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S&PA Professional

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 **CIMSPA**

THE SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INDUSTRY MAGAZINE



RISING ABOVE THE FEAR

Charity FEAR offers hope to tube-fed people and their families to take part in sport and activities

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Fraser Ford, interventions coordinator at Southampton Saints Foundation



"Putting the right sessions, instructors and equipment in place to allow some people to swim for the first time is just fantastic to see. We can't wait to expand them across the country" (p26)



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UPFRONT
EDITORIAL

▶ DeeDee Doke

Go green for health



Using green spaces to get more active

Green spaces are good for us – they make us feel good; subconsciously, we breathe a bit deeper when we see an expanse of green. This is not just a psychological response; according to research published in *Science Advances*, long-term exposure to green spaces may slow down biological age-related changes by about 2.5 years.

The study examined molecular changes in the blood of over 900 people living in four US cities over 20 years, and researchers found that “being near green space caused some biological or molecular changes that can be detected in our blood”, the

research’s principal investigator said. Now there’s more reason that ever before to ‘go green’!

The deadline is 11 August for local authorities with pools in their areas to apply for financial aid from the Swimming Pool Support Fund. The £20m fund for which applications are open now is intended to help facilities with swimming pools that are experiencing increased costs pressures, leaving them “most vulnerable to closure or significant service reduction”, Sport England has said.

This tranche of financial support will “help keep hundreds of pools open”, said sports minister Stuart Andrew.

In September, a £40m pot will be made available for investment to improve the energy efficiency of public facilities with pools in the medium to long-term.

Be sure to get your applications in. And enjoy the rest of the summer!

Dee Dee Doke



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S&PA News

A round-up of the latest developments in the industry



HMRC THROWS LEISURE SERVICES A VAT LIFELINE

By Roisin Woolnough

Local authorities that own and manage leisure services in-house have gained a revenue boost following changes to their VAT status. In March this year, HMRC conceded that in-house leisure services should not have to pay VAT on services such as admissions and gym membership, agreeing that they should be classed as non-business.

That means local authorities will not pay VAT on any income derived from those services, although they will still be able to reclaim VAT incurred by running

costs, such as repair and maintenance. This ruling will have a significant financial impact on the relevant councils and potentially, on the future management of leisure services.

Nick Burrows (*opposite, below*), director at public sector tax advisers PSTAX, explains: “The old rules were that if you got £120 of income from admission to the leisure centre, for example, the leisure centre would have to give HMRC £20 – the leisure centre would only keep £100. With the new rules, they keep the whole £120.”

Not only that, the door is also open for

local authorities to put in a one-off refund claim for VAT that has already been paid to HMRC within a certain timeframe. Any local authority that has provided leisure services in-house can backdate their claim for the past four years’ worth of payment. And according to Burrows, some local authorities will be due an even bigger payout, having requested a refund back when councils first started challenging HMRC on their tax status, roughly 10 years ago. “This policy change means local authority services have always been non-business. A lot of councils, in the run-up to the court cases, put in refund claims on VAT they had already paid. Some claims go back many years – in principle, it could be back to 1973, when VAT was introduced.”

Several local authorities have been driving this change in status – Midlothian Council, Mid-Ulster District Council and Chelmsford City Council. JJ Tohill, strategic director of corporate service and finance at Mid-Ulster District Council, is delighted with the

UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS

ruling. “This concession is very welcome and is the culmination of well over a decade of challenge to HMRC’s interpretation and application of the law. Ultimately, the work we do is to benefit the local residents of our district and in the circumstances of this matter, I felt that it was only right for us to pursue our case to obtain a refund of VAT overpaid to HMRC for the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland, and ensure that we do not have to charge VAT to the public on leisure facilities in the future.”

Tohill says the reversal in tax status will be a financial lifeline for in-house local authority leisure providers, who have been operating in very straitened circumstances. “The combination of Covid-19, quickly followed by high inflation and a cost-of-living crisis, has had a significant impact on local authority finances. Any sums received from HMRC in these difficult times will help and ultimately have an impact on the standard of services and amenities provided by the Council, which are so important to the local area and the social fabric of our society.”

More than 20% of leisure facilities are owned and managed in-house by local authorities across the UK. Lisa Forsyth (*below, right*), director at Max Associates, a management consultancy specialising in the sports and physical activity sector, thinks the ruling could signal more local authorities opting to consider whether they should take services back in-house.

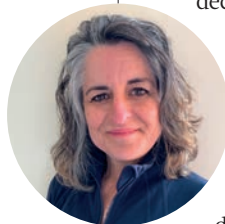
“This VAT position may make it more financially viable for them to do it in-house. I think it will lead to more councils asking the question – 20% of income is significant enough to change your model. As a result, when

management contracts come up for renewal, we are likely to see more local authorities seeking advice on VAT and tax and legal aspects,” she says.

Forsyth says there has already been a move towards providing services in-house, particularly among London boroughs, for political reasons, and also when several councils are working in partnership and want to create a united leisure portfolio. But, she advises against councils leaping in without due consideration. “VAT is one element of financial analysis. You need to have a balanced view of all the impact of change.” For example, providing services in-house can mean more expensive workforce terms and conditions.

As far as Tohill is concerned, the change is unlikely to lead to a significant switch to providing services in-house. “At the moment, I don’t see the change in VAT treatment as heralding a broader overhaul of the system of leisure service management by councils. Of course, we always keep such matters under review and there are many factors to take into account when determining the strategy going forward, of which VAT is one.”

Forsyth is surprised that there has been so little noise about HMRC’s decision, particularly from the private sector, which has been lobbying the government for a reduction in VAT in the wake of Covid-19. The change in status means HMRC has decided there is not a significant risk of distortion of competition with the private sector on leisure activities, but Forsyth and Burrows both think the private sector is unlikely to agree. “There could be something going on in the background to challenge HMRC,” says Burrows.

MESSAGE FROM
CIMSPA CEO

TARA DILLON
ON MULTI-AGENCY
PROVISION
ACROSS THE UK

In this column, I want to champion all of the place-based, multi-agency work that is taking place in our sector. This really is the future and, without doubt, is the best way of showcasing the impact of sport and physical activity on local communities.

For the last year, CIMSPA has been involved in two remarkable place-based initiatives, which take a hyper-local approach to training and recruitment to give local people the skills required by employers in their area. The benefits of these projects are already being felt by local residents, education and training providers as well as employers. And importantly, they are producing incredible data demonstrating the measurable impact of our sector in these locations. See p10 for more information about these projects.

As place-based provision expands across the country, so will this rich source of data. Armed with this critical information along with local case studies, we can make a more compelling case showing the difference sport and physical activity is making to people across the UK so that policy makers can make the right decisions at the right time for our sector and for the health and wellbeing of the nation.

UPDATE

S&PA NEWS

By Roisin Woolnough

The government has pledged to make active travel – everyday journeys made by walking, cycling or wheeling – the natural choice for shorter journeys in England, or part of longer journeys, by 2040. But it is unlikely to meet its key objectives around active travel unless change accelerates significantly, according to a new report by the

National Audit Office (NAO), ‘Active travel in England’.

The NAO report was commissioned to establish progress on the Department for Transport’s (DfT) objectives around walking, cycling and wheeling (when someone uses a wheelchair or mobility scooter). It looks at the DfT’s strategic approach to active travel, progress made against DfT’s objectives for active travel since 2017 and progress in tackling the

“Active travel schemes have the potential to deliver significant health and environmental benefits”

Gareth Davies, head of the NAO

MAKING
ACTIVE
TRAVEL
THE NORM





barriers to uptake of active travel.

Despite significant investment – an estimated £6.6bn will have been spent on active travel between 2016 and 2025, according to the DfT – the NAO report found that the DfT is falling behind on all four objectives. “Active travel schemes have the potential to deliver significant health and environmental benefits,” says Gareth Davies, head of the NAO. “However, DfT knows little about what has been achieved through its past spending and is not on track to achieve most of its objectives.”

During Covid-19, DfT gave local authorities a £250m cash injection to facilitate the delivery and adoption of active travel schemes. But, many of them struggled to get schemes off the ground quickly enough or to engage with local communities. This led to poor quality implementation and schemes that were unpopular with local communities.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, York Council expanded its Footstreets scheme (when certain streets were pedestrianised to enable social distancing) and now plans to implement further schemes encouraging active travel to address congestion, improve air quality and improve the health of York residents. “The council has developed a number of active travel schemes and we plan to work closely with Active Travel England, now based here in York, to show how public investment in active travel is public money well spent,” says Councillor Pete Kilbane, deputy leader and executive member for economy and transport at City of York Council. “With the city’s ambitious congestion and carbon reduction targets, we have no option but to increase active and cleaner travel alternatives.”

Local authorities have an important role to play in designing and delivering interventions, but over half of them (56%) have low capability and low

ambition in this area, according to the report. This is having a significant impact on the quality of interventions and take-up numbers.

Part of the problem is that until recently, progress was not tracked or measured, leading to a situation whereby the DfT did not know the quality of local authority schemes and if they were working or not. Due to these problems and the decreasing likelihood of the objectives being met, the DfT-established Active Travel England in 2022. Active Travel England has several key aims:

- to improve the design standards of active travel infrastructure
- to hold local authorities to account for their investment in active travel
- to advise on how to improve walking and cycling provision
- to improve the skills and capacity of local authorities to deliver active travel programmes.

So far, Active Travel England has made good progress and quickly.

“With the city’s ambitious congestion and carbon reduction targets, we have no option but to increase active and cleaner travel alternatives”

Councillor **Pete Kilbane**, deputy leader and executive member for economy and transport, City of York Council

However, the NAO report has identified several important areas that Active Travel England needs to work on in conjunction with DfT to build on its successes. These areas include:

- developing longer-term and stable funding for active travel
- increasing the capability of local authorities to deliver schemes
- making people feel safe when they are walking, cycling and wheeling.

