

TARA DILLON

Unlocking S&PA's potential

p10

YOUTH ACTIVITY

Tackling the teen twilight zone

p34

WORKPLACE FOCUS

Supporting autism in sport

p40

S&PA Professional

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 **CIMSPA**

THE SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INDUSTRY MAGAZINE



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Rebecca Phillips, strategic lead for health and wellbeing at Everyone Active



"As much as I hate to say it, you can't just go out to play or exercise in some areas. Sadly, the days of playing under the streetlights until your mum shouts for you to come home have gone" (p34)



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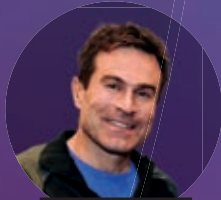
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A time of renewal



*Putting S&PA
top of the new
government's
agenda*



ew government, national renewal – we are in exciting times as a nation and sector. In this magazine alone, there's evidence of the unstoppable renewal across the S&PA universe – from embedding care and wellbeing opportunities for new and future mothers in our leisure centres, to supporting teens into activities that can set a lifetime of healthy habits.

What better prompt to renewing our commitment to physical activity could there be than the recent Paris Olympics and Paralympics? These superstar events put the S&PA world

centre stage and at the front of mind hopefully for our new government, as the sector seeks more commitment from those controlling the purse-strings and mindset priorities to 'do the right things' for our population.

At a macro level, the participation of athletes in Paris doesn't exist without government support. Great TeamGB performances are underpinned by brilliant coaches and support staff. From elite performance to grassroots and community engagement, the sector workforce truly is the catalyst for changing lives.

Half of the newly-elected members of Parliament are first-time MPs. This

means there is both challenge and opportunity to help them understand early that how they support S&PA at a national level will benefit their constituents for a lifetime.



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CIMSPA®

S&PA News

A round-up of the latest developments in the industry



SPORT AND ACTIVITY VITAL TO THE COMMUNITY IN ENGLAND, SAYS REPORT

Leisure facilities in England are playing an increasingly bigger role in their communities compared to even a year ago, according to a new research study from Sport England.

The *Moving Communities Impact Report*, released 15 August, highlighted the significant achievements of leisure

facilities and the people who run them in fostering community engagement despite a variety of challenges.

The study revealed that participation and throughput to leisure centres have both increased, with the average number of participants per site up by almost a thousand people (7%) and

overall visits growing by over 10,000 per year (5%). Growth in leisure centre usage by economically disadvantaged groups is also notable, with visits from users in the most deprived 20% of areas increasing by 9% (100,000 people).

The statistics demonstrate the important role sport and physical activity facilities play in supporting vulnerable communities to get active locally, providing inclusive and accessible opportunities for physical activity, and underlines the vital role these facilities play in delivering Sport England's long-term strategy in tackling inequalities at its heart.

The research also found that leisure centres generated a social value of £890m in 2023/24, which is an increase from £842m in the previous year.

It also uncovered the impact leisure centres can have on the population's attitudes towards fitness and activity, with 86% of respondents saying they preferred exercising in leisure centres than in a more informal setting.

Emma Bernstein, Sport England strategic projects lead, emphasised the report's importance: "The value of these facilities to our communities cannot be overstated. They are more than just places to exercise; they are lifelines in offering social connection, mental health support and physical health benefits.

"This report showcases their importance, but even more so, how they have continued to provide those benefits during particularly tough times."

The report is based on comprehensive data collection from 563 public leisure sites across England which submitted data across the two-year period of the report. It also highlights the financial performance of 436 sites which provided consistent financial data for that same period (April 2022–March 2024).

● For more information, visit:
<https://bit.ly/4dQltVY>

UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS

IOS AND SOUTHWARK OFFER FUNDED SWIMMING TEACHER TRAINING

The Institute of Swimming has launched a funded swimming teacher training initiative with Southwark Council. With a new leisure centre at Canada Water incoming, the initiative aims to increase its swimming teacher workforce ahead of the opening of the hub in early 2025.

The new look centre will include an eight-lane 25m swimming pool, a learner pool, a four-court sports hall, a 150+ station gym, two dance studios (one of which includes space for soft play) and an indoor cycle studio.

Southwark Council has committed to giving everyone in the borough the opportunity to learn to swim but they require a swim teacher workforce to deliver the promise.

The IoS Recruitment Academy will offer local people the chance to retrain for free (with only a one-off £85 administration fee) and embark on a career as a swimming teacher, with no educational requirements or elite swimmer status needed.

Following the successful completion of the training programme the newly qualified swimming teachers will have the opportunity to work at the following pools in Southwark:

- The Castle Centre
- Seven Islands Leisure Centre
- Dulwich Leisure Centre
- Peckham Pulse Leisure Centre
- Camberwell Leisure Centre
- Canada Water Leisure Centre (opening in 2025)

Once qualified, Level One Swimming Teacher Assistants can expect to be paid £16.19 per hour and Level Two Swimming

Teachers can expect to be paid between £18.20 and £19.10 per hour, plus many other employment benefits.

"Being a swimming teacher is a very rewarding job and the hours might suit someone who is looking for additional income," said Rebecca Cox, managing director of the IoS.

"Swimming teachers usually work part-time hours, often for two to five hours in length. The role of a swimming teacher may require a mixture of working from poolside and in the water."

Roxanne Lee from Southwark Council said the local authority is looking to recruit "at least 15 people" to help meet the demand for the learn-to-swim programmes.

"We are looking for aspiring people who recognise the importance of teaching swimming as a valuable lifesaving skill," said Lee.

"We are currently providing swimming lessons to more than 6,200 local children and adults per week, plus thousands of children through the school swimming lessons.

"With our new centre opening and a commitment to further increase our aquatic programme across all our sites, we need new teachers and are therefore funding the cost of this training."

Swim England data shows that 96% of UK swimming teachers love giving back to the community by supporting children in developing an essential life skill and agree that being poolside gives them happiness and a good work/life balance.



MESSAGE FROM CIMSPA CEO



**TARA DILLON ON
WORKING WITH
THE GOVERNMENT
FOR NATIONAL
RENEWAL**

Since the last issue of S&PA, a new government has come into power making positive noises about the value of our sector and its role in driving productivity and growth. The early signs are positive but it's imperative that we seize this opportunity by uniting our voices and demonstrating our contribution to Labour's five missions for national renewal (see p10).

Our workforce is central to everything we do. Sports and physical activity professionals are the driving force behind our impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the population, to social cohesion, community engagement and the country's economic prosperity.

This is why CIMSPA has launched The Training Academy for Sport and Physical Activity. As one of the promises set out in our 2024-30 strategy, 'Releasing the Power of our Profession', this new online platform will support training and career development to elevate both the skills and status of all exercise professionals.

Developed following consultation with the sector, it provides a one-stop shop allowing professionals to access the best quality training and development. The courses available through the Training Academy are delivered by providers that have achieved our three-star quality assurance status – CIMSPA's highest rating for training and education provision.

Investing in the training and development of our professionals is the only way that we can realise the full potential of our sector and contribute to the ambitious vision set out by this new administration.

UPFRONT

S&PA NEWS



MICRO-CREDENTIAL COURSE OPENS AT CARDIFF MET

Cardiff Metropolitan University will soon open applications to the first module within its new Certificate of Higher Education in Sport Management.

The course is the first of its kind for the sport and physical activity sector, providing a formal education pathway designed to suit the busy schedules of those working in the industry.

In collaboration with CIMSPA, the university has created this training in response to strong demand from the sector for management-specific training catering to professionals.

To offer the accessibility needed for individuals to work and learn

concurrently, the university has broken down the new Certificate of Higher Education into six micro-credential modules.

The course content is quality assured by CIMSPA and in alignment with the Entry Manager occupational professional standard, a framework created alongside sector employers that establishes the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for the role.

“This is an exciting opportunity for our sector to be at the forefront of professional learning and development,” said Tara Dillon, CIMSPA CEO.

“Micro-credentials are the gateway for professionals to develop their knowledge and expertise flexibly while gaining recognition which they can carry with them throughout their career.”

The first module to be taught is Finance, Sales and Marketing in Sport and Physical Activity, providing a well-rounded understanding of the topics in the context of our sector.

Applications for this opportunity opened on 2 September, closing later the same month on 30 September 2024.

● For more information, please visit: <https://bit.ly/4gf06ze>

FOUR MORE NON-EXEC APPOINTMENTS TO THE BOARD AT SFC

Sport for Confidence (SfC) CIC has strengthened its board with the appointment of four new non-executive directors.

Co-founder and creative director Dan Black said the news added to the feeling it is “an exciting time” for the social enterprise: “Welcoming these four incredible individuals to our team supports our vision to create a high-performance boardroom focused on driving standards of good governance, preparing the organisation for the challenges of the next few years and strengthening our capabilities to optimise opportunities.”

The first new non-executive director (NED) to join the board is Carol Slade, an independent IT consultant who had previously worked for a major disability charity as board secretary, company secretary and lead on board governance.

Ben Beevers, group development

director at Everyone Active has also been appointed as a NED, bringing with him more than 30 years leisure, health and fitness experience.

