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HEALTH & SAFETY
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Six wellbeing trends for 2024
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S&PA Professional
THE SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INDUSTRY MAGAZINE
ISSUE 52 WINTER 2023-24
CIMSPA

The Institute of Swimming looks to local communities to address the lack of instructors

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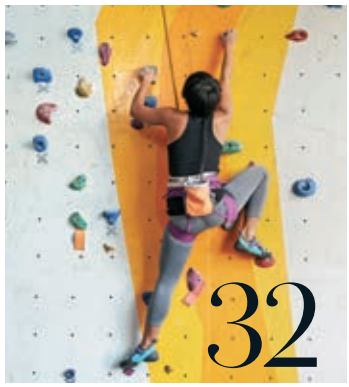
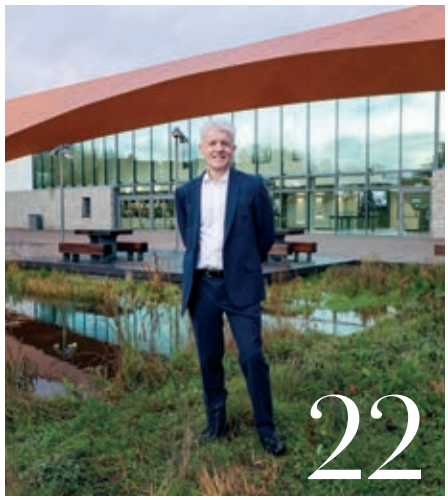


"My intention was to stay for about five or so years, but then the Olympics came along and there was a big job to do. It was like turning a juggernaut around to create something truly special" (p24)



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UK leisure framework

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Over **£300m** of committed investment in leisure projects

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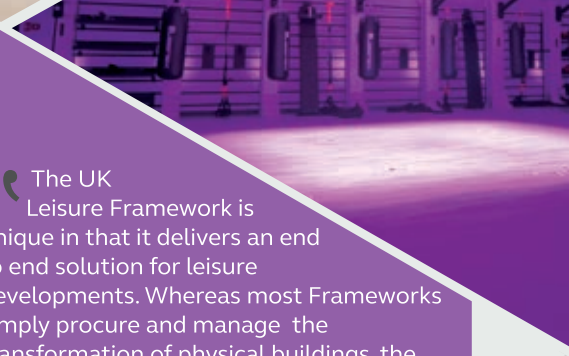

"The UK Leisure Framework is unique in that it delivers an end to end solution for leisure developments. Whereas most Frameworks simply procure and manage the transformation of physical buildings, the UK Leisure Framework offers services that contribute to whole-community engagement, providing an efficient means of increasing opportunities for physical activity through the creation of inspiring active spaces."

Jamie Groves
Managing Director,
Denbighshire Leisure Ltd.

"The UK Leisure Framework allowed the Council to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy and get our projects to market with expediency. Working with Alliance Leisure, provided a range of options, early cost certainty and our projects were delivered on time and within budget."

Damian Hughes
Senior Manager, School Planning & Provision, Flintshire County Council

For more information visit **www.leisureframework.co.uk** or email **framework@allianceleisure.co.uk**

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UPFRONT

EDITORIAL

DeeDee Doke

Finding inspiration

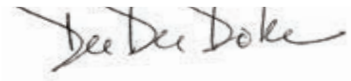
Inspiring activity in the depths of winter

Happy 2024!

In our sport & physical activity sector, there's inspiration to be found even in these dark, rainy and cold January nights. The sight of runners filing past me one by one on the pavement of my little city in the evenings, wearing their high-visibility belts and bands, and light running attire certainly inspires me as I drive past in my heated car en route to my gym for a vigorous 45 minutes of aqua aerobics or Zumba. "If they can battle this hideous cold, I can certainly exert myself for an indoor workout," I say out loud to myself.

Xplor Gym's research report 'Winning the War on Attrition' has an exciting bank of information for those who want to focus on gym/club membership in 2024. Recruiting is just the first step of the membership journey, and it's retaining those users that can pose significant challenges. Particularly interesting is the insight into the impact of proper onboarding and induction on retention – and you'll find great tips to supercharge your retention drives.

Another blast of inspiration for me, captured for this issue of *S&PA Professional*, emerges from Sport Wales (*see p8*). Their examples of brilliant initiatives from local Welsh clubs and teams to ensure that every person in Wales has the opportunity to participate in a sport or physical activity are so imaginative. Inspiration is inclusive. Let's remember that as we go farther and deeper into 2024!



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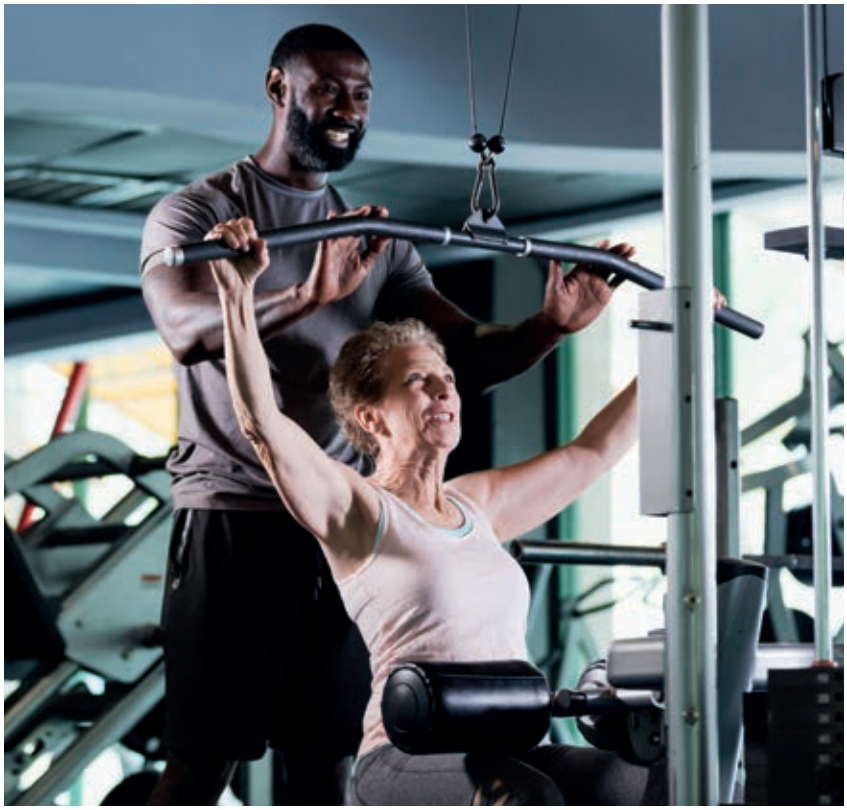
S&PANews

A round-up of the latest developments in the industry



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OLDER GYM MEMBERS REMAIN LOYAL FOR LONGER

The average length of stay and membership of UK and Ireland gym and leisure centre members increases with age, recent research suggests.

According to the 'Winning the War on Attrition' report from Xplor Gym, people aged 25 to 34 have the lowest length of stay and membership, and they cancel faster than other age groups. "This group are also most likely to cancel due to a change of location and cost/financial reasons," says the report, for which 714,674 gym and leisure club members paying by Direct Debit were surveyed.

At 72 months, members aged 75+ years keep their membership the longest, with those aged 65 to 74 years old a distant second place by keeping their membership an average of 47 months. Among older age groups, the report says, the length of time between last visit and cancellation extends beyond half a year. "Supporting and encouraging these members back is essential," the report emphasises. "For older members, the right approach to offering support to get back to activity is vital."

Members who cancel because of a relocation or unsuitable location have a shorter length of stay and membership on average, cancelling quickly after their last visit. "It's a similar picture for those who cancel for cost and financial reasons," the report says.

However, 52% of cancellations occur silently, researchers found.

Another key finding is that members who have an induction actively visit for longer than those who don't. "There's still room to improve the onboarding and welcome experience to positively [affect] attrition," the report suggests.

Recommendations for operators include:

- Make leaving a positive experience
- Offer support through flexible memberships, casual access options and freezes to help when cost is an issue
- Help members manage their membership online, including freezing and cancelling when needed, to recover members when possible and gain better insight into why members cancel
- Get more insights by building a culture where members are used to giving honest feedback and providing digital and less confrontational ways of feeding back "so you can re-engage more of this group before the point of cancellation".

Xplor Gym is a gym membership management software company.

NEW YEAR'S HONOURS FOR NI SPORTING COMMUNITY

By DeeDee Doke

A number of Northern Ireland sporting community members have been recognised in the New Year's Honours List.

Sport NI [Northern Ireland] interim CEO Richard Archibald said: "2023 has been another incredible year for sport in Northern Ireland, with athletes across our funded sports bringing home an amazing 23 international medals, World and European titles, and new national and world records.

"The honours also recognise the unsung heroes of sport: the coaches, volunteers, officials and administrators without whom sport simply couldn't happen," Archibald went on to say. "These people help change and shape the lives of our community and are the foundations of our sports. It is fantastic to see their dedication and service recognised and the positive role sport plays in our communities."

Among those receiving honours are:

- Michael Andrew Boyd for services to association football, to sport, to charity and to reconciliation in Northern Ireland.
- Francis Joseph Donnelly for services to disability sport and to the community in Northern Ireland.
- David Edward Clarke Finlay for services to Olympic wrestling in Northern Ireland.
- Leslie John Raymond Irvine for services to association football.
- Robert William McVeigh for services to the Commonwealth Games in Northern Ireland.
- Alison Jane Moffitt Robinson for services to sports management and development in Northern Ireland.
- William James David King for services to association football in Northern Ireland.
- Patrick Eugene McGeehan for voluntary service to association football in Northern Ireland.
- Deon Frederick McNeilly for services to athletics in Northern Ireland.
- David Wheeler for services to association football in County Fermanagh.