The NAO also recommends that the DfT reviews its objectives for 2025 and beyond and sets ambitious but achievable targets for Active Travel England. “DfT has raised its ambitions for active travel and recognised areas where its performance must improve,” says Davies. “Establishing Active Travel England is a good step. Active Travel England and DfT must now maintain this early positive momentum, by learning what works and applying it and building partnerships across central and local government.

Three years ago, DfT acknowledged problems with its objectives in ‘Gear Change: A Bold Vision for Cycling and Walking in July 2020’, outlining the barriers to success: poor quality infrastructure, limited integration with other transport and planning policy, limited capacity and skills within local authorities to deliver active travel interventions and public concerns around safety and confidence to cycle.

In May this year, it announced how £200m of new active travel investment will be shared among local authorities. And according to a DfT spokesperson, there is more to come: “We are committed to ensuring that more people choose to walk, wheel and cycle across England and will be investing at least £100m more over the next two years.”

● For more on Active Travel, see our feature on pp30–33.

UPDATE

S&PA NEWS

GET INVOLVED IN LSIPS

The sector's employers must get involved in Local Skills Improvement Plans if they want to meet their local workforce needs, says Clare Dunn, CIMSPA's head of local delivery

Introduced by the Department of Education, LSIPs are designed to address the skills shortages faced by businesses across England. LSIPs work by aligning education and training with the needs of local employers, placing employers at the heart of education provision to support and create a flourishing local jobs market, helping local economies grow and thrive.

In 2021, CIMSPA was involved in one of the eight LSIP trailblazer pilots to test how employers, providers and local stakeholders could work together to develop LSIPs for their regions.

Alongside this government-funded pilot, CIMSPA also ran an additional pilot in Nottinghamshire in partnership with Vision West Nottinghamshire College.

We co-ordinated and developed the creation of Local Skills Accountability Boards (LSABs) for the pilots in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. The LSABs are led by local employers and include education providers, local authorities, the local health authority (known as ICT and ICBs) and other key strategic stakeholders, who work together to identify the current objectives in their area, the future skills and occupations that will be needed to fulfil those objectives, and also how education providers can adapt their provision to close these skills gaps.

It's been fascinating to be part of the Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire pilots, which have given employers the opportunity to demonstrate the

“By recruiting from the local area will also help improve inclusion and diversity in the workforce”

Clare Dunn, CIMSPA



importance of sport and physical activity to the local economy. Engaging with key stakeholders like the Chamber of Commerce for the first time, employers have been able to show just how much our sector can impact local priorities from improving health inequalities and physical health and mental wellbeing outcomes to reducing crime and anti-social behaviour to improving educational outcomes and more.

As a result, members of the Employer Representative Bodies and local Chambers of Commerce have a better understanding of how the sport and physical activity sector can impact local need and are incorporating the industry's skills needs into their skills plans. And crucially, by recruiting a new workforce from the local area, one that is more representative of the demographic of that area, will also help improve inclusion and diversity in the workforce.

Nottinghamshire is already benefiting from the pilot. After establishing the skills needed by local sport and physical

activity employers, we worked with West Nottinghamshire College to create the Level 2 CIMSPA Practitioner Professional Sport Fitness course. The bespoke course offers students an introduction to the different career pathways available within the sport and physical activity sector.

As part of the course, students completed work placements as lifeguards at Lammis Leisure Centre in Sutton-in-Ashfield and have since gone on to local employment with CIMSPA employer partners.

There are around 600,000 people in the sport and physical activity sector and we lose around 20% of this workforce every year. LSIPs can help the sector's chronic skills shortage.

Our data from these pilots demonstrates a healthy but growing need for more health-related skills as the sector is recognised for its impact on public health and specifically in tackling health inequalities.

At the same time, the initiative will help get more people into work, by making it easier for local people to access the skills needed to secure jobs in industries with skills gaps.

We want more of the sector's employers to engage with us so that we can identify their current and future recruitment and training needs, and create a portrait of the local landscape. It's only when we are armed with this information that we can really create impact at a local level.

As LSIPs are being rolled out across every region in England, we want to ensure that the sport and physical activity sector is at the heart of local skills development. We have recruited a cohort of skills hub managers who will lead the rollout, and we can provide support and guidance to anyone looking for further information on this project.

For more information, please contact partners@cimspa.co.uk

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE



CIMSPA LAUNCHES NEW CAREERS GUIDE

The new guide will help sport and physical activity professionals realise their potential, says Colin Huffen, head of workforce policy and external affairs

There are currently more than 585,000 people working in the UK's sport and physical activity sector. Large, diverse and vibrant, the industry offers a wide variety of career and professional development opportunities with more launching all the time.

To help professionals navigate the fantastic opportunities available, at CIMSPA we have launched our new Careers Guide for the Sport and Physical Activity Sector.

This is something our stakeholders, education and employer partners and

members of the workforce have been asking for, for some time. People want to know about the careers available and the training they need to access them. Until now, the sector hasn't had a clear reference point outlining the career opportunities available we can all point to. By launching the guide and supporting it with the sector's jobs board, we have made a start in providing the information they're looking for and helping them to realise their full potential.

Developed in conjunction with

Careermap, which has produced similar guides for other sectors, the new guide breaks down the different industries and occupations that exist within sport and physical activity, including frontline practitioner, management and senior leadership positions.

The guide goes into detail on what the different roles entail, the professional recognition needed for each of them and advice on how to access the right training and qualifications. It also includes information about likely salary and benefits, case studies from people already working in industry roles as well as how CIMSPA can support professionals to fulfil their career goals.

Suitable for all levels of sport and physical activity professional, the guide has been designed to be generic and meets the needs of a broad audience, from those thinking about a career in the sector to those looking for their next opportunity or progression route by giving information and signposting to where they can find out more.

The guide has been made possible thanks to the considerable groundwork we've done with our partners over the last four to five years in developing professional standards and agreed industry definitions. Without that work, we wouldn't have been able to provide such meaningful and realistic careers advice and guidance.

But this is just the start. In the next 12-18 months we'll be spending lots of time and investment developing and improving careers advice and guidance for the workforce and our partners. We are developing a careers hub which will include this guide and our jobs board as well as more detailed advice, guidance, and resources to support the sector.

If you have ideas about what you would like from the careers hub, please contact us at info@cimspa.co.uk

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

WOMEN: YOUR POOL PLANT NEEDS YOU!

Pool plant operation is still a very male dominated area of the sector. It's time to change this, says Luke Griffiths, Safety Training Awards' technical qualifications and business development manager



A diverse workforce is a more creative and innovative workforce. Employing people from more diverse backgrounds opens up greater opportunities for new ideas, collaboration and strategic thinking, which benefits all aspects of sports and physical activity provision, including pool plant operation.

Yet when it comes to this area of centre management, women are still significantly under-represented, both in the workplace and education.

Based on our figures for this year alone, nearly twice as many males than females have completed the STA Level 3 Award in Pool Plant Operations

qualification. And when it comes to STA's pool plant tutors, the figures are even more concerning; just 13% of STA's pool plant tutors are female.

There are very small signs of change. STA Excel, one of STA's main education providers, has seen a slight increase in female applicants for its STA Excel Pool Plant Tutor courses over the last 12 months – reporting 16% of females attendees.

It's still not enough. Females need to feel empowered to gain the skills and embrace the opportunities afforded by a career in pool plant. And the best way to do that is through education.

STA's Level 3 Award in Pool Plant Operations qualification offers a valuable platform for women to become experts in pool plant. It can also give them the confidence to tutor others in this vital area of centre management.

Encouraging more women to become pool plant tutors could help to make the Pool Plant Operations qualification more appealing to other females helping to boost their numbers in the workplace.

Here, female pool plant specialists talk about their experience of working in pool plant.



SUSAN MURRELL

OWNER, MD, LEAD TUTOR AND ATC CO-ORDINATOR, OCTANAUTS SWIM SCHOOL AND SJ TRAINING SOLUTIONS

"In 2009, I moved to Bahrain to become assistant operations manager at Wahooo! Waterpark. Soon after I arrived, a UK tutor came out to deliver a Level 3 Pool Plant Operators course. After gaining the qualification, the maintenance manager helped me get more familiar with the extensive plant area. This consisted of four individual systems, defender filters and Brine Tank. Having underestimated

how popular our weekly ladies nights would be, this meant I spent most of my first ladies evening pouring 25kg bags of salt into the tank that was struggling to keep up with the 1,000 ladies who'd descended in the first hour of opening. I used the knowledge and experience I'd gained in Bahrain to developing others by becoming an STA Pool Plant Tutor alongside my other disciplines. As a swim school owner hiring a number of pools, my expertise helps us work with the pool managers onsite to reduce closures, ensure planned preventative maintenance is in place, as well as consult on how to

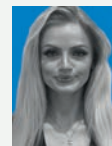
reduce running costs. All of this helps my business' reputation – cancelled lessons are rare with Octanauts Swim School. Plant operations is historically a male dominated area of leisure, but there is no reason it should be."



RUTH CHILDS

DUTY MANAGER, SANDWELL LEISURE TRUST

"For me, the most enjoyable part of plant room operations is balancing pool water and correcting a pool where the chemical levels are out of the parameters. I am particularly interested in pool water chemistry. I also enjoy passing on my knowledge to new relief duty managers in pool plant operations and backwashing. I am currently part of a water safety working group for the hydrotherapy pool at Portway Lifestyle Centre. The group ensures the pool is safe for all users including NHS patients, babies, children and people with medical conditions, which I find very rewarding. It's a misconception that women are not as capable in the plant room. Having worked in many plant rooms for over 23 years, I would like to encourage all women interested to complete the Pool Plant Operators Certificate and to feel confident to use their knowledge in the plant room."



RUTH PROPHET

DUTY OFFICER, UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING SPORT

"Having worked in swimming pools and the leisure industry for the last 15 years, I've been in and around pool water treatment rooms for many years. When I took up my current position, our team decided we needed an in-house pool plant tutor to deliver courses and ongoing training to our staff. I found the pool plant room interesting – I studied physics at university and had a

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE



background in science and engineering – so I volunteered to become an STA pool plant tutor. One of the best parts of working in pool plant is the impact we have on the customer experience. Most swimmers probably don't appreciate the amount of work we do behind the scenes to create a fantastic swimming experience. Pool plant still seems very male dominated, but I have many female peers with extensive experience and knowledge who would be a huge asset to the industry."