A SfC statement said Beevers (right) has “a huge bank of knowledge relating to how community leisure centres can connect to the community, delivering facilities and services that engage everyone” that the organisation will seek to tap into.

Joining the pair are Scott Baker, clinical director for Allied Health Professionals and Leadership for Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board, and Ian Moss, who currently works for an independent music company on legal, commercial and HR related matters. The NEDs began their three-year, voluntary tenure in August 2024.

Lyndsey Barrett, co-founder and lead

occupational therapist at SfC, said at launch the organisation had only one client in Basildon, but now works all over the country.

“Today, the organisation has a national reach, working in collaboration with many, many partners including Public Health, the NHS, the Royal College of Occupational Therapy, a number of local authorities, leisure operators and many,

many local community providers, all aligned to our vision to create inclusive environments that break down barriers, empowering access, choice and independence,” said Barrett.

“These board appointments mark a new phase in our development. I am really looking forward to the onward journey and all that we will achieve together.”



TOWN OPENS NEW SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY HUB TO IMPROVE HEALTH

A new multi-million pound leisure hub has opened in the Lincolnshire seaside town of Mablethorpe.

Delivered by Alliance Leisure, the £13.5m Station Leisure & Learning Centre aims to address the town's poor health and educational outcomes. Mablethorpe's health ranking is in the lowest 12% of towns in England.

In addition to the four-lane, 25 metre pool and changing village, the 3,000m² scheme includes a large gym including functional areas and EGYM, multi-purpose studio and group cycling studio as well as a TAGactive indoor adventure

area and soft play for younger children.

The development has been funded by £7.5m from the Towns Fund, with match funding from East Lindsey District Council after the Connected Coast Town Deal Board secured £23.9m of Towns Fund investment for the town.

Magna Vitae operates the new centre for the council. Designed to improve sport and physical activity, learning, travel and the overall town experience, the projects include town centre improvements, a sustainable visitor hub at Sandilands Nature Reserve and a new pavilion, café and restaurant for the seafront.

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

UNLOCKING OUR POTENTIAL

Tara Dillon, CEO of CIMSPA, shares her thoughts on the crucial role of sport and physical activity under the new government

As we embark on a new era of government, I'm cautiously optimistic about the future of the sport and physical activity sector – we are poised to be the driving force behind improved health and wellbeing across the UK.

The new Labour government, led by Sir Keir Starmer, brings a fresh approach that appears to promise better connection across government departments. I'm encouraged by the appointment of experienced individuals to key roles and the creation of mission delivery boards to address Labour's manifesto pledges – driving economic growth, reforming the NHS, investing in clean energy, reforming the justice system, and enhancing skills and opportunities. Let's hope these good intentions translate into positive action.

Our sector can make significant contributions across these areas, and data and collaboration are key to our success.

We already have compelling evidence demonstrating our impact on preventive health and our ability to foster community wellbeing through place-based strategies.

Data from Moving Communities shows how our collaborative efforts in local areas are making a difference. We are reaching into communities, bringing solutions to them rather than waiting for them to come to us. This proactive approach is essential for

addressing local health disparities and promoting active lifestyles.

The first 150 days of the new government are critical. From Culture, Media and Sport to Business and Trade to Health and Social Care, it's imperative that we get cross-departmental understanding of our sector's impact and reach during these first crucial months.

Economic inactivity is at an all-time high, with record numbers of people unable to work due to health issues. Indeed, according to government figures, in 2022, 22% of working age people in England, Scotland and Wales were economically inactive meaning they were out of work and not looking for a job. Our sector is uniquely positioned to address this by promoting physical activity, which can significantly improve both mental and physical health to reduce the burden on the NHS and increase economic productivity.

And this is where the power of collaboration comes into play. There are numerous examples of innovative collaborations throughout our sector.

“As part of the NSPG, we can present a united front to government and showcase the value of our sector”

Employers across the country are partnering with local health services and active partnerships, making their facilities central to community health and wellbeing. These partnerships are reaching individuals who traditionally would not engage in physical activity, thus broadening our impact.

Historically, our sector had approached government with disparate voices, but the National Sector Partners Group (NSPG) is now recognised by the government as the representative body for our sector. Formed during the pandemic, the NSPG was instrumental in securing the £80m Swimming Pool Support Fund – a testament to the power of combined resources and robust data.

The NSPG continues to evolve and effectively represent sport and physical activity. It has already reached out to all new secretaries of state to highlight our contributions and is hosting an upcoming parliamentary event to further showcase our achievements to key policymakers.

We must continue to support the NSPG and speak with one voice. By feeding all our evidence and best practice into the collective body, we can present a united front to government and showcase the economic, social and wellbeing value of our sector to ensure that it recognises our contributions and how we align with its priorities.

Momentum is key. We can't wait for



others; we must take the initiative. Our sector is actively working in communities and has partnerships in place. We need to share the insights of this work with the NSPG, so it can continue to build momentum and advocate on our behalf telling our stories to people in power who are listening.

Behind all of this is our workforce; it's the foundation of our sector and our success. CIMSPA's strategy, *Releasing the Power of our Profession*, outlines a roadmap for professional recognition and scaling our sector's contribution to health, wellbeing, social cohesion and economic prosperity.

I'm delighted to see so many employers prioritising investment in their people, supporting the development and professional

recognition of team members and planning for the future needs of the community by investing now. This progress has been accelerated through collaboration. By partnering with stakeholders from outside the sector with a vested interest in the wellbeing of local communities, employers are recognising how a workforce with growing skillsets can deliver massive impact.

I'm also encouraged by the drive towards greater devolution of powers to ensure skills development meets local economic and workforce priorities. Our sector has been at the forefront of this early work through the establishment of over 30 Local Skills Accountability Boards, which bring together employers, education providers, local

authorities and health commissioners. These boards ensure that the sport and physical activity workforce is equipped to meet local needs. As an example, CIMSPA has launched a comprehensive skills plan for the sport and physical activity sector in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. Running from 2024-27, the plan will ensure alignment between education, skills and economic plans, and give all stakeholders (education providers, funders, employers and professional bodies) a key reference point to maximise benefit and efficiency.

CIMSPA has contacted the government to share insights from this work, which will support the government to provide more local autonomy on skills and employment support. The Skills England Bill appears to recognise that investing in the right skills in the right places is essential for achieving the economic growth we so desperately need. I'm delighted to see the intention to establish this new body as a collaboration between employers, learning providers, local and national government and other key stakeholders. I look forward to supporting it on behalf of the sport and physical activity workforce.

For many years, the key has been in the lock, but I now feel that we are finally turning the key. As a sector, we must seize this opportunity. By continuing to collaborate, share best practice and leverage data, we can improve public health, social cohesion and support economic prosperity.

I am incredibly proud of the resilient and maturing sector we have become. And I'm more positive than ever about our sector's role and our potential. All the stars are aligned, and we have a pivotal role to play in shaping a healthier, more active and prosperous future for everyone.

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

MEET OUR NEW TRUSTEES

*Introducing another two of our incoming trustees: **Donna Fraser** OBE OLY, EDI specialist, four-time Olympian and former 400m GB sprinter, and regulation specialist and former GB rower, **Gavin Stewart***



DONNA FRASER



WHEN DID YOU RETIRE FROM SPORT?

I officially retired from professional athletics in 2009, after being diagnosed with breast cancer. After my breast cancer journey, I tried out for the London 2012 Games. It was a big ask to make the team. I didn't qualify, but it felt great to finish my athletics career on my terms. That same day, the story about my breast cancer came out in the press and I got a standing ovation, something which I still find very emotional today.



HOW DID YOU COME TO WORK IN THE SECTOR?

My family are West Indian and considered running a hobby, not a proper job. Pre-lottery funding, I

combined training with a full-time role in tourism. I asked my employer if I could go part time to train for the 1996 Olympics – they refused. I knew I could always get another job, but I might not get another shot at the Olympics so I left. It was a painful year. After the Games, I worked as a part-time health and wellness manager for EDF Energy as part of their sponsorship programme ahead of the 2000 Games. I ended up working for EDF Energy for 18 years.



YOU'VE RECEIVED AN OBE FOR YOUR SERVICES TO EDI IN THE WORKPLACE. WHAT DRIVES YOU?

I never envisaged a career in EDI; I didn't even know EDI existed before being introduced to it at EDF Energy. However, I'm passionate about helping people progress and believe that if you give people the space and opportunity, they can thrive. That's what EDI is all about. I honed many of the skills needed for EDI during my athletics career. Both sport and EDI are about people and doing things differently to make gains. Teamwork, recognising talent and providing a platform for people to give their all and being their authentic selves are essential in both sport and EDI.



WHY DID YOU WANT TO BECOME A CIMSPA TRUSTEE?

I was familiar with CIMSPA's work through my EDI role at UK Athletics and understood its value, focus and vision. Since my breast cancer diagnosis, I'm determined to do more in life and to make a difference where I can. When I was approached about lending my EDI expertise via the trustee role, I was happy to help.

