

UNITE THE MOVEMENT

The sector tackles inequalities

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AGENDA

Energy bills leave pools in crisis

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BUSINESS

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 **CIMSPA**

THE SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INDUSTRY MAGAZINE



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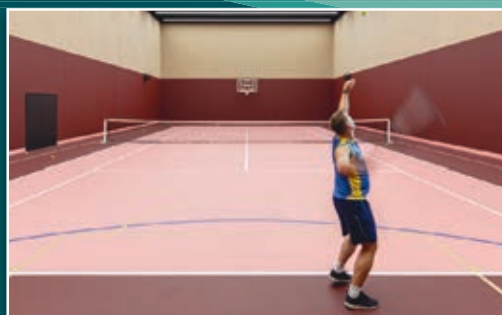


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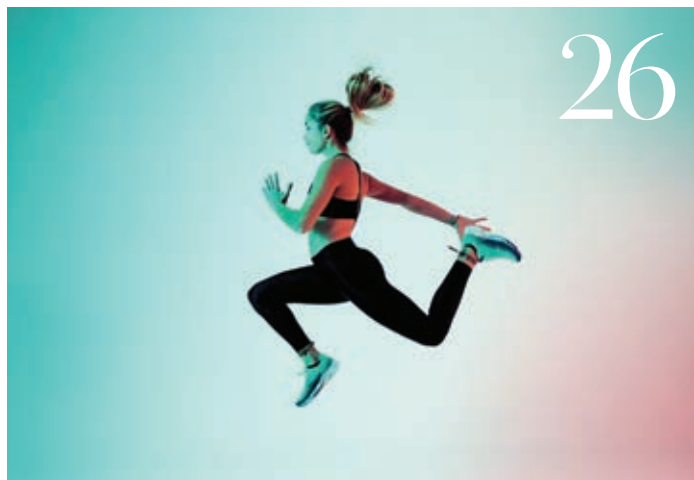
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UPFRONT

EDITORIAL

► DeeDee Doke

Partnerships pay


*Sport England
and CIMSPA Unite
the Movement*

Has it been hot enough for you in the UK this summer? Pools have been the most popular places in most communities to get cool, along with air-conditioned gyms and studios. The value of pools cannot be overlooked as the UK, along with the rest of the world, grapples with infrastructure and energy issues. Read our report in Agenda, p20.

It's time for our chartered institute to give itself a well-deserved pat on the back. In a recent conversation with Phil Smith, director of partnerships at Sport England (see

p10-11), he talked about the significant investment being made in CIMSPA in connection with the Uniting the Movement strategy over the next five years. The millions being invested in CIMSPA "represents Sport England's confidence in CIMSPA's own leadership", Smith said.

"In my view, they've got a strong, diverse and experienced board that's really committed to ensuring the organisation lives up to the challenge that we've got in this industry and a CEO [Tara Dillon] who's a passionate advocate of Uniting the Movement, what we're trying to achieve. [We]

have a lot of confidence in her and the board and the chair. And that's equally as much a reason for our investment as the plan that they put forward."

Thank you Mr Smith. And well done CIMSPA!



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S&PA News

A round-up of the latest developments in the industry



ACTION, BRAND AND CHANGE AT ACTIVE UPRISING

By DeeDee Doke

Active Uprising took place in Birmingham at the ICC in June – the first time since 2019 that the event was held in-person.

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson (above left), chair of ukactive, bid farewell to the organisation she led for seven years, and sport & physical activity professionals debated diversity, equality

& inclusion (DEI), public sector leisure funding issues and redefining how the sector demonstrates value.

The daylong event also featured a call to positive action from Channel 4 TV SAS: *Who Dares Wins* personality Ollie Ollerton and an advisory about the value of branding from global branding expert Rita Clifton CBE.

At the first in-person Active Uprising for three years, participants

enthusiastically mingled about and mixed with peers they had often not had the chance to meet with since the Covid global pandemic struck in early 2020.

Leaving ukactive to become chair of Sport Wales, Baroness Grey-Thompson noted her particular pride in the maturation of the sport & physical activity sector, coinciding with her tenure, and especially during the pandemic. “The sector came together,” she said. “We can’t lose that. I’m glad to be part of the continuing evolution.” She has also joined the board of Yorkshire County Cricket Club as a non-executive director.

Grey-Thompson will be succeeded at ukactive by former NHS leader Mike Farrar.

Other highlights of the conference included:

UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS

MESSAGE FROM
CIMSPA CEO

**TARA DILLON ON
COLLABORATION,
INCLUSIVITY AND
UNITING THE
MOVEMENT**

Last month I witnessed collaboration in its best format. We facilitated a meeting with representatives from district councils, a county council, colleges, a chamber of commerce, an Active Partnership, community groups, an integrated care system and local sport and physical activity (S&PA) operators. We came together to discuss challenges faced how they could work collectively to develop solutions.

When local health and social care issues came up, S&PA providers talked about their social prescribing and MIND programmes among other schemes. When the problem of inactive workplaces was aired, local operators discussed employee wellbeing programmes.

Such was the level of collaboration in the room, one council representative was moved to suggest that this model of partnership working should be replicated in every district across the country. We couldn't agree more.

Over the years, we have struggled to see this level of cohesion between these types of organisations, but I'm glad to say that we now see it in abundance. People and organisations finally seem to have grasped the fact that we must work together under the common purpose of Uniting the Movement if we want to affect real change.

You can find examples of such collaborative working in the brilliant work being done by our strategic partner Aspire Active Partnerships (p14) and by the National Sector Partners Group (p12). I hope we'll see even more collaboration and inclusive practice so that even more people can benefit from S&PA.

- 'Brand' is an expression often bandied about to suggest the visual aspects of an organisation or individual's presentation, with logo and colours too often considered to be the keys to a brand, said Clifton, delivering the first keynote address of the day.

"People get a bit hysterical over the visual aspects of a brand – but it [brand] is what is beneath," Clifton said.

"Branding is your most sustainable asset. That's the thing that makes money while you sleep."

A brand reflects an organisation or a person's skills and specialisms, behaviour, relationships, associations and partnerships. Examples of individuals with recognisable personal brands are the former UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher "who cultivated a strong persona", New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern known as "strong and empathetic", and Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, widely recognised as a "modern, strong, empathetic leader", Clifton explained.

Advantages of a positive, living brand affects both external and internal conditions, Clifton pointed out. It can help reduce costs, such as in staffing, when good existing staff stay, eliminating the need to recruit, she said.

- Former Special Forces soldier and TV star Ollie Ollerton (*above*) offered strategies to build and sustain mental resilience, as he reflected on his life and key events that turned his thinking in different directions. "Comfort ends. Change begins," was among Ollerton's slogans that neatly summed up the attitudes of changing

one's thinking to change one's circumstances. "A vision without a goal is merely an illusion," he said. "A dream with a date becomes a goal."

- From rising energy costs to making green space more accessible and understanding the barriers to activity for children when they do not want to change their clothes in front of others, local authorities face wide, varied and expensive challenges, a panel discussing 'The decade for change within public sector leisure' commented. Part of the solution to many dilemmas is for health and leisure services "to work in tandem and align better". In turn, local authorities must "get under the skin of communities" to understand underlying needs and priorities, panellists said, which then can result in "more relevant facilities" as "a wellness offer, not just [one for] fitness and sport".

- When marketing in the independent gym and fitness sector features "hero images" of the stereotypical gymgoer – fit, wearing fashionable gear, succeeding in their workout – the messaging suggests that those who want to get fit but don't meet the stereotype aren't welcome. "How do we have more diverse marketing?" asked Carl McCartney, customer experience director, Les Mills UK. The topic arose as panellists discussing 'A sector redefined' explored the independents' future. Moderator Laura 'Biceps' Hoggins, PT, author and director of the Foundry Gyms, acknowledged "we haven't done our jobs" in terms of providing, for instance, a variety of female role models to attract gym engagement. "We sell the dream" of 'looking perfect', she said.



UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS

ARMY RESERVES LOOK TO CIVILIAN PTs TO FILL SHORTAGE

By DeeDee Doke

The British Army Reserves are short of fitness trainers. Through the Royal Army Physical Training Corps (RAPTC), they are developing an initiative to fill the ranks with eligible, qualified and experienced personal trainers from the civilian world – hopefully to include CIMSPA members.

With a total of 59 slots allocated for Reserve PTIs (personal training instructors), with the possibility of the number rising to 90, currently only 36 are filled, with that number having “fluctuated up and down a bit” in recent years, said Captain Stephen Green, of the RAPTC’s policy section. “We have a strategy to fill these vacancies at the ranks of sergeant.”

The PTIs with no prior military experience will be offered ‘lateral entry’ into the RAPTC Reserves.

Once implemented, the plan is to recruit current civilian PTs from the age of 23 to 43 to serve around 207 days per year, with a geographically close Reserve unit. No accommodation will be offered, Green said.

The civilian recruits will need to

undergo basic training, which consists of three separate modules remotely and face-to-face. “They will also be required to attend military PTI courses “to learn and understand the demands and rigours of military physical training”, Green said.



UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS



SUPPLIER'S VIEWPOINT ALLIANCE LEISURE SUPPORTS VISION 2030

By John Leaver, head of marketing, Alliance Leisure

Alliance Leisure welcomes the recent release of ukactive's strategy setting out its milestones to achieve Vision 2030. As a long-standing Strategic Partner we fully support the ambition to secure long-term investment in order to support infrastructure sustainability, and to navigate and access health funding and systems.

As a leading leisure specialist development partner, we are uniquely placed to see the benefit of infrastructure investment in the sector. Since the call for a £1bn investment in the industry, Alliance Leisure has completed or is now at an advanced stage of development of £300m of new and remodelled facilities.

Positioning leisure firmly at the heart of regeneration, along with levelling up and Towns Fund placement, we are committed to the vision.



CIMSPA hopes that the initiative will provide numerous CIMSPA members "the opportunity to develop their skillset and operate in a different environment", said Ben Hulson, CIMSPA's regional partnerships manager and wellbeing lead. "The Army will be promoting the value of CIMSPA membership to all of their... PTIs in the coming years and months."