MESSAGE FROM CIMSPA CEO

TARA DILLON ON THE NEW YEAR AHEAD FOR THE SECTOR

Welcome to 2024. In the dynamic and interconnected sport and physical activity sector, effective leadership is the cornerstone for driving progress, innovation and success. Our sector thrives on leadership that orchestrates vision, motivates action and cultivates a culture of empowerment within individuals, teams and organisations.

To support current leaders in the sector and those aspiring to leadership in the future, we will be sharing a series of articles throughout 2024, which showcase how strong leadership is a catalyst that propels individuals and teams to achieve shared goals, develops resilience during challenging times and ignites transformational change. We kick off this series with an interview with Catherine Baker, a leadership and mindset specialist, whose book *Staying the Distance* shines a light on the unseen lessons that sport offers for long-term performance (p10).

Also, in this issue, we have an update on the Workforce Governance and Registration Scheme Project, an important sector-wide piece of work that aims to support, safeguard and regulate the workforce to allow everyone taking part in sport and physical activity to enjoy safe and high-quality experiences (p14).

As we start this new year, the sector is in a positive place, but challenges remain from making the industry more attractive to a diverse workforce. As always, we will listen and work with you, our partners and stakeholders, to address these challenges so that the people working across our sector continue to play a pivotal role in the health and wellbeing of the public.

UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS

AROUND THE WORLD: DIY FITNESS MONITORING

Researchers at AIMS Public Health report that the practice of 'do-it-yourself biology' has exploded in Southern Europe, as awareness increases of lifestyle-related health issues affecting the populations there. Such issues include sedentarism, unhealthy weight, glucose intolerance, raised blood pressure and impaired blood lipid profile.

The practice, known as 'biohacking', refers to making incremental changes through diet, exercise, lifestyle and supplementation to improve health, well-being and cognitive performance. This reflects a trend toward consumer behaviour shaping how fitness is managed today. The five countries surveyed in AIMS's research were Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Devices such as continuous blood glucose monitors, fitness wearables and implanted sensors are "bringing biohacking to the fore", the research said. "This growing trend includes incorporating combination therapy into our daily routines, such as whole body vibration, cryo, heat, red light therapies and intermittent fasting, and has been 'coined' the high-performance lifestyle as it aims to optimise our existence."

AIMS Public Health is an international Open Access journal devoted to publishing peer-reviewed, high quality, original papers in the field of public health.

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SPORT WALES GETS PEOPLE MOVING IN 2024

Adapting your sport and fitness sessions for participants' different needs and speaking more Welsh are among the tips to get people in Wales more active.

Sport Wales is sharing such advice to ensure that every person in Wales has "the opportunity and ability to be active" in 2024.

According to a National Survey for Wales cited by the Welsh national sport organisation, nearly 1m people in Wales don't take part in regular sport or physical activity.

"There's lots of reasons someone might not want to take part, and we know that participation levels are still below average for women, disabled adults and those living in material deprivation," Sport Wales said in a statement. It is urging organisations to consider some of the inspirational moves made by Welsh groups in the past year to eliminate barriers to participation.

Projects cited include:

- Rhiwbina Ladies Bowls Club started a veterans session for older members who struggled to keep up with the regular classes.
- Shotton Town Junior Football Club was created to ensure deaf or hard of hearing children could get active and play football.
- Rhondda Dragons Dodgeball Club created a junior team in response to a Sport Wales School Sport Survey that over 100,000 children in Wales wanted more opportunities to play dodgeball.
- Aberystwyth Basketball Club launched glow-in-the-dark basketball sessions to help women and girls at their club feel more comfortable.
- Dysinni Hockey Club has adapted the sport to suit participants' needs, such as providing walking hockey for those who want to take things slower and indoor hockey for the colder months of the year.

In addition to encouraging organisations to adapt their offerings to participants' needs, other tips for helping every person into activity shared by Sport Wales are:

- Become more environmentally sustainable, through measures such as recycling old sports kit.
- Aim for committee diversity and better representation through consideration of factors including gender, age, religion, disability, socio-economic background.
- Speak more Welsh. Over 500,000 people in Wales speak Welsh, "so offering Welsh language sessions, or even just including Welsh words in your day-to-day activities, can go a long way in helping Welsh speakers feel comfortable at your club", Sport Wales said. An example is Llewod Lambed Netball Club. With 75% of members speaking Welsh, they offer netball in both Welsh and England, meaning that local players can access the sport in their first language.
- Get funding for their club. The Be Active Wales Fund offers grants to clubs that aim to improve sport participation in their areas.

PERSONALISED FITNESS TOPS FITNESS TRENDS FOR 2024

Personalised fitness that includes improved wearable technology and AI-enabled gym technology tops the list of fitness trends for 2024, according to new insight from leisure operator David Lloyd.

With headquarters in the UK and 101 of its 130 clubs located here, David Lloyd has identified six top fitness trends for the coming year.

Following the personalised fitness theme, which also includes the use of super-smart body analysis machines, other trends identified are:

- Multi-generational family fitness including family fitness classes and child-family racquet sports

- Community wellness such as group exercise classes, running clubs and social sports
- Slow-building fitness habits, exemplified by so-called 'cosy cardio' practices such as lighting a candle while exercising and 'hot girl walks' that involve listening to podcasts while walking outdoors
- The importance of sleep
- Nutrition and gut health including intermittent fasting and mindful eating.

A "clear theme" of finding calm and balance in 2024 was revealed in the David Lloyd study. 2024 workouts will be about "ease, enjoyment and combining fitness with family time", it said. Other survey highlights showed that 39% of participants want to try something new in 2024 and 36% pledged to say 'yes' to more life opportunities.

SUPPLIERS VIEWPOINT

SPATEX 2024 ADDRESSES THE HOT TOPIC OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Water leisure exhibition SPATEX 2024 is addressing the hot topic of climate change at the event being held at the Coventry Building Society Arena from 6-8 February.

With swimming pools and hot tubs big consumers of energy, sustainability and saving energy is high on the agenda.

Free to attend, SPATEX 2024 will display the very latest trends and innovations from around the world. With over 100 exhibitors, including leading water leisure suppliers, it's aimed at professionals involved in the provision, planning, design, construction, and management of leisure, play and sports facilities.

"It provides the first opportunity in 2024 to see the significant advances that have been made in energy, saving across all sectors of the water leisure industry. It's a buoyant market with products promoting low energy, low carbon footprint coming on-stream all the time, such as one-piece pools with super-efficient insulation; ingenious variable speed pumps; air source heat pumps etc," organisers said.

"The topic of energy saving is also brought into sharp focus in our free double seminar programme," said SPATEX organiser Michele Bridle. "We aim to demonstrate that with education, the latest technological advances and careful management, there are effective ways to significantly reduce energy consumption and bills. It's this positive message that, with the help of our exhibitors and experts, we aim to communicate to our visitors."

New for 2024, authoritative industry bodies, including Swimming Teachers' Association (STA), Institute of Swimming (IoS), Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS), Legionella Control Association (LCA) and Water Management Society (WMS), will be out in force – holding extra seminars and networking events, both for their members and exhibition attendees.

"SPATEX offers the potential to meet over 1,000 people from the water leisure industry in one day," organisers said.

Visit the SPATEX Help Desk at the entrance to the exhibition hall.

Register for free at www.spatex.co.uk.

The Coventry Building Society Arena, Coventry CV6 6GE. For more info: helen@spatex.co.uk Tel: +44 (0) 1264 358558.

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

CATHERINE BAKER

We talk to the founder of Sport and Beyond about leadership, mindset and behaviours that drive world-class performance

Success is a delicate balance of attitude, behaviours and the right coaching, whether that's in business or sport. Catherine Baker is a former corporate lawyer turned leadership coach who has harnessed her business expertise and passion for sport to drive sustained performance among both aspiring and established leaders. An experienced non-executive director, Baker is also a Trustee on the Board of the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust.

"We all know that athletes perform differently depending on the coaching and environment. Using proven techniques from the world of sport and business, I help people get the most out of themselves and their teams to achieve their goals," she explains.

SPORT AND CORPORATE EXPERTISE

Baker's story began in a bustling household where she was one of five children. Given lots of freedom to roam in the great outdoors and constantly competing with her older siblings, she fostered a passion for sport, especially tennis and hockey. At the age of 12, she was advised to focus on just one. Unwilling to choose, Baker continued to excel at both sports, going on to play at representational level. She qualified as an LTA [Lawn Tennis Association] coach at 18, coaching in summer camps, before taking a degree in Economics and Politics, followed by a fast-track law conversion course and pursuing a career in corporate law. Throughout her career, she continued to play sport, even enjoying the unique experience of being the first Westerner to play hockey for the Singapore Cricket Club while on secondment.

After 13 years in corporate law, Baker faced a pivotal moment. Baker, her husband and their children had moved to Yorkshire when her husband joined his family's distribution business. Juggling her career in London with three young sons proved untenable, prompting

"Athletes perform differently depending on the coaching. Using proven techniques from the world of sport and business, I help people get the most out of themselves and their teams to achieve their goals"

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

Baker to take up part-time work, which included teaching law at the University of York. But it was qualifying in safeguarding training for the LTA and then training in personality profiling to help athletes transition into the world of work that marked her entry into sport as a profession, not just as a hobby.