SONJA DALGARNO
HEALTH, SAFETY & COMPLIANCE
MANAGER, CIRCADIAN TRUST

"All my roles in the industry have required a certain level of pool plant knowledge. I did my first pool water tests when I was 16-17 years old as a casual lifeguard in

North Devon. After graduating in leisure management, I've had various management roles, and have gained the NEBOSH qualification and the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Internal Auditor certificate. In 2016, after 10 years of working for Circadian Trust, my line manager asked if I'd be interested in becoming a pool plant tutor. Since qualifying as a tutor I've delivered many courses for Circadian Trust, regularly teaching and qualifying new employees to understand the importance and impact of pool plant management on water quality. I really enjoy running the courses to enable others to look after their pool plant effectively. The understanding of pool plant operations is like learning anything new; it takes perseverance, determination and a belief and passion for what you're doing."



SUSAN POPHAM
HEALTH & SAFETY ADVISER, WALSHALL
COUNCIL

"My first job after university was as a duty manager in the leisure industry and I completed my first pool plant operators' course in 1992. I managed facilities and worked as a consultant in the industry until joining Walsall Council's health & safety team in 2019. It's great to be able to influence water quality and deal with issues quickly to ensure the water quality is ideal and doesn't impact swimmers. In my current role I also support several schools and leisure centres, which means I have the chance to share my knowledge and experience. When I first worked in leisure, many centres had dedicated plant engineers. This has changed as technology has progressed



and equipment has been updated. Modern day pool plant is generally better planned and as a result easier to manage. Yes, there is noise, you are dealing with hazardous substances and the equipment can appear intimidating. But once you understand the equipment and follow good practice in relation to risks, there really is nothing to worry about.”

“Most swimmers probably don’t appreciate the amount of work we do behind the scenes to create a fantastic swimming experience”



CIMSPA Pool Plant Operative Professional Standard

The role of a Pool Plant Operative is to manage the pool plant and surrounding amenities, ensuring a safe working environment is regularly maintained and all legal requirements are adhered to.

Both STA and Active IQ have Pool Plant Operations (PPO) qualifications endorsed against the CIMSPA Pool Plant Operative Professional Standard. The standard outlines the role and scope of a Pool Plant Operative and the essential knowledge and skills needed to meet the requirements of the sector minimum deployment standards.

Supported with a

comprehensive resource manual and robust assessment, STA’s qualification consists of six units:

- Principles of healthy and hygienic pool water
- Principles of water testing
- Principles of disinfection, pool chemistry and dosing in pool plant operations
- Principles of mechanical pool plant operations
- Swimming pool heating, ventilation and energy efficiency
- Management practices and health and safety in pool plant operations.

Ultimately, STA’s Level 3 qualification

provides operators with the information needed to operate safe and hygienic pool facilities. Learners are assessed to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and understanding to achieve certification.

The STA PPO qualification is valid for five years – two years longer than similar unregulated courses – saving on revalidation costs. All STA qualifications are delivered through its national and international network of Approved Training Centres. For further information, visit www.safetytrainingawards.co.uk/qualifications/pool-plant or call 01922 645097.

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

CIMSPA is working with its industry partners on a variety of projects to help recruit and retain a multi-skilled workforce. One of these initiatives is the higher education endorsement programme. This sees CIMSPA's higher education partners, which includes universities and colleges, align their Sport and Physical Activity undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses with CIMSPA's employer-led professional standards to equip students/graduates with the knowledge and skills employers want and need.

"We place great value on the CIMSPA

endorsement; it's far more than a kitemark. It ensures our degrees are mapped to industry standards that have been designed with employability at the core. With one of our strategic objectives being to produce 'future ready' students, we believe the CIMSPA accreditation is instrumental to achieving this," says Lisa Binney at Solent University.

The endorsement scheme and the professional standards of Entry Manager and General Manager provided a sound framework for programme and curriculum design at Cardiff

Metropolitan University, says Elizabeth Lewis, academic team lead for sport management and culture.

"Using the standards, we were able to identify some of the key knowledge, skills and abilities that our future sport managers need to be successful in the sector."

The scheme has wider benefits beyond improving opportunities for graduates, believes Marc Keech, University of Brighton.

"CIMSPA has helped sport-related degrees demonstrate not only the critical thinking required from service

EDUCATING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

Graduates of CIMSPA-endorsed degree courses are entering the sector in a variety of roles, but more must be done to build relationships between employers and education partners to help the industry evolve and grow





delivery in a range of environments, but has also highlighted how important sport and physical activity are to national and local economies.”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE DEGREE PROGRAMMES ENDORSED?

That CIMSPA endorsed degrees provide students/graduates with the skills and behaviours to work in multiple roles across the sectors is not in doubt. What remains more difficult to gauge however, is the extent to which employers understand the value of

these professional qualifications and how they can help alleviate their staffing issues.

“Industry partners that we speak to appreciate the endorsement once we highlight the worth. We find that we are having to play quite a large part in educating industry about professional standards. In time, we hope this will become more two-way rather than us guiding the way,” says Sarah Lee, Hartpury University.

Cardiff Metropolitan University’s Lewis agrees. She says providing a

work-ready workforce is just the start. Both employers and graduates should commit to lifelong learning.

“The degree programme prepares them to work as an entry/ general manager in sport but also develops a wide range of management skills which are desirable in a number of industries. The skills that graduates may need might be specific to an organisation and how they operate and therefore it’s important that training and development opportunities exist, whether through mentoring and informal learning or structured formal learning. It’s important that both students and employers embed the idea of lifelong learning and development to keep up with and stay ahead of sectoral changes. Universities play a key part in this by providing learning opportunities that align with industry needs and can be made accessible to the workforce at an appropriate time and cost.”

EQUIPPING GRADUATES WITH TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS

There are currently 122 degree programmes endorsed by CIMSPA and approximately 2,000 students have been accredited via their degree to date. Higher education partners are seeing graduates move into a variety of roles from sports coaching and development to community and charity roles to working with local authorities, leisure trusts, health and well-being centres and national governing bodies of sport.

“It has been noted through alumni contacts that the students who received the CIMSPA graduation prizes have gone on to work within the industry and have done really well. The feedback is that they really valued the development of their understanding of the role of CIMSPA during their degree and what the endorsement gave them. They found they had confidence discussing it at interview stages and

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

further promoting it within their role,” says Binney from Solent University.

Work placements held during their studies help students transition to part and full-time work and also educate employers about the value of mapping courses to professional standards.

“Our work placements benefit students by enabling them to undertake ‘work of value’ that benefits the student and contributes to the success of the host. Some of them have gone onto work for the placement employer in either a part time or full time capacity,” says Mandy Gault from University of Chichester.

“We have some fantastic stories, including two 2023 graduates who are moving into roles with Active

Partnerships that have to some extent been tailor-made for them,” say Ste Robson and Louise Morby at Leeds Beckett University.

“By no means do all of our graduates move into sport development, so we have to ensure that the employability support we offer caters for a wide range of outcomes. These include teaching, events and hospitality, uniformed services and caring professions. We are not precious about this as long as graduates have been well prepared in terms of transferable skills.”

When it comes to skills, it’s important to think beyond job specific skills and consider elements of personal and professional development such as communication, emotional

intelligence, analytical thinking and adaptability, says Keech from the University of Brighton.

“When we talk of employability we must think of it as more than a single construct and look more closely at graduate transitions into workplaces and organisations. Where possible we work with our placement providers to enable them to understand that our approach is not job specific, but focused on enabling graduates to enter the industry ready to play a role.

“We still have more to do as individual institutions and collectively in working with sport and physical activity employers to demonstrate that organisational commitment is often influenced by the extent to which



graduates can use and develop their graduate skills. This is especially the case when people say that some sport graduates change jobs because of a lack of challenge.”

CREATING A WORKFORCE TO MEET FUTURE CHALLENGES

There are pockets of great examples across the sector of education providers working well, building opportunities with employers and local projects. However, it's clear that more needs to be done across the sector to build relationships between employers and education partners, to understand how the higher education endorsement programme can help to meet both their current and future workforce needs.

“Some colleagues in industry are evidently very engaged with CIMSPA, so they appreciated the benefits of our partnership more fully than others. We think the next phase might be some work to further bridge gaps in mutual understanding regarding employers' needs and how universities can help to meet them,” say Leeds Beckett University's Robson and Morby.

It's about achieving critical mass, says Phil Brown from Plymouth Marjon University. “I would encourage all universities and HEIs to join the endorsement scheme. The critical mass from both education providers and sport and physical activity employers will improve the professionalisation of the sector. The sector is on a professionalisation journey; it's beneficial to be an active member shaping this process rather than a bystander observing or critiquing from the side lines.”

It's essential that CIMSPA, higher education partners and employers continue to work together to ensure that the workforce is prepared to meet the future needs of the industry, says Cardiff Metropolitan University's Lewis.



“CIMSPA has helped sport-related degrees demonstrate not only the critical thinking required from service delivery in a range of environments, but has also highlighted how important sport and physical activity are to national and local economies”

Marc Keech, University of Brighton

She continues: “The sector has changed considerably as a result of COVID-19 and will continue to evolve. There is a clear drive towards sustainability and for sport to consider how it responds to this agenda. The emergence of AI and virtual reality and the impact this could have for both higher education and sport is both alarming and exciting. Universities are part of the sport and physical activity network and we want to support the sector to grow and evolve, not only by helping to create a work-ready workforce, but also in providing research and insights into the sector that can be supportive and developmental as we grow together.”