Hulson went on to say: "We had the discussion that the RAPTC will use CIMSPA membership as the baseline and will ask for this to show competence for lateral entry. And this is something we will look at building on for various ranks within the Army structure."

In addition to meeting the age guidelines, the civilian PTs must have a diploma level 3 in a physical training discipline as well as managerial experience. Candidates for the new roles will also undergo a personal interview with the RAPTC corps colonel to ensure they have the necessary characteristics and qualities the British Army brand demands, Green said.

Asked when the initiative was likely to launch, Green said: "We have an aspiration to go live on 1 August."

"Everyone has bought into the concept of this," Green went on to say, "but there are slight complexities to work out first."

WHAT CAN THESE RECRUITS BE EXPECTED TO DO?

- Travel: opportunities to train in places like California and Kenya.
- Earn both military and civilian qualifications, while continuing to learn and develop, and being paid at the same time.
- Get paid for all the reserve training and duties completed. After initial training, this could be around £90 per full day worked.
- Opportunity to earn a tax-free bonus every year, which can be over £1,000 after a few years' service.
- The role within an Army Reserve Unit will be to carry out the commanding officer's Physical Training, Sports and Adventurous Training directives, and ensure the unit's personnel are fit for their roles both physically and mentally.

The PTIs will carry out Reserve soldiers' physical training in the following areas:

- Endurance, strength, speed, flexibility and agility.
- Swimming.
- Obstacle/confidence course.
- Specific training for rehabilitation and downgraded personnel.

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

SECTOR TACKLES INEQUALITIES AND UNITES THE MOVEMENT

By DeeDee Doke

In a period of contrasts, the sport & physical activity sector now has more diverse boards and trustees than ever before, a “sign of optimism” in a 12-month period that also has seen inequalities widen between England’s active and inactive populations, according to Sport England’s director of partnerships.

Tackling inequalities in helping the whole of the nation to be active is a key aim of Sport England’s 10-year strategy Uniting the Movement. To achieve the strategy’s goals, Sport England earlier this year launched a new investment model providing about 130 partners – with a connecting, influencing or governing role within the sector – with more than £550m in funding for up to five years, a longer-term approach than previously.

“We knew when we published our strategy that tackling inequality was going to be the central theme, and possibly the biggest challenge,” said Sport England’s Phil Smith, who

oversees the System Partners. "What the last 12 months has shown us is that not only is that still true, but those inequalities have widened, in terms of the people who are keeping active and those who are not, and in terms of those who are in the sporting or physical activity workforce and those who are not.

"Therefore, we've probably got even more to do, and we need to have even bigger scale responses to the challenge of tackling inequalities."

However, Smith went on to say, "there are some signs for optimism that have happened in the last 12 months, so it's not all doom and gloom. When I look at the inequality there was in positions of leadership, for example, across our industry... there are now more diverse boards of directors and trustees in the sport industry than there ever were before.

"For example," he continued, "when we started trying to tackle diversity on board, I think it was less than 20% of board positions were occupied by women. And at the last count, that was now up to 45% and maybe even close to 50%. Similarly, in other areas of under-representation, like disability and ethnicity, we've taken some positive action and we have changed the landscape.

"Now that in itself is a good thing. But I think the power of that change will be realised in the years to come, as those diverse boards make better decisions, representing wider communities in the industry," Smith said.

"So, the last 12 months has given us some even bigger challenges in equality in terms of people that are playing or taking part. But we've used the opportunity over the last couple of years to change some of the foundations of the industry that will help us fix those inequalities in the long term."

Right touch regulation

In the wake of the Anne Whyte Review that revealed coaches' mistreatment of British Gymnastics athletes, Sport England is working with CIMSPA to develop a national registration and accreditation scheme for coaches.

The scheme will guide the framework for "effective regulation", Phil Smith, executive director of partnerships at Sport England, has told *S&PA Professional*.

While the Whyte Report focused on events at British Gymnastics from August 2008 to August 2020, claims of mistreatment of both amateur and elite athletes by professional and volunteer coaches alike have emerged previously in the UK and elsewhere, some dating back decades.

UK Sport and Sport England commissioned the independent review – led by Anne Whyte QC – in July 2020 after allegations of mistreatment in gymnastics. The review formally began the following month.

"We need to try and avoid a repeat of the issues that have recently come to light in gymnastics, where neither the coaching culture or practice has been appropriate, and that's at the extreme end of things that can go wrong," Smith said. "But we need to be so much better at making sure that people are coaching safely and enjoyably."

The review made 17 recommendations directly for new leaders to implement at British Gymnastics, headed by Sarah Powell since last year. Smith said: "I'm working with new leadership at British Gymnastics to help them implement those recommendations as soon as possible.

"But," he went on to say, "there are also wider implications for the entire sporting system and the workforce... One of those is the need for the culture of coaching to be better and more positive in lots of parts of the industry – and not just the high-performance part of sport, although that's obviously true.

"So, we are doing some work to firstly understand what really is the culture, and is it a singular culture or a series of different ones? And in the coaching of children, how can that be better?"

Smith added: "Secondly, how can the workforce be better governed and regulated, which takes us to some sort of registration and accreditation scheme. We've already started working on that with partners at CIMSPA."

Part of that work must be to embed within the sector "the importance of objective safeguarding and how we can make sure that we prevent safeguarding issues occurring in other sports", Smith said, "...but when they do occur, we've got our way of finding out about them early and addressing the situation."

CIMSPA will "certainly be the organisation who will set the professional standards, the standards that individuals will have to meet to be accredited as members of the workforce", Smith said. "We've yet to define those standards of course and how the actual registration scheme might work.

"What we need to avoid is a type of regulation that makes it harder for well-intentioned people to get either paid or unpaid work in the industry," he emphasised. "We are an industry that relies on the time and effort of millions of volunteers.

"So yes, I do see the risk of creating a level of regulation that puts off a number of skilled and positive people from getting involved – that's another reason to take our time, not introduce something as a knee-jerk reaction to the Whyte Review and think about the implications of increased regulation."

He reflected: "The phrase people smarter than me often use is 'right touch regulation', and I would subscribe to that: we've got to get the balance right between protecting people from harm and not deterring individuals from playing a role in the industry's future."



IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

TIME TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Leading voices from across the sector are to strategically align to help sport, recreation and physical activity support the national renewal after Covid-19



As a nation, we are still recovering from Covid and are in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. It's precisely because of the scale of the challenges that we collectively face that leading voices from across the sector believe now is the time to do things differently and unlock the full potential of sport, recreation and physical activity.

The National Sector Partners Group (NSPG) consists of organisations that play a lead representative role across the sport, recreation and physical activity sector. These are:

- Active Partnerships
- CIMSPA
- Local Government Association
- Sport and Recreation Alliance
- Sport for Development Coalition
- Youth Sport Trust
- ukactive

These organisations have historically worked together to raise awareness of issues and opportunities that impact the work of the sector overall, joining forces periodically to provide a united voice on the sector's behalf.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a transformative impact on society and our sector, testing and challenging the sector's resilience, but also highlighting the significant role it plays in the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the nation. Against this background, the NSPG has decided to align more strategically to ensure the sector plays its fullest role in our national renewal.

The next 12-18 months will be crucial in determining how our sector can survive, recover and grow again following the pandemic. The decisions made and support provided by governments in this period – both in

Westminster and across the devolved administrations, but also locally – will define the health and influence of the sector for the next generation.

Through our collaborative work we aim to engage decision makers to improve the operating landscape for the sector and embed sport, recreation and physical activity as a key contributor to wider public policy objectives.

ACHIEVING NATIONAL PRIORITIES

The evidence of the size, scale and value of the sector has been well documented, yet levels of physical activity remain either static or in decline with sport, recreation, and physical activity still seeking the required support to play its fullest role.

If we don't support improvements to enable more people to benefit from sport, recreation and physical activity, we will see existing trends and their



consequences for physical, mental and social wellbeing last for generations.

We believe now is the point of maximum opportunity, where the government should seize upon the chance to unlock the potential of sport, recreation and physical activity to help achieve its national priorities.

Government has set out its overarching priorities, most recently at the Comprehensive Spending Review. Sport, recreation and physical activity has a clear and positive role to play in helping to achieve all of them, from driving economic growth and reducing the burden on the NHS and social care system to levelling up the country and accelerating the transition to Net Zero.

THE CHANGES NEEDED

Sport, recreation, and physical activity can play a key role in achieving whole of government priorities and support

the national renewal. But only if there is radical and bold change. The NSPG believes that there needs to be root and branch reform of the policy and operating landscape the sector currently exists within.

This must encompass:

- Development of a strong and consistent evidence base on which to make well-informed decisions and guide investment.
- Strong direction from the centre of government on the importance of sport, recreation and physical activity supported by structures to better enable coordination and collaboration across different departments and portfolios.
- Deeper collaboration between government and the sector involving greater co-design of policy and monitoring of implementation.
- Targeted investment into the sector on a long-term basis to provide certainty and stability and maximise value for money.
- Fundamental changes to regulatory and taxation regimes so they become greater enablers for sport, recreation, and physical activity.
- Greater advocacy from governments at national and local level for the role the sector plays in all communities.
- Improved co-ordination between national and local government to better align policy and objectives, particularly where there are shared responsibilities eg. public sport and leisure.
- Smarter deployment of sport, recreation and physical activity as a means of achieving specific policy objectives including improvements in education, skills and employment and prevention of crime and recidivism.
- Improved links between the sector and related business and voluntary sectors to create more opportunities

for investment, innovation and collaboration.

These reforms would complement existing strategies across the four nations – such as Sport England’s ‘Uniting the Movement’ – that have identified the more personal, context-specific barriers people face to being active.

The NSPG is setting out the need to address the more systemic ‘policy’ barriers and the government levers that can improve the operating landscape for, and wider impact of, sport, recreation and physical activity.

