excel and that there are several other contributory factors, such as environment, mental toughness, coaching, nutrition and practice. "You can have all the nature in the world, e.g. the right genetics, but if you don't have the right training, it won't create the right conditions. And if you have sub-optimal nutrition and you're not fuelling yourself properly, you will not adapt. The same is true if someone has too much pressure on them or they are miserable during training sessions."

Repeated practice is undeniably important in elite performance, both in terms of reaching the top levels, and also in terms of staying there. "Andy Murray has to hit a certain number of tennis balls a year to stay in the groove," says Ingham. "A swimmer has to do a certain number of strokes to gain the feel of the water and most endurance athletes have to put in a certain number of hours in order to gain endurance qualities."

However, Ingham, who was formerly director of science at the British Olympic Association and English Institute of Sport, and has supported more than 1,000 athletes, including Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill, Sir Steve Redgrave and James Cracknell, says

that practice needs to be targeted and personalised.

"The pendulum of thinking is that it's deliberate practice that is needed – it needs to be intentional and deliberate," he says. "It's not just about throwing raw volume and hours at someone and you get the results. If I went out and hit tennis balls for 10,000 hours I wouldn't become an elite tennis player. It's about being sophisticated about how you do





“You can have all the nature in the world, e.g. the right genetics, but if you don’t have the right training, it won’t create the right conditions”

More info

To find out more about the Qatar University research, visit <https://bit.ly/2EqDI8Y>.

it, so that all the hours you spend have a maximum return.”

Sir Mo Farah is an athlete who has done everything he can to perform at the highest level, and then up his performance yet further, through extremely targeted and deliberate practice. “He is a good example of someone who is willing to do what it takes,” says Ingham. “It was felt that altitude was the right stimulus for him, so he came away from his family to train at a high altitude. He was doing 130 miles a week, at altitude and doing sprint sessions. Training at high altitude is really challenging physically and mentally.”

Ingham says top athletes are adaptive. They adapt constantly, whether it’s their training regimes, their diet, their performance, their mental focus – it’s one thing to have raw talent, but it’s another to make the most of that talent and harness it for optimal success. Sometimes, setbacks force athletes to adapt significantly. Ingham says Dame Ennis-Hill had to change her starting leg after breaking her ankle, for example.

Sport science is much more sophisticated now than it was even 10 years ago, and it keeps improving all the time. Even if the Qatar University findings aren’t as groundbreaking as the university claims, ongoing research like this moves sport science and elite performance on. And it contributes to the next research project and the next. Ingham thinks truly groundbreaking research into genes is only a matter of time.

“Research where you would probably be able to de-codify someone’s genes and with reasonable probability predict what they could be capable of. It is to come – it might be soon, or it might be a while.”

What we do with such research is another matter altogether. 🧐

IN DEPTH

PROFILES

*Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, sports and physical activity professionals have been doing their bit, whether it's putting free classes online, delivering food supplies to the vulnerable, or raising money for good causes. **Caroline Roberts** showcases a few of the contributions*

THE HEROES WHO STEPPED UP TO THE PLATE

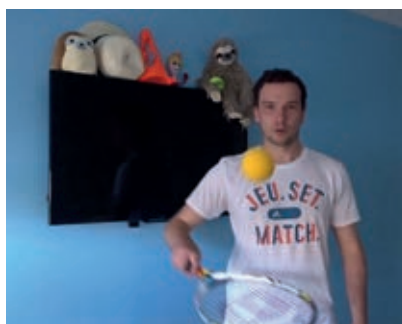


The Hornchurch Sports Centre transformed into a distribution hub

SPORTS HALL TO DISTRIBUTION HUB

When leisure centres and gyms closed, the sports hall of Hornchurch Sports Centre in east London, run by CIMSPA partner Everyone Active, was transformed into the local PPE and food distribution hub. Four staff members, helped by a team of volunteers made up of furloughed Everyone Active employees, were kept busy running the centre seven days a week, packing food, taking deliveries and controlling stock.

During lockdown, the hub dispatched more than 3,000 food parcels to vulnerable and shielding locals and, at the time of writing, 500 PPE deliveries had been sent to care homes and key workers, with this side of the operation still ongoing. "The hub was a great collaboration between us and Havering council, but it was a



pretty crazy time with the core four of us putting in extremely long hours to keep it ticking over," says area contract manager Tom Fletcher. "It was a new challenge for all of us and was physically very demanding, with large deliveries coming in on a daily basis."