I believe athletes should be visible and give back by promoting physical activity and encouraging participation and volunteering. Representation matters: young people need role models



who look like them to achieve.

We must explore new ways to engage people in our sector. I worked on the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. We made the event the most accessible and inclusive to date by reaching out to the community, listening to their needs and involving them. I don't like the term 'hard to reach'; people aren't hard to reach, we just need to make the effort to go out into their environment and build relationships.

CIMSPA is already doing this, but we must continue to listen. As a board, we can talk all day, but it's only by talking and listening that we truly understand the challenges people face so we can provide the right solutions.

GAVIN STEWART

? TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE SECTOR

After learning to row at university, I competed for GB at the Seoul and Barcelona Olympics. This drew me into representing athletes – initially other rowers and then across Olympic and Paralympic sports. I spent

10 years in 'sports administration', first as chair of the BOA Athletes Commission and then as a board member of UK Sport and chair of its first Lottery Awards Panel, allocating funding across sports through the Sydney and Athens Games. I got to know the workings of elite sports programmes and their governing bodies and saw many of the good things Lottery funding brought, as well as some of the risks that came with it.

The other strand of my career is in financial regulation, working for the Bank of England, Financial Services Authority and then the Financial Conduct Authority. This included evaluating the effectiveness of regulation, and a stint as chief risk officer for the last of these, so I have a good sense of both how regulation works well and what can go wrong.

? WHY DID YOU WANT TO BECOME A CIMSPA TRUSTEE?

Since stepping back from UK Sport in 2004, I've stayed interested in sport and the challenges it faces. Many of these existed 20 years ago, and while some have become more acute, the importance of sport and physical

activity to society has also grown. So when Marc and Tara asked if I was open to being co-opted as a trustee, I said I wanted to help as much as I could.

? WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BRING TO THE ROLE?

It will need refreshing, but my experience with the BOA and UK Sport gives me a broad knowledge of Olympic and Paralympic sports, their governance and cultures, and the challenges they face. With my rowing background – a sport that's very aware of the importance of high quality coaching, sports science and sports medicine, from grassroots to elite – I also bring an understanding of how the various elements of sport and physical activity fit together. Finally, my years in regulation should be useful to CIMSPA as part of the National Workforce Registration Scheme project. I'm also conscious of the areas of CIMSPA's work where my knowledge and experience are much less. I'll need to work hard to get up to speed on those.

? WHAT ARE THE KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR CIMSPA?

These are closely linked. Sport and physical activity are crucially important to many aspects of modern society, but the sector is quite disparate and its overall funding, despite the National Lottery, has been under pressure for more than a generation.

At the same time, public expectations have risen and The Duty of Care Report and the Whyte Review of Gymnastics have exposed some serious faults in the overall governance of the workforce, both across the sector and within individual sports. These must be fixed to give everyone, not least those working in the sector, justifiable confidence in the safety and quality of coaching and other services offered.

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE



COMMUNICATING WITH POSITIVE IMPACT

*Communication is key to leadership. Catherine Baker, founder of Sport and Beyond, and author of *Staying the Distance*, shares some surprising truths about successful communication*

I was very fortunate in having former England football manager Gareth Southgate write the foreword to my book *Staying the Distance*; aside from my husband, Gareth was the first person to see every chapter as I wrote it.

I am writing this article just after the England Men's loss in the Euros final. It still hurts, not least because I know how much Gareth wanted it for his players and his staff. With all that is being written about Gareth at the moment, and his abilities as a manager, the facts speak for themselves: he has been our most successful manager of the men's team since Sir Alf Ramsey, and his record over the last four big tournaments (semis, final, quarters, final) is unsurpassed for an England manager.

There is also universal agreement about his positive impact on the culture and environment within the England set-up.

One of the facets of Gareth's management and leadership style that's often highlighted is his communication skills. Those of you who followed the press conferences and interviews during the tournament might also have noticed that the players' communication was always consistent, on message and clear.

Communication is a key skill in leadership. With everything we say, we can either add to a performance or take away from it. We all know what it looks like when we get it wrong: despite your best efforts, somehow you haven't seemed to get the right message across in the right way. Heads go down. Performance drops. And it's hard to bring it back up again. And this goes beyond the immediate moment. Our ability to communicate with positive impact, on a consistent basis, is central to our ability to engage and get the best out of those we work with and lead over the long term.

Through the research I did for my book, I discovered some surprising things about successful communication. I will share four of these with you.

THE MYTH OF THE BIG SPEECH

If you've thought about the impact of your communications on those you lead, it's quite possible that much of your thinking has centred around the big speeches, the important moments. Where you feel it's important to deliver an inspiring and compelling message, evidence suggests that it's a very different type of communication that really makes a difference. In fact, it's the short-burst, high-energy communications that have greater impact. Ones where the communicator makes sure they are engaged, focused and energised. Linked to this, is the way in which they communicate...

"The most effective communicators I know speak clearly, simply and in a straightforward way"

BODY LANGUAGE AND TONE

It's important to be aware of what you are saying, when you are not actually saying it. What do I mean by this? Well, we should always be aware of how we are delivering our message and what we are saying, not with our words, but with our tone and body language. One of my most repeated quotes comes from civil rights campaigner and poet Maya Angelou who said: "I've learnt that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

In his book *Captain Class*, Sam Walker (looking at what distinguishes the top teams through the ages) shares explosive insight from a 2016 basketball game between the New Orleans Pelicans and the San Antonio Spurs (one of his top 16 teams). He had come to watch how captain Tim Duncan communicated with his players. Throughout the game, while Duncan appeared contained and calm, what stood out for Walker was his eyes. He continually used them to communicate with his teammates and officials and convey powerful meaning. Whether that be shock (at a referee call), delivering a key message to a player or observing everything going on. Everything was calculated, all powerful; he never broke eye contact, and he listened as much as he talked.

Now think back to the approach that Gareth has taken with his players as he communicates with them – he uses touch, brings them in close, and speaks

calmly and intently to them. All aimed at getting his message across in the best way.

SIMPLE AND TANGIBLE

It's easy to think, especially when we are earlier on in our careers, that we need to sound impressive. And for some this can mean an assumption that using over-sophisticated and complicated language is a must. However, the most effective communicators I know speak clearly, simply and in a straightforward manner that people can understand. It's not about proving themselves; it's about helping their audience to take on the message. And they make sure their message is tangible – often via visual images, metaphors and stories. If you are Gareth Southgate, about to send a finisher onto the pitch, you know you need to keep your messaging short, simple and clear. Why should it be any different in your workplace?

CONSISTENCY IS KING

I mentioned earlier the consistency of messaging coming out of the England camp during the Euros. For me, this was one of the most impressive things. I often use the following test when I go into organisations – if I stopped any employee in a lift, would they be able to accurately articulate the organisation's vision and purpose to me? And can they tell me what the key strategic priorities are for this financial year? If they can't, I think there has been a breakdown in communication, most likely a significant lack of consistent repetition of a clear and unambiguous message.

Communication is a key skill at work and particularly in leadership. And it's something that you can work on and improve. After all, doesn't it make sense to ensure that your communications add, rather than take away?

Staying the Distance by Catherine Baker is published by Bloomsbury Business.

IN DEPTH

CIMSPA UPDATE

TAILOR-MADE TRAINING

The Training Academy for Sport and Physical Activity, Progression by CIMSPA, offers specific learning for future professionals

As a new destination for sector learning, the Training Academy for Sport and Physical Activity (launched 2 July) was designed in collaboration with employers, training providers and individual professionals from the sport and physical activity workforce.

This teamwork on a national and local level has created a resource that promotes career progression and employability in the sport and physical activity sector.

As well as being flexible and easy to access, all Academy learning is:

- matched to local needs
- designed to provide key skills
- quality assured.

LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES

CIMSPA has ensured that all courses offered through the Training Academy correspond to employment opportunities in the areas they are delivered in – as well as making them easy to search and filter to suit each learner's needs.

Created by talking with local skills accountability boards (LSABs), which bring together employers, education

providers and employability-focused organisations in specific regions, CIMSPA has diagnosed what skills are needed in each area for which jobs.

This solid data and real-life feedback from local businesses has shaped the Training Academy. From this strong foundation of local knowledge, CIMSPA has been able to engage with both national and local training providers to ensure that learning options are available to address the skills needed in a given area. This benefits the training providers by ensuring that there is genuine demand for their learning, filling courses on each locality's need.

"We've analysed the skills needs of hundreds of employers across the country and have built a picture of skills and recruitment gaps that are impacting the sector in each locality. The Academy will offer courses and qualifications which have been specifically included because they meet those skills needs," says Natasha Eason, associate director of the Training Academy. The result of this for sector professionals? Better prices for learning, as consistently full courses means costs are covered and training providers can offer great value.

As well as being cost-effective, finding and gaining locally required expertise offers more long-term value to sector professionals and those looking to begin a career in sport and physical activity.

CORE COMPETENCIES

All of the training, learning and qualifications offered through the Training Academy are also mapped to the sector's widely recognised professional standards.