These barriers and the proposed measures to address them have been categorised under the following broad headings:

- Evidence
- Access to investment
- Tax reform
- Legal/regulatory reform
- Wider policy reform.

There is inevitably overlap in some case – some wider policy reforms may require specific legal or regulatory changes for example. This is not an exhaustive list, but a set of clear examples identifying the changes and associated benefits different government levers could deliver.

The NSPG wants to work with government to explore the opportunities to deliver the shared ambition to drive lasting improvements in participation, enhance the wider operating landscape for sport, recreation and physical activity and maximise the sector’s contribution to government priorities.

We believe that now – more than ever – there is a need for the government to be ambitious in adopting solutions to the policy barriers that exist.

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

TURNING THE DIAL ON CHILDREN'S INACTIVITY

Collaboration is key to getting more children moving, says Aspire Active Partnerships, one of CIMSPA's newest strategic partners



There is no one solution to solving the nation's inactivity crisis but ensuring children and young people have positive experiences of sport and physical activity is a good place to start.

Youngsters who are physically active are more likely to exercise in adulthood, and research has linked regular activity with academic attainment. Despite this, too many children and young people in the UK are failing to meet the recommended guidelines for physical activity.

Aspire Active Partnerships is working to reverse this trend. Established in 2016, the group supports organisations in the children's activity and sports coaching sector to improve children and young people's participation in sport and physical activity with innovative delivery and training services as well as resources that educate and inspire.

Its education arm, Aspire Active Education, engages youngsters in activity through a variety of programmes designed to improve

physical literacy, health, wellbeing and academic achievement. Launched in 2005, the organisation has developed a wealth of knowledge and expertise over the last 17 years.

Aspire Active Partnerships has now entered into a strategic partnership with CIMSPA to set new standards in sport and physical activity services for children and young people.

"We know that if we improve the skills of those working in our sector and give people the opportunity to become better leaders, we will naturally see enhanced levels of service which will result in more children being active," says Paul Griffiths, co-founder of Aspire Active Partnerships.



LACK OF QUALITY CONTROL

The lack of operational standards is an issue for the youth activity sector, says Griffiths, especially as more companies enter the market.

“The sector is not very well policed in terms of quality of delivery. The organisations in our network employ their team members and invest in their training and development to deliver better services, but many are competing with companies that employ freelancers, with little training. It means they have fewer overheads and can undercut more established sports coaching businesses.

“With strained budgets, we can see why schools choose organisations based on cost, but too often the services they are purchasing are inadequate in terms of quality and compliance. If they were more aware of the regulatory

elements and investment being made by organisations like Aspire and those in our network, they may be more likely to choose to invest in high quality opportunities that are safe and impactful.

“I can change a plug, but that doesn’t mean I should set myself up as an electrician, and that’s what we are currently seeing in this sector. There’s no quality control. This is why we need to set standards that define the skills and qualifications needed to deliver high quality sport and physical experiences to children and young people. And this is where our strategic partnership with CIMSPA will help.”

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

Aspire Active Partnerships is growing. Before the pandemic, 20 organisations belonged to the network. That figure

has more than doubled since then and Griffiths expects membership to reach triple figures over the next three years.

“Companies were wary about working with others in the youth activity market, but since the pandemic they’ve understood the value of being part of a wider business network, the benefits of collaboration and sharing best practice with ethical leaders and employers who are passionate about innovating to get more youngsters active.”

Together the organisations are engaging 400,000 children and young people a year in sport and activity. Despite this, Griffiths believes the wider health and fitness industry undervalues the work of the youth activity market.

“When I was at university, working with children in sport was not considered a ‘proper job’ and our

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE



Some of the programmes delivered by the Aspire Active Partnerships network

- **Maths on the Move** – aligned with the national curriculum, MOTM uses physically active learning, MOTM enhances children's confidence and attainment in maths
- **English on the Move** – a physically active learning programme, which combines physical activity with spelling, punctuation and grammar teaching, aligned to the National Curriculum
- **PE Curriculum Support** – an Association for Physical Education Professional Development Board recognised programme that empowers teachers to raise the standards of primary school PE
- **Playground activators** – a Sports Leaders UK accredited training programme which up-skills the primary school workforce to help engage more children in physical activity during the school day.

sector still isn't recognised for our work or our impact."

And more needs to be done to get the education sector onside too, he believes.

"Some schools still don't see the value of sports coaches in schools beyond supporting PE teachers. Yet, primary teacher training typically only dedicates one day to covering the entire PE curriculum. If the teachers themselves had poor experiences of PE growing up, they won't have the confidence to deliver high quality PE sessions, so their pupils will get a poor experience and the cycle continues."

Investing in workforce development will help, especially as working with children and young people requires a unique set of skills, says Griffiths.

"We need absolute clarity on guidance, and we want to champion the importance of minimal standards

of deployment for coaches working with children in schools and communities. Organisations need to invest in the right training for their people and we also need to educate schools and parents so they understand the importance of this as well as making decisions based on quality as opposed to cost."

CIMSPA and Aspire Active Partnerships will also work together to improve leadership in the youth activity sector.

"A lot of the people started out as sports coaches and stumbled into becoming a business owner. Apart from us, there's nothing out there to support them and their organisations. Working with CIMSPA we aim to create more and better leaders and if we can do that we will have greater impact as a sector.

"I love the fact that CIMSPA is committed to positively progressing the sector and I'm very excited about what the future holds for us both."

IN DEPTH

RIGHT DIRECTIONS

SPORT ENGLAND LAUNCHES NEW ASSESSMENTS TO SUPPORT LEISURE FACILITIES

Sport England's Continuous Improvement Tool, Quest, has launched two new assessments for leisure facilities.

The new Quest and Quest Plus assessments have been designed to help facilities restrengthen their core operational standards, as well as demonstrate the positive impact they have on their local communities.

Quest was first established more than 20 years ago to measure how well a facility is operating and how effective organisations are across a range of topics. The renowned award has evolved over the years to keep pace with the ever-changing sport and leisure industry, including the launch of Quest Foundation Review earlier this year, which provides insights into real-life, 'live' customer service experiences from people who have traditionally been excluded from physical activity opportunities. The new assessments, which start from 1 September, will replace the current Quest Recovery, written to support

the sector as it recovered from the pandemic.

Sarah Maxwell, head of external accreditations at Right Directions, which manages Quest on behalf of Sport England, explains: "We have carefully considered the current environment and challenges leisure facilities are operating within, and have combined the latest industry best practice with other fundamentals, such as operational plans, to develop the new Quest and Quest Plus assessment."

Quest is a one-day assessment, whilst Quest Plus will take place over two days. Both will include two new compulsory modules on day one, Tackling Inequalities and Environmental Management. Tackling Inequalities, developed alongside the Activity Alliance, aims to help leisure operators provide more inclusive and accessible physical activity opportunities for people from a range of inequality groups. Environmental Management will support facilities in the development of plans to

include environmental considerations within their operations. Operators will also be assessed on Compliance Declaration, Operational Management, Managing the Team and Customer Journey.

The Quest Plus day two modules include a variety of topics that will help facilities make progress in specific areas of their business, with Planning to Improve, which helps identify what their service is trying to achieve and set out specific and measurable business objectives, becoming a compulsory module.

New optional modules for day two include Exercise Referral Standard and Accessible Facilities. Exercise Referral aims to provide a set of quality operating standards to help drive improvements and consistency in scheme delivery, whilst Accessible Facilities will help facilities meet their design and operational obligations for different user groups. Accessible Facilities focuses on a physical audit of the

facility from a user's perspective against key inclusive focal points, including the provision of accessible changing rooms, working hearing loops and inclusive fitness equipment.

The new Tackling Inequalities and Accessible Facilities modules can be completed together, either within or outside of the Quest assessments. Facilities achieving Very Good or above will be awarded a new Quest Tackling Inequalities in Leisure Standard.

Maxwell explains: "Taking part in Quest enables facilities and their teams to have the quality of their work both recognised and nationally accredited, as well as showing how they measure up against national standards.

"Facilities receive a detailed report, with bandings between Unsatisfactory and Excellent for every question asked, as well as each module, and an overall result. We've also introduced a new accolade of Outstanding for facilities that achieve an overall Excellent score in Quest Plus and their Mystery Visit. This independent review will ultimately help facilities and their teams deliver greater impact and social outcomes."

For more information about Quest or Quest Plus please contact us via Quest@rightrightdirections.co.uk, telephone 01582 840 078 or visit www.questaward.org



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ADVERTORIAL



ALLIANCE LEISURE NAMED SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR 2022!

Alliance Leisure secures title at the ukactive awards in recognition for delivering transformational projects that create engaging active environments that support healthy, happy and prosperous communities.

For over 20 years, Alliance Leisure has worked with local authorities and facility operators up and down the country to design, procure and develop leisure transformations that deliver outstanding community value.

During this time, the company has delivered 192 projects representing investment of over £250m. Projects have ranged from multiple new builds across entire leisure portfolios to outdoor gyms, pump tracks and 3G pitches. Every project is unique and is designed to address the bespoke needs of the community it serves.

Constantly innovating, Alliance Leisure is focused on helping clients achieve their objectives to deliver

maximum benefits to its partners, clients and active communities. The company understands that people want to move in different ways and create facilities that provide an opportunity for everyone.

To date, Alliance Leisure has delivered £265m of completed leisure developments and is on track to deliver a further £90m by the end of 2022 – with more to open in 2023. That's around one third of £1bn, which was the rallying call from ukactive back in 2016.

But it's not just about the buildings and spaces. Alliance Leisure also supports operators in the promotion of their facilities and services through its creative marketing and training brand

TA6. TA6 is focused on creating sustainable revenue streams, investing in staff development and improving the health of local communities.

The brand worked with more than 70 leisure operators in 2021 and was directly responsible for delivering marketing campaigns that generated over 50,000 membership sales

(worth around £15m of revenue). In the last 12 months, TA6's digital adverts have generated over 100 million impressions to an estimated 10 million people (around 19% of the UK adult population), resulting in almost 1 million visitors to its clients' websites.