AGENDA

LIFETIME ACTIVITY



FITTER AND HEALTHIER FOR

*Sport, physical activity
and health operators
are trying a different
approach to a lifetime of
fitness and healthiness
around the UK*

By
Rachel
Masker



> Initiatives

> Dementia-friendly cricket

Horizon Leisure, in partnership with Activ8 Minds and Get Up and Go Havant, has welcomed back Dementia Friendly Cricket to Havant Leisure Centre. Everyone has a turn to bat, bowl or field. Organisers give a warm welcome to both players and carers who can join in or sit out to have a chat and meet others in a similar situation. "Exercise, laughter, friendship – what could be better," said one participant.

The inclusive multi-sports sessions alternate between two main sports: walking cricket and walking football. In addition, a coach runs a choice of table tennis, boccia (like bowls) and New Age Kurling – adaptation of the original sport so it can be played in a sports hall rather than on ice.

> Toddler groups

Keeping kids active is a priority at Havant in Hampshire which is among the most deprived 25% of local authorities in England. By Year 6, 19% of children are classified as obese, according to Public Health England. Local priorities include children's health and wellbeing with a focus on mental health.

Horizon Leisure runs toddler groups at Havant Leisure Centre. Fun activities include pre-school bounce, trampoline tuition for the under-fours; supervised adventure play sessions in the main sport hall with bouncy castle and soft play toys as well as gymnastics for pre-schoolers. Aim of the pay-as-you-go classes include keeping kids healthy and promoting an active lifestyle.

> Baby massage

Winchester Sport and Leisure Park and Romsey Rapids have hosted Ladybird baby massage classes. The course provides a safe and supportive space for learning and connection not only between parent and baby, but for parents to connect with each other. "Connection and community are vital in those early months of parenting – a time that can feel stressful and isolating," said organiser Suki Cohn, adding: "The whole point of baby massage is to set a great foundation for the mental health and wellbeing of the child into adulthood."

From the cradle to the grave. In the 1940s that phrase was used to describe a vision for the welfare state. Now, it is a description of the ambition of public leisure centres to provide for a wider customer base. An illustration, too, of the extent to which sports and physical activity can improve everyone's lives, from the start of life to the end.

From baby Zen to menopause cafes and dementia-friendly cricket, leisure is changing; there's a pivot towards wellbeing. Leisure trusts are developing new initiatives to help young and old lead happier, healthier, more connected lives, often with the aid of charities and NHS professionals.

In 2016, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson called for a £1bn regeneration scheme to save the NHS by transforming the UK's ageing stock of leisure centres into its new preventative frontline. The former chair for not-for-profit ukactive called for government funding to replace 1970s-era leisure centres with "community wellness hubs". These would combine sports hall, swimming pools and gyms with libraries and GP surgeries.

AGENDA

LIFETIME ACTIVITY

> Young person membership

Proving popular at Oldham Leisure since it was launched in October 2021. This membership, which costs £16.99 per month, is for young people aged 11-18 who don't have to be accompanied by an adult. Oldham Active currently has around 1,800 members in this age group and each month 25% of new joiners are young people. Oldham is among the most deprived 20% of local authorities in England and scores worse than the national average for most health and wellbeing indicators.

> Easy does it

Designed for people of all ages, shapes and size, this gentle introduction to exercise at Oldham Leisure Centre is aimed at those who want to get fit, lose weight or are recovering from an illness or injury. Sessions include chair-based activities, Tai Chi, yoga and aquacise. Regular exercise not only helps to lose and maintain weight and combat many health conditions and diseases, but also improves mood, boosts energy levels and is a great way to make friends, say organisers.

> Menopause café

Trafford Leisure is supporting the Greater Manchester Creative Health ambition hosting different initiatives. One example was a six-week menopause café series at Urmston Leisure Centre last year covering wellness and exercise, diet and nutrition, HRT/other options, mental health and relationships. Sadly, the sessions have now finished.

> Falls prevention

Age UK is running a falls prevention programme with Oldham Active. The free specialist falls prevention class lasts for up to six months with the option of free transport. The gentle exercise classes have been designed especially for older adults with specialist falls prevention instructors. When the course finishes, participants can continue onto the 'Next Steps' programme which lasts a further six months.

So, what happened? GLL (Greenwich Leisure Limited) runs over 240 leisure centres on behalf of councils under its 'Better' brand. Joe Rham, customer experience director, says sports, leisure and health services are now co-located at a number of locations across the country. Examples include the recently reopened £27m Sands Leisure Centre in Carlisle. The revamped venue, a partnership between GLL and the city council, now offers state-of-the-art fitness facilities, new pool and a live entertainment venue. Additionally, the bigger building meant North Cumbria University Hospitals Trust could expand the rehabilitation activities offered by its musculoskeletal team. In London, the newly refurbished and extended Plumstead Centre combines health, fitness, sports, performing arts and library all under one roof.

"These are wellbeing hubs in action," said Rham. The leisure chain boss said co-location gave medical professionals a wider view of what is available to meet people's exercise needs and made social prescribing easier, too. "We have always had a 'cradle to a grave' approach," said Rham, adding: "For us it's more of an evolution of what was there already rather than a pivot."

Local authorities and leisure trusts need to combine a cradle to grave approach with a wider equality agenda in terms of helping people lead happier, healthier, longer lives, said Rham. As a not-for-profit enterprise, GLL is committed to providing leisure and fitness facilities at affordable prices. The aim is to help everyone get active.

GLL offers off-peak concessionary gym and leisure centre memberships to anyone in receipt of benefits as well as juniors, pensioners, people with disabilities and carers. "One of the things that makes us unique is our membership structure," said Rham. Some 45% of members are subsidised in



“Being physically active has mental health benefits but we want to focus more specifically on mental health”

Joe Rham, customer experience director, GLL

some way. "Ultimately, they are subsidised by us working in partnership with councils."

He added: "Being physically active has mental health benefits but we want to focus more specifically on mental health." New classes being rolled out across the country include relaxing



Above: Innerva fitness equipment has helped Alliance Leisure attract older adults into keeping fit

mindfulness sessions for adults and juniors. Previously these classes were only available for adults.

Alliance Leisure develops facilities on behalf of leisure operators keen to improve or expand the services they offer. James Foley (*below, inset*), commercial director, said: "There is still the demand for traditional leisure centres with new and improved pools to teach kids to swim and sports hall etc, but we need to augment that."

When he was a child, said Foley, he climbed trees and roamed meadows, but society has changed. Some leisure centres (and shopping centres) have installed TAGactive, an arena-based game designed to promote fitness, fun and competition, including rope bridges and giant ball rooms. "Gamification and experiential activity play help to attract and retain an audience after six or seven years old when children might

disengage," said Foley, adding: "It's important to meet people where they are and introduce physical activity."

Alliance Leisure revamped Salt Ayre Leisure Centre in partnership with Lancaster City Council. The redevelopment won the new concept, build and design category at the inaugural ukactive awards in 2015. Foley says he still gets a buzz when he sees the "vibrant café" full of people of different age groups. "For some older adults, the only social interaction they get all week is to go to armchair exercise classes and then spend half an hour in the café before they go home."

It's important leisure centre operators recognise the importance of social wellbeing, said Foley and "that it's not just about offering physical activity although that is important".

Outdoor provision is also key.

Parks and outdoor green spaces are essential to mental health.

Lesley Aitken, commercial group business manager for Active Nation, said: "We have

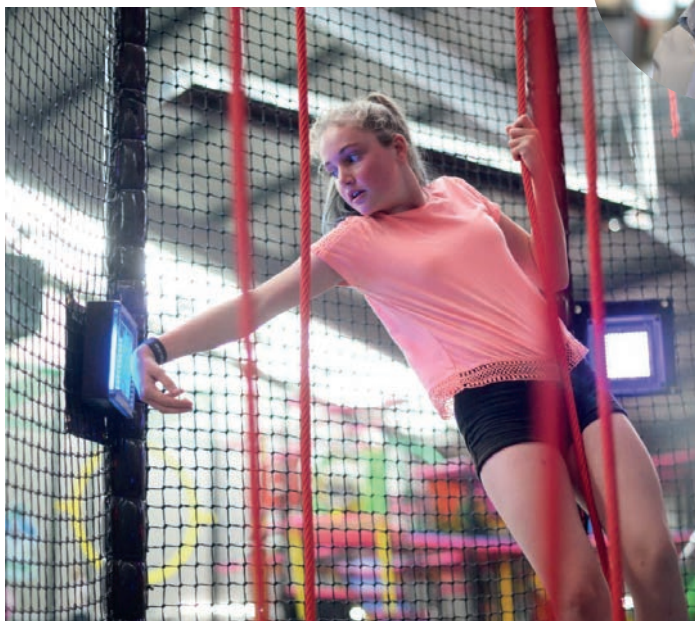
witnessed a noticeable shift towards a comprehensive 'cradle to grave' approach to wellbeing in both our indoor and outdoor venues.

"While there is an element of evolution and development in our offerings, we are actively striving to better showcase the range of facilities and programmes available. We aim to cater to individuals of all ages and life stages, ensuring that our services support their wellbeing throughout their entire journey."

From aquatics to Zumba, body pump to yoga, the range of group exercise classes is impressive. For older adults, provision includes ShapeMaster power-assisted exercise machines to provide a low-impact, full-body



Some Alliance Leisure centres have installed TAGactive, an arena-based game designed to promote fitness and attract youngsters beyond the ages of 6-7 years old



AGENDA

LIFETIME ACTIVITY

workout. "From camping to canoeing and sailing, there are plenty of options available to engage families in exciting outdoor adventure," added Aitken.

"There is a growing emphasis on mental health alongside physical wellbeing in our centres. We recognise the importance of a holistic approach to health and have been actively collaborating with healthcare trusts and charities to develop integrated solutions." Little Zen baby massage for pre-crawling tots is available at venues along with meditation and yoga on the Active Nation Anywhere platform, for example.

Active National has partnered with Southern Health NHS trust to run ESCAPE-Pain exercise sessions to help people with chronic knee, hip or back pain. The programme integrates educational self-management and coping strategies with an exercise regime personalised for each participant. "We teach that exercise and continuing to move improves their condition and increases their quality of life, reducing the medication taken," said Aitken.