But supporting the community through a difficult time was hugely

rewarding, he adds. "As a team of leisure professionals, we stepped out of our comfort zone and learned an array of new skills. I think it's left us extremely well prepared to manage the challenges that our industry faces in the next few months as we've gained a real perspective on how this crisis has affected our whole community."

KEEPING UP TENNIS BALLS, AND SPIRITS

Tennis coach Michael Millar hit on a great way of keeping the 200 or so players he teaches entertained and developing their skills during lockdown, and raising money for good causes at the same time. Michael, who works at Craiglockhart Leisure Centre, operated by CIMSPA partner Edinburgh Leisure, set up the Keep Calm & Keepie-Uppie Tennis Challenge,

IN DEPTH

PROFILES

which asked players to see how many times they could bounce the ball on their racket in one minute. Extra points were awarded for tricks, such as bouncing it off the frame or hitting it with the racket between their legs.

Players of all ages and abilities took part, hitting more than 100,000 keepie-uppies during the month-long challenge and raising more than £1,000, which was divided between the Advantage disability tennis programme Michael runs, NHS Lothian and the Edinburgh Food Project. "The creativity of some players was great to see," he says. "My particular favourite was when a player's dog got involved in the challenge, sharing the keepie-uppies with their owner. I needed to keep a connection going with the players, not just to keep them engaged with tennis but also, hopefully, to serve as a bit of a distraction during an uncertain time. Tennis is a sport that involves a huge amount of hand-eye co-ordination and 'soft hands' so being able to build overall control of the ball is a vital skill. The challenge was a perfect way to develop this."

R&R FOR FRONTLINE MEDICS

The NHS Rest and Relaxation Centre was set up at Manchester's National Squash Centre as a place where NHS staff working on the front line during the pandemic could come for some respite. The facility included a gym, running track, chill-out spaces and a café, and 12 members of staff from CIMSPA partner GLL were among those running it. During the height of the crisis, the centre had more than 7,000 visits, including from those working with critically ill patients at the North West Nightingale Hospital.

"As a lot of the health workers' lives were disrupted, especially those from the Nightingale, who were living away from home in hotels, it was nice to be

able to provide facilities that gave them a sense of normality, even if it was only for the hour during their visit," says Callum Tongue, a trainee manager with GLL.

The staff were presented with the High Sheriff's Special Recognition Award for their outstanding contribution during the pandemic, and also received a framed photo of the Nightingale staff along with a card thanking them for helping keep everyone grounded during an extremely stressful time. Ian Harkins, GLL head of service, says: "The feedback from the NHS staff has been incredible and shows the impact GLL had on their wellbeing. The fact that we have helped our NHS workers both physically and mentally during the biggest crisis since WW2 is an extraordinary accomplishment, and I think we deserve to be proud of what we have achieved."



Above: The R&R Centre at Manchester's National Squash Centre. Right: Yoga studio The Haven became a larder. Far right: The Burpee Guy completed a 12-hour gruelling challenge





LOCKDOWN LARDER

When lockdown hit, Julia Morton turned her yoga studio, The Haven in Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, into a community larder. The free food resource differs from a foodbank in that anyone can come and choose their own food without the need for a referral. "Hearing about the rising levels of food insecurity just got me thinking and I found out we were the only town in our area not to have a community food larder. There's a stigma around going to a food bank. Our mantra is: no one leaves the larder empty-handed. Even if you come to donate and you don't need anything, you take a little thing. That makes it easier for the people who do need it to take something as well."

The larder is run with the help of 20 volunteers and has been used by an average of 600 people a month. It has proved such a valuable community resource that Morton has decided to keep it open by moving it into a smaller space on the premises when the yoga studio reopens in January. And she's about to launch a crowdfunding campaign to take the project further. "We'd love access to a kitchen as we get so much leftover food from our local Co-op, so we could make affordable healthy meals and give some young people in the area an employment opportunity at the same time."

BURPEE FUNDING BOOST

Craig Peters, AKA the Burpee Guy, put himself a through a gruelling 12-hour burpee challenge during lockdown. During the overnight challenge, the personal trainer from Worthing in Sussex managed 4,450 of these push-ups followed by a leap. He raised just over £1,500 for the Rockinghorse Charity, which supports sick children and their families across the county.