In 2015, Baker combined her sport and corporate expertise by launching her company Sport and Beyond. The original aim of the business was two-fold: to help athletes make better decisions around which direction to take in their post-sport career; and to support businesses with the mindset, team and leadership expertise from elite sport. By 2019 she had grown the business to a team of 13, working with a range of clients including the likes of BT, HSBC and PGIM from the corporate world, as well as top international law firms, partnering with subject experts and elite athletes to deliver the training. Faced, however, with significant personal challenges in 2019 including her father's illness, which led to an increase in her wider family responsibilities, Baker decided to restructure the business returning to a solo venture primarily focused on leadership coaching and keynote speaking.

Baker's personal mission is 'to inspire belief and enable progress' and she helps leaders to change their habits and behaviour to boost their performance. Over the last five years she has coached a large number of CEOs from the sports sector, along with CEOs and senior leaders from many other sectors.

In 2023, she launched her first book *Staying the Distance* – the *Financial Times* Book of the Month – which addresses the challenges facing leaders today.

STAYING THE DISTANCE

"Leadership can be hard, and it can certainly be relentless. People can often feel exposed and out on their own. This was exacerbated during the pandemic, when business leaders had to navigate an uncertain and constantly changing environment. They were operating at an enforced sprint, and many felt out of control. It was incredibly taxing and required a skillset that many had not yet developed," says Baker.

> "Some of the leaders I was working with were struggling to keep their head above water and sustain their performance. When the pandemic finished, people assumed it was all over ... but there is an after-effect"

"Some of the leaders I was working with were struggling to keep their head above water and sustain their performance. When the pandemic finished, people assumed it was all over, but just like a tsunami, there is an after-effect. Leaders are still grappling with the challenges that have come out of the pandemic along with all the others we are seeing in the world today."

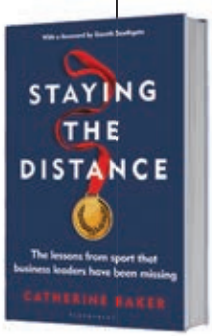
These common struggles among leaders served as inspiration for *Staying the Distance*, which combines some of the lesser-known lessons from sport with actionable techniques to drive long-term performance.

"Whether they are running a blue-chip company or a leisure centre, most leaders are working in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) environment today. Chronic problems around leadership have become acute. To survive, every organisation needs strong, coherent and sustained leadership."

The book targets aspiring and established leaders alike. Divided in two halves, the first focuses on how leaders can get the best out of themselves over the long term, covering aspects such as attitude, behaviours and beliefs. Featuring a mix of new stories, fresh insight and research from sport and business, it addresses common challenges like imposter syndrome and fear of failure, providing practical tips to build confidence and overcome obstacles to help people realise their ambitions and turbo charge their careers. Jokes about the book making a useful doorstep aside, Baker's 22-year-old son found it genuinely useful for navigating his career choices after university, which highlights the relevance of her teachings.

The second half delves into the leadership and environmental factors that bring out the best in teams and organisations. It draws parallels from sport, emphasising the importance of coaching and culture in optimising team performance.

Baker's experience and credibility in both the sport and business worlds allows her to bridge the gap and provide learnings and strategies that leaders can apply to their working lives to propel themselves, their teams and their organisations forward.



Note: We will be sharing some of the key learnings from Baker's book throughout the year to help sport and physical activity leaders steer a course through ongoing uncertainties, build resilience and foster sustained leadership.

Staying the Distance *is published by Bloomsbury Business.*

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SPORT ENGLAND

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

WHERE ARE WE WITH WORKFORCE GOVERNANCE?

Dr Vinny Webb, CIMPSA's head of workforce governance and sporting bodies, gives an update on the Workforce Governance and Registration Scheme Project

Q WHY IS WORKFORCE GOVERNANCE A CRITICAL FOCUS FOR CIMSPA?

The ambition we are striving for is that everyone taking part in sport and physical activity can enjoy safe and high-quality experiences and are supported in achieving their goals in a positive environment.

Workforce governance involves creating clear and workable policies, aligned systems and processes to support, safeguard and self-regulate the workforce working in sport and physical activity, be that a paid professional or engaged volunteer. It's something the industry grappled with for years with little progress. However, the launch of the 2017 Duty of Care report and subsequent independent reviews including the 2017 Cycling Independent Review and 2021 Sheldon report into Child Sexual Abuse in Football, in addition to the recently published Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Get Active strategy highlighted the need and support for this work to achieve a future for sport and physical activity. Moreover, the Workforce Governance and Registration Scheme Project forms part of the Sport England strategy, Uniting the Movement. It also aligns with the policy response from Sport England and UK Sport to the Whyte review into allegations of abuse in gymnastics. This project is a sector-wide approach to improving the sporting environments for all.

Therefore, in January 2023, in response to the Whyte Review, Sport England and

ISTOCK

UK Sport committed to work with CIMSPA, national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and other sporting bodies to develop a prototype national workforce registration scheme. Covering sport coaches in the first instance, the register will identify to employers, deployers, clubs, participants and parents that the coach is 'fit to practice' in specific roles, eg. participation coach and pathway coach with specific populations such as children, women and girls, in specific environments like a club, school and leisure centre. If the prototype is successful, the intention is to roll out across most workforce roles.

We have brilliant people working in our sector who commit to developing themselves and give lots of time to their participants' development. Therefore, workforce governance is as much about supporting and showcasing the contributions and professional outlook of the sport and physical activity workforce as protecting all participants against potential harm.

Understanding the prevalence of **harm**

37%

of athletes reported having **experienced one form of physical abuse at least once** as a child in sport*

61%

of athletes reported having **experienced one form of emotional abuse at least once** as a child in sport*

75%

Child emotional harm in UK sport has been found to be as high as 75%**

38%

Other studies beyond the UK have found lower rates at 38%***

*Global level Project CARE (Census of Athletes Rights Experiences) 2021

** Alexander et al., 2011

*** Vertommen et al., 2016

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

Support for workforce governance

83%

of parents believe **providers should have the same safety checks as school teachers**

83%

of providers believe **providers should have the same safety checks as school teachers**

6 IN EVERY 10

Parents have a **concern about safety**

70%

Approximately 70% of parents **supervise their child's activity** due to concern over safeguarding and injury

81%

of parents are **interested in a National Register** – with safety and competence prominence

Feedback from Phase 1 WFG Consultation

Q YOU HAVE COMPLETED PHASES 1 AND 2 OF THE WORKFORCE GOVERNANCE CONSULTATION OVER THE LAST NUMBER OF YEARS. WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Phase 1 investigated the current state of play and the appetite for a project of this kind, while Phase 2 focused on research and engagement with stakeholders across the sector to gain a deeper understanding of how organisations were supporting the workforce and mitigating workforce related risks. Phase 2 also examined the role and existing methods of workforce regulation and registration, and appraised best practice from other sectors and countries.

The findings of the consultation showed that the quality of existing regulation is inconsistent and that coverage of existing regulation across the sector is low compared to participation.

It also unveiled widespread support for workforce self-regulation. For example, 83% of parents believe providers should have the same safety checks as schoolteachers and 6 in every 10 parents have a concern about safety.

See https://shorturl.at/hlxO5 for more information about Phases 1 and 2 of the project.

Q WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THE CURRENT PHASE 3 OF THE PROJECT?

We believe a whole system approach is the most effective strategy to protect participants from harm, promote safe sport and support the workforce. To this end, Phase 3 covers four works streams: workforce evaluation; standards, policy and stakeholder engagement; support, auditing and action planning; and workforce registration scheme. We have broken the project down into three phases: discovery, consolidation of findings, and finally test and learn. We are currently working in phase 1.

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IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

Q YOU'VE STARTED A SPORT ENGLAND FUNDED PILOT TO DEVELOP AND TEST A NATIONAL WORKFORCE REGISTRATION SCHEME. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THIS?

The national workforce registration scheme will hold details of the workforce who have a 'licence to practice', ie. the workforce who are trained, developed, appropriately qualified and have had their credibility verified by meeting the required standard. We want the sport and physical activity workforce to be proud of the registration scheme; a scheme that recognises their contributions and commitment to self-development and one that protects them alongside their participants. It will help promote workforce competence and will identify the 'point of difference' in the workforce that is committed to supporting participants meet their motivations, to those who do the minimum and work outside of their role 'scope', their training and skill sets. The scheme will recognise the hundreds of thousands of great people contributing to our sector by demonstrating their commitment to standards and continuous professional development.

The register aims to mitigate the number of people who intend to do harm from moving between sports, while providing a protection mechanism for all the really great sports and physical workforce out there. In doing so, it will help improve trust and relationships with stakeholders, the public and government who want us to be seen as a credible, well-governed, self-regulated sector.

We will also help to develop processes and policies that support participants to report harm when it happens without fear of reprisals, so they know how and where to find support and have confidence that their report will be dealt with in a timely and transparent manner.

Q WHAT'S INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING A PROTOTYPE WORKFORCE REGISTER?

We are currently working with sporting bodies and key stakeholders to determine the requirements of a national registration scheme and to build the prototype workforce register. The project is complex and challenging. It involves extensive engagement with NGBs and other key stakeholders to understand their digital maturity and evaluate their existing systems – some sporting bodies already operate their own coaching and workforce registration schemes, so they are already on the journey. However, the challenge we all face with technology is the fact that not all IT architecture is connected to pass data from platform to platform. The engagement also includes collaboration with safeguarding organisations in the system and sharing best practices among sports to ensure a co-ordinated and informed approach.

We are focusing on the role of sports coaches initially to establish proof of concept, which, if successful, will be expanded to cover other roles like assistant coaches, coach developers and other vital roles within the sector.