"While there is an element of evolution and development in our offerings, we aim to cater to individuals of all ages and life stages, ensuring that our services support their wellbeing throughout their entire journey"

Lesley Aitken, Active Nation commercial group business manager

> Dance easy for breathless people

Telford Leisure has partnered with BreathChamps CIC to deliver Latin and ballroom dance classes for people living with chronic lung conditions such as asthma, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), emphysema and more. Professional dance instructor Amy Victoria Wyatt is teaching the adapted dance classes at Sale Leisure Centre. Participants need a medical referral to attend. Registered nurse and founder of BreathChamps CIC Heather Henry said: "It's very 'Strictly Come Dancing'. We do seated and standing dance classes because we have people who are severely breathless. It takes a lot for a breathless person to go to a leisure centre."

> Live well and dance with Parkinson's

Trafford Leisure has also partnered with Parkinson's UK (Trafford branch) to deliver its dance and movement programme. Ballet, tap dance and seated dance can all help people cope with the physical and mental aspects of the condition, says Parkinson's UK. Basic dance techniques have been shown to improve posture, core strength and coordination. There's a feelgood factor with the music, too. Exercise professionals are increasingly using music to improve walking, balance and other activities related to gait.

> Mental health first aid

One in four people experience mental health issues. While things are improving, stigma still exists. As a society, we don't know how to take care of our mental health like we do our physical health, says Trafford Leisure. The enterprising leisure trust has launched one and two-day courses to train individuals and businesses how to spot signs and how to handle mental health first aid.



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INCLUSIVITY

HEALTH NEEDS

Jason King-White
has an oxygen
tank so daughter
Margot can swim

PROJECT FEAR OFFERS HOPE FOR ACTION

*A charity gives
those who are
tube-fed or
have medical
conditions using
a central line the
freedom to take
part in swimming
and other active
pursuits*

By
Rachel
Masker

It's a sunny Saturday afternoon in late May and people are gathering at Eastleigh's Places Leisure pool for a fun family swimming session.

It seems like a fairly typical crowd: young couples with children, a few toddlers and even a teenager or two. The pool is slightly less boisterous than usual, perhaps, but there's still plenty of splashing about and playing with multi-coloured floats and balls.

But don't be fooled. This is not your run-of-the-mill family swim session; it's hosted by a charity called Face Everything and Rise (FEAR) for children and adults (and their families) who are artificially fed or receiving treatment via a central line.

In partnership with Sport England and Places Leisure, the charity runs monthly swim events across England. This includes lending specialist drysuits to keep medical central lines safe and dry, reducing the risk of infections. For some, it's their first time ever in a pool.

More than 100 people attended a recent FEAR event at Romsey Rapids with some travelling over 150 miles. Notably in the pool today one man, Jason King-White, is wearing a backpack containing an oxygen tank, a lifeline for the curly-haired tot in his arms. His 18-month-old daughter Margot has multiple complex needs and is fed by a tube into her stomach. Swimming with them is his partner, and Margot's mum, Yvonne.

Speaking after their family swim, Jason said: "It's nice to go and do something like this together. At ordinary weekend swimming pool sessions there are usually lots of children and it can be rowdy. These are quieter sessions." Yvonne, a keen swimmer, agreed, saying: "It means we can have a family time and know Margot is going to be safe. It's more relaxed." The couple worry that in a packed pool children might

FEAR lends special drysuits to keep lines safe and dry for swimmers



accidentally shove Margot, displacing her oxygen line.

They would also endure stares, whereas at FEAR sessions other swimmers understand. "I was quite scared about taking Margot swimming," said Yvonne. "But I know from her physio it's good for her. I push her a bit and do exercises drills like tickling her feet to get her to move her legs. Hopefully, the long-term goal is to get her walking but it's just wonderful being able to go swimming. It's what I always envisaged doing with my daughter."

Before attending the FEAR events, the couple had only ever taken a dip with their daughter at Naomi House Children's Hospice near Winchester. Yvonne did once take Margot to a public swim session but left after being asked to complete a risk assessment. "I just wanted to take her to the pool – and it's already stressful for me," explained the mum-of-one.

Charity founder Kim Purkis, who jumps in the pool after welcoming participants, said: "If her consultant lets Margot swim and the family wants her to swim, why shouldn't they have the opportunity? I guess that's what FEAR is

about – making it possible and less scary for families to swim."

But Purkis is swimming against the tide of opinion that says people with central venous lines shouldn't swim or over-exert themselves because of the risk of infection or dislodging their tube. There are mixed messages from different NHS trusts and little evidence.

Purkis knows more than most about the risks and benefits. A former international high board diver and keen swimmer, she has been tube-fed since 2015 after being diagnosed with intestinal failure. The special educational needs teacher pulls down her tee-shirt to show where her central line goes into her chest and ends in a vein just above her heart to deliver nutrition straight into her bloodstream.

The tube is called a Hickman line and this method of feeding, bypassing the gastrointestinal tract, is known as Total Parental Nutrition (TPN). Purkis is attached to her feeding tube and TPN backpack seven days a week, 15 hours a day. "When you have a Hickman line you lose the freedom to do a lot. The line itself can't get wet, so you're told swimming is a big NO."

INCLUSIVITY

HEALTH NEEDS

It was a devastating blow. Purkis said: "I was desperate to get back in the water again, so we did our own research." In summer 2016, Purkis bought a made-to-measure Hammond drysuit to keep her central line safe and dry in water. "The first time I used the drysuit was on a Mediterranean cruise. It was brilliant and although I got funny looks, I loved it. I remember being quite emotional about in the water again. I don't remember feeling scared, just excited."

Eight years on Purkis has scuba-dived under ice, learnt to solo paraglide and gone cliff camping. She also plays golf, rides her horse and swims. Next month, the inspirational charity boss is learning to surf.

But she stressed: "I'm not a daredevil, as in I wouldn't take unnecessary risks. So, if I swam in the sea, on holidays or went scuba diving, I wore the drysuit. It wouldn't be safe for me not to."

She added: "You either keep your line safe or end up in hospital with an infection that could lead to sepsis, so you can see why people are protective."

In 2021, after trialling various dressings, Purkis discovered Cath Dry, a water-resistant clinical dressing for central venous catheters and similar lines that can reduce the risk of bacterial infections.

"The drysuits are fantastic and allow you to swim safely, but the dressing took this a step further and allowed me to feel the water all over my skin. You also have the freedom of being in the water without wearing a big suit. I wear both now," said Purkis, adding her NHS consultant fully supported her swimming with these precautions.

Purkis set up FEAR to help others who are artificially fed. "It's about showing people that they can still enjoy sport and activity. Boost their wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem. Swimming is possible with a central line and feeding tubes!



FEAR has also donated more than 4,000 teddy bears worldwide

"It's about showing people that they can still enjoy sport and activity. Swimming is possible with a central line and feeding tubes!"

"Central lines are used for chemotherapy and dialysis too, so we are getting more and more requests from families who'd like to borrow a drysuit for their child who is battling cancer. The demand is huge.

"FEAR events are not about taking

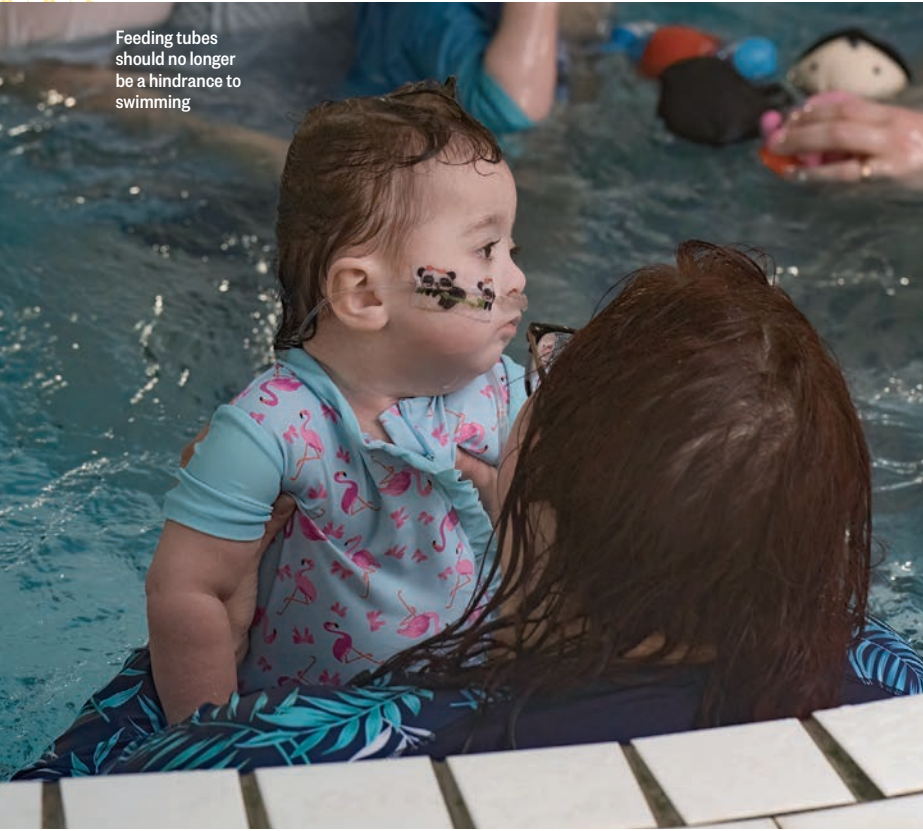
risks or proving people wrong. They're about socialising, being together, happiness and escapism from their health for a few hours."

Meanwhile Places Leisure has hailed Purkis as one of their Swimming All-Stars and heroines for showing "an inner strength that can only be described as extraordinary" and "embracing the latest medical technology to get back in the water and get her mojo back".