The money was used to help provide beds so that parents can stay with their children on hospital wards.

"It was very rewarding, as we know what it's like to not have a bed and be sitting on a chair all night," says Craig, whose twin boys needed life-saving laser surgery while in the womb. "The challenge was live-streamed on Instagram and Facebook, my wife was up all night supporting me and my Italian neighbour kept me awake with espressos."

So why burpees? "It's the exercise that everyone loves to hate so it captured people's imagination. I did the squat thrust version rather than the chest to ground one because I was doing it outside on a concrete floor, and the last thing the local hospital needed at that time was someone coming in with an injury. It's a great full body workout and it's really strengthened my lower back. Don't get me wrong – I still hate them, though!"



A woman with her hair in a ponytail, wearing a sports bra, is holding dumbbells in a gym setting. The image has a teal tint and is partially obscured by a dark blue diagonal shape on the left side.

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EXPERT ADVICE

A TIME FOR TOUGH DECISIONS

Gyms and leisure facilities are facing two challenges: the winding down of the furlough scheme and particularly onerous health and safety responsibilities. Triathlete and avid gym user John Hayes looks at some of the requirements that must be followed

The furlough scheme continues until the end of October. From September, employers had to fund 10% of salary as well as NICs and pension costs, rising to 20% in October. Employers may now make workers whom they do not wish to return to work redundant and consultations are well under way. The government has agreed that notice pay (but not redundancy payments) can be covered by the furlough scheme. Employers need to consult with staff and apply appropriate selection criteria and take specialist advice if needs be.

Next, the return to work. Owners of gyms and leisure facilities are subject to strict health and safety obligations to reopen their businesses safely. Government guidance is constantly being updated, with latest here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19#social-distancing-in-the-workplace---principles>.

Businesses must also follow instructions in the event of new local restrictions: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-restrictions-areas-with-an-outbreak-of-coronavirus-covid-19>.

All workplaces must carry out a Covid-19 risk assessment and confirm the actions taken to manage the risks of transition. The decision to return to the

“Owners of gyms and leisure facilities are subject to strict health and safety obligations”

workplace must be made in consultation with workers (and representative groups). The HSE has published useful guidance <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/index.htm>.

In short, owners of gyms and leisure facilities must:

- identify what work activity or situations may transmit the virus
- consider who could be at risk, including vulnerable employees
- decide how likely it is that someone could be exposed; and
- act to remove the activity or situation, or if this isn't possible, control the risk.

The government has prepared a useful document as to what to include in a risk assessment: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/assets/docs/risk-assessment.pdf>

For gyms and fitness facilities, special considerations apply, including:

- ensuring social distancing on site, for example by signage and one-way walkways (and working out the maximum number of customers)
- putting equipment two metres apart (which may mean removing items)

- providing additional handwashing facilities
- staggering shifts and conducting additional training
- amending fitness timetables to manage foot flow
- engaging greater numbers of cleaners and training staff in cleaning duties
- advising workers to wear visors
- having fixed teams or “bubbles” to minimise exposure
- discouraging or minimising attendance by spectators and non-participating children, especially in indoor facilities
- reorganising seating or waiting areas to ensure social distancing
- restricting numbers in swimming pools to allow three square metres per bather
- avoiding use of shared objects such as towels, robes, rackets, balls and weights, unless they can be cleaned or sanitised between users
- ensuring water fountains have signs preventing face-to-tap drinking; they are only for refilling personal bottles
- operating beauty, massage and physio services by following the relevant salon guidance; and
- servicing or adjusting ventilation systems.

Personal trainers will need to abide by social distancing guidelines, especially in gyms. Many have been innovative and taken more of their work outdoors and/or on Zoom or similar programmes.

There are other considerations, but at the time of writing gyms and leisure facilities are allowed to be open and are encouraged to do so. Let's hope they do re-open safely – they are a vital resource for many. ☺

John Hayes is founder of law firm Constantine Law

WORKPLACE

FOCUS

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR USUAL ONBOARDING PROCESSES IN A POST-LOCKDOWN WORLD

Covid-19 requirements are a fact of post-lockdown life, says Lisa Charles-Jones

Onboarding new starters is crucial in any successful recruitment journey. Get it right, and they'll be set-up for success from day one. But get it wrong, and you risk having a disengaged team member, which could then affect a customer's experience.