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The ultimate aim is for sports bodies to host their own registers where possible, feeding data into a central data vault. This type of federated model ensures that each sport maintains control over its data, which will then be verified and fed into the master vault, which the public can access to verify that a coach is qualified, competent and safe.

The project has interim milestones every six months, and the aim is to reach a prototype by the end of the two-year period. The project will end in September 2025 with recommendations for a potential full implementation.

Q WILL THERE BE A PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN?

If the prototype proves viable, there are plans for a public awareness campaign to educate participants, parents and the wider public about the benefits and purpose of the workforce registration scheme. Increasing awareness will help to build trust and confidence in the sector, ensuring that people understand the measures in place to promote safety and professionalism.

Q HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU ABOUT THE FUTURE OF WORKFORCE GOVERNANCE IN THE SECTOR?

I've worked in the sector for more than 20 years, and I've never seen such co-ordination and momentum in workforce governance before. I'm encouraged by the want and the will for change that I see across government, sport policy makers such as Sport England, UK Sport, sports bodies and other key stakeholders. This is one of the most important pieces of work ever to take place in the sector and as far as I'm aware, there is nothing being done on this scale anywhere else in the world.

Improving workforce **competence, confidence & recognition**

63%
of coaches are not affiliated to any sporting body

54%
have no qualification or training

40%
lack confidence in their coaching practice

47%
of coaches believe their contribution is not recognised

Statistics from Coaching in the UK 2019 Report – YouGov, UK Coaching

IN DEPTH

RIGHT DIRECTIONS

THE QUEST FOR GREATNESS

When it comes to delivering an exceptional customer journey our sector is in pretty good hands, according to Sport England's Quest. The quality assurance scheme, which has been defining industry standards and good practice for more than 25 years, rated 95% of facilities 'Good or above' for their overall customer journey between September 2022 and May 2023.

Lorenzo Clark is one of the 30 existing Quest assessors that travel the length and breadth of the UK (and the islands) each year, evaluating the country's leisure facilities to ensure our services are delivering a positive impact on the community.

"It's a great job," he says. "Understanding how operators deliver their products and services, and witnessing centres that take real pride in helping people, makes this role so satisfying; to see best practice in action is very fulfilling.

"I've assessed everything from elite centres like Bisham Abbey and Lee Valley White Water Centre, to community centres and skate parks attached to schools. Assessing Plas y Brenin National Outdoor Centre at the foot of Mount Snowdon, close to where I was born, was fantastic, but university assessments are another world altogether, with a different community. Each visit is different and generally the people you meet are so enthused, it's brilliant."

JOIN THE QUEST BRIGADE

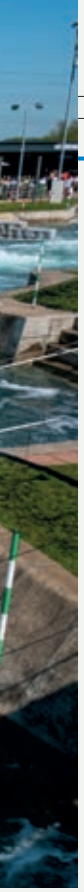
With so many of the UK's 2,000+ leisure centres undertaking Quest, and the number steadily rising, opportunities for new assessors to join the team are currently available. Sarah Lobo is Head of External Accreditations at Right Directions, which manages Quest on behalf of Sport England. She says: "Pre-Covid, we were regularly assessing around third of the country's leisure centres and we're quickly building back up to this, so we are looking to recruit new assessors to undertake a minimum of four assessments a year – though many choose to do more."

A Quest assessor must have at least five years' leisure facilities or active communities' management experience, with extensive knowledge of best practice in health & safety management and operational requirements, to help them identify areas of performance improvement for centres and their teams. Personal experience of a facility or team going through a Quest assessment is also beneficial, as well as a personal interest in sport, leisure, health and general wellbeing.

Once fully trained, assessors are sent a list of possible assessments each month and can liaise with their chosen facility to agree a date within a flexible one-month window. Assessors can undertake additional training through Quest, enabling them to appraise specialist Quest Plus modules, including Swim England, Learn to Swim, Exercise Referral and Tackling Inequalities in Leisure.

FOR THE LOVE OF LEISURE

Clark, whose full-time role is a contract manager with Everyone Active, has been a Quest assessor since 2000. In this time, he's completed more than 200 assessments. He says: "I started in the leisure industry in 1987 as a lifeguard, mainly to support



my swimming and waterpolo career. During the last 36 years I've covered every role from fitness instructor and swimming teacher to stadium manager, area manager, director of operations, general manager and my current position, and have worked in the public sector, trust and community sector, as well as the private sector. I love the industry and love helping people get healthy and fit; the number of families that enjoy our facilities always makes me smile.

"My journey with Quest started in the 1990s as a mystery visitor and I became an assessor 10 years later thanks to my mentor and life-long friend Mike Shutt, who opened my eyes to really understanding what makes leisure tick. If you clicked with him you 'got' leisure and why you do it, as it's never been for the money, always for the difference we make to people's lives.

"Mike worked for Leeds City Council and I met him as a young assistant manager. He would arrive just when you were locking up the centre to help educate around what should be switched off to save energy, way before anyone even thought about this. He wanted Leeds to become best-of-class. He truly believed in best practice and sharing great examples to help develop the industry and provide a world class service. He invested in me as a person, encouraged me to develop, introduced me to ISRM (now CIMSPA), and really motivated my career in leisure and thus Quest.

"To be a Quest assessor you need to understand the operational side of the industry, the strategic direction from Sport England and the wider industry whilst being open minded to the fact everyone believes they are carrying out best practice. You need to understand why they think that, and check and challenge it in a positive way. You must be able to talk to all staff at every level. The front of house team are usually the leisure centre's biggest advocates, as they get to see all the customers and truly believe they are doing a great job. Most centres have a core of staff that have pride, passion and a determination to be the best. This could include a duty manager, an office role, a lifeguard, a cleaner and front of house. If you can find these team members, you get to hear everything!"

> "You need to be broad minded and pragmatic in order to view each facility as a new individual centre rather than cloudingyour mind with what you or others do well"
>
> **Lorenzo Clark**
> Quest assessor

While Clark believes the route from mystery visitor to Quest assessor made his journey easier, his advice for new Quest assessors is to be open minded. He explains: "Having been a mystery visitor before becoming a Quest assessor, I generally understand if what I'm seeing is the real truth. But you need to be broad minded and pragmatic in order to view each facility as a new individual centre rather than clouding your mind with what you or others do well. Yes, there is a benchmark, but assessments need to be fair and reasonable. Helping teams to understand the positives of their result is a really nice aspect of the role, nobody wants to fail and that needs to be on your mind when assessing.

"I always like return to centres for their re-assessment (Directional Review). It helps to complete the process as I can understand if they have evolved, embraced the process and made meaningful changes as a result. For instance, when I'm doing a Quest assessment I always ask myself two questions: Would I like to work at the site? And is it safe? Whenever I see a lifeguard leave the pool unattended I cringe and want to end the assessment in my head straight away. I once had a mystery visit report where lifeguards were playing football back and forth across a pool full of customers. Anything to do with poor safety still shocks me."

Clark's advice to anyone thinking about becoming a Quest assessor: "Do you currently do Quest, and if not why not? I was told very early on in my career that, even if my leisure centre didn't do Quest, I would need a business plan covering Quest's core elements, so why not learn from the best and help the industry improve by reviewing it from the inside?"

Quest assessors are paid to complete the assessment and write up the report and all expenses are covered. To find out more about becoming a Quest assessor contact: **quest@rightdirections.co.uk**.

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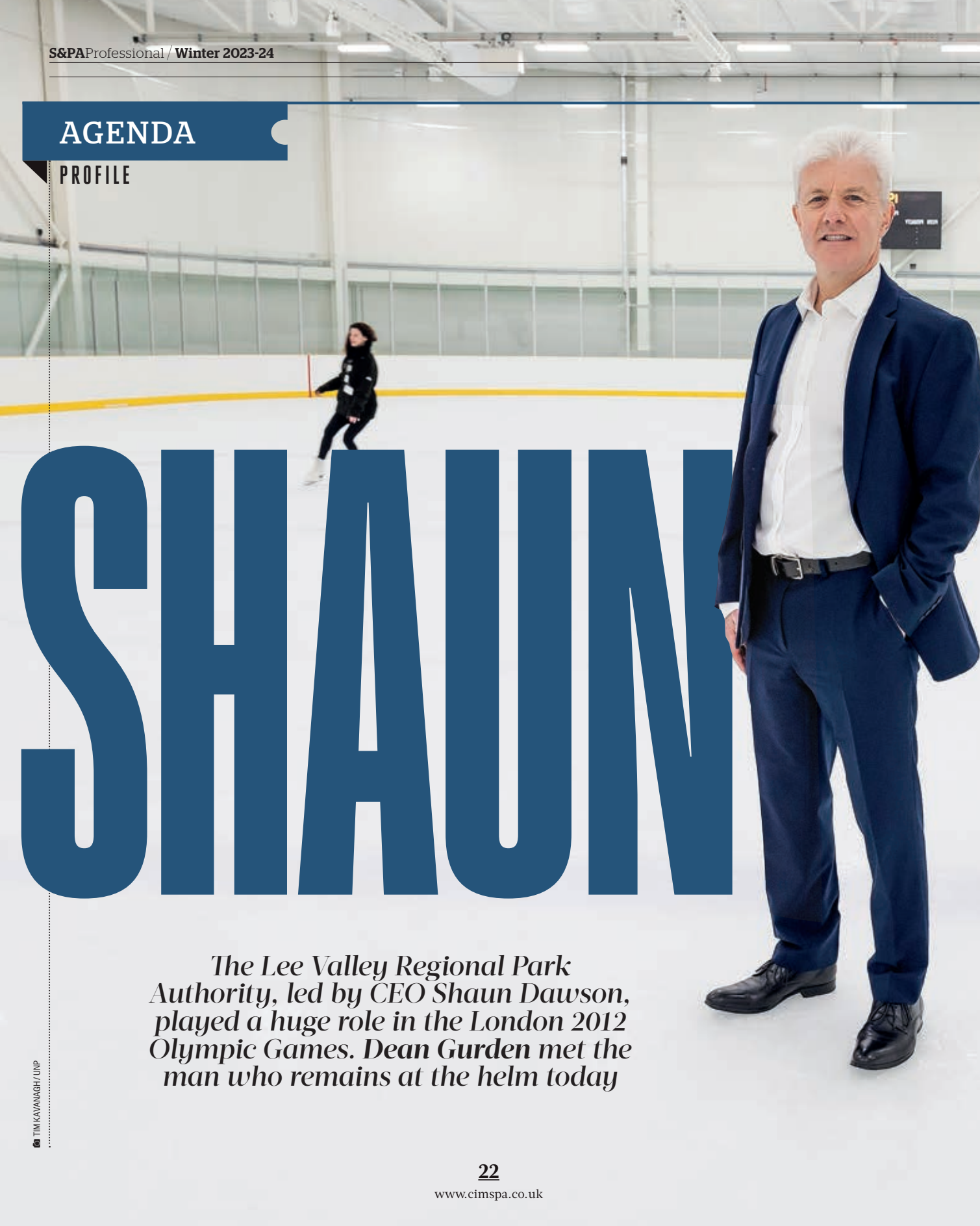
AGENDA