Created by relevant employers and managed by CIMSPA, the professional standards set out the skills, knowledge and competencies required to work in sector roles, environments and with certain societal groups. The standards also outline the training required to

transition through career pathways.

With all courses mapped to professional standards, those booking training can rest assured that any Academy learning opportunity will provide support in developing the expertise needed and, in turn, that will drive a career in the sector forward.

TRAINING YOU CAN RELY ON

The platform sets a high bar for the standard of training, too, as all Training Academy education providers are quality-assured against the CIMSPA training provider partner quality assurance framework.

Only partners who have been awarded three-star quality-assured, or 'Enhancing', status are able to contribute learning to the Training Academy provision. Enhancing status requires that training providers excel in their field, offering a high quality of education and learner journey by following industry best practice across their organisation. This ensures learners can be certain that all of their options are quality-assured in terms of content and delivery.

FUTURE PROGRESS

The Training Academy is an evolving tool. As more training providers gain Enhancing status, their quality-assured learning will be added to the platform and expand the opportunities available. This means learners will always be able to refresh their knowledge and broaden their skillset, safe in the knowledge that every step they take is the best option for their career progression.

Through the Academy, sport and physical activity professionals can gain industry-recognised qualifications that advances their professional status and increases their attractiveness to potential employers and clients.

● For more information, please visit:
<https://trainingacademyspa.co.uk/>

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IN DEPTH

RIGHT DIRECTIONS

RIGHT DIRECTIONS SUPPORTS SPORT ENGLAND'S ENVIRONMENTAL CAUSE

Audits will ensure leisure centres have sustainability at the core of operations

Right Directions is carrying out an environmental audit of more than 200 leisure centres across England, as part of Sport England's £63m Swimming Pool Support Fund.

The government funding was distributed earlier this year for energy efficiency projects at pools and leisure centres, including investment for new heating systems, solar panels, pool covers and better insulation, as well as other energy saving interventions.

Right Directions, the sector's health & safety and quality management specialist, which also delivers Sport England's continuous improvement scheme Quest, has been tasked with auditing the leisure centres to ensure there is an environmental management culture in place. It will also help deliver the policies and procedures needed to safeguard the projects' long-term viability and check they contribute to improving the sector's environmental sustainability and driving down its utility consumption.

The audits include a full tour of the centre and, covering seven modules, 32 different questions:

- Centre Observations – Environmental Management
- Environmental Policies and Planning

- Staff Involvement in Environmental Management
- Leisure Operations – Environmental Management
- Maintenance
- Environmental Emergencies
- Environmental Measure and Review

Organisations are scored according to how compliant they are in each question, with the criteria being:

- **Fully Compliant** – very good, with possibly one minor action required
- **Opportunity for improvement** – requirements are overall conformed to, however there is the potential to improve the process/practice/results and action is recommended within three to six months
- **Minor Nonconformity** – non-compliance is not likely to result in the failure of the Environmental Management System (EMS) or reduce its ability to ensure controlled processes or products. Or it may be a failure in some part of the EMS. Action is required within one month
- **Major Nonconformity** – very little in place or being actioned. The absence or total breakdown of a system to meet the requirements of the EMS. Several minor nonconformities against one

requirement can represent a total breakdown of the system and thus be considered a major nonconformity. Urgent action is recommended.

Initial audits are taking place between April and December 2024, with the lowest 153 scoring sites also undergoing a follow up desk-based review with an auditor in the first quarter of 2025, when actions taken following feedback from the first audit will be expected to result in improved environmental management scores for each of the centres.

Caroline Constantine, managing director of Right Directions, explains: "The audits start with a tour of the facility, then we look at their policies and planning, so the approach to environmental management. We also want to see how the organisation communicates with staff and the staff involvement in environmental management. Then there are leisure-specific questions and maintenance questions, because efficient equipment will reduce consumption and well-maintained equipment will last longer."

The audit covers topics such as whether environmental hazards are identified and suitably controlled, if hazardous waste is disposed of responsibly and whether public awareness initiatives are in place. Whether the centre has defined environmental objectives and targets,



if a single-use plastics policy is in place and if contractors and suppliers are assessed for their green credentials. The auditors will also want to know what would the facility do in an environmental emergency and how are they measuring and reviewing how well they're doing, including utility consumption?

This environmental management audit enables Right Directions to report back to Sport England on how environmentally aware the sector is.

Constantine continues: "A lot of the issues we are picking up on so far don't require funding or equipment as a remedy. For instance, their lux levels are too high so the leisure centre is too bright. Staff simply need to turn off some lights. Other common issues are badly managed pool chemicals, and even solar panels covered in bird poo or algae, neither of which require much money, simply a bit of forward thinking and planning.

"Let's go back to basics. What are you actually doing to reduce consumption

and look after the planet? Are the staff onboard with this commitment?"

Leisure centres undertaking Sport England's tool Quest that scored Very Good or Excellent in the Environmental Management module, or those receiving a small amount of funding do not have to be audited as part of the Swimming Pool Support Fund process.

Constantine, who is also MD of Quest, explains: "These Quest sites have already demonstrated to us that they take environmental management seriously and have an Environmental Management System with processes and procedures in place, so do not need to be audited again."

However, every centre that applied for funding, including those that did not receive investment from Sport England's Swimming Pool Support Fund, were given an online environmental awareness training session free of charge. The course is packed with information on legislation, best practice and money saving tips and ideas, with a focus on staff communication.

Constantine concludes: "Looking at the audit data so far we can see there are some standout areas that require attention from operators, including whether an aspects and impacts assessment and register is in place, many operators simply didn't know they needed one; are environmental procedures in place – there is a lack of quality management systems generally; staff not receiving environment awareness training, and environmental achievements not being recognised, so even when operators are going great things they're not telling anyone about it! We would recommend that anyone who hasn't had their audit yet watches our webinar, reads the guidance notes and gets in touch with us for further advice."

Right Directions also offers environmental management support and training packages, both online and in-person, as well as independent, standalone environmental management audits and support with the creation of bespoke environmental management systems.

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AGENDA

PRE/POST-PREGNANCY ACTIVITY

MUM'S

THE

WORD

Pregnancy provides a golden opportunity to engage women and their families in physical activity, but it's often missed. We look at initiatives aiming to change that

By
Caroline
Roberts

WHEN IT COMES TO EXERCISE





AGENDA

PRE/POST-PREGNANCY ACTIVITY

The benefits of exercise in pregnancy are clear. It helps control weight gain, reduces blood pressure, improves mood and lowers the risk of gestational diabetes, a temporary form of the condition that can affect pregnant women. And after the birth it helps ward off postnatal depression.

NHS guidelines for pregnant and postpartum women recommend 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity exercise with some form of strength training on two days. However, a number of studies suggest that around three quarters of women fail to meet this target. Research by Sport England found 64% of women surveyed said they were anxious about exercising in pregnancy while 'MOMentum Lost', a 2024 report by the Active Pregnancy Foundation, found that only 10% of women questioned felt they had the necessary support and advice to stay active. Moreover, of those women who already had a gym or leisure centre membership, half felt they would have to cancel or visit less frequently.

This is something that resonates with Kirklees Active Leisure. "Around half of our customers are female and many fall into the 20-40 age bracket," says Hannah Longster, health programs co-ordinator. "We've identified that we often lose this particular audience once they become pregnant. We want to encourage women to engage in and maintain physical activity because we're invested in their wellbeing, and it also makes sense for us from a commercial perspective."

Its Moving Mums programme, launched in 2021, provides exercise classes involving a mix of cardio, resistance and flexibility training for pregnant women and those up to a year postpartum. As well as being marketed as a standalone offer, the classes form part of the mainstream timetable and



are included in standard membership. Non-members who join the programme receive a 20% discount on all classes for 12 months and also qualify for two months' free swimming.

It's been a boon for first-time mum Nicola Colley, who joined after she had given birth. "I wasn't active before and the thought of going to a gym petrified me. I hated PE at school and had never really found a type of exercise I connected with. Going to the first session was daunting but I knew I

needed to do something as it's hard being a new mum and my mental health was low. Everyone was so friendly and supportive and it's a really relaxed setting with the babies on mats in the centre. If you need to feed your baby halfway through it's fine."

Having completed the Moving Mums programme, she is now back at work and has joined the gym. "It's absolutely changed my attitude to exercise. Moving Mums came at the point when I was the most vulnerable and self-

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Targeted approach for young mums in Bromley

Mytime Active has joined forces with Bromley Children and Families Voluntary Sector Forum to deliver Swim, Splash and Support, free twice-weekly swimming lessons for mums aged 15 to 24 and their babies. The initiative is promoted through Bromley's Family Nurse Partnership, where health and social care professionals make referrals for young women to join the programme.

The scheme is currently at capacity with 30 young women registered and an average of 12 young

mums attending each of the sessions. In a recent survey, 90% of the young mums said that their life satisfaction has improved since joining and that they have made friends at the classes.

"The young women may have quite complex histories and it gives them the opportunity to build relationships, learn lifesaving skills, create bonding experiences and social interaction with their little ones in a safe space," says Debra Weekes, partnerships manager with Mytime

Active. "Becoming a parent can be a lonely experience and we're proud of the positive impact this initiative has had on these young parents and their babies."