We've recently been through the largest onboarding process we have ever carried out, with more than 3,000 people going through training before we reopened in July. We had to overhaul some of the things we did, so here are a few key learnings about onboarding in a post-lockdown world.

MAKE USE OF LARGE SPACES

If you're onboarding a large group, you need to use a bigger area than usual to comply with social distancing requirements. Make use of sports halls or outdoor courts and pitches wherever you can.

CULTURE IS KEY

Give your starters a first-hand experience of your workplace culture. Our teams are made up of a diverse group of people who tend to be outgoing, so our workplace training and onboarding needs to reflect and

embrace those differences to ensure we all know how to treat customers consistent with our values and culture.

MAKE IT ENGAGING

We always try to run high-energy onboarding sessions, but it was more important than ever after lockdown to keep excitement levels high.

Anyone who has been out of the workplace for a few months may have become accustomed to a slower pace of life, so it's vital to start your session with a bang and inspire people from the beginning.



MAKE THE MOST OF BLENDED LEARNING

With so much new health and hygiene training to carry out to make sure staff are Covid-19 safe, cover some fact-based modules online. This allows you to maximise the time you have in person with your new starters, and focus on how to create the best possible experience for your customers.

EVERYBODY NEEDS A REFRESHER EVERY NOW AND THEN

We decided to run onboarding sessions not just for our new team members, but also for people who joined before lockdown, to bring them up to speed on Covid-19 guidelines. One thing our teams are having to 'un-learn' is physical contact, such as handshakes. We're a sociable bunch and very friendly with customers, so we've had to change the way we greet people.

SOMETIMES THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR A GOOD OLD-FASHIONED WALK-THROUGH

There's only so much you can teach a starter through online modules and group sessions. Someone who works in a gym isn't going to need exactly the same training as a pool attendant, so the best way to learn about their new day-to-day is to be shown around by an experienced manager, who can introduce them to the team and talk them through what happens.

TAKE FEEDBACK

This is a new process for all of us, and unfortunately Covid-19 doesn't look as if it will disappear any time soon, so after completing onboarding, make sure you listen to your team. We're asking everybody for – anonymous – feedback to understand what worked and what didn't, and will take that into account for our next round of new starters. 🙌

Lisa Charles-Jones is HR director, Parkdean Resorts



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TECH TOOLKIT

PRODUCT ROUND-UP

THE VALUE OF VIRTUAL

Digital communications and a greener outlook continue to grow in importance

THE NEW FUNCTION OF FUNCTION

The global pandemic will continue to accelerate the development of products that link the real and virtual worlds of fitness. One of the latest to achieve this is Virtual Player from interactive fitness expert, FunXtion, which allows clubs to stream and schedule world-class virtual classes at any time.

It provides an interactive workout experience on the gym floor, functional area or directly to members at home via an app. The Virtual Player already holds more than 200 virtual workout and 2,000 individual exercises, ranging from yoga to HIIT and from dance workouts to boxing, and more are uploaded every month. The company believes that instructor-led classes can be taken to the next level with digital support, as it gives them more time to coach, motivate and make personal connections with members. An intelligent scheduling tool and work-out creator enables instructors to build work-outs, plan them months in advance and even set them to their own music.

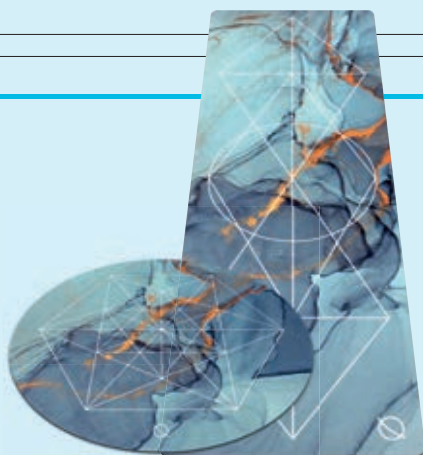
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www.funxtion.com



Mapping the room

The demands of social distancing will continue to put pressure on operators to ensure safety. Fisikal aims to help with its new room mapping technology. In a similar way to passengers being able to view a plan of an aeroplane and reserve a specific seat, it enables members to view a map of a studio space and book a specific equipment station. Whether it be a static bike, suspension straps or a functional training station, members can look at a studio map via an app and make their reservation. "Feeling comfortable in a space is particularly important to people right now while Covid-19 is still active," said Rob Lander, CEO of Fisikal. "Our technology gives people advanced assurance that their preferred location in a class is going to be available to them when they arrive."