PROFILE

SHAUN

*The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, led by CEO Shaun Dawson, played a huge role in the London 2012 Olympic Games. **Dean Gurden** met the man who remains at the helm today*



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DAWSON

26 YEARS AND COUNTING

AGENDA

PROFILE

Look up the average tenure of a chief executive, and the stats show it's between four and nine years. This makes it even more astonishing that Shaun Dawson, CEO of Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (LVRPA), has been in post for more than 26 years. He clearly loves what he's doing and is obviously doing it very well indeed.

We can all probably recall that magical summer of 2012 when London hosted the Olympic Games. LVRPA played a central part in making those games a success with no less than three Olympic venues operating in the shape of the VeloPark, White Water Centre, and Hockey and Tennis Centre.

As CEO, Dawson was there to steer LVRPA through this exciting and challenging period, and the experience he gained has made him much in demand advising others on similarly high-profile events. As a member of the UK government's Rio 2016 Advisory Panel, he spent time in Brazil advising city, state and federal governments on sporting legacy work. He was also called upon to provide advice to city officials, government ministers and the various agencies for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

But back to that 26-year tenure. "I was quite a young chap when I arrived in 1997 at the age of 34," says Dawson. "My intention was indeed to stay for about five or so years, but then the Olympics came along and there was a big job to do. It was like turning a juggernaut around to create something truly special, which I really think we've done over the last couple of decades."

The early 2000s, as the Olympics started to loom large, was a time when Dawson would perhaps have been considering his next position. "But it was just too big an opportunity to miss," he admits. "Even then, who knew it would consume me in the nicest possible way for the next couple of decades – I just love it here."

Having studied ecology at the University of East Anglia, I ask Dawson how he got from there to his current role in the recreation and sport sector. "I was always very sporting from a young boy," he explains. "It was the usual cricket and football, but I excelled in karate and was European under-21 team champion in 1983. The ecology degree combined with my love of sport meant a Master's in Recreation Management was a good next choice for me."

As Dawson points out, it was a time when the sport and leisure industry was really taking off and starting to develop as a professional industry in the late 1980s. He had a couple of roles in the public and private sector – one of which was assistant director of education and leisure at the London Borough of Hackney – before joining LVRPA. "I was fortunate that the job came along then, as I was clearly well suited to it," he says.

He readily admits that park authorities are quirky organisations. "We're creatures of statute set up by our own Act of Parliament in 1966, the Park Act," he explains. "There aren't any other organisations quite like us." LVPRA was set up to regenerate the whole 40km stretch of the Lee Valley, but with an emphasis on built leisure and sports facilities.

"The big challenge has always been one of identity," Dawson explains. "As LVPRA is part-funded by the taxpayers of London, Essex and Hertfordshire, we've always needed to create

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something that appeals regionally as well as to the local communities."

He cites the newly opened Lee Valley Ice Centre as a great example of putting the community at the heart of any new endeavour. The original centre opened back in 1984, but a major redevelopment and expansion was completed as recently as this June.

"The first thing we decided was to have two ice rinks – one for elite skaters and one for the general public," he says. "Therefore, the amount of available time for public skating has increased significantly. Having a fitness gym also added to the offering for the local community. And we included rooms that could be used for local community meetings, so it's not just about sports activity. It's using the space in different ways."

> "The environment surrounding the Centre is just as important as the building itself"

North of the Ice Centre also lie the vast open recreational spaces of Leyton and Walthamstow marshes. "We get a lot of cyclists and dog walkers coming by the Ice Centre," adds Dawson, "so we built a hatch out from the cafe to serve these passers-by. It's a little thing, but that came about by listening to the local community. In fact, 5% of the budget for the Ice Centre was spent on the landscape [about £1.5m] and it's achieved a 30% biodiversity net gain, which is phenomenal. The environment surrounding the Centre is just as important to the local community as the building itself."

Dawson is adamant that you can't just open the doors and expect everyone to just come into your facility. You've got to intervene with certain groups and communities. "We have a Community Access Fund, which is used to help disadvantaged groups across London, Essex and Herefordshire with transport, coaching or just the general entrance price," he says. "After all, some groups will look at these wonderful venues and just think it's not for them, and others simply can't afford it."

Dawson says some publicly-funded sports and leisure facilities need greater understanding of their relationships with different audiences. "Most local authority facilities are very much driven by a community need, in terms of making sure

AGENDA

PROFILE

they're accessible to their local community from a pricing, programming and accessibility point of view," he says. "But the pressures on the public purse are only going to increase.

"It's imperative that they are designed in such a way that not only do they keep the community at their heart, but that they have other commercial opportunities built in. They need to be able to commercialise some of their activity to generate income to support their community activities. This is the approach we've always taken with all our venues over the last 20-odd years."

As Dawson points out, some community facilities can't generate income for their maintenance, upgrading and modernisation. "They have to understand their key audiences and the realism of public funding, and make sure that in 10 or 20 years, they can adapt and respond with continual investment," he says. "Thankfully, we're seeing a lot of venues that get it right."

> "I guess the pandemic was probably the most difficult, forcing us to close venues and use our reserves wisely"

Ask him to name the biggest challenge he's faced personally and he's hard-pressed to name just one. "The financial crisis, navigating our way through the austerity years and the energy crisis were really tough," he says. "But I guess the pandemic was probably the most difficult, forcing us to close venues and use our reserves carefully and wisely."

In fact, the issue of funding has loomed large over the entire last decade. "Our funding ratio used to be about 70% public funding and 30% from other commercial activities," he says, "but that's been completely reversed. We're now in a position where the majority comes from non-taxpayer sources."

But the one thing that Dawson is clear about is that none of these obstacles have been overcome by him alone. Asked if he has any tips for other aspiring leaders in the sector and he immediately says: "Recruit good people and look after them. You deliver through a team, so go the extra mile to get the best people and then take care of them. Thankfully, we're blessed at having talent at all levels across all our disciplines."

As a leader, he also knows how important it is to be out there and be seen. "Have regular briefings," he

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advises. "Don't underestimate the importance to your workforce of you being visible and accessible as a leader. This was really brought home during the pandemic when we had online briefings on a regular basis."

He's also a strong advocate of learning from others. "We've always looked for lessons to be learned at an international level. The challenges that the sport and leisure sector faces here in the UK are very similar to those faced across Europe, the US, Australia and so on. You'll find solutions and ideas out there in the responses of others."

Ask Dawson what he's most proud of having achieved and his answer encompasses this international and local connection. "Back in 1997, the LVRPA was very much unknown and tucked away," he says. "It had a portfolio of sporting venues that were 30 years old, out of date, not relevant to modern requirements and very, very local in their outlook. What I hope I've helped try to achieve over the last 20-odd years is create a portfolio of regional venues with a national and international dimension, which draw people in from across the region. That's something of which I'm very proud.

"I was invited to speak in Spain recently, because people look at the Lee Valley legacy story and realise they've got so much to learn from us. There's no question that we've done a good job and it's nice to see that others see that and want to learn from what we've done. At the same time, we're making a difference to so many lives locally – that's probably my proudest achievement."

And after 26 years, what next? Dawson has no plans of stepping down anytime soon. "All our venues are now over 10 years old," he points out. "It's always an ongoing story. There's a big chapter of investment to come, and we'll continue to look afresh at our venues and how we can diversify them. There's still so much to do."

LVRPA in numbers

13M

Number of people that have **used the three Olympic legacy venues since opening** to public (VeloPark, White Water Centre, and Hockey and Tennis Centre)

8.3M

Number of people **visiting the park annually**

34

Number of **major international events hosted** at its legacy venues

22,000

Number of disadvantaged individuals having **engaged in its funded programmes**

40,000

Number of schoolchildren that **took part in activities at Lee Valley Athletics Centre in 2022/23**

DIVERSITY

SWIMMING

MAKING WAVES IN TEACHING

By Caroline Roberts

Swimming teachers have always been in short supply, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. The Institute of Swimming is on a mission to change this

Swim England estimates that around 660,000 children are missing out on swimming lessons every year, and those from ethnically diverse or disadvantaged backgrounds and those with disabilities can find lessons even harder to access. The Institute of Swimming (IOS), the leading approved training provider of Swim England qualifications, has launched a series of new recruitment academies to provide more teachers to help address the problem.