Mark Haslam, head of swimming and sport at Places Leisure, said: "Our partnership with Kim Purkis and FEAR just made sense. We want to bring swimming and more generally fitness to everyone we can. Putting the right sessions, instructors and equipment in

PETER NICHOLSON

Feeding tubes should no longer be a hindrance to swimming



place to allow some people to swim for the first time is just fantastic to see. We can't wait to keep putting on these sessions and expanding them across the country."

Swimming is just a start. FEAR is now launching multi-activity days with sailing, rock climbing, canoeing and archery. "I'd also like to introduce horse riding, paddleboarding, and many other sports," said Purkis.

Being tube fed has a massive impact on people's lives yet there is little support. "People's lives are hugely impacted by not being able to eat and drink. Socially, physically and psychologically," said Purkis.

Dinner invitations stop. People who are tube-fed need to think about whether it's possible to take their feed out to social events. Some prefer to stay home while connected. "Physically they now have tubes in their bodies, which is a huge deal. It's very hard to suddenly look in the mirror and see scars and tubes. We have a mental health team on board, which is run by two NHS mental health nurses. They support people with coping strategies," said Purkis. Her charity has also donated more than 4,000 teddy bears worldwide in a bid to comfort people.

What are Purkis's hopes for the future? "My hopes are huge just because I would like to help as much as I can. I'd love to offer swimming to more places around the country. I want to offer more activities and sports. I'd like to have more drysuits, so that we can help more people."

Today she gets a buzz seeing families enjoying the swim session at Eastleigh's pool. "To look around and see happy, smiley faces is very fulfilling. I love it that families come back. That's always a good sign that events are successful and a fun place to be."

For more information see the charity's website: www.faceeverything.co.uk



Swim sessions at Eastleigh's pool are enjoyed by families

PLANNING

ACTIVE TRAVEL

INVESTING IN A HEALTHY FUTURE

By
Patrick
Appleton

Not everyone has to be a weekend warrior. With added green spaces, cycling and walking, we can all do our bit to enjoy a healthier style of life

Designing our environment must be front and centre as we head into the future.

Plenty are doing good work on this, but we need more. Enter Active Design, which is a set of Key Principles aimed at everyone involved in delivering and managing the built environment. It is not all doom and gloom, as planners, designers and national governing bodies (NGBs) have put it to the top of their lists in how to help the nation become more active. Sometimes, people might not even be aware of participating in active travel, but we need a radical change in our urban design: wider footpaths, cycle lanes, green spaces are all essential if we are to achieve this.

Sport England says that the design of the places and spaces we live, work and play has a significant impact on our ability to be physically active. This should be enhanced wherever possible, including opportunities for active travel, children's play, outdoor leisure and anything else that enables people to be active. Interventions that support physical activity can also support other key objectives such as environmental sustainability, reducing inequalities and economic growth.

"Through good design, we can help improve these levels of physical activity," says Nick Evans, head of planning & active environments, Sport England. "This has been shown from a number of global studies including one by James F. Sallis in 2016. It looked at 14 cities worldwide and found that those who lived in more activity-friendly neighbourhoods, which includes access to green spaces and connected streets, did significantly more minutes of physical exercise per week over those who lived in the least activity-friendly neighbourhoods.

"There's no such thing as a 'neutral space'. The places and spaces around us can have a positive or negative impact on

whether, how, when and where we move. Those involved in designing and developing the places we live have an important role to ensure that places are designed to have a positive impact on our physical activity levels."

The government also recognises the priority of making places available to walk and cycle comfortably and at our leisure, with Professor Rachel Aldred, professor of transport at the University of Westminster and director of the Active Travel Academy, saying: "As we know most people are not getting enough physical activity and walking and cycling can make a big difference.

"It's something you do not need to think about; you walk to the bus stop or cycle to/from work. It can be a really

ActiveDesign – what is it?

These are the key principles based around physical activity, health and wellbeing, and community strength to inject new considerations into how we build our towns and cities:

- Foundational Principle – Activity for all
- Theme 1 – Supporting Active Travel
- Walkable Communities
- Providing connected active travel routes
- Mixing uses & co-locating facilities
- Theme 2 – Active, High-quality places and Spaces
- Network of multi-functional open spaces
- High-quality streets and spaces
- Providing activity infrastructure
- Active buildings inside and out
- Theme 3 – Creating & Maintaining activity
- Activating spaces
- Maintaining high-quality flexible spaces

PLANNING

ACTIVE TRAVEL

good way of building physical activity into our lives. Rather than people having to think ‘oh God, I have to do something now or [do] some exercise’.”

Aldred also talked about investment in infrastructure, where some £200m investment in more than 260 schemes across 60 areas were announced recently (February 2023) in England alone. Those plans will encompass 121 miles of cycle track, 77 miles of paths and greenways, along with Mini-Holland schemes (see box, right) and initiatives to make streets safer around 130 schools in England too. Charity Cycling UK revealed that Brighton and Hove Unitary Authority topped the list with £10.82 per head, however bottom of the list was Bracknell Forest Unitary Authority, which has been awarded £30k – just 24p per head of its population. That is some way off countries like The Netherlands, which spends half a billion euros each year on road and parking infrastructure for cycling, which aids economic health benefits to the tune of €19bn (£16.3bn) per year.

Active travel describes journeys made by walking, wheeling, or cycling. Active travel is a low-carbon way to get around and offers many benefits compared with other forms of transport. Government believes active travel has the potential to support its wider strategic priorities to increase physical activity and achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. From 2016 to 2025 Department for Transport estimates that the government will provide roughly £6.6bn on active travel intervention.

Scott Cain from the Bicycle Association and Connected Places Catapult is positive in this regard, and he expects more to be done in the future to help achieve this.

“That is why we’re seeing transport policy being used to achieve health outcomes – it is part of UK national

Mini Hollands – what are they?

The Mini-Hollands programme is part of the Mayor of London’s Healthy Streets approach. Substantial investment – around £100m – is helping three outer London boroughs transform into cycling hubs, equipped with high specification Dutch-style infrastructure. Changes include redesigned junctions that are safer for cyclists and pedestrians, segregated cycle lanes on busy roads and reductions in the amount of traffic using residential streets.

This investment aims to make these boroughs as cycle-friendly as their Dutch equivalents – where more than half of all journeys are made by bike in some cities – so that more Londoners can choose to cycle. All road users will benefit from improvements to streets and better facilities for pedestrians.

Mini-Hollands will encourage more people to cycle more safely and more often, while providing better streets and outdoor spaces for everyone. The project will specifically target people who make short car journeys in outer London that could be cycled easily instead.

government policy which is the DfT and Active Travel England. It’s also then increasingly in the combined authorities who have cycling and walking commissions, and the devolved administrations where in some senses, some of the most ambitious and innovative projects are taking place,” Cain says.



“In Scotland and Wales, they’re formally committing to reducing car miles driven, so that’s a 20% reduction in car miles driven. That is one of the policies being announced in Scotland and there are similar levels of ambition in Wales. This is one of those at every level of government, local through to national and subnational we are seeing these policies and programs and investments, seeking to change how we get from A to B.”

David Lock Associates (DLA, a leading town planning and urban design consultancy) and Sport England have been in partnership since 2003, when DLA were commissioned to undertake a piece of work reviewing how the design of places and how they were planned influenced people to become active, which became the first iteration of



essential to ensure inclusive and equitable spaces and facilities can be designed and delivered or improved. Effective engagement should continue throughout the design process, to test ideas and refine concepts through to detailed design and delivery.”

Carr says that an example of this is Nottingham, where the planning authority is currently engaged in an ongoing programme of transforming the city’s streets for active travel. This includes the provision of an extensive network of new segregated on-street cycle routes that will connect all parts of the city, local networks, junction improvements, and

radical changes to the city centre and its public realm, removing private vehicles from key streets.

Those who are in power have a tough job, but it is doable bit-by-bit. The funding pot is not unlimited and that while the digital offering has improved, rural areas struggle sometimes when network signals drop.

“We are training people to think creatively outside the box, there is a question of do we continue to spend most of our money on running those fixed facilities like leisure centres – or do we invest more of it in outreach services and go and meet people there?” the LGA spokesperson says.

“Or engage specific parts of the community and ask which are you most comfortable doing? That is a big political challenge – if you look to close a leisure centre it is very significant.

As they do form the bulk of the offer, it’s very tricky.”

That is just stressing the realities of operating a leisure or community centre in the current climate, but Cain says that we need to offer those provisions as well, for the health of the nation.

“Public leisure centres are a very important part of the mix,” says Cain. “Continuing to invest in leisure centres is a social policy – it’s like social infrastructure, we could call it. So along with libraries and community centres I think the public leisure centre is a very important part of a solid and connected community.

“I would also say formal exercise and the gym is certainly not for everybody and it can be very alienating. Instead, it’s about finding things that are very low-friction ways to allow people to be active and that’s why walking and cycling in your everyday clothes that you wear for your destination, rather than dressing head-to-toe in lycra is an important part of what public policy needs to get back to.”

Professor Rachel Aldred



Active Design, published in 2007. Revised again in 2015, they have teamed up again this year to review and adapt the Key Principles of Active Design (see box, p29).

“The principle of creating and enabling ‘activity for all’ is a cornerstone of our work,” says Joseph Carr, senior associate at David Lock. “To achieve it, early engagement and understanding, ongoing monitoring and flexibility, and targeted action to address imbalances, is essential to ensuring everyone can feel comfortable and able to be physically active in their daily lives.

“Use of effective and creative engagement techniques, discussion, co-design and evidence gathering is

Bold strategy

The Department for Transport’s four objectives for increasing active travel to 2025 are set out in its second Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy and include:

- Increasing the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled from 41% in 2018-19 to 46% in 2025; to 50% in 2030; and 55% in 2035
- Increasing walking activity to 365 stages per person per year in 2025
- Doubling cycling from 0.8 billion stages in 2013 to 1.6 billion in 2025
- Increasing the % of children aged 5-10 walking to school from 49% in 2014 to 55% in 2025

PERKS

STAFF BENEFITS

In late 2021, a survey for the CIMSPA Employer Partner Report found that 86% of respondents were experiencing staff shortages across a wide range of roles and pay brackets, with swimming teachers, lifeguards and fitness instructors among the most difficult to recruit. Updated figures are due to be released later this year but, anecdotally, recruitment is still a challenge for many operators.