One participant, Anna*, gave birth when she was 18. "I was very nervous about the sessions as I was suffering from postpartum anxiety. I was panicked that Joe would drown and, having just had a baby, was very body conscious. I felt very overwhelmed when I arrived but the staff were amazing and reassured me. I like the

routine of knowing we have swimming on Tuesdays and my confidence in the water with Joe has increased, thanks to a fantastic swimming teacher, who provides lots of activities like blowing bubbles to teach the baby to hold their breath. I've also benefited from talking to other mums and like the fact we're all young. In other playgroups in the area, parents tend to be a lot older than me, making it difficult for me to relate to them."

* Names have been changed to protect privacy

conscious and it's built me back to feeling better in myself and wanting to continue so I'm now looking for classes that I can fit around work and childcare. I've already tried body balance, circuits and dance classes. I don't want to be unable to run around and play with my daughter. I want to be there for her and be around for her whole life. Being active is a huge part of making sure that happens."

Midwives are well placed to encourage women to be more active but

research has shown that many are reluctant to broach the subject. Despite the government guidance, there's still a lot of uncertainty among clinicians about the benefits of exercise in pregnancy and what's safe, says Pip Davies, midwifery sister and member of the Active Pregnancy Foundation's advisory board. "In standard midwifery training there's very little time dedicated to the subject of physical

activity in pregnancy, which means it's an area midwives are unlikely to feel confident giving advice on. Time constraints also mean that it's difficult to give women the individualised exercise guidance they need."

Suffolk-based Abbeycroft Leisure has been bridging the gap by working in partnership with local clinicians to develop its Active Mums programme, aimed exclusively at pregnant women. Each of the seven sites running the scheme has scheduled visits from a midwife, physiotherapist, and mental health nurse, explains co-ordinator and practitioner Helen Bye.

"Some women can't attend every session due to work commitments so this means they know which ones to target," she said. "For example, if they've been suffering back or pelvic

"We want to encourage pregnant women to engage in and continue physical activity"

AGENDA

PRE/POST-PREGNANCY ACTIVITY

girdle pain, they know the physio will be there on a given day. Seeing the same people each week helps them open up about their concerns and they're reassured that there's an expert available to help."

Alongside this, the sessions include some low-impact exercise. "It's really varied," said Bye. "I put together a short circuit of exercises they can replicate at home, or do some structured dance routines. It's about responding to what

the women want and need."

Participants are offered free membership during their time on the programme, and a discounted follow-on membership that many women take up. Active Mums also acts as a lead-in to the operator's other offers, such as Baby's First Swim, a free, four-week introduction to the water. "It's got women used to coming into the centres and being active and they're wanting to continue. What we're missing is specific

postnatal sessions and that's where I'd like to be going next."

Hannah Peasland is one of the many Active Mums participants who has continued her membership. "I was a regular swimmer before, but it's hard to know what you can carry on doing when you become pregnant. It's a bit of a grey area as you don't want to overdo it." Attending the sessions has opened up other exercise possibilities to her. "I had never been in a gym before and was



always quite fearful of it. The Active Mums studio was right next to the gym and there were a few sessions when Helen [Bye] suggested we venture in to do some weights. It was the first time I'd been shown how to use the machines properly and it increased my confidence. I now feel able to start doing gym work which is a real positive. Going to Active Mums exposes you to the different types of people going in and out of the gym and it makes you think: I can do this too. I've now had my induction and it's something I'm looking forward to doing more of."

Hampshire operator Horizon Leisure has also partnered with clinicians for its weekly Parent and Baby sessions, which are led by one of the operator's health coaches and visited by local GPs and breastfeeding advisors. Running since April 2023, it was designed to fill a gap in local provision," says Alexandra Pinhorn, Horizon's marketing manager. "We noticed that babies no longer get weighed regularly as they used to and lots of local groups are focused on socialising babies rather than parents getting a chance to share their experiences. It helps new parents feel less isolated and encourages them to make use of our creche facilities that are free to members."

The sessions have been an important source of support for Lucy Dorn, whose daughter suffered rapid weight loss in her first five days of life. Although this resolved, the lack of ongoing support and weighing appointments left the first-time mum without the reassurance she needed. "The opportunity to have my baby weighed regularly has made the first year of parenthood much easier, knowing that she is healthy and gaining weight as appropriate for her centile. Rosie, the GP, has also been able to answer any small questions that I would usually need book an appointment for and this



has given me huge peace of mind. My daughter now uses the free crèche on site, which is brilliant and has helped me keep up my exercise regularly."

Holding the sessions at local leisure centres also encourages families to engage with activities on offer, such as the Active Play scheme aimed at children up to the age of five. This includes soft play, bounce, gymnastics and swimming lessons. Horizon operates in an area where there are high levels of deprivation and it has secured funding

from Hampshire County Council to enable 90 families to benefit from free access to the scheme.

Pip Davies believes there needs to be more evidence-based information, resources and standards along with a public education campaign about exercise in pregnancy, and operators can play an important role in this. "The public health benefits of encouraging mothers to be more physically active are potentially huge. It will lead to more active families and, as a by-product, less of the obesity and disease that is so costly to individuals and the NHS."

"What we are missing is postnatal sessions – that's where we'd like to focus on next"

For those professionals who want to enhance their skills in this area, they should look for endorsed training that has been aligned to the CIMSPA professional standard: Working with Antenatal and Postnatal Clients.
<https://www.cimspa.co.uk/directory/>

IN-DEPTH

PROFILE

TACKLING

By
Roisin
Woolnough

ADVERSITY

*Having had his dreams of playing professional football shattered, **Ryan Quinn** used his setback to create a career for himself in sports management*

Most top footballers are scouted at around 13 years of age. Some are scouted as early as seven, others up to the grand old age of 22. Ryan Quinn was just six when he caught the eye of Coventry City Academy. He was called up and there he stayed for the next 12 years, playing football, training hard and trying to make a name for himself. His goal was to turn professional and compete at the highest level. That was all he ever wanted.

When he was 18, everything changed. Quinn, now centre manager at Xcel Leisure Centre in Coventry, was called into a meeting with his parents, his coach and the first team manager, to be

told that it was all over – he was not going to become a professional footballer, he was being released.

“It was really tough. That was the biggest setback I’ve had in life – one of the worst days in my life. I’m not an emotional person, but I did cry that day.”

Before that fateful meeting, Quinn said nobody had expressed any issues about his performance on the pitch and nobody had said that his position was under review. “In a work environment, you have conversations about how to improve and stuff like that, but football is quite brutal. That’s something I’ve come to learn and live with.”

That’s not to say that Quinn hadn’t felt concerned about his position in the

“We are all going to have challenges at work and tough times, but if you’re in it together and create a culture where people work hard for each other, you have a positive culture”

Academy. Some months previously he had regularly been called up to train with the first team and had played a



IN-DEPTH

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played a few pre-season friendlies. At that point, it looked like everything was going according to plan. Then, a few months before his dismissal, he realised he was no longer being called up to train with the first team, unlike some of his fellow wannabees. But he kept hoping it was a blip, that he had done enough to progress to the next level and realise his dreams.

But, he says, it was not to be. And there he was, 18 years old, having spent the last 12 years completely focused on one goal to the exclusion of everything else, now having to totally reassess his life and his future. He was no longer part of the Academy and he didn't speak to his former football manager again or receive any meaningful support to help him transition to his new life. "You are just kind of left on your own," he said.

The next six months were not good for Quinn. He spent a lot of time hiding away in bed in his parent's house, with no idea of what to do next. His non-footballing friends were embarking on the next stages of their lives – university or jobs – but he didn't have any plans. But with the help of his girlfriend, family and friends, he managed to pick himself up. "My

"I've become good at not getting too high or too low about situations, because something is always around the corner"

partner, who I'm still with now, has been amazing throughout. She pushed me to apply for university, something I had never considered doing."

Over the next three years, Quinn studied for a degree in sport management (achieving a first), did a part-time sports coaching job with CV Live (a partnership between Coventry Sports Foundation and Culture Coventry Trust, with Xcel Leisure Centre being one of its facilities) and played football at a semi-professional level for a variety of teams.

He discovered that he really enjoyed working with people, first off as a sports development officer, going into primary schools in the local area and managing coaches. Then he moved into operations and progressed quickly up the management route.

While Quinn says a small part of him still wishes he had achieved his goal of becoming a full-time professional footballer, he is also very happy with where he is now. "I believe everything happens for a reason and it's kind of shaped me into who I am today. It gives you that sense of resilience and bouncebackability."

He also thinks those years grafting in a sporting environment gave him a lot of transferable skills that have stood him in good stead in the workplace, both as a manager and as a team player – skills such as being passionate, having a winning mentality, teamwork, consistency... Not to mention the ability to work hard to ensure a job is done well.