"In teaching a child to swim, you're giving them a skill that could potentially save their life as well as the confidence and ability to enjoy water," says Rebecca Cox, managing director of the IOS. "Swimming is also a gateway sport. If my kids couldn't swim, I couldn't take them bodyboarding or on a little boat when we go on holiday as I wouldn't feel sure that they were safe."

This year's new academies have grown out of the general Recruitment Academy programme, launched by the IOS in 2018 to help address the difficulties many operators find in recruiting and retaining swimming teachers. "Around half of our teachers are in the 16 to 18 age bracket," says Cox. "It's a great job for them, as it's a safe space to work in and it helps fund them through education, but it also means there's a high attrition rate

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and we need people who are going to stay in the role for longer. Although we'd been training teachers for years, we didn't feel like we were solving the problem."

The original academy model is designed to respond to operators' specific staffing needs by using social media and community networks to source trainees in the areas where they are most needed, and also to focus on attracting those aged over 25. It provides candidates with low-cost access to Swim England's Level 1 Swimming Assistant qualification before moving them on to the Level 2 Swimming Teacher qualification, with funding for the L2 covered by the prospective employer. "It provides an end-to-end solution for finding new staff and training them, and because of the selection processes we use, the majority of candidates end up in employment," explains Cox.

It has also opened up opportunities to work with people from less represented groups, she adds, and the scheme has now evolved with external funding being used for specific programmes targeting diversity. Swim England statistics show that almost half of children from ethnically diverse groups are unable to swim 25m, while this applies to only 14% of the white population. What's more, figures from the Royal Life Saving Society show

DIVERSITY

SWIMMING

CASE STUDY

Making a splash in teaching **Shabana Qureshi**

Shabana Qureshi is completing her Level 2 qualification at the academy based at Sparkhill Pool and Fitness Centre in Birmingham so she can run swimming sessions for women in her community. Her job involves promoting community wellbeing and she found that a lot of women wanted to learn to swim but there was no instructor available to run women-only sessions at the pool.

"A lot of the women missed out on swimming at school, and for cultural reasons they don't feel comfortable using a mixed pool. Even though there's a lot of modest swimwear available now, such as burkinis and headwear, they still prefer women-only sessions but there aren't many and they're always oversubscribed. Women from other cultures can feel self-conscious too and it's important that they have those choices.

From novice to instructor within two years, Shabana Qureshi (*far left and above right*) is helping women in her local community become healthy and feel safe in the water

"I only learnt to swim myself in the last 18 months. I was completely new to swimming and the pool environment, and I felt very self-conscious at first. I had a lot of emotional barriers to overcome to even get into the water, but I was very determined. I really enjoyed my lessons, I felt good in the water, and began to gain in confidence as I learnt the strokes. I'm sure that my experience will help others and I'm passionate about sharing my own swimming journey with my community, as I understand what it's like to not have the opportunity to learn as a child. Swimming is often at the centre of family activities, be that a holiday with a pool or a day trip to the seaside. For too long, many women from my community have had to be the bystanders to this family time.

"I'm proud to be a swimming teacher, and I'd like to tell other women like me that it's a great career, it's very inclusive, it's very flexible and can fit round caring responsibilities. My pathway from being a non-swimmer to becoming an instructor was very quick, and if I can do it, then so can anyone."

that cases of drowning are 3.5 times higher among non-white children. "Swimming is predominantly a white sport at all levels and we need to get right back down to the grassroots and ensure that young people who are learning to swim understand that this is a space for them. Having a representative workforce is going to help with that journey."

May 2023 saw the launch of two academy projects, in Southwark and Northampton, focused on increasing ethnic diversity in the workforce. The funding of £10k came from Disney to mark its remake of *The Little Mermaid*, which featured a black actress in the lead role, and from reusable water bottle brand, Ocean Bottle. Another academy ran in Birmingham and the Black Country, funded by Sport England's Inspire 22 Commonwealth Games legacy funding. The external funding has made it possible for training costs that would normally have fallen to operators to be covered. The academies are already starting to have an impact, with 19% of new teachers trained by the IOS now coming from non-white groups, compared to 9% last year.

Meanwhile, the Inclusive Recruitment Academy in Manchester focused on attracting trainees with disabilities. Ellie Bamber (*above and below*), who runs Bambers Inclusive, a swimming school for disabled children and adults, has employed three new staff members via the scheme. "I think it's quite challenging for disabled people to access swimming lessons and it's sad that there aren't more opportunities out there. I get a lot of other swimming schools getting in contact saying they can't cater for a child and asking if we can we help," says Bamber, who herself is disabled.

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"I have a huge waiting list and my blocker in putting on more lessons is a lack of teachers.

"Representation is so important. Teachers who have disabilities come with that lived experience, and an out-of-the box way of thinking. We have a teacher, Sam, who has cerebral palsy and one of our children with reduced use of the legs is really inspired by her. It's very much a case of: 'If she can do it, so can I'. A group of girls were imagining themselves becoming swimming teachers when they're older and they were debating who's going to be Sam and who's going to be Ellie. I think it's so lovely they can see themselves in realistic role models and can see where they fit in."

So far, a total of 172 new teachers have qualified to Level 2 through the academies in 2023 and the IOS estimates that this will could represent access to swimming lessons for an additional 13,000 children. In addition, 44% of teachers coming through the funded academies are aged over 26, an increase of 12% on the previous year.

The IOS is now planning to roll out the programme to other locations under a new brand, Peers on Poolside, designed to train teachers from underrepresented groups. "It's quite embryonic at the moment," says Rebecca. "We're looking at ways we can work with local companies and access more partner funding. We have small pockets of activity at the moment, but it's growing."

HEALTH & SAFETY

RISK ASSESSMENT

THE NEW STANDARD FOR SPORT AND RECREATION

The new international Standard for the sport and physical activity sector breaks new ground and offers greater freedom. Dr Laurence Ball explains

In May 2023, International Standard ISO 4980 or 'Benefit-risk assessment for sports and recreational facilities, activities and equipment' was published. The Standard has major implications for sport and recreation, which are, on the one hand, obvious but on the other, break ground that will hopefully be found to be refreshing, even liberating.

A challenge which providers of sport and recreational activities have faced is that all such activities, from climbing to 10-pin bowling, pose risks of injury to participants. This sometimes leads to prosecutions or civil claims, a consequence that is encouraged by an underlying belief in some quarters that if things were properly managed accidents would not occur. This is exemplified by the oft-used opening gambit of prosecution barristers, which is to say that the fact that an accident happened is proof that the client was exposed to risk.

The retort to this is first that we live in a risk-based society in which the aim is not to eliminate risk but to manage it so far as reasonable or reasonably practicable. This means that some accidents inevitably will happen. Secondly, people are engaged in sport and recreation for multiple reasons, such as the copious health benefits of physical exercise, including mental health, social engagement and enjoyment.

However, a difficulty with the second argument has been that providers are required, under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act (1974) and the Workplace Management Regulations (1999), to carry out a risk assessment. There is no standard specification on how a risk assessment should be done or recorded, but invariably those formats which are on offer, and there are many of them, do not incorporate the benefits of activities. This is unsurprising because risk

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HEALTH & SAFETY

RISK ASSESSMENT

assessment has its roots in factories and workplaces where one is employed for productivity purposes and not personal health benefits. The aim there is to reduce and/or eliminate risk, and there are no other considerations.

Indeed, when work on ISO 4980 was initiated some five years ago it did not include the word 'benefits' in its title either. However, members of the international working group soon determined that sport and recreation were unlike workplaces and required something different: the notion of benefit-risk assessment (B-RA) was settled upon, and the title and content of the Standard changed.

It cannot be said that B-RA is entirely novel. It has been used in other sectors, such as food safety, for many years, and the UK Play Safety Forum, which exists to consider and promote the wellbeing of children and young people through ensuring a balance between safety, risk and challenge in respect of play and leisure provision, has likewise promoted B-RA. However, social change is often slow, and the shift from workplace style risk assessment to B-RA has been impeded by long-standing beliefs and practices. Thus, ISO 4980 is significant in that it provides international recognition and a greater consensus on the importance of a balanced approach.

So what does the new ISO have to say? There are a number of key points. For example, the following is stated:

"A key issue identified is the differentiation of sports and recreational activities from a work activity. Sports and recreational activities are designed for the public good: therefore, public interests are paramount. The public good can include the social, physical, psychological health and welfare of the participant and society. Participation in sport and recreation involves exposure to risk, which is not necessarily a bad thing and can be of benefit to the public good. Exposure to risk in daily life can reduce fear and improves the development of human competency."

"Participation in sport and recreation involves exposure to risk, which is not necessarily a bad thing and can be of benefit to the public good. Exposure to risk in daily life can reduce fear and improves the development of human competency"

The implication of this, as with food safety and play safety, is that there must be a trade-off between the benefits and risks of an activity in order to maximise the overall social utility and public benefits.

The ISO also identifies three types or levels of B-RA depending upon whether the assessment is generic, site-specific or dynamic. A generic assessment could be used to evaluate the risks of an item of equipment, eg. an F1 racing car or a climbing rope, a site-specific

assessment would address the race circuit or a specific climbing wall, and the dynamic assessment would address the real-time organisation and marshalling of a race or, in the case of hill walking, the changing environment, weather, fitness and shifting capabilities of participants.