Providing more opportunities for training and career progression through, for example, the ReTrain to ReTain package, is obviously an important way to address the problem, but employee

As employers continue to struggle with recruitment and retention, we explore how operators are raising their game when it comes to staff benefits to try and buck the trend

By
Caroline
Roberts

THE BENEFITS





benefits and perks can also play a role in attracting and keeping staff.

Oldham Active, which operates six leisure centres, introduced a range of benefits and improvements to employment conditions at the beginning of April. Employees are signed up to a health scheme paid for by the company, which enables them to access online GP consultations and a 24/7 counselling helpline, as well as cash contributions towards treatments such as dentistry and physiotherapy. "Someone with a bad back may not be able to afford to pay £40 for a physio session," says Louise

Walton, head of HR. "Our health scheme means they can get the treatment they need, which will hopefully benefit staff morale and improve sickness absence. We were also really keen to provide the counselling service because of the mental health crisis and previously we didn't have anywhere we could signpost employees needing support."

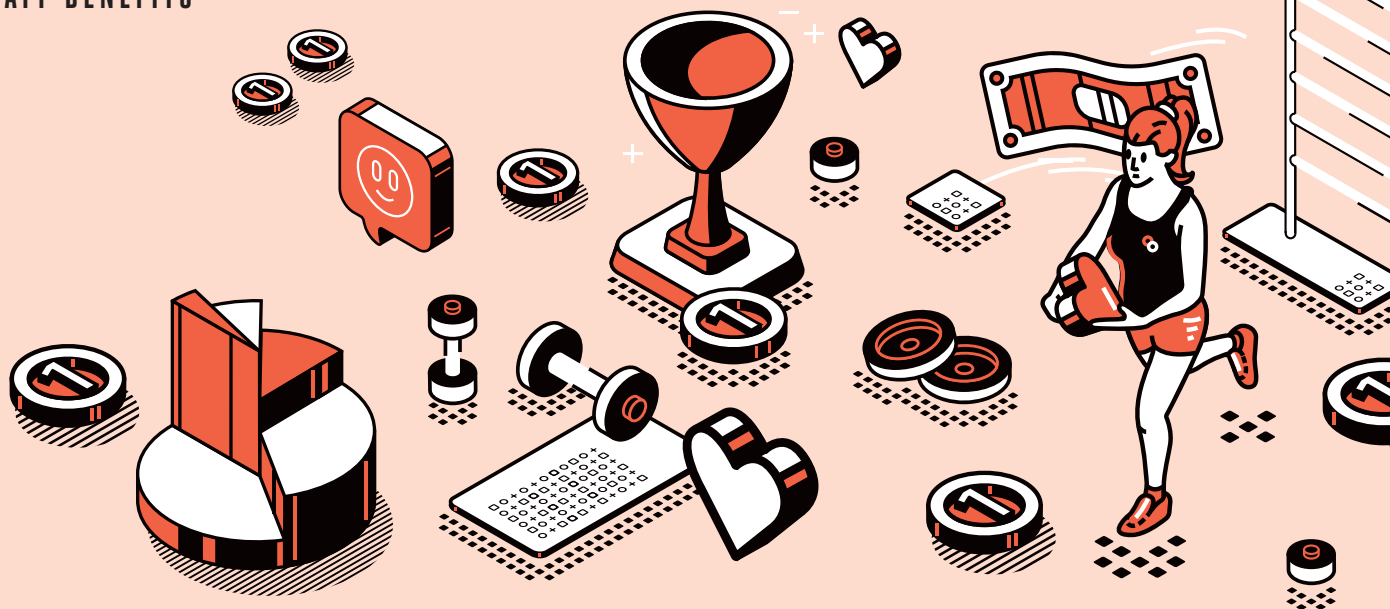
All colleagues and a nominated guest have free access to Oldham Active facilities and plans are being finalised for this to be extended to other operators in the Greater Manchester area through the GM Active collaboration. Annual leave entitlement has also been increased to five weeks plus bank holidays, with an additional week after five years' service and the option to buy extra days. And part-time group exercise instructors, who were previously employed on casual contracts, have now been offered contracts in line with the rest of the staff and so are entitled to the same benefits, including the annual

"We've tried to change our recruitment marketing to emphasise our range of benefits"

OF BENEFITS

PERKS

STAFF BENEFITS



leave increase and sick pay that exceeds statutory provision.

“We’ve really tried to change our recruitment marketing to emphasise the range of benefits and the values of the organisation, rather than focusing so much on the experience applicants need

to bring to the role," says Walton.

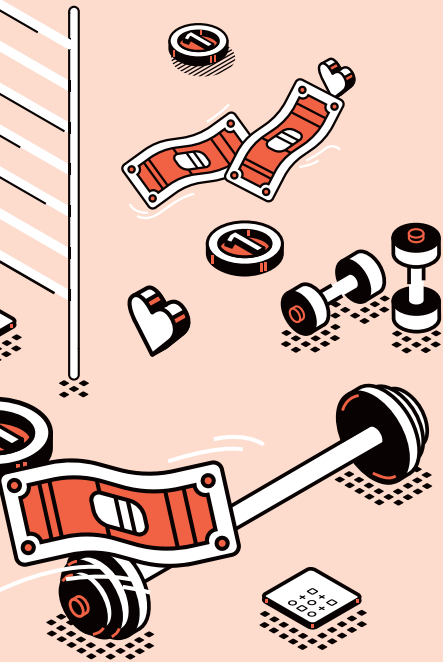
While it's too early to fully evaluate the impact, there are already encouraging signs. "Before April we advertised for a dance coach to join our sports development team delivering sessions in schools. We only had one

applicant and she soon left. When we readvertised, we had 11 applicants and employed someone we're very happy with, as well as getting a couple of casual staff on board. There's been a really good level of interest that can only be attributed to the changes we've made."

Edinburgh Leisure inherited a range of employee benefits when it took over operations from the local authority 25 years ago. Its current offer includes a health plan, counselling and support service, childcare vouchers, free facility use and a staff discount and cashback scheme at a wide range of retailers. It has nevertheless been affected by workforce shortages in recent years, compounded by the high cost of living in the city and the opening of a large new facility last year.

Perks are only effective if they are well targeted and staff are aware of them, says Karen Scott, director of people. “Over the years, we’ve done a lot of work on identifying what benefits staff value the most and we’ve found it’s about age and stage of life. Younger staff coming in are more focused on pay and holidays; for those with families and older staff, it’s the childcare vouchers, health plan,





“One thing the HR team is going to work on this year is really promoting the benefits and what is available to staff”

flexibility and part-time options. That’s why we offer a broad suite of benefits.”

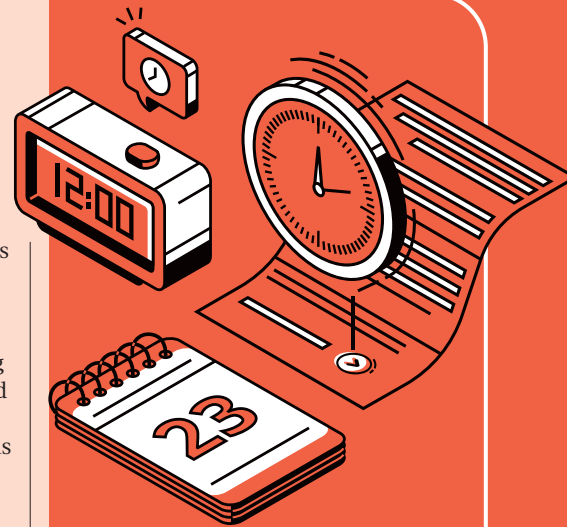
You also need to have an effective strategy for communicating those benefits, she adds. “The problem with having lots of benefits is that there’s quite a long message to get across to applicants and employees. You ask staff if they’ve signed into the discount provider website and are getting the discounts off their shopping and you’re just met with blank looks as they didn’t even know we had it. One thing the HR team is going to work on this year is really promoting the benefits more, getting around the venues and speaking to staff to remind them of what’s available.”

Everyone Active has addressed this

issue by bringing together all its benefits and support tools in an employee app, which was launched in 2020. It also gives colleagues access to the latest organisation news and updates, helping keep them on board with the vision and direction of the organisation and fostering a sense of community, explains David Greenwood, head of operations. “It provides a communication platform for all colleagues to be informed on the latest steps we’re taking as a business. They can also engage in Bright Ideas, an online suggestion scheme which allows any employee to send a business idea straight to the senior management team. If it’s taken up, they earn a £250 reward.” One recent colleague suggestion resulted in a school partnership programme that encourages parents to join their local centre or sign up their child to the swimming programme in return for a donation to their school.

Creating that positive workplace culture costs little, and things like employee ideas schemes can be very successful if there’s a good feedback mechanism so people know their ideas have been considered, adds Scott. “Something you often hear in the HR world is that people don’t leave the company, they leave their manager, and it’s actually very true. That personal relationship on the ground is really important.”

Edinburgh Leisure uses the b-Heard Employee Engagement Survey provided by Best Companies and has asked managers to focus on two key things arising from the most recent survey: supporting career aspirations and listening to staff. “Keeping that person-centric approach is the challenge when staffing levels get tight,” says Scott. “But it’s as simple as making sure managers meet with people and have those essential one-on-one conversations so they feel heard.”



Benefits of flexible working

Offering more options to work flexibly can also help with recruitment and retention – recent research has found that over 75% of the workforce say that this is one of the benefits that they most value.

In response to recruitment challenges, Everyone Active has introduced a flexi-work benefit aimed at students. This enables them to fit work around their periods of study as well as allowing their role and hours to be transferred to another of the operator’s facilities while they’re away at university.