The CIMSPA Coventry and Warwickshire Local Skills Accountability Board (LSAB) member takes his role as a manager very seriously. He has read many books on topics such as how to influence people and how to be a good manager. He has always taken note of the management





style – good and bad – of his managers, from his footballing days onwards. “There are some managers that you like and some that you don’t. You learn from experiences where you feel people haven’t managed you well. The ones that I’ve appreciated are the ones that take the time to get to know you as a person and what makes you tick.”

Some of the managers Quinn remembers most vividly from his time at the Academy are what he calls ‘the old school ones’. “They were brutal. They’d go absolutely nuts at you. It was a bit like an army camp in a way.” These managers had the aspiring footballers doing chores, such as cleaning the players’ boots, washing their cars and putting the cones out.

Other managers inspired Quinn, such as the one who first signed him at Atherstone Town, where he plays now. This manager’s mantra was always ‘enjoy the football’. He invested time in the players and getting to know them. Rather than concentrating on

individual performance and niggles, he said players should enjoy their time on the pitch. Quinn said this created a much less pressurised environment, enabling him to thrive. “If I look back at my football days at Coventry, while I wouldn’t change it, I almost didn’t enjoy it. It was very robotic – training a few times a week, playing matches and [being] very intense, with lots of pressure and expectations. The day I was released was horrendous, but going into non-league has probably been the best thing ever. I felt how I did at six years old, with no pressure. You can go out on the pitch and express yourself.”

That’s how Quinn wants his workforce to feel about coming to work – that they can enjoy themselves and that their manager knows who they are and what makes them tick. He enjoys creating a team environment, mentoring people and helping them grow in the workplace. “We are all going to have challenges at work and tough times, but if you’re in it together

and create a culture where people work hard for each other, you have a positive culture.”

He sees himself as an approachable manager. Having had his own setbacks early on in his life – being let go at 18 and then a gambling problem in his early 20s – has made him very empathetic. If an employee is having personal problems, he tells them to look after themselves, first and foremost – leave work if they need to and have a day at home.

Football taught Quinn to manage the highs and lows of life. “In football, you could win 5-0 one week and then lose the next. You can beat yourself up about it and about any mistakes, but nobody wins forever. I’ve become good at not getting too high or too low about situations because something is always around the corner.”

But when someone is having a tough time or there’s a performance problem at work that needs addressing, Quinn says he doesn’t shy away from difficult conversations. If you have the right culture, a supportive and friendly culture where everyone pulls together, Quinn says it’s much easier to tackle those difficult conversations. “In football, at half time, the lads call each other out. We did it in a good way. It was for the good of the team. I promote that at work – calling each other out when you have to, but in a good way.”

Looking back over the past few years since his dreams ended at Coventry City Academy, Quinn is very proud of what he has achieved, how he was able to pick himself up again and create a new career for himself.

What would he say now, to his 18-year-old self or anyone else in that position? “Things will work out. Remember what you’ve achieved, rather than focusing on this thing that hasn’t worked. Get back on the road and keep going. You will be fine.”

INTERVIEW

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

FROM LIFEGUARD TO CEO

Adam Hill FCIMSPA shares how his experiences working in the sport and physical activity sector have equipped him for his current role as CEO of Mansfield District Council

By
Annette
Wade-Clarke

To work in the sector, you've got to be professional; you've got to be someone that is inspiring, informative, helpful, nurturing. Where I am now as a chief executive, those skills are so important.

So, what I learnt as a lifeguard about how I talk to people, how I understand

people, how I enthuse, energise and encourage them, are all skills that have been crucial through my career and today even more so.

EXPERIENCES THAT DRIVE

One of my earliest memories of working in the sector that drove my passion for people was when I was a

relief swimming teacher. I was working with a school for students with additional needs in Rotherham. There was a child at the side of the pool in floods of tears. He wouldn't get into the pool at all. I talked with him and discovered that he had recently watched the film, Jaws. In the film there is a big black pipe that the shark bites and it electrocutes itself.

Now the pool was an old fibreglass pool that had a big black join across the middle and the child was terrified that if he entered the water something terrible would happen.

In that moment my role was to work with this child and get him into the pool and eventually get him to swim, which, after only couple of sessions, I managed to do.

I guess the challenge which everybody will be aware of is the budget challenge. Sport, physical activity and leisure is a choice for people, but it has one of the greatest influences on community cohesion, mental health, general health and wellbeing, and helping communities to grow and thrive. Yet it is still a discretionary service, and when budgets get tight it's often one of the first areas that is reduced. That's a real shame because for me it has one of the biggest impacts.





COLLABORATION

I now chair a local place-based partnership, which is linked to the integrated care board and integrated care strategy. We're looking at how we can bring physical activity together with health, how people get jobs, how they stay in jobs, how we make sure they stay well and fit and active. By doing this, it's about not looking at where we are as singular providers and sectors, it's about empowering collaboration, co-production. We can make £1 become £3 by working together and having more impact which can help to address those budget challenges.

The place-based approach is so fundamental here in Mansfield where there have been a number of health, wellbeing, economic and social challenges for our communities.

Co-production is so important wherever you are working. I can make sure that the local authority has the policies and corporate strategy but because our communities engage with so many other services we have to align,

whether that's with healthcare providers, social services, education institutions – there are so many community touchpoints. Developing a community or neighbourhood is about so much more than bricks and mortar. This is why bringing services, including sport and physical activity, together is so important.

Take the work that CIMSPA is doing on local skills. To have the voice for the sector workforce supporting local agendas, looking at skills development that not only helps to provide services that get the local population more active, trains those working in the sector to address specific local health needs, but also makes local people more employable – it's brilliant. The work that is taking place at a hyper local level to deliver the services that communities need, creating more social and work opportunities is so important.

Through collaboration like this it's possible to tackle challenges collectively and to bring scale to the benefits that can be achieved.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Connections and network are so important in the sport and physical activity sector because it's so people centric. I have some of those contacts on speed dial because I know that they will give me a reality check and will tell me things that nobody else will.

One thing that we do need to be mindful of for the future of the sector is losing the social connection. But it's so important that we don't lose the people touch. The human interaction that this sector thrives on is the real strength. Those life challenges that we've talked about – the isolation, lack of confidence, chronic diseases, mental wellbeing – they all benefit from the human engagement that we could lose if we're not careful.

One thing I have learnt is how important it is to take things step-by-step. It's important to have aspirations but don't have too fixed a plan. Having goals is crucial but you have to be agile and prepared to adapt and grab great opportunities as they come along in your career.

People need to understand that the careers in the sector aren't just about playing sport; it's so much more. Maintenance, community development, customer services, teaching, commercials, management – there are so many different opportunities and lots of different ways into a career.

I think we need to do more to promote the opportunities that our sector offers and help people to see that actually you might start out as a lifeguard as I did, but one day, why can't you be a CEO? There's every reason you can be.

The skillsets that working in the sector develops have so much value. And finally, don't ever stop learning. There are always new ideas that can help your own thinking and development, so grab every opportunity.

YOUTH ACTIVITY

TEEN TWILIGHT ZONE

Activity levels among the younger population still has a way to go, but there are positive signs among many youth age groups

By
Dean
Gurden

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

“There is no situation, no age and no condition where exercise is not a good thing,” says Chris Whitty, chief medical officer at the Department of Health and Social Care and head of the National Institute for Health Research. It’s a laudable statement, but when it comes to young kids and teenagers exercising, the news is both good and bad.

The good news is that, according to data from Sport England, children and young people’s overall activity levels

are stable, with the initial recovery from the pandemic being maintained across the 2022–23 academic year. But the bad news is that it still means less than half (47%) of teenagers are achieving Whitty’s recommended 60 minutes of activity per day.

Yes, there is a problem, agrees Craig Jones, COO of Junior Adventures Group, “but there are some green shoots”. He cites Sport England’s Active Lives’ data of last year that showed a 12% increase in the 11 to 16-year-old population in being active in different

environments, meaning activities not classed as sport but more related to wellness, fitness and health.

“It indicates that many young people are health conscious, which is great news for our sector,” he says. “We see more children moving away from traditional sports and moving into fitness, which is encouraging.”

Les Mills is one fitness provider that has long had skin in the game when it comes to encouraging youngsters to be more active. Its ‘Born to Move’ programme has been around for 10



years and provides free programming and music to its partners who can then reach out to partnered or unpartnered venues, which includes any youth space. "It could be a community hall, hospital, an intervention group or a church hall," says business development manager Justine Davies. "We provide activities for the young, whether it's from a virtual perspective via a pre-recorded playthrough or live instruction in a class."

Its programmes have always been flexible but, as she points out, this is even more of a necessity for kids, allowing them to choose or build music tracks to a theme, introduce resistance exercises for teams, or maybe a hit session or lifting weights. So far, it's gone into over 1,400 schools. At the heart of Les Mills' offering to young people are its five pillars of child

development: make it fun; make them feel like they belong; make it right for their age and stage; give them a sense of achievement; and keep them physically and emotionally safe.

As Davies says: "We need to create spaces and youth destinations where they actually want to be seen."

Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. She refers to her experience while helping to review the HAF (Holiday, Activities and Food) programme, the

government-funded scheme for holiday activities and food for kids, particularly those from more deprived backgrounds. "Some authorities running these programmes in the summer were doing it really well, but some were completely missing the mark," she says.

"We asked the teenagers what they desired from a six-week summer programme and they said a lot of choice of activities and not a rigid timetable, because that made them feel like they were still in school. They also wanted cool chillout areas to relax in, guidance on cooking and eating healthily on a budget, and the availability of mentors in the community to offer them help and support."

So what about the industry in general? Is it responding to this potential untapped market? "I think it appreciates the problem, but its response has been fragmented," says Jones. "There are pockets of good practice, and more of the sector realises it needs to engage with the next generation of its potential members, ▶

Five pillars of play

- make it fun
- make them feel like they belong
- make it right for their age and stage
- give them a sense of achievement
- keep them physically and emotionally safe

Source: Les Mills' Born to Move platform

YOUTH ACTIVITY

TEEN TWILIGHT ZONE

but it could certainly do more.”

As a starting point, Jones advises gyms and leisure centres to get to grips with the statutory requirements around safety and safeguarding. “By doing so I think it will give them more confidence in engaging with young people,” he says. He flags up a paper being published by ukactive to coincide with National Fitness Day on the 18th September, which improves the existing guidance for children visiting gyms and joining group exercise.

“It’s an update of an existing publication and should give the industry clearer standards and qualifications on upskilling the sector in this area, addressing things like virtual inductions and utilising digital to increase engagement,” he adds. It also includes informative case studies, such as Oldham Leisure, which is a shining example of how to attract young people, having witnessed a huge uptake.

But once you’ve got them through the door and into your facilities, what do gyms and the instructors working in those facilities need to be aware of when interacting with the young? “They need to understand that kids might not react in the same way that adults do,” counsels Jones. “I worked with a young lad for about a year doing activities in a group and got absolutely no eye contact from him. He always had his hood up. But he kept coming back. I explained to the parents that he really didn’t seem to be enjoying it, but they were astonished and

said he’d told them he absolutely loved it.”

Make it fun, advises Hannah Mittoo, director at The Academy Programme, which works with schools and independent gyms using CrossFit and weightlifting to engage young people. “We’re talking low-hanging fruit,” she says. “It needs to be equal measures of tangible and aspirational, because you want them to come back. Gone are the days where you have to ‘be’ someone



YOUTH ACTIVITY

In numbers

47%

Percentage of children meeting the CMO guidelines of **60 mins or more of sport or physical activity**

8 HOURS 39 MINUTES

Average time per day teenagers **spend on screens**

176,000

Drop in the number of secondary-school age people **taking part in running, athletics and multi-sports levels** compared to five years ago

908,000

Increase in the number of children and young people taking part in gym and fitness compared to five years ago

Source: Sport England, Active Lives, 2022-23 academic year

Hannah Mittoo says young people need to have fun while being active, so she keeps activity in her sessions ‘short and sharp’

Mittoo with some members and instructors on the Academy Programme, which uses CrossFit and weightlifting to engage young people with fitness and a whole variety of physical activity



“I worked with a young lad who gave me no eye contact, but he kept coming back. I explained to the parents he didn’t seem to be enjoying it, but they were astonished and said he’d loved it”

Craig Jones (below, right), COO of Junior Adventures Group

every workout. You just want them to attend and think how much fun they’ve had. Keep it to short, sharp bursts.”

The secret is to be on their level, adds Davies. For its Born to Move programme, Les Mills trains its instructors to understand how to talk to different age ranges.

“You’ve got to communicate with them and understand what motivates or worries them,” she says. “Make sure that the music played resonates with them.” That said, don’t try and be too cool, or talk down to them. When all of us think about the best teacher we ever had, they probably treated us as an equal. Do that and their respect should follow.

And let them wear what they want, continues Davies. “A lot of kids just don’t

have the money for gym kit or trainers, so let them join in anyway.” She recalls one conversation with a teacher who talked about how difficult it was to get girls to cycle to school, but the school uniform was a skirt, shirt and tie. “I asked them if they’d ever tried riding a bike in the rain in a skirt? If you truly want an active school, get them to wear something like a smart tracksuit at school. It doesn’t have to be scruffy. Look at how the Olympic teams walk out looking cool in sportswear,” she says.

Parents undoubtedly have a role to play in all this too, though background, lifestyle and circumstances obviously

have a bearing on their ability to provide their kids with activities and opportunities. “It can be a real struggle for some,” acknowledges Davies, “but they also need to understand that it doesn’t have to be the most expensive thing in the world to go for a walk with your kids or try to understand them to find the best ways to keep them active.

“However, I appreciate it can be hard,” she adds. “As much as I hate to say it, you can’t just go out in some areas. Sadly, the days of playing under the streetlights when it goes dark until your mum shouts at you to come in have largely gone.”

What’s also vanished is a world before mobile phones. Sport England research shows that teenagers spend on average a whopping eight hours and 39 minutes per day on screens. As Jones points out: “It’s an alarming thought that they are asleep for about a third of the day and then on the phone or in front of a screen for almost that same length of time.”

Clearly, getting them away from those screens and into physical

activities is always going to be a battle. Hearteningly, however,

Mittoo brings us back to that Active Lives’ stat, showing a 12% increase in the 11 to 16-year-old population in being active in different environments:

“That equates to 908,000 individuals – almost a million kids – that are

trying to signal to the fitness industry that they exist and want to participate in their own physical literacy journey.” It’s now up to the industry to respond.

For more information on ukactive’s Children and Young People in Leisure Centres report, visit here:
<https://bit.ly/3SFJS7R>



TECH TOOLKIT

PRODUCT ROUND-UP

WHEELS OF CHANGE

Tech innovation for bikes and beyond

BY SUE WEEKES



CYCLING IN THE AIR

The Total Body Cycle is a new air cycle from Matrix Fitness, which aims to make group exercise and HIIT more intense by transforming cardio workouts into total body exercises. Matrix said it has reimagined the classic air bike design with belt-drive air-resistance increasing the challenge the harder the rider pedals, pushes and pulls. It claims it offers the user a quieter experience than chain-drive competitors while ergonomically designed handlebars offer multiple grips for all different phases of rides. The equipment includes a backlit LCD console that captures watts, RPMs, heart rate, calories, time and distance. Matrix has also facilitated speedy transitions between users with a quick-pull lever allowing you to quickly adjust seat height while it claims the low-maintenance belt-drive streamlines service and minimises downtime.

<https://www.matrixfitness.com/uk/eng>



Who's top of the leaderboard?

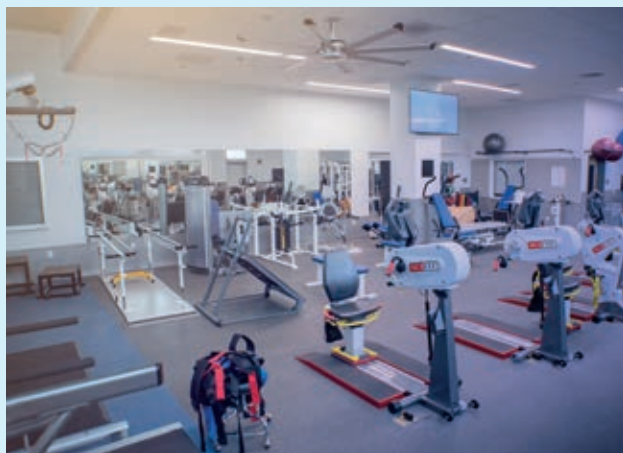
Wattbike has launched a new Leaderboards feature to enable riders to track their performance, set personal records as well as compete with a global community. It includes a variety of challenges, including endurance tests, hill climbs, speed sprints and distance goals to enable gyms, sports teams or schools and colleges to run internal Wattbike challenges that will increase engagement and boost retention. Users participate by completing a workout in the Challenges category or taking part in selected tests and climbs via the free-to-use Wattbike Training Hub. The Leaderboards display all-time results with a monthly breakdown coming soon. During the summer, Wattbike introduced a number of special challenges themed around events such as the Tour de France and the Olympic Games Paris 2024. It is also running its 1k Challenge in which it invites Wattbikers to complete the 1km workout in the Training Hub as quickly as possible.

<https://wattbike.com>

SEAMLESS FLOORING AIDS EASY CLASS TRANSITION

Flooring specialist Ecore is expanding its Athletic portfolio with Performance Motivate Plus, specifically tailored for light strength and conditioning workouts. Ecore transforms reclaimed materials into high-performance products. Motivate Plus complements Ecore's Performance Beast flooring, which is built for handling heavier weights. Ecore explains that, when adjoined, the two flooring products facilitate a smooth transition between spaces, enabling a seamless switch to different training modalities. Performance Motivate Plus features Ecore's patented TRU technology. The company has also introduced four new colours to each of its product lines: Rustic Edge, Raw Titanium, Forged Steel and Urban Slate.

www.ecoreathletic.com



PAYMENT BY WRISTBAND

Polar Electro is partnering with Swedish tech company Fidesmo to introduce a new collection of sports watch wristbands that are enabled for convenient and safe contactless payments. Made of soft, durable silicone, the Polar Payment Wristbands are compatible with all Polar watches that support standard 20mm and 22mm lug widths. They are fitted with a near field communication (NFC) chip that links payment cards and the contactless payment service Fidesmo Pay. As soon as the payment function is activated on the Fidesmo Pay app, users can pay for goods and services at any contactless terminal in-store. Fidesmo's solution enables advanced secure hardware transactions, similar to Apple Pay and Samsung Pay. Fidesmo Pay is available in more than 40 European countries, including the UK, and works with any terminal that supports contactless payments worldwide.