Dynamic B-RAs differ from the other forms in that they cannot be written down. In the UK there is a requirement to record risk assessments but dynamic assessments, potentially the most important in many situations, are the result of complex thought processes by activity leaders that do not permit such a goal.

A further issue revolves around who is competent to do these assessments. It is obvious that B-RA requires knowledge of both the benefits and the risks of activities. This fact tends to enhance the import of activity leaders because it is generally they who are immersed in their activity and consequently have the greatest knowledge of it, its benefits, and the capabilities and interests of their clients. This is presumed to be a positive shift because the practice of using inspections by external agents which has evolved in some sectors has limitations - for example, inspectors only get a snapshot of an activity and may not even see it in operation, and may not even have personal experience of the activity.

For those readers who think that B-RA might have something to offer, the form provided by the Play Safety Forum might be of interest. This was designed as an easy-to-use tool to support play providers in balancing the benefits of an activity with any inherent risk, taking into account the risks while recognising the benefits to children and young people of challenging play experiences. Although written for play providers and play workers, the form can be straightforwardly adapted for other activities.

The PSF's initiative has been supported by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the UK Government. Dame Judith Hackitt, former chair of HSE, said of it: "HSE endorses the proportionate advice in the RBA Form. We should all make sure that needless health and safety excuses do not get in the way of activities. Of course take sensible and reasonable precautions, but let young people play."

STANDARD

ISO 4980

- Recognises the importance of the benefits of sport and physical activity as well as the risks
- Describes a process whereby the acceptability of a sport activity should be based on a comparison of benefits and risks
- Restores agency to practitioners

Clearly, ISO 4980 has a variety of major implications for sport and recreation. Practitioners and providers of sport and physical activity will have no problem in recognising the immense public benefits of their professions, and will know that this should all along have been an obvious part of any assessment process. The ISO confirms this and breaks new ground by formalising the process and reinforcing it via incorporation of B-RA.

However, change will not happen overnight because existing protocols have a tendency to endure. Nonetheless, it is to be hoped that the sport and physical activity sector will find significant benefits in the ISO, which has the goal of providing greater freedom for the sector to innovate and develop.

Dr Laurence Ball MSc, PhD, GradIOSH is a consultant and a published author of a number of academic papers on public safety and risk management, risks and benefits of leisure, and proportionate risk management.

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TECH TOOLKIT

PRODUCT ROUND-UP

FITNESS AND WELLBEING

BY SUE WEEKES

Hitting the spot with apps, watches and wellness pods

INTEGRATING RECOVERY AND WELLNESS WITH FITNESS

Wellness technology provider Hyperice is partnering with fitness solutions company Escape Fitness to create dedicated wellness pods within fitness facilities. The MARS Mobility and Recovery Station will feature Escape's MARS screen delivering specific mobility and active recovery content 24/7, a range of equipment to support mobility and recovery routines and the Hypervolt2 Pro percussion massage device, designed to enhance recovery and boost mobility. This will be tethered via a flexible cable to provide constant charging and prevent theft. The areas, which will have a relatively small footprint, also feature merchandised racks, designed and manufactured by Escape Fitness. The companies want to redefine how people approach recovery and wellness inside fitness facilities and beyond.

https://escapefitness.com/
hyperice.com

Multisport watch takes leap forward

Polar says it re-evaluated every aspect of its flagship multisport V2 watch when it designed the latest Vantage V3 and one of the most striking differences is the more colourful, vibrant 462ppi display, courtesy of the use of AMOLED (active-matrix organic light-emitting diode) technology. It also enables the watch to have a larger visible screen area. Other major improvements are in the biosensing technologies used, with the introduction of the next-generation Polar Elixir. This analyses a spectrum of biological markers and has three key additional sensing capabilities compared to V2: pulse oximetry tech to measure blood oxygen saturation more accurately; automatic detection of skin temperature at night to provide insight into overall wellbeing and even menstrual cycles; and ECG testing capabilities that allows users to take an electrocardiogram in 30 seconds. Elixir's fourth-generation optical heart rate monitoring also claims to provide 25% more accuracy in popular sports like running and cycling.

Price: On application
www.polar.com/uk-en

IMMERSIVE WELLBEING APP EMBRACES THE GREAT OUTDOORS

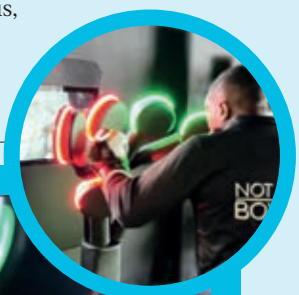
Wellbeing application Tora aims to elevate immersive experiences by taking users on an outdoor adventure while at the same time tackling isolation. Co-founder Indi Howard said research indicates more than three-quarters of people want immersive experiences but such encounters are often confined to indoor spaces. The app connects users and promotes urban escapades through engaging games, walking challenges and interactive icebreakers. As users play, they simultaneously accumulate coins redeemable for rewards and discounts. The origins of Tora go back to when co-founder Noah Heathcote amalgamated his personal journey combatting isolation with expertise in immersive theatre from Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

www.torasocial.com/

CARDIO INTEGRATION AIMS TO OPTIMISE MEMBER EXPERIENCE

Fitness technology company EGYM and Core Health & Fitness are partnering to integrate their cardio offerings. The integration is part of Core's launch of the next-generation Android-based Star Trac and StairMaster cardio displays, which will be combined with EGYM's software to provide gym members seamless connectivity and real-time data tracking. EGYM provides intelligent workout solutions and offers and a suite of connected gym equipment and digital products that integrate with third-party hardware and software. The overall aim is to ensure gyms and fitness facilities have the tools and technology to achieve optimal results for members and the business. Core Health & Fitness is also home to brands such as Nautilus, Throwdown, Schwinn and Wexer.

www.corehealthandfitness.com
https://egym.com/uk



BOXING YOUR WAY TO FITNESS

BoxBlitx is an interactive boxing fitness machine for those who want to practise their punching skills or keep fit. It's the product of four years of development and two and a half years of testing. Users can choose from seven workouts that test speed, reaction and endurance and it has a fun, training or competition mode. There are also different speeds and difficulties so it is suitable for all skill-levels. According to Blitx Fitness, testing shows that 12 minutes on a BoxBlitx machine is equivalent to 18 minutes moderate use on a treadmill. There's a gamified and community element with leaderboards and challenges. BoxBlitx weighs 180kg and measures 84cm (width) x 126cm (depth) and 188cm (height).

Price: On application
www.blitxfitness.com

WORKPLACE FOCUS

SUPPORTING STAFF

Six workplace wellbeing trends that will continue to rise in 2024

According to Nuffield Health's 2023 Healthier Nation Index, 44% of us said our jobs had negatively impacted our mental health at some point this year.

Employers have a responsibility to help individuals manage both their physical and mental wellbeing. But it's clear businesses still need to work harder to provide targeted support to their employees.

The good news is, though, that changes in the corporate world are trying to make this possible. In fact, previous 2022 Nuffield Health research showed two in three businesses are offering physical and mental wellbeing offerings in their workplaces.

With this in mind, I suggest six workplace wellbeing trends we can expect to see grow in prominence in 2024.

1 WORKPLACE ERGONOMICS

Our 2023 Index revealed that 36% have taken time off work due to musculoskeletal issues, which shows there's a big need for physical wellbeing support in the workplace.

As we move into a more permanent hybrid work set-up in 2024, we'll see the development of specialist programmes and more technological innovations as potential solutions to improve workplace efficiency and prevent musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

For example, wearable technologies like exoskeletons are revolutionary mechanical frames which can be worn by a worker to support and protect the body from the strain of arduous work. Research shows they can offload up to 40% of a load, and

reduce the work required by muscles.

Virtual reality is also on the rise. It can assist in employee training by simulating work environments and helping employees identify workplace hazards.

Away from tech and innovations, it is important for employees and employers to note their legal requirements to provide a provision at work and at home including desk and DSE assessments!

2 SHIFTING ORGANISATIONAL VALUES

Research shows the hybrid work model has been forecasted to rise to 81% adoption, with Gen Z among its most enthusiastic supporters.

In the past, we may have seen resistance to such demands from businesses, but now, more than ever, employers are working on ways to stay open to employee suggestions and adapt work models accordingly.

We'll see more of this in 2024, which highlights that workplaces are beginning to understand the importance of ensuring workers are satisfied across the board rather than just adequately remunerated.

Companies will continue to focus on how to improve work/life balance, wellness, intellectual challenge, and personal growth and development.

3 NON-NEGOTIABLE SELF-CARE

According to our research, only 15% of us take more time to focus on self-care, when trying to support our mental health. Self-care time has traditionally been reserved for outside work hours, like a morning walk or a hot bath at night.

However, work is invariably intertwined with our life routines and it's becoming clear to businesses that weaving moments of self-care throughout the day will be more beneficial to employees than grinding through a hard day and leaving their 'me' time for later.

In 2024, we'll see more businesses encouraging their employees to educate themselves on their self-care needs. More will provide employees with helpful tools or sessions that encourage them to slow down and breathe.

Whether it's introducing company mindfulness sessions, inviting in experts to teach individuals about self-care practices or researching new ideas that could potentially benefit the whole team, building awareness will be key to many businesses next year.

4 INCLUSIVE WELLNESS INITIATIVES

Workplace wellness is for everyone and in 2024, diversity and inclusion efforts will continue to extend to wellness programmes.

Many businesses are rethinking their benefits offerings to promote fairness, equal opportunity and prevent burnout. For example, is offering a subsidised gym membership a benefit if employees are not located near a gym or able to afford the reduced membership?