One employee to benefit is Bailey Hill, a 17-year-old lifeguard at Moulton Leisure Centre in Northamptonshire, who works two eight-hour shifts during the week and two at the weekend. “The flexibility of this role has helped me in many areas as I’m able to gain valuable experience in a working environment while still completing my studies at college,” he says. “It’s developed my confidence and I’ve been given training that has helped me build essential skills in leisure centre maintenance, customer relations and health & safety in the pool. I’m still thinking about university, and in my current role at Everyone Active there’s the flexibility for me to have a gap year and return to work here, so it’s great to have that option.”

TECH TOOLKIT

PRODUCT ROUND-UP

TEMPERATURE RISING

All the new gadgets and high performance gear

BY SUE WEEKES



DRY AND COLD COMBINE FOR WELLNESS

Starpool's Zerobody Cryo brings together dry flotation and cold therapy, and claims to offer spa, wellness and sports & fitness facilities the same benefits of cryotherapy and immersion in icy water. The user's body is completely wrapped in a patented membrane so they come into contact with water without getting wet. The water temperature is brought to 4-6c via a cooling unit. Starpool reports that session durations range from three-to-eight minutes depending on individual goals. The development of Zerobody Cryo is the result of Starpool's scientific research based on the four pillars of stress management, sleep, performance and longevity.

Price: TBA

www.starpool.com/



Making functional training more inclusive

Escape Fitness wants to make functional training more inclusive with its revamp of its Multi Activity Resource Station (MARS-2.0) that provides members with access to quality instruction whenever they need it. It seeks to break down barriers to participation that exist when people feel unsure about how to effectively use equipment. MARS 2.0 features updated workout screens that offer real-time, digital coaching 24/7, instructing a user through a full workout based on time or reps. The new workout timer is synchronised with the videos, allowing users to skip backwards or forwards throughout stages. Members can choose from a large selection of fitness content via a touchscreen from individual exercises and equipment demonstrations to entire workouts. The full Escape Fitness content library is available to all but with the option to switch-on or off content streams to reflect the equipment provision within the gym. MARS 2.0 has been designed to attach to an Octagon frame but it can also be freestanding.

escapefitness.com/discover/mars

MYZONE EXPANDS PREMIUM RANGE

Myzone has expanded its premium range with three new experiences that can be hosted or broadcast to members. MZ-Club enables facilities to broadcast their own live and pre-recorded content using the Myzone booking diary. In addition, trainers and staff can also upload pre-recorded content to the MZ-On Demand section of the app. MZ-Together gives any community the opportunity to take part in Myzone live classes, such as Cardio Club, hosted by Myzone master trainers with a global network. MZ-On Demand unlocks more than 1300 classes that can be filtered by Myzone Effort Points (MEPs), duration or required equipment. MZ-Maps is included in each option, which is a new feature that helps individuals track their effort. Based on its own research, gym members using Myzone reportedly stay at least 24% longer than those who don't use it.

www.myzone.org/premium



AI INTEGRATION SMARTENS MEMBER JOURNEY

Fisikal and Keepme have integrated to provide leisure centres, health clubs and gyms with a fully interoperable package designed to optimise operations in areas such as new member acquisition, retention and secondary spend revenue opportunities. The package comprises smart member automation, artificial intelligence-powered business intelligence, advanced booking, payment and content delivery solutions. Keepme uses predictive AI and member data to optimise efficiencies at all points of the member journey, while Fisikal's functionality streamlines personalisation, on-demand content, bookings and payment processes. The companies are already talking to several operators and expect to announce the first joint go-live.

fisikal.com
keepme.ai

Booty Builder boosts impact of squats

The Booty Builder family of equipment has been extended with the Hack Squat machine, which claims to provide a more targeted activation of the quadriceps, glutes and hamstrings. It can be used for a variety of exercises, including traditional hack squats, reverse hack squats and single-leg variations. It also allows for a more controlled and stable movement, which can be beneficial for individuals who

are new to strength training or who need to work on their form. The Hack Squat features a locking mechanism and safety stop and, compared to traditional barbell squats, claims to help reduce the stress on the lower back. UK distributor React Fitness said this can be beneficial for individuals who have lower back issues or who are recovering from an injury.

react-fitness.com



WORKPLACE

FOCUS

IS EUSTRESS BEST?

Harnessing the stress response in a positive way at work. Lisa Gunn explains



HSE research states factors like stress, anxiety and depression contribute to 17 million days of absenteeism a year. A survey commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation also found 74% of adults felt stressed “to the point they felt overwhelmed or unable to cope”.

However, there is a way in which we can harness the stress response that we are familiar with, using it to create a happier and more productive way of working while also avoiding the damaging effects of burnout.

DEFINING EUSTRESS

According to medical research, there is a type of positive stress known as ‘eustress’. The Oxford Dictionary defines this as “*moderate or normal psychological stress, interpreted as being beneficial*”.

Some of the typical characteristics of eustress is a short-term burst of energy that motivates you to act. This can cause us to perform better while feeling energetic, alert and motivated.

This is a different response to chronic stress where we often feel overwhelmed and unmotivated yet continue to push ourselves to work in this state, which

can cause our physical and mental health to suffer.

HOW TO HARNESS EUSTRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Eustress can be beneficial to help us succeed at work. Although the response is usually temporary, it can help when we need to complete a specific task. This can prevent us engaging in behaviours such as procrastination.

However, a way in which we can harness this positive stress response is by working for short periods of time. Our brains often respond better to tasks when we know a break is coming. So we may take a task on our to-do list, set a timer for 25 minutes and start the task.

When the 25 minutes is up, take a short break, move your body to change your physiological state then either continue for another 25 minutes or start a new task. This can also prevent us from feeling overwhelmed and stops a build up of stress by allowing our body to rest.

CREATING BALANCE

When we are stressed, our body is elevating towards our fight or flight response, which means it is producing adrenaline and cortisol. When we are

exposed to constant cortisol levels this will negatively impact our health.

Some of the common symptoms of continuous, elevated stress include irritability, concentration difficulties and procrastination. Potential physical and mental health problems caused are anxiety, obesity, insomnia, high blood pressure and depression.

It is important managers know how to confidently have sensitive conversations with individuals to help support them via any workplace adjustments or by seeking professional support if required.

If someone has high stress levels it is likely that their ability to function will reduce as they seek to manage symptoms while remaining under stress. Employees need to be aware and frequently reminded of what support is available for them to support their mental health in the workplace.

Where signs of burnout are recognised, employers should signpost employees to the emotional wellbeing support available to them, such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) or cognitive behavioural therapy.

Lisa Gunn is mental health prevention lead, Nuffield Health

LAST WORD

SPORT AMBASSADOR

Fraser Ford, interventions coordinator at Southampton Saints Foundation, says it's important to encourage people and foster the right attitude



SWITCHING THE MINDSET

I played a lot of sport growing up and by the time I was 16 I realised it was going to be a big passion in my life – more specifically, playing sport and helping people. I started football coaching for my local football team around about that time and really enjoyed it. So, when I turned 18, I decided to study for a sports coaching and development degree at Solent University in Southampton.

It was while I was at university that started volunteering for the Saints Foundation, which is the charity of Southampton Football Club. I volunteered for the first year and they kindly offered me part-time work for the second and third years of my degree. I also continued on a casual work footing when I next did a master's degree in sports management. After that they kindly offered me a full-time job.

My first role for the Foundation was as a community champion at a local secondary school. It basically combined the roles of sports coach and youth worker, as well as involving one-to-one mentoring.

I then moved internally to become an interventions coordinator, which is the job I've been doing for almost 18 months. It involves working with Southampton City Council and young people in the criminal justice system.

Our referral-based programme,



“We’ve had 88 referrals since September 2022, which shows the need for the kind of work we’re doing. And we’ve had loads of lovely success stories”

Saints Switching Play, supports those aged 14-17 to overcome many of life's challenges, while hopefully giving them the tools to thrive. It essentially challenges anti-social behaviour through one-to-one mentoring, group and community work, and sport and physical activity.

We see a lot of young people that clearly enjoy sport and physical activity, but who haven't had the opportunity or encouragement to get involved. For example, boxing is really popular. Although we're definitely not here to teach them how to box, we use it as a catalyst to get them coming along to sessions and taking part in physical activity, which is enormously good for their physical and mental health.

In terms of the physical activities we offer, we try to be as people-centric as possible. While giving the new arrivals a tour of the stadium, we have a walk and a talk and establish what their passions and interests are, and then try and shape the programme around them. So it might be focused on popular sports like football or boxing, but it might equally be rugby, rock climbing, basketball or trampolining.

It's while they are with us and doing these activities that we're having conversations about their lives or simply how their week is going. If this starts showing up examples of negative behaviour, we're hopefully in a good



LAST WORD

SPORT AMBASSADOR



"I want to continue helping these young people develop and be their best selves"

position to help them combat it.

What works in our favour is that I think we're seen as part of Southampton Football Club and not necessarily as social or youth workers. We're looked at more as simply sports coaches who are trying to help steer them in the right direction.

We've had 88 referrals since September 2022, which shows the need for the kind of work we're doing. And we've had loads of lovely success stories. In fact, there have been young people that have come through the programme and integrated into other Saints Foundation projects.

We even got some that have come onboard as coaches in their own right.

They've been through Saints Switching Places and are now volunteering their time with us to help other young people. That's such a positive thing for us. There's really no one more relatable for someone coming to the programme than someone that has already been through it.

Thankfully, our funding for the programme appears to be safe. We're currently supported by research and technology company Substance, who are indirectly funded by Sport England and the Big Issue, but we're also funded by the Youth Justice Sport Fund. We previously had funding from the Premier League, but it unfortunately came to an end. Our area of work is

expanding massively, so we're always on the lookout for new funding. It started with just me, but there's a team of three of us now, and we've got a growing waiting list that needs helping.

For me personally, the great thing about my job is seeing the journey from the point where a young person first joins us to when they perhaps move on to another Saints Foundation project or to something external, but equally positive. That's what motivates me and gets me up in the morning – I want to continue helping these young people develop and be their best selves."

Fraser Ford spoke with journalist Dean Gurden.

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