And despite COVID restrictions, TA6 has delivered training and coaching to more than 3,000 leisure staff.

Paul Cluett (pictured), Managing Director, Alliance Leisure, says: "This award reflects the hard work, dedication and experience of our team. Even through tough economic times, we have continued to work with councils to find ways to fund and deliver projects that are essential to community health, cohesion and prosperity. We look forward to continuing this journey, creating sustainable, active environments that encourage more people to be more active, more often." **Contact: info@allianceleisure.co.uk**



AGENDA

SWIMMING POOL CRISIS

By
Rachel
Masker

IN DEEP WATER

SOARING ENERGY BILLS LEAVE UK POOLS STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE

*Eight out of 10 public pool operators say
they will need to reduce services this year*



AGENDA

SWIMMING POOL CRISIS

Rocketing energy bills will force widespread closure of swimming pools within six months, government ministers have been warned.

Pool closures, or threatened closures, have already been reported, including in Falmouth, Newport, Keswick, Halifax, Falmouth and Croydon.

Now campaigners are warning hundreds – potentially thousands – more leisure centres and pools may be forced to close their doors without an emergency government bailout.

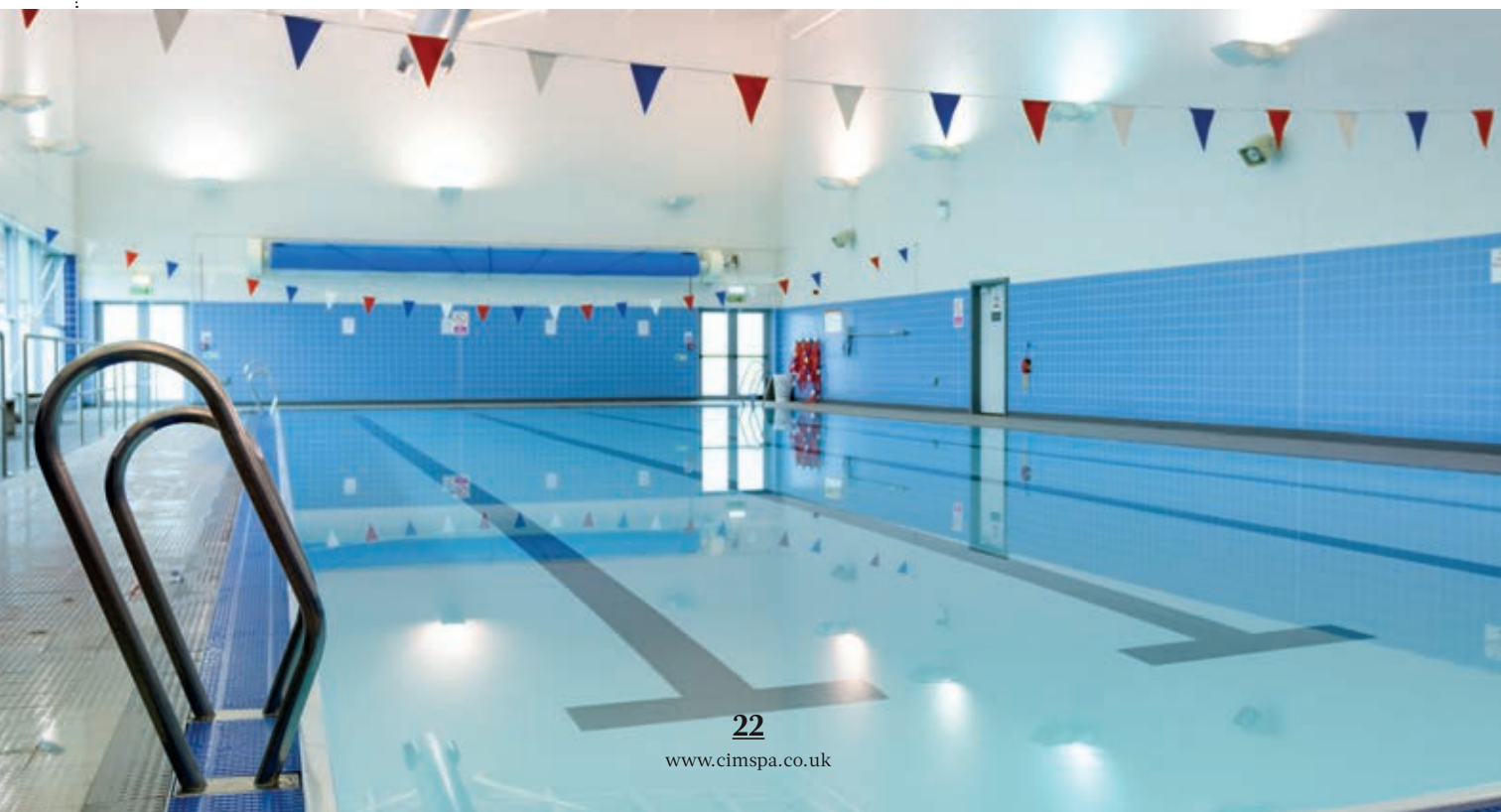
Pool providers are struggling to cope with an estimated gas and electricity bill of between £1bn and £1.25bn this year, up from £500m in 2019. Belt-tightening measures include colder pools, price hikes and reduced hours of opening.

Huw Edwards, CEO of ukactive, which represents gym and pool

operators, said: “Many of our members have told us that rising energy bills have put them at real risk of closure. We need the government to act, or these essential services will disappear from our communities very quickly, just as the UK prepares to host the Commonwealth Games this summer.”

Widespread closures could threaten elite sports, school swimming lessons, club activities, vital support for frontline NHS services and leave millions shut out from activities they enjoy.

In May, a coalition of leading bodies and organisations in the physical activity sector wrote an open letter to the UK Government calling for emergency support to keep pools open. The coalition included the sport governing body Swim England, CIMSPA, ukactive, the Local Government Association, the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers





“These are alarming statistics, and it is imperative that the government acts quickly to support these facilities, which so many people rely on for their physical and mental wellbeing”

Tara Dillon, CEO of CIMSPA

Association, the District Councils Network and Community Leisure UK.

The letter states: “The implications of these very important services ceasing to operate especially given some provide statutory services, will not only be business failure and job losses but the restriction of vital health and wellbeing

services for millions of people of all ages and all backgrounds that are a core part of levelling up in the UK.”

The warning comes after ukactive surveyed nearly a third of the country’s public pools and found that without support, 79% may have to close all or some of their services over the next six months. This means that hundreds, potentially thousands, of swimming pools may be lost.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of facilities surveyed expect to reduce staffing levels, while eight out of 10 are likely to increase prices this year.

Jane Nickerson, CEO of Swim England, has already met sports minister Nigel Huddleston to raise concerns. She said: “The findings from the survey of pool owners and operators paint a very stark picture of the future for our swimming pools and leisure centres with price hikes, service reductions and pool closures on the horizon.”

Tara Dillon, CEO of CIMSPA, agreed. She said: “These are alarming statistics, and it is imperative that the government acts quickly to support these facilities, which so many people rely on for their physical and mental wellbeing.”

She warned three-quarters of any job losses from closures would be among young people aged 16 to 24, a group already struggling with high levels of unemployment.

The letter ends with a call for urgent discussions to review possible options, including an increase in the local government settlement in 2023-24 with a ringfenced grant to protect public leisure services, business tax reform and support for a move to non-carbon intensive heating methods.

Campaigners are worried that with fewer public pools, access to affordable swimming will be threatened in some areas and with it a life-saving skill important to physical health. About 2m children per year receive

Case study: Ashbourne Leisure Centre decarbonisation

From the outside, Ashbourne Leisure Centre in the Derbyshire Dales looks like many other community sports complexes built in the 1970s. It boasts a 25m pool, main hall, minor hall, squash courts, gym and indoor cycling studio.

But look at the newly installed state-of-the-art heating system and it’s a different story. High-tech air source heat pumps (ASHPs) powered by 180 solar panels are set to halve the site’s carbon footprint and lower energy bills.

“The bulk of the heating load will be transferred from gas boilers to the new ASHPs,” said a council spokesman. “The ASHPs use electricity, the increased use of which has been mitigated to an extent by installation of solar PV panels, battery storage and a building energy management system.

“However, there is still a cost associated with the ongoing use of ASHPs, so installation of the technology does not make the site immune to rising costs.”

The revamp also included upgrades to ageing plant and equipment at the leisure centre, including air handling systems and electrical infrastructure.

All the work was funded by a £734,000 grant through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS). Derbyshire Dales District Council, which outsources the management of its leisure centres to Freedom Leisure, didn’t pay a penny. The scheme was modelled by Leisure Energy, specialist energy management consultants.

Work has only just finished, so the leisure centre has not yet seen the full impact on bills. But estimated energy savings of 4% will contribute to lowering the running costs at the centre, says the council.

AGENDA

SWIMMING POOL CRISIS

swimming lessons, according to Swim England figures.

“Councils are working incredibly hard to prevent centres from closing and understand that many people are facing rising individual costs, so have no desire to raise prices if it can be avoided,” said Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, chairman of the LGA tourism and sport board.

Commenting on colder pools as a cost-cutting measure, a Swim England spokesman said: “The drop in temperature is minimal but still not ideal. It will deter children from swimming lessons, as well as those with health conditions who require heat for circulation issues. In general, colder water indoor facilities are not going to help participation or the customer experience and operators are aware of that, so any decreases are going to be minimal with some not doing it at all.”

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO MAKE LEISURE CENTRES MORE ENERGY EFFICIENT?

Even before the energy crisis, an estimated 40% or 1,868 of the 4,336 public pools in England were under threat of closure by 2030 from ageing buildings and cuts to public funding, according to a report by Swim England. Debts following the pandemic along with higher energy costs means this number is expected to increase. The energy crisis has increased the urgency of retrofitting or replacing inefficient buildings, say campaigners.

Leisure centres consume vast amounts of energy over long hours of operation. Energy is the operator's second highest cost after staffing. It's not just water in swimming pools that needs heating but air above and in changing rooms. “Ironically, a gym needs cooling,” says Neil Bland, managing director of Leisure Energy, specialist energy management



consultants, who helps leisure centres save on utility bills – water, electricity and gas.