Price: On application
fisikal.com



FORM FOLLOWS A GREENER FOOTPRINT

Instructors who are keen to lower their carbon footprint should check out Form's newly extended range of carbon-negative yoga mats. They are made from recycled natural rubber and plastic bottles and are free from toxic PVC/glue/silicone. Pro and Travel mats are fully recyclable at the end of their lives, while the Onyx biodegrades after between two to five years. The Form Grid on which the mats are designed has been developed with common and key yoga poses in mind. The range also includes a circular mat. Form has officially achieved Climate Neutral Certified Status through measuring its 2019 greenhouse gas emissions footprint, purchasing carbon credits to offset that footprint and implementing plans to reduce emissions in the coming year. It said it is committed to "pushing the sustainability message".

Price: £45-£79

www.theform.co.uk

THE SPARK TO FITNESS

The Polar Unite fitness watch has a built-in daily training guide that delivers on-demand, personalised workouts straight to your wrist. FitSpark recommends tailored workouts each day that take into consideration an individual's sleep, recovery, fitness level, and training history. It also provides animated instructions for guidance on strength, cardio, and supportive training, while timers,



instructions, and vibrations guide the person through the workout. During workouts it provides real-time training stats, and following each one Polar Unite offers immediate insights about time spent in certain heart-rate zones, calories burned, and how much strain the session put on the cardiovascular system, making it easy to track and monitor progress over time.

Price: €149.90

www.polar.com/unite

MASSAGE GUN WARMS AND RELAXES

The Pulseroll is a massage gun that helps muscles warm up for a workout and then soothes them after putting your body through a rigorous test – as well as keeping muscles loose, increasing blood flow and flushing away lactic acid. This lightweight massage gun can also help prevent much of next-day soreness, or DOMS, after strenuous workouts. Its built-in rechargeable battery can run for five



hours of constant use. With five vibration speeds, users can adjust the intensity of the massage gun's activity which can take place across all muscle groups. Quiet noise technology and six swappable heads (plus a free case) are part of the Pulseroll's package. The manufacturers claim it can produce 14.7% improved range of motion and 22.3% improved recovery time.

Price: £224.99

www.pulseroll.com

AI-POWERED CRM

Keepme has launched an upgrade to its artificial intelligence (AI)-powered sales and marketing platform for fitness operators. Keepme V2 blends AI, operational tools and automation to streamline the efforts of fitness centres to attract, retain and re-engage members. It has a new lead management system and communications tools and the AI engine is designed to help operators make data-driven decisions to maximise revenue. The company's