To address such disparities, gathering feedback from employees is essential. Understanding their unique needs and challenges allows for tailoring benefits to address immediate concerns.

In 2024, there'll be a heightened focus on ensuring that every employee, regardless of background or abilities, has access to the support and resources they need to thrive.

5 REDUCING FINANCIAL STRESS

Our 2023 Index revealed 59% of individuals believed the cost of living or a change in personal finances had negatively impacted their mental health over the past year.

Mental health can be significantly impacted by financial worries, and without effective support, mental health conditions can affect a person's confidence and identity at work.

More businesses will adapt their wellness offerings to enable employees to cut costs where they can. For example, offering flexible work options, like remote work, flexible hours or compressed workweeks, can help employees better manage their schedules and save on commuting costs.

There'll also be a greater focus on offering childcare benefits or access to discounted childcare services, which will also support employees in managing the high costs associated with childcare.

6 NOT SLEEPING ON THE JOB

The Healthier Nation Index highlighted that poor sleep is still a huge issue across the nation. On average, Brits are only getting 5.91 hours of sleep a night; this is down from 6.11 in 2022 and 6.19 in 2021.

There still exists a need for employers to be more attuned to the sleep needs of their staff and the potential role it has in improving employee physical and emotional wellbeing if businesses prioritise its importance.

In 2024, more firms will engage with their healthcare partners to bolster sleep education, and the relevant employee benefits to support those struggling.

More businesses will provide wellbeing support through external services like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which is an effective therapeutic therapy to treat insomnia.

CBT-I (CBT for insomnia) considers how thoughts and beliefs about sleep may be influencing sleep behaviours, examines behaviours and habits around sleep, and introduces techniques like relaxation and sleep restriction.

Marc Holl is head of primary care at Nuffield Health

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LAST WORD

SPORT AMBASSADOR

Nemesis Martial Arts founder **Peter Felix** *on the positive effects the sport has on young people*

TEACHING CONFIDENCE

Peter Felix, a fifth-degree black belt and former undefeated European and British champion, set up Nemesis Martial Arts & Fitness back in the early 2000s. The club's website puts it very simply in saying it "provides martial arts training to the people of Berkshire through the use of various traditional and modern martial arts skills".

However, when it comes to its younger attendees, it's about so much more for Felix. "I really wouldn't want to be a kid today," he says. "Especially with all devices they seem to be hooked on. They are often bouncing off the walls when they come to us for training. But martial arts training gives them a good grounding. Physical exercise is obviously good for all of us, but martial arts also teaches them to be good, fulfilled human beings."

In knowing how much the sport informed his life in a positive way, Felix wanted to provide youngsters in the county with a structured environment based on mutual respect for both them and their fellow students. He started martial arts aged 11 and found he picked it up quickly, competing on the national circuit by the time he was 16. "Like most 16-year-olds all I wanted to do was compete and win," he says.

Numerous awards and medals followed. "I joined Team GB quite late in my life and also became a coach about 25 years ago in my mid-30s," he says. "I was still actively competing on the international and European circuit, but I felt there was a need to give something back. I've lost count of how many world champions I've created, but my main motivation now I'm 60 is just to pass on my knowledge to the new generation. I want to make sure they understand the principles of sportsmanship, integrity, tenacity and perseverance."

In setting up Nemesis Martial Arts, he wanted a set-up where kids could get training but didn't have to pay a great deal of money. "We been very fortunate

PETER FELIX

"Government should invest more in grass-roots sport. It has to address the fact that two years of pandemic fallout with its lockdowns and social upheaval have caused significant mental stress among children"

LAST WORD

SPORT AMBASSADOR

"I've lost count of how many world champions I've created, but my main motivation now I'm 60 is just to pass on my knowledge to the new generation"

to have sponsors for those kids that were really good but couldn't afford to seriously compete," he says. "I'm afraid sport has become increasingly elitist and often the domain of middle-class kids."

A combination of social media and word of mouth has allowed the centre to target those youngsters that could get the maximum benefit from his courses. "We also used to get a lot of referrals from GPs," he explains, "and parents that have managed to steer their kids away from joining gangs by getting them involved with us have then told other parents about the club."

At any one point, the club probably has about 30 to 40 attendees with about 50% being young people – and, of those, about 60 to 70% are female. "This is a change we've noticed over the last 20 years," says Felix. "I've got friends who are football or athletics coaches, and they are all saying the same thing – that girls are feeling increasingly empowered and getting involved in activities like this."

For Felix, martial arts are a means to changing the possible – and sometimes inevitable – negative trajectory of some children's lives. That said, he's adamant the government should be playing more of a part in this. "Government should invest more in grass-roots sport," he says. "It has to address the fact that two years of pandemic fallout with its lockdowns and social upheaval have caused significant mental stress among children – who are now growing into their teens with unreconciled problems. I believe martial arts and sport in general can help with this.

"Part of what we teach is confidence. We've got kids coming to us who had no future at all. There's one who was told he would amount to nothing, but now owns and runs a very successful multimillion-pound business. We've got others who have gone into accounting, one training to be a GP, and one that became a consultant in the oil & gas industry. And these people are now bringing their own children along to the club."

Felix's best performers were hoping to compete in the International Championships in Canada in November, but costs proved prohibitive for many. "We were fully intending to go to Canada, but a lot of the students simply couldn't afford it. Therefore, all our available resources have now been redirected into getting them to 2024 European Continental Martial Arts Games. But they must get through many qualifying competitions before then." We can only wish them the best of luck.

Peter Felix spoke with ***Dean Gurden.***

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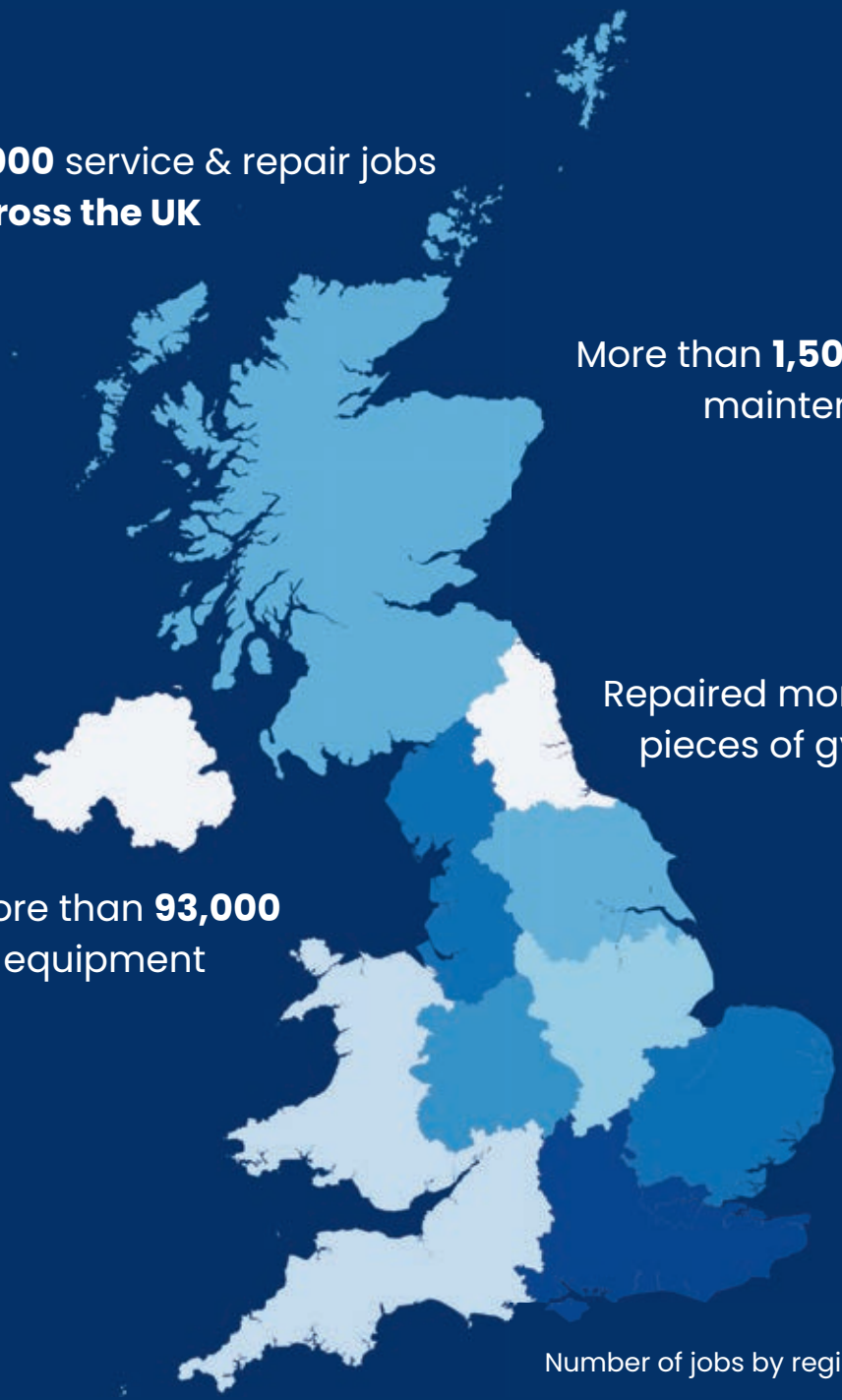

Number of jobs by region and density

Nuffield Health · PUREGYM · GLL · Be Well · Bannatyne Health Club & Spa · 3d leisure · the gym group · JD GYMS