Leisure centres, especially those with pools, can account for up to 40% of a council's carbon footprint. Grants are available to



“We can reduce the energy running costs and totally decarbonise an old leisure centre for about £2m”

Neil Bland, MD, Leisure Energy

install low-carbon heat pumps and other energy efficiency measures under the £1bn Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS).

Bland believes retrofitting ageing leisure centres is a greener, most cost-effective option than replacement. He said: “We can reduce the energy running costs and totally decarbonise an old leisure centre for about £2m. A new leisure centre would cost a minimum of £20m and all the waste (from the old building) would have to be recycled and the embodied carbon of the new centre would be further waste.”

Asked if sports complexes built in the 1960s and 1970s can be made energy efficient, Bland said: “The simple answer is yes. Old equipment such as lighting, pumps, motors and control systems can be relatively easily upgraded to the modern energy efficient versions.

“Modern heating equipment is also



The Stour Centre leisure centre was future-proofed, replacing gas-fired boilers with solar heat pumps

“It has made a huge difference,” he said. “Our projects have averaged a 92%

reduction in fossil fuels and a 57% reduction in carbon footprint. Councils would not have been able to fund these projects internally and it has kickstarted a green economy and increase in green jobs, which was also one of [Chancellor] Rishi Sunak’s reasons for introducing the scheme.”

A government spokesman declined to say if PSDS will be extended beyond 2024. Instead, he issued a statement, saying: “We are giving councils the resources they need to maintain and improve their services, with an additional £3.7bn being made available for 2022/23. The majority of this funding is un-ringfenced in recognition of local authorities being best placed to understand local priorities, such as local leisure centres and libraries.”

Open letter to UK Government from coalition of leading bodies in the physical activity sector

“The implications of these very important services ceasing to operate especially given some provide statutory services, will not only be business failure and job losses but the restriction of vital health and wellbeing services for millions of people of all ages and all backgrounds that are a core part of levelling up in the UK.”

much more efficient than their 70s counterparts. With the current rises in energy prices payback periods are getting shorter.”

Leisure Energy helped nine local authorities submit bids to the PSDS. In total more than £17m was secured for renewable energy upgrades at 14 leisure centres across the country, lowering bills and fighting climate change.

For instance, Ashford Borough Council received a £1.7m grant to future-proof the Stour Centre, its flagship local leisure centre. Existing gas-fired boilers were replaced with heat pumps, powered by electricity from new PV solar panels. The site’s estimated energy bill of £390,000 in

2020, was slashed by £100,000. Plus, carbon emissions fell by 600 tonnes or 45%, say Leisure Energy.

Automated pool covers, plant room insulation, LED lighting, replacement pool air handling units and upgraded water control systems are among other energy saving initiatives installed at sports centres.

At Tenbury Swimming Pool, operator Freedom Leisure was able to reduce its gas and electricity consumption by 42% and 50% per annum respectively.

Bland believes the PSDS should be extended to 2030 when many councils have pledged to be net carbon zero, and to leisure charities, as well as public bodies.

BUSINESS

EDUCATION

FIXING THE SKILLS

Why is there a skills shortage in the sports and physical education sector and what is being done to fix it? Rachel Masker investigates

It is universally acknowledged that the UK economy growth is currently being stunted by the challenges faced in recruiting and retaining people, and the sport and physical activity sector is no different. The government have recognised this and recently introduced legislation to put employers front and centre, with the publication of the Skills and Post 16 Education act.

The then Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, wrote that, compared to other countries, notably Germany, the UK has been poor at working with employers to invest in the skills and training required to build a thriving economy, a problem acknowledged in the recent 'Skills for Jobs' white paper that preceded the new act. "We do not have enough technicians, engineers or health and social care professionals," he said.

"Redressing this will be critical to improving our productivity and international competitiveness."

In previous times, the sport and physical activity sector had been on the back foot when it comes to being taken seriously by government and inclusion in funding for training and education initiatives. However, senior figures at CIMSPA believe that the work done in recent years has put the sector in a much better place.





In the short term, initiatives such as 'ReTrain to Retain', a £5m project delivered by CIMSPA and funded by Sport England, aims to help people who work, or are keen to start careers, in the sector. Support includes digital learning, webinars and training from accredited providers, with priority given to those working with disabled people and socially diverse communities. CIMSPA also recently unveiled a new online jobs board to match workers with vacant posts and help to tackle the skills shortage. On launching the initiative, Colin Huffen, head of regulation and standards at CIMSPA, said: "The ReTrain to Retain job board is a unique opportunity for those who are out of a

job to easily find new work. But it is also there for many others too, including those who are looking to take the next step in their career."

However, CIMSPA has also been focused on making deeper, more structural improvements to the way training and education is delivered in the sector. A central aspect of this has been the investment of significant time and effort in strengthening the links between employers and further and higher education providers, to ensure that supply is meeting demand locally.

Spencer Moore, director of strategy at CIMSPA, explains: "The problem is not a lack of sports and physical education courses on offer, but in some cases



GAP

BUSINESS

EDUCATION

the curriculum content isn't tailored closely enough to the requirements of employers, especially locally. As a result, our employers have historically told us that some college leavers and graduates aren't arriving 'job-ready'."

Moore continued: "I am not saying the system was completely broken but it definitely needed improvement. For example, training for sports coaches should focus more on safeguarding and protecting children, equality, diversity and inclusion, mental health and wellbeing, customer service and engagement, according to our employer research. In addition, tutors and lecturers need to be trained and upskilled to understand the skills required by employers and deliver the new content."

CIMSPA acknowledges that, in the past, the sector has been at a disadvantage compared with other industries when it comes to government investment, due to a lack of evidence. To help resolve this problem, CIMSPA ran a pilot scheme with six Active Partnerships in the East of England, designed to understand the needs of

local employers and, in partnership with local education providers, create local skills strategies aligned to those needs.

These pilots proved successful and provided CIMSPA with the evidence to support a 2021 application for one of the government's new Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) pilots. As a result, a joint bid from CIMSPA, Leicestershire colleges and the East Midlands Chamber of Commerce was

selected as one of just eight LSIP pilots for 2021-22, and the only one to focus on sport and physical activity. The bid highlighted the positive role sport and physical activity can play in supporting the wider economy and NHS, especially around preventative healthcare and long Covid recovery.

An £800,000 grant was used to fund an in-depth skills gap analysis and feedback on the education sector from



CASE STUDY

CIMSPA partners with West Nottinghamshire College to launch new vocational diploma

From next year there will be a new CIMSPA vocational diploma in fitness and leisure – the first of its kind in the UK – tailor-made to meet the needs of employers.

CIMSPA joined together

with West Nottinghamshire College to develop the pilot project and advise on the curriculum content based on its insight into employer needs.

The CIMSPA Level 2

Practitioner Professional Qualification is aimed at giving students the skills they need to develop careers such as sports coach, group exercise instructor and recreation assistant.

In addition to role-specific modules such as lifeguarding and sports coaching, students will study general subjects such as health and safety and food hygiene. There will also be the chance to gain relevant work experience in local gyms, leisure centres, pools and health centres.

Spencer Moore, director of

strategy at CIMSPA, said: "From consulting with our employer partners, the key requirement was for multi-skilled staff to fill gaps left by the pandemic." Moore said the course would equip young people with the core skills and knowledge to start careers in this sector.

This is the first course to be developed by CIMSPA. The aim is to roll out similar diploma courses across the country. "About 90% of the course content will be the same but it will be flexible to meet local employer needs," said Moore.

about 100 employers. Projects included:

- Workforce industry exchange – where staff members undertake work placements to better understand the needs of employers
- Employer engagement to ensure they had a say in developing new training and the partnership's curriculum
- Development of new training material across 12 topic areas identified by employers, used in tutorials with students and lessons.

The colleges involved in the LSIP pilot are Loughborough College, Leicester College, the SMB College Group and North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College.

Jo Maher, principal and CEO at Loughborough College, said: "Reflecting employers' needs within the technical specifications of qualifications will help modernise them and provide our learners with more relevant skills and qualifications required. Key to this process is the invaluable insight of our employer partners."

The findings of the local skills improvement plan "trailblazers" will be published by the Department of Education in the coming weeks, and the aim is to set out the key changes needed to make technical skills training more responsive to employers' skill needs within a local area. The deadline for submitting applications for LSIPs for 2022-23 was last May and the Leicestershire partnership is already working on a bid for the second round of the Skills Development Fund after 2023.

Alongside the LSIP pilot, CIMSPA also launched an innovative partnership with West Nottinghamshire College (*see Case Study, left*), which used insights gained from employers to develop a new qualification, tailored to meet the needs of employers in the region.

The outcome of these partnerships and pilot schemes has been to put sport



"I'm pleased to say we have many colleges and universities asking how they can be involved"

and physical activity in a much stronger position for future investment in education and training. The sector is now firmly on the front foot, taken seriously by government and in a strong position to secure the funding for a national roll out of local skills plans, to the benefit of the whole sector.

CIMSPA's Huffen summarises the situation: "CIMSPA education partners are fully engaged with their professional body and employers but

that has not always been the case for everyone, and education policy historically hasn't been led by employer need. This is changing, and over the past four years awarding organisations, colleges and universities have been reshaping their curriculum to align to the skills employers have told us are essential and have written into the industry's professional standards.

"The challenge now is to make this the norm for all education providers, and I'm pleased to say we have many colleges and universities asking how they can be involved and how CIMSPA can support them to work with their local employers. This will provide us with even further evidence to present back to the Department for Education, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and other policy makers so we can be seen as a priority sector for future investment."

ACCESSIBILITY

NEURODIVERSITY

By
Caroline
Roberts

RETHINKING THE ENVIRONMENT

Physical activity can offer important benefits for neurodiverse people, but the loud noises and bright lights of the gym or leisure centre can often put this group off exercising



ACCESSIBILITY

NEURODIVERSITY

Open expanses of gym floor with bright lighting, clanking of weights machines, music emanating from the studio and shrieks of excited children in the pool area. For many of us they're just part and parcel of the sports and leisure facility experience. But for a significant proportion of the population, the environment can be a source of annoyance and distress, and a disincentive to membership.