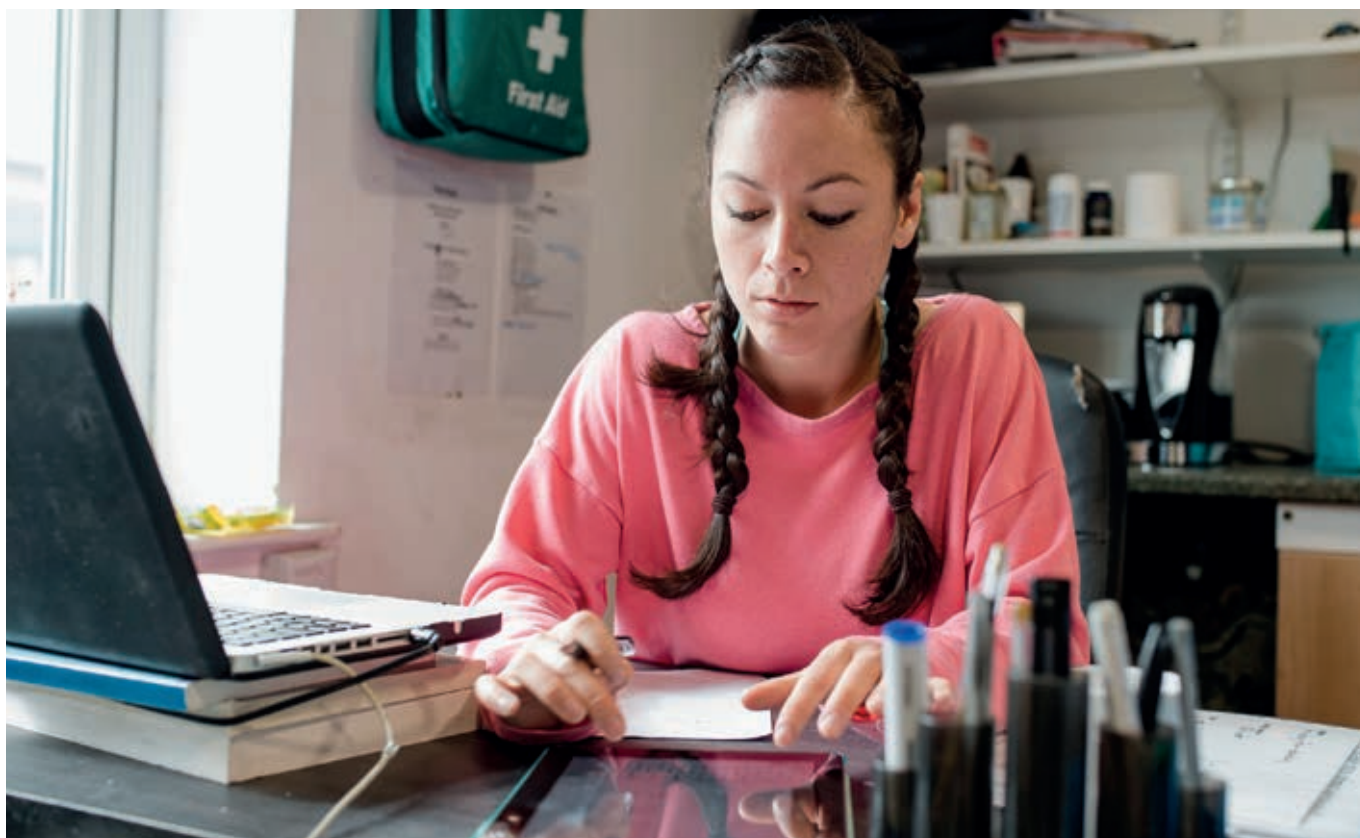


research with hundreds of operators highlighted the need for an AI-powered customer relationship management (CRM) system. This was one that could manage the whole member lifecycle – from lead capture

and sales, to retention, secondary spend, and former member win back. Keepme's AI evaluates each lead and funnels them into tailored sales flows, while the sales playbooks and automations ensure that every lead is followed up. It also identifies at-risk members and other critical groups, while a new 'Take Action' features allow users to engage customers with a single click.

Price: On application

www.keepme.ai/



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LAST WORD

SPORTING LIFE

James Hope-Gill *has transferred his skills from a football background to create a structure for an organisation and a voice for a sport with a reputation for non-conformity*

RIDING HIGH ON A CONCRETE WAVE

How do you go about getting a governing body up and running for potential stakeholders who essentially do not like the idea of a governing body? That's the task faced by James Hope-Gill when he set up Skateboard England in late 2015 and became its first CEO. Much like skateboarding itself, it's taken a combination of determination, grace and balance to be accepted in what is a unique community.

"Talk to skateboarders and you'll find that they don't necessarily even want a governing body," says Hope-Gill. "But what they absolutely do want is an organisation that's looking after the interests of skateboarding and making sure any decisions taken are made by skateboarders."

Coming from a footballing background – he spent 20 years at Sheffield & Hallamshire Football Association – Hope-Gill admits that it took a while to be fully accepted. "Skateboarding is a lifestyle, and many don't even see it as a sport," he explains. "I was never a skateboarder, but for those who are, it's part of what they do and who they are. Consequently, there's a built-in wariness of outsiders... For a period, I was called the 'football guy'."

But Hope-Gill was honest and upfront, explaining that, although not a skateboarder himself, he had a skillset that could really benefit the sport.



"People can see and respond to that transparency and honesty," he explains.

In determining that 'right way', Hope-Gill spent a couple of years working with the community and key people to put the right structure in place. What he eventually set up looked to all intents and purposes like a governing body. But from a skateboarding point of view, it was there, first and foremost, to communicate and engage with skateboarders. "Skateboarding has never been about one individual competing against another," explains Hope-Gill.