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<https://fidesmo.com/the-latest/>

WORKPLACE

FOCUS

WORKING WITH AUTISTIC PEOPLE THROUGH SPORT

Matt Bates from Spautism UK outlines how sports organisations can make small changes to improve their workplace for autistic people

Over the years there have been a variety of statistics relating to autistic people and employment, but there is one common theme in all of them – most autistic people are unemployed.

As a consequence, I strongly believe a lot of sports businesses are missing out on great employees and colleagues. Here's a brief overview of how workplaces can become more empowering for autistic people, and what the benefits are.

AN INTRODUCTION TO AUTISM

People with autism have a different way of experiencing the world to neurotypical people, which encompasses how they communicate and interact with others. Autism is lifelong, and while included as a developmental disability in the Equality Act, we at Spautism encourage thinking about difference, not deficit.

While there are similar traits in some people with autism, like building routines to help them prepare for each day, every autistic person is different; some autistic people do not like structure. It's about meeting the needs of the individuals you work with.

To meet those needs, it's important to understand the different ways that people might see, interpret and react to things around them. This is something we focus on when discussing the truths and common misunderstandings of autism from a sports perspective with organisations.

RELATIONSHIP WITH SPORT

Some autistic people have a 'special interest' where they are incredibly passionate about a particular subject, and not only devote a lot of time to learning about it, but are brilliant at remembering facts and figures.

Everyone has their own hobbies

that they enjoy and, similarly, special interests differ from person to person. While someone might be fascinated about Japanese food, another might know the winner of every Formula One race since the turn of the century.

You won't need me to tell you that employing someone who is incredibly passionate about your sport, club or organisation can be a very positive thing for your workplace. We are fortunate to have met a variety of autistic people who work in a sport they are passionate about – from match officials, to journalists, to scanning tickets at the entrance to stadiums – and the Sports and Stats Masterclass that we launched publicly in 2022 brought together people's passions for sports and numbers.

Organisations could be missing out on this talent right from the moment they publish vacancies. Being clear on what the job role entails, and specific on what skills are important, could make someone feel more confident about whether the job is right for them and if they would be welcome.





Above: Spautism and MAN v FAT raised awareness of autism by hosting a football tournament at Millwall Community Trust



FROM AWARENESS TO ACCEPTANCE

To get more people thinking about autism, while often raising money for charities, lots of organisations around the world run awareness events. Several of these take place during Autism Awareness Month in April.

While these are very important to help people understand more about autism, it's the activation of that knowledge 24/7 that makes the biggest difference, and your organisation takes the step from awareness to acceptance. But how do you do that?

SMALL CHANGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

When it comes to improving inclusivity, lots of people immediately jump to making big changes that require major renovations or money-spending. Changes like this can be great, but it's what I describe as 'reasonable adjustments' that can also make an important difference – and can be achieved without busting the bank.

Reasonable adjustments are about going through your daily processes, asking why you and your company does things the way you do. It's easy to

follow what you've done before, but is there a better way?

For example, is it compulsory for everyone to attend a training day? Of course, everyone needs training, but you may have employees for whom the thought of attending a whole day of training at a new location is incredibly difficult. You may then create a virtual session or send out pre-recorded videos that employees can stop, start and rewind.

Providing different ways for employees to digest information is an example of becoming more inclusive, allowing them to learn in the way that best suits them, which can ultimately boost productivity from all your employees when it comes to perfecting that next project.

SPEAK TO SPAUTISM

Spautism works with organisations to help them become more inclusive, from a series of consultation meetings through to company-wide training that will help all-employees start to think more inclusively.

Making your workplace more inclusive doesn't just positively impact your employees, but there is a knock-on effect to the customers, supporters, participants, and other stakeholders who engage with your staff at your sports club or organisation. Among many groups, we have delivered training for coaches and match officials from the Lawn Tennis Association which aimed to not only improve their awareness, but make the sport more enjoyable for autistic people participating in their sessions or watching events.

Opening up to learning more about autism is not just great for autistic people in the workplace, but your organisation as a whole.

Matt Bates is content & communications director at Spautism UK



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T H E H E A R T B E A T O F Y O U R G Y M

LAST WORD

SPORT AMBASSADOR

Rebecca Phillips, Everyone Active strategic lead – health and wellbeing, on working within the community



IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES

In my role as the health and wellbeing strategic lead for Everyone Active, I deliver the operator's community strategy, where we support local authorities to improve outcomes for a whole host of local residents.

Currently we have 68 local authority partners nationally, supporting our local regional activity & wellbeing colleagues to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes for each client. The demographics of an area are very different, as they have the local needs but we aim to provide the physical activity solutions through national and local partnerships that support healthcare services.

There are various ways to do that, and so it's about making use of the space that they offer. GPs and social prescribers often won't have lots of room to see patients with the support and the care plans that they need, but if they [GPs etc] come and work within a leisure centre, then it breaks down any barriers to being physically active, and in turn that breaks down the hurdles to participation.

By co-locating services in the leisure centres, that can make a huge difference, along with integrating physical activity into health and social care pathways. With a commissioned service like mental health, or maybe a talking therapy service, if patients are

offered care through mental health support, it often helps them to integrate physical activity into that treatment plan, so they are supported with better outcomes by moving more.

In the future, as a sector we need to focus on prevention, but I also don't think the NHS has fully embraced how much our industry can support their outcomes. They understand how physical activity can support patients, but we need more acknowledgment and trust in making these referrals. If they've got long waiting lists in an area, then the leisure workforce and the leisure sector can support them to put in an intervention while people wait for surgery or those who are waiting for mental health support.

If patients start moving more and start connecting with other people, then they're already starting their treatment plan before the NHS is able to support them with their care. What is going to be key for the next five years is a greater understanding in terms of

how the sport and physical activity sector can support the health service.

I really enjoy helping people make a difference to their lives through healthy opportunities related to sport and physical fitness. It makes me realise the difference we could have on people's lives if we helped them to move more and be active. I started work with Everyone Active 13 years ago as a sales manager, but in my role now I can see the difference I'm able to make with the local community, and it motivates me so much. A lot of the work we do is supporting people with long-term health conditions or in a particular demographic where they find physical activity harder to access.

It was more of a commercial role that I worked in at the beginning, but I had the privilege of working for a manager that really understood the community. They understood that the community was at the heart of everything we did and he was really passionate about supporting people. That made me realise what a difference we could have on people's lives if we helped them to move more and start physical activity.

In my opinion, the best way to make people more active is by doing it and living it – behaviour change is a journey. Seeing my daughters learn and adapt to new things makes me want to continue to be their role model by living and breathing physical activity, even

“Sport and physical activity brings people together, whether that's watching it or doing it yourself”



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LAST WORD

SPORT AMBASSADOR



walking them to school. Being a parent has made me realise just how powerful that can be. For instance, I did not have a good swimming experience when I was younger; I can swim but not to a great standard. I felt it was important that my girls learnt to swim at a young age, and they have had lessons since both of them turned three. We are doing all sorts now, too: we've all started running, paddle boarding, horse

riding – and even learning French!

I like to travel as well, and it's interesting to see how different countries focus and campaign for improved health and wellbeing. We went to the Olympics in Paris as a family and even attended Andy Murray's final match as a professional tennis player which was quite emotional, but a great experience. And that's another great thing about sport

“As a nation, we see the barriers to being active, but other countries show us it doesn't matter”

and physical activity – it brings people together, whether that's watching professionals or doing it yourself. It's an important aspect of life, being fit and healthy and interacting with others, be that family, friends or even strangers!

Other countries might have more of an outdoor lifestyle because of the weather, which is not always possible in the UK. However, I think the emphasis on outdoor swimming at the minute is interesting, because in a way, that's almost defying the weather. I think we're sometimes a nation of people that might see the barriers to being outside, but other countries show us that it doesn't matter.

Having my dog, Chilli, helps me to get out too, regardless of the weather, and still motivates me to run, regardless of whether it's raining or not. However, on the negative side, I think being a woman definitely affects me exercising outdoors in the winter, because it's dark and I need to make sure I feel safe. Where I live, it's quite rural and there aren't many street lights. That's the only negative, but then we've got plenty of gyms to be able to exercise in.

Understanding such barriers makes a big difference in trying to help others think about them differently. In those circumstances I would try and run with somebody else so that I would feel safer, which, of course, brings up the whole social connectiveness aspect of exercise.

*Rebecca Phillips spoke with
Patrick Appleton*

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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.

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