Recent estimates suggest that one in seven people are neurodivergent, or have brains that are wired differently, resulting in conditions such as autism of varying degrees, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia and dyspraxia. "The human race is neurodiverse as we all have different strengths and talents, but neurodivergent people have differences in the processing of information, social communication and attention, as well as in sensory processing," explains Dr Jessica Eccles, a psychiatrist and neuroscientist. "People with autism and ADHD in particular often have hypersensitivities and may find things like bright lights and lots of noise quite upsetting."

However, regular exercise can have specific benefits for neurodivergent people. "For people with ADHD, it can be a good way of improving focus. Also, autistic people and people with ADHD have an interest-based nervous system; they're really into whatever it is that they're into. So, if sport and

exercise is an interest, it can have a lot of meaning and be really important in their lives. It's about finding the right sort of activity and removing barriers."

TURN IT DOWN

Some operators are already taking steps to do this. CIMSPA

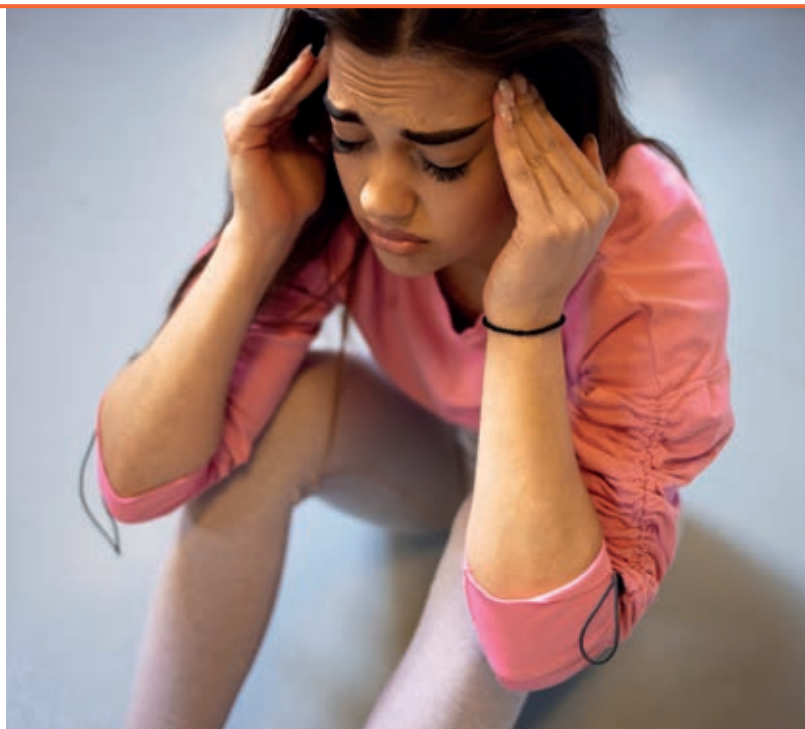
employer partner Everyone

Active is piloting 'quiet hours' with no music or loud noise at leisure centres it operates in the Stratford-upon-Avon area and at Hatch End Swimming Pool in Harrow.

"The idea was originally inspired by local supermarkets that were hosting quiet periods, and we thought by doing the same we could help people to feel included and welcome at their local leisure centres," says Adam Mundy, Everyone Active's area active communities manager. The centres display posters to ensure current and new members are aware of the quiet times, which take place from 1pm to 3pm on weekdays, and share the message via social media and local press.

Be more neurodiversity-friendly

- Designate a more secluded section of your gym floor as a quiet area with no speaker and dimmer lighting.
- Neurodivergent people may not like communal changing rooms so provide some private space if possible.
- Provide clear guidance on gym etiquette, such as what you should wear and the maximum time you should use a piece of equipment.
- Have disposable earplugs available, or even noise cancelling headphones for hire.
- Avoid using strong-smelling cleaning products.
- Make notices dyslexia-friendly by using single-colour backgrounds with dark text on light colours, short, direct sentences with straightforward vocabulary.
- Raise awareness with staff training. The National Autistic Society provides an online course Autism, sport and physical activity. Find it at nas.org.uk/What-we-do/Best-practice



ISTOCK

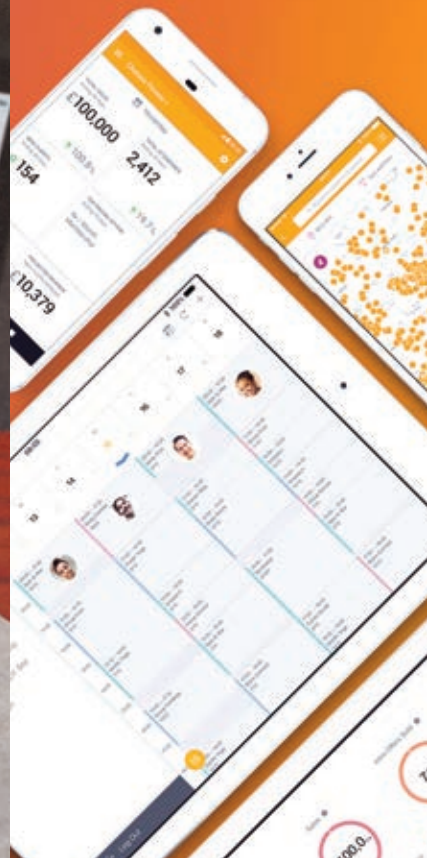
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ACCESSIBILITY

NEURODIVERSITY

The initiative is yet to be formally evaluated but, says Mundy: “Once it was fully explained to members, our wider customers were very understanding and got behind it. We’ve also had great interest from customers at other centres asking for this to be implemented in their community.”

The sessions were launched at Hatch End Swimming Pool in early April. “As a standalone swimming pool facility, we can shut our doors to the louder noises from outside and provide a quieter space to swim,” says general manager Hannah Lewington-Beamish. We’ve capped numbers to 20 people in the pool during the sessions, there’s no music and they’re timed to start 15 minutes after aqua aerobic sessions, so all the other customers have left the centre. We’ve recently had our skylight windows replaced to allow in more natural light, and we don’t have any interactive screens poolside, which helps people who are sensitive to sensory stimulation.

“We have a group from a local day centre and a group who come with

Mencap. We’ve also had a few parents bring children who have more complex special educational needs. But the sessions are open to anyone who needs a quieter environment to enjoy the experience of swimming.”

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

But it’s not just about providing the right environment, says Eccles. “Clear communication and breaking things down into manageable chunks can help everyone, regardless of their neurotype.” It’s also important to be mindful of how you give instructions. “If you tell someone to do 25 repetitions three times a day, an autistic person may take that very literally even if they’re in pain or it’s causing them a problem, so caveat when they may not need to do it.”

Another thing to be aware of is the prevalence of hypermobility among the neurodivergent population, she adds. While this can be a benefit in some sports and activities, hypermobile individuals can be more prone to injury



CASE STUDY

Regular gym-goer Emma Hawes Taylor was diagnosed as autistic as an adult

“The main gym makes me feel really vulnerable because it’s bright and open plan and everyone can see me being rubbish at running. I’m sensitive to bright lights, cold, and loud noises – they make my ears hurt. When you’re autistic you don’t have a filter for sensory stuff so it becomes the only thing you can focus on. If there’s too much going on, I don’t take in what people are saying and can’t do things. The way I describe it to my children is that there are ‘too many inputs’. Luckily, there’s a more private bit of the gym where there’s no speaker and I gravitate to that. I prefer doing classes because they dim the lights. I don’t feel exposed as I go at the back in the corner.

“Autistic people find it hard to process information and neurotypical people don’t always explain things clearly enough. It sounds ridiculous but if everybody is in the middle of an exercise and I don’t know what I’m doing, I actually want to cry, and it makes me want to leave. Repeating the demonstration is really helpful, as is coming over if they see I’m struggling and quietly talking me through it rather than drawing attention to it from the front.

“I also have hypermobility. I’m always the bendiest in the yoga class and find it difficult to keep my legs straight as my knees bend back but they feel straight to me. I can’t tell my body’s not in the right position, so I need instructors to look out for that.”



and may need extra help with technique. “We know from work we published earlier in the year that at least 50% of neurodivergent people are hypermobile and, in the case of females, it’s more like 70-80%, compared to 15-20% of the general population. We don’t yet know why but neurodivergent conditions and hypermobility are both things that run in families so probably the same processes that are affecting the development of connective tissue, such as collagen, may also be affecting brain development. If you’re training someone who’s hypermobile, you should be thinking there’s also a

“Another thing to be aware of is the prevalence of hypermobility among the neurodivergent population”

possibility they may be neurodivergent.”

Neurodivergent characteristics can vary widely so the best way to know if you’re catering for everyone’s needs is to ask them. A direct question can be difficult but phrasing it as ‘How could

we make our facility environment more accessible and accommodating for you? Do you have any concerns or things that would put you off coming?’ suggests Eccles.

“On a wider level, it would be good for the leisure industry to engage in discussions with neurodivergent communities about their priorities and to take advantage of training opportunities. The key thing is to have a nuanced approach where you take account of the difficulties faced by neurodivergent people but also recognise the positives as their characteristics can make them very dedicated exercisers or sportspeople.”