And it's a sport that only seems to grow in popularity, even during pandemics. According to Sport England, there has been a 20% increase since

March to the already existing 750,000 skateboarders in the UK. "There was a period in July where you couldn't even buy a skateboard because the country had actually sold out," says Hope-Gill.

Surprisingly, it's not just your stereotypical young male skateboarders who are causing this surge in interest. Females want in on the action, too. "We know from talking to teenage girls that they feel nervous or uncomfortable about learning to skate when there are boys there in a park. But there have been some great projects and organisations out there that are specifically putting on girls' and women's coaching sessions."

He singles out Projekts, an organisation in Manchester: "They now have a full-time girls' development officer funded by Comic Relief. They've seen the number of girls getting involved soar."

A case in point is Sky Brown. If you haven't heard of her, you soon will. Skateboarding was due to make its Olympic debut in Tokyo this year and Brown, at 12 years old, could have been the UK's youngest Olympian at the event.

Hope-Gill's other hat is CEO of Skateboard GB, so the Olympics are something he is heavily invested in.

Maybe it's time to buy that skateboard you've always promised yourself. You have four years to become very good. 🏆

James Hope-Gill spoke with Dean Gurden.

LAST WORD

SPORT AMBASSADOR

Julie Davis is deputy chief operating officer at *The Clinical Research Network West Midlands*



DOING OUR BIT FOR NHS STAFF

When the pandemic hit, I was involved in setting up the Nightingale Hospital Birmingham, looking after our staff and delivery of Covid-19 research studies. That's my day job and it's a really busy, important day job.

I was also doing my Masters in public health, looking at sedentary behaviour in offices. We've always done a great deal on wellbeing in the network, such as running fitness classes for staff and holding workshops on healthy eating. When lockdown happened, we were thinking: "How do we keep our staff active, happy and healthy when they are working ridiculous hours?"

#DoingOurBit is something I set up in my spare time with the help of Study Active, Active IQ and Fibido.

Created by the NHS, for the NHS, it's a free online fitness platform. The name came from a campaign I set up within our network – staff, some of whom were shielding, wanted to do their bit against Covid, so we had those who weren't on the front line making scrubs, doing admin and helping where they could.

Study Active, Active IQ and Fibido also wanted to do their bit for the NHS. Every video on #DoingOurBit is free, and there's no promotion.

It's about keeping the workforce active and moving. Also, the evidence

shows that patient outcomes improve if you have happy and healthy staff.

For the first 11 weeks of lockdown, my husband, who is a personal trainer, did free virtual sessions on Google Hangouts for our employees. He did a half-hour slot each week, mostly circuit-based, and people received a calendar invite and could join if they wanted to.

However, it was his second job and he couldn't keep delivering it. I am training to be a personal trainer as well, so I contacted Study Active to see if I could take over those sessions.

Study Active had an idea about bringing other people in and got Active IQ and Fibido involved. That's when #DoingOurBit all started really.

There's something in there for every level of fitness. There's yoga and pilates. There's family fun, with some activities designed to be done with children. There's nutrition, hydration and motivation. There's a stretch and unwind your mind section. And there's low-impact aerobic and high-impact aerobic sections. You can do it from home or from an office space. None of it requires any equipment – just trainers and a bit of space.

Initially, it was set up for the 180 staff in our department, because we knew how hard they were working. We also got in touch with The Royal

Wolverhampton NHS Trust and they were interested. It went to 10,000 people in the first week, on 15 June. It was going to be a slow rollout regionally, but we had enquiries from the entire country.

We have now opened it out to 43 NHS organisations and we haven't had to target anyone because of the level of interest. The aim is to open it up to reach all 1.1 million NHS employees.

It's more than I could ever have imagined. I am passionate about fitness anyway and am a power lifter. I used to do a lot of running and did the 100km Thames Path Challenge. But then I gave up on running and wanted a new challenge. I tried my hand at the sport of strongwoman and qualified for England's Strongest Woman final, but I realised I was a bit small. I was advised to go into power lifting and did my first competition four years ago. I went to Serbia and won my competition. Since then, I've done all the internationals and won titles.

Once I'm trained I want to get as many people active as possible. I'm doing my Level 3 PT and hope to qualify soon. I would like to get every NHS organisation signed up to #DoingOurBit – that's the dream. 🧡

Julie Davis was interviewed by S&PA Professional's Roisin Woolnough

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