TECH TOOLKIT

PRODUCT ROUND-UP

HEAVY LIFTING

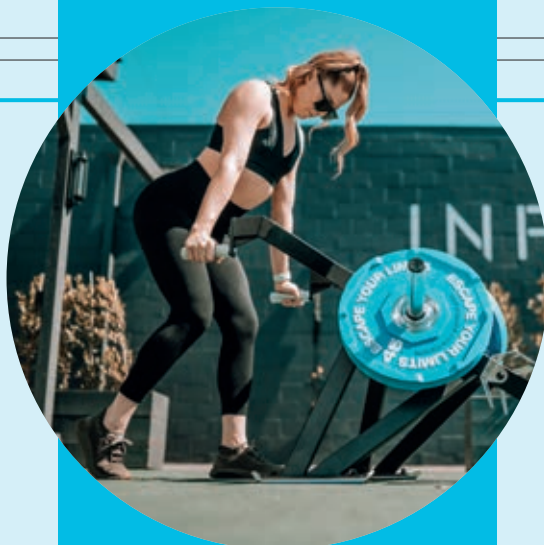
Equipment to improve strength training BY SUE WEEKES



SPACE-SAVING STACKABLE DUMBBELLS

Escape Fitness has launched a space-saving flat set of stackable dumbbells. Stakrbell can be stored in the Escape Fitness Deck 2.0 with other equipment, such as resistance bands, creating a self-contained training station for studio-based group exercise classes and boutique style grid training. It includes 2kg (4.4lb) and 3kg (6.6lb) weights, which link together without the need for fixings. This seeks to minimise transition time between exercises, maintaining heart rate and motivation. Escape Fitness highlights that as these dumbbells do not roll, they stay where they are placed as opposed to 'roaming' equipment that can create a safety hazard. With a polyurethane coating, the dumbbells are designed to be durable and anti-abrasive. Stakrbell is available as a standalone product or as part of various equipment bundles.

Price: On application
www.escapefitness.com



Get 'farm strong' with carry and sled combo

Escape Fitness has also launched the innovative Escape Barrow, which claims to be the world's first loaded carry and sled functional training equipment. It uses the 'loaded carry' – commonly known as the 'farmer's carry' – which transitions into a sled push without the need for equipment changes. Designed for outdoor use and durability, it has a load capacity of 200kg (440lb). Escape Fitness partnered with well-known strength trainer Pete Holman on the project. Holman said that having grown up on a ranch in Colorado, where moving heavy loads by wheelbarrow was a daily requirement, he knows the benefits of being 'farm strong' and wanted to combine the two exercise modalities into one machine. The Escape Barrow has a carbon steel frame and two plate loading points, one on either side of the central weight plate to ensure an even distribution of load throughout lift, execution and set-down. Two thick tyres at the front of The Escape Barrow are complemented by two skis at the rear, enabling the structure to be rolled, pushed, dragged or pulled.

The Escape Barrow is available now for pre-order.

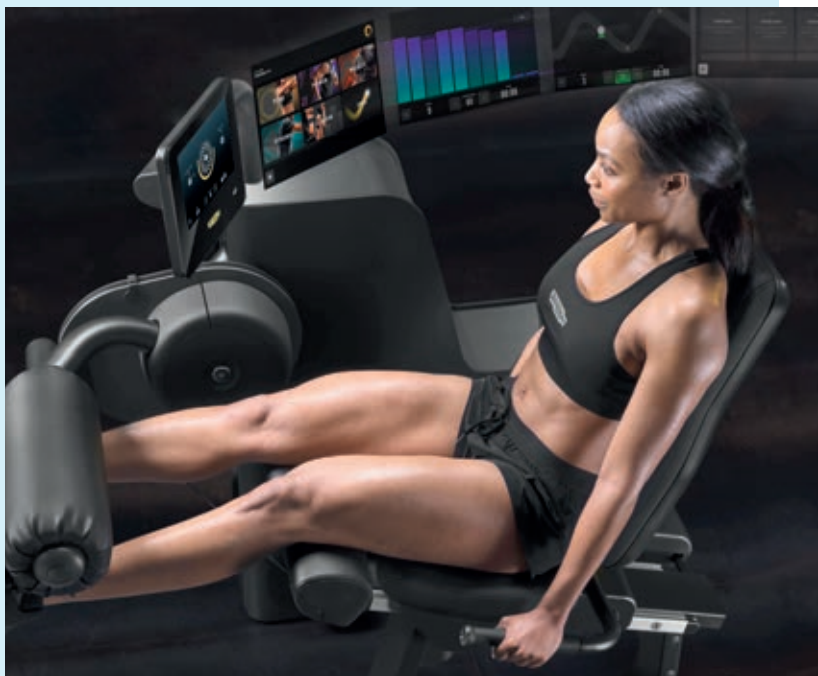
www.escapefitness.com

AI STRENGTHENS TRAINING SOLUTION

Technogym has launched a new line of strength training equipment, which uses artificial intelligence (AI), aerospace technology and scientific research to adapt to its users. It claims this can deliver 30% better results in the same amount of time compared to traditional training with equipment or free weights. There are nine pieces of kit in the range with more to be added in 2023. The patented Biodrive system that Technogym and NASA have worked on together – and which is powered by AI – provides six types of resistance, which is designed to improve the effectiveness of exercise programmes. Biodrive also recognises when a person is tired, automatically reducing the load to allow you to complete the set. It also uses gamification, rewarding users with badges as you achieve new goals. Users log-in to the Technogym Ecosystem to select the workout experience that best suits the results. Personal trainers can use the Technogym's Mywellness software platform to assign each user a tailor-made programme optimised to individual goals.

Price: On application

www.technogym.com



POWER YOUR RIDE METRICS WITH SOLAR

Garmin has launched a solar-powered GPS bike computer. The Edge 1040 Solar's Power Glass solar charging claims to extend battery life up to 42 mins per hour in saver mode (the latter mode should give riders 100 hours of power). The device provides stamina insights and riders can

automatically evaluate recent exercise history and access performance indicators to see if they are training productively, peaking or overreaching. Meanwhile, advanced cycling metrics are designed to provide insight into performance changes based on variable conditions such as position, bike set-up and ride duration. A ClimbPro feature allows riders to see the remaining ascent and grade when they are climbing while following a route or course to help gauge effort. Riders can also save their climbs for



post-ride review on the device or in the Garmin Connect app. Other functionality includes nutrition and hydration alerts and heat and altitude acclimatisation.

www.garmin.com

WORKPLACE

FOCUS

HMRC PHISHING SCAMS

Professionals in the sports & physical activity sector such as personal trainers need to spot and avoid bogus communications. Craig Harman of Perrys Chartered Accountants explains

Fake emails, calls and messages suggesting they are from HMRC have grown exponentially in the last five years, with HMRC receiving more than 670,000 calls reporting scams in 2021 alone. Our sector's self-employed professionals such as personal trainers are especially at risk from the latest HMRC cyber scams doing the rounds.

HMRC EMAIL SCAMS

Phishing attacks aren't new, but fraudsters have become increasingly sophisticated, with many replicating email addresses from authorities, such as HMRC, that on first glance look bona fide.

Fraudulent emails are being sent telling customers they are eligible for employment income support scheme credit during the Covid-19 pandemic. If you receive such an email, you should not reply to it, click on any links or open any attachments. Do not disclose any personal or payment information. Instead, report it immediately to HMRC by emailing it to phishing@hmrc.gov.uk

FAKE TAX REBATES

Another common scam is the offer of a tax rebate either via text or email. HMRC will never contact anyone by text or email about tax rebates, so any messages received offering a refund will certainly be fake. If you receive any such message, do not reply but report it to HMRC and then delete it.

BE WARY OF WEBSITE LINKS AND MALICIOUS WEB PAGES

Be wary of web links. Fake sites cloning official pages from HMRC's website or claiming to be officially affiliated with the tax authority are dangerous. HMRC will never ask you to click on a link to complete your details online to receive a rebate. To avoid being fooled, always visit HMRC's website directly at <https://www.gov.uk/>

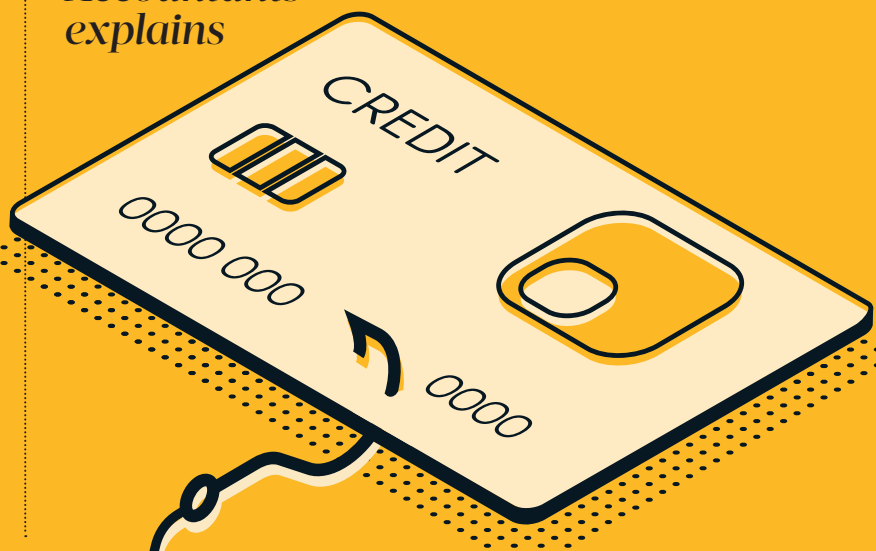
HMRC TEXT SCAMS

HMRC will never ask for any personal or financial information when sending out texts. If you receive such a text, do not reply or open any links in the message. Instead, forward it to HMRC using the text number 60599 or email to phishing@hmrc.gov.uk

HMRC PHONE SCAMS

Fraudsters use phone scams to target potential victims using automated messages. HMRC is aware of a scam that tells the receiver that they are the subject of a lawsuit and to press 1 to speak to a caseworker to make a payment. This is false. If you receive such a call, hang up immediately.

Other similar scams might refer to National Insurance number fraud or tax refunds and will ask you to supply bank or credit card information. If you are unsure, hang up and report it to Action Fraud: include the date of the call, the





phone number used to contact you and what the call was about. You can also contact HMRC directly on its phone number 0300 200 3310 to verify the legitimacy of any calls.

HMRC WHATSAPP SCAMS

HMRC will never use WhatsApp to contact customers about a tax refund. If you receive any such communication via WhatsApp saying it is from HMRC, you should report it immediately by emailing HMRC and then delete it.

HMRC SOCIAL MEDIA SCAMS

A recent social media scam being used to con people is the distribution of direct messages via Twitter offering a tax refund. These messages are not genuine and HMRC will never use social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn, to offer tax rebates or request personal information. Ignore all such messages and report them to HMRC straight away.

HMRC REFUND COMPANIES

Refund companies sending emails or texts advertising their services and offering to apply for a tax rebate for a fee are not connected with HMRC in any way. Before using any such service, you should read the company's terms and conditions or disclaimers and think carefully before instructing them to assist you. If in doubt, contact a professional accountant for advice.

HMRC CUSTOMS DUTY SCAMS

Changes officially introduced by HMRC on 1 January 2021 mean that some UK consumers buying goods from EU businesses might need to pay customs charges when their goods are delivered. This change in regulations has resulted in a surge of associated email and text scams asking for customs duty payments.

Customers are contacted via false emails or texts and told to pay customs duty to receive a parcel which doesn't exist. If you are not expecting a parcel, or if you are in any doubt as to the authenticity of such messages, then do not reply. Instead, report it to HMRC immediately by emailing phishing@hmrc.gov.uk

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TAKING PART-TIME JOBS

According to HMRC, undergraduates taking part-time jobs are at increased risk of falling victim to scams – particularly if they are new to interacting with the tax authority and unfamiliar with its processes. The advice is to be wary if you are contacted out of the blue by someone asking for money or personal information.

Mike Fell, head of HMRC's Cyber Security Operations, said: "We see high numbers of fraudsters contacting people claiming to be from HMRC. If in doubt, our advice is – do not reply directly to anything suspicious, but contact HMRC through GOV.UK straight away and search GOV.UK for 'HMRC scams'.

Craig Harman is a partner at Perrys Chartered Accountants. To learn more about HMRC phishing scams, visit <https://www.gov.uk/topic/dealing-with-hmrc/phishing-scams>



Simple steps to avoid being scammed

Scam calls, messages and emails are extremely common, and, sadly, it is highly likely that a fraudster will attempt to trick you at some point.

Fake emails, texts, calls and messages are getting more and more difficult to spot. Fraudsters are continuously refining and enhancing their tactics to con innocent people out of their personal information or money. This includes cloning web pages, creating look-a-like email addresses and making calls to vulnerable people. Here, we've put together some simple steps to avoid being duped by bogus emails, messages, texts and calls pretending to be from HMRC:

- Never click on links in texts, emails or other messages
- Always visit HMRC's website directly by typing <https://www.gov.uk/> into your browser
- HMRC will never contact you by text or email about tax rebates
- If you receive a call from HMRC that uses automated messaging, or you are called by someone asking for bank details or other personal information, hang up immediately
- Report all suspicious activity to HMRC straight away
- If in any doubt about the legitimacy of a message or call, do not reply, but report it HMRC either on email phishing@hmrc.gov.uk, by texting 60599 or calling 0300 200 3310
- Remember, HMRC will never ask for any personal or financial information via text, email or social media



LAST WORD

SPORT AMBASSADOR

Two swimmers from South-East London are determined to help the nation's mental health through outdoor swimming

THE LIDO LADIES

Jessica Walker and Nicola Foster are on a mission to get the nation swimming. Regardless of age (the pair are in their mid-50s), size or ability, they are passionate advocates of the health-giving benefits – both physical and mental – of outdoor swimming. And, boy, do they do it in style. Affectionately known as the Lido Ladies, you may already be familiar with them as they've graced the pages of many a magazine in their signature flowery hats and waterproof lipstick that hark back to a bygone age of lido glamour.

As their name suggests, lidos are at the heart of their story. After a family tragedy left Walker suffering from chronic anxiety, it was the calm of her local lido in South London that brought her back from the brink. The odd quick dip slowly became a form of daily meditation. In persuading her friend and one-time competitive youth swimmer Foster to join her, the pair have been swimming and laughing together for the past few years, and now find themselves in the best physical and mental health of their lives.

Their favourite lido, Charlton, is thankfully open throughout the year. Rain or shine, whatever the season, you'll find them taking to the water. "People say I'm so brave swimming in

the colder months," says Walker, "but we've just built up slowly. I would say to anybody who wanted to start outdoor swimming – and everybody should – that it isn't something you just do overnight. You should start on a warm sunny day, in nice conditions, and gradually build up."

Foster agrees: "Pick a heated lido. We swim at Charlton most mornings, which is heated, whereas nearby Brockwell Lido isn't. We both swim around about 2km and need to be in the water for about 45 minutes to do that. I simply can't do that if the water is cooler than 15 deg Celsius."

Both believe that lidos must be cherished and protected, as all too often they fight to stay open. "They often struggle to make money," says Foster. "That's why pools often get parcelled up with a gym. The gym will very often subsidise the pool."

"But it's been interesting coming out of the pandemic," she adds. "It seems local government is finally starting to realise that these facilities provide a very much needed service. The Albert Avenue pool up in Hull, for example, had fallen into such an awful state that people were just using it for kayaking. The council has now prioritised just over £4m to bring it back to its former state because I think it realises the social importance of these pools."

Walker also flags up the hit that



lidos are taking because of the recent increase in energy prices. "It costs eyewatering amounts of money to heat these pools," she says, "which means they often become a side-attraction to the gyms, because that's where the money is made. Thankfully, most people can still afford to swim. It's a great social leveller."

Walker positively rejoices in the sheer variety of people that populate the lidos on any given day. "They are almost always busy," she says. "You have people with physical challenges or disabilities. There's a lady who swims in my lane who's just had a double mastectomy, and she's doing it to regain her muscle strength in her shoulders and chest."



The Lido Ladies (Jessica Walker, holding the clock, and Nicola Foster, left) started off on Instagram in 2020 during the first UK lockdown and are on a mission to get the nation swimming



“There are all kinds of stories and people swimming in the colder months of the year are utterly passionate about it.

“Yes, the fast lane can be full of beautiful 20-somethings with extraordinary bodies who are all training hard,” she adds. “But on the flip side, the lane on the other side of the pool is full of people who are either in wheelchairs or learning how to swim for the first time or who have health issues, or who are basically slow swimmers, but they all love being there.”

The couple have been touring the country’s lidos with much media attention, but if they had to choose their favourite it would have to be Charlton. “And not because it’s the most architecturally interesting,” says Foster. “There are many more superior in that respect. For example, Hillingdon in London is amazing. But we love the team at Charlton. It feels like home.”

“What I love most about them is that they notice when you don’t come,” adds Walker. “I missed a swim a couple of weeks ago because I was ill. The next day about eight or 10 people asked me where I’d been and was I alright? People notice that you’re not there. That doesn’t happen a lot in London.”

Ask Walker what she would ultimately like to achieve with the couple’s ongoing media campaign, and she says: “If I could make one person a day suffering from mental health feel better about themselves and their lives through swimming, that for me would be amazing.

“I still regularly visit my doctor because he says he wants to keep an eye on me. But each time I walk through the door, he tells me I’m his pin-up patient. Apparently, I’m living proof of the effectiveness of swimming medicine.”

The Lido Ladies spoke with Dean Gurden

LAST WORD

SPORTING LIFE



Dr Rashmi Becker MBE is the founder of *Step Change Studios*, providing dance opportunities for disabled people and people in under-represented groups

STEP FORCE FOR CHANGE

I have always loved physical activity and started skating when I was about four years old. It was something my mum got me interested in and I became serious about it, training every day. Unfortunately, I started to get a number of injuries, particularly with my ankle.

During this time, I did every type of dance from ballet and tap to modern and classical Indian dance. As well as enjoying the dance side, I became aware of the inequalities in representation in dance, and especially the lack of opportunities for disabled people.

I volunteered in care homes and gave the odd bit of support for disabled people at community events. More and more people were saying they wanted to do something active, but when I contacted dance places, there wasn't anything available. That's what prompted me to set up Step Change Studios in 2017.

About 10 years ago I also became guardian to my brother who's disabled. I saw how his wellbeing benefited from movement, music and physical activity.

I expected Step Change Studios to be a part-time, voluntary thing, but it just took off. Originally, I started off with a

wheelchair dance class. Then we started hearing from other impairment groups. We were contacted by charities asking us to go into care homes, hospitals and special education needs schools. It started off with just me, then I took on a couple of freelance teachers. That's gone from two or three to about 20. We're focused on providing classes online and around London and the South East, but we need to cast the net wider.

Our Dance Dosti programme sets out to support visually-impaired people from a South Asian background to be more active, but a big part of it has also been about engaging the fitness sector to be more inclusive in general. We've run free online training sessions where we've had a wide range of people attending,

including freelance instructors and the likes of Everyone Active. They proved very popular, and we've had really good feedback. We've produced a helpful paper, 'Top Tips for Dance and Fitness Professionals: Engaging people with sight loss'.

As to what fitness professionals can and should be doing, the first thing is to look at their classes and consider whether they are representative of their community. If not, think about why that is and what can they do about it.

As part of their basic training, instructors are shown how to deal with older people or those who are pregnant, but there's a huge lack of confidence among fitness instructors around disability; many are worried about saying the wrong thing or feeling like that person might slow the class down.

I've been lucky enough to win a few awards over the years. Getting an MBE was the most special. It came during the pandemic, where it's been hard trying to create things that are accessible and help people to be active. It's wider recognition that this work is valuable.

As for the future, I'm going to take a moment to pause and catch my breath. Dance Dosti has been a full-on one-year initiative. In working with the fitness sector, we've created more than 100 workouts in four different languages. We're going to be growing our classes and have a lot of community initiatives.

I'm also on the board of Sport England, which has launched its new 10-year strategy 'Uniting the Movement', and central to that is tackling inequalities. My ultimate wish is that organisations like Step Change Studios shouldn't need to exist because these often-excluded people should be able to go to their local gym, leisure centre or community class and be welcomed.

Dr Rashmi Becker MBE spoke with Dean Gurden



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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey sports top, is looking at a piece of gym equipment. The background is a blurred gym environment.

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