

Culture Committee CC 21-02 p1

Date: 18 December 2002

Time: 9.15 – 12.30

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly for Wales

Item 1: Policy Review on Sport

Presentation from the Welsh Sports Association

Barriers to Access

Whilst the Sports Council for Wales and the local authorities have made enormous progress over recent decades in providing an infrastructure of leisure facilities, geographical and transport access remain a problem in some areas. Similarly, access to sporting opportunity costs money with the costs increasing rapidly for the more talented who may wish to further their involvement. Finally, there are severe limits on the number and variety of sports which can be provided in schools, coupled with the very limited time allocated in the timetable to school sport.

Opportunities for women and girls are better than ever with the Sports Council for Wales identifying this as a key area. The governing bodies of sport in Wales have also been active in this regard for many years.

Opportunities for older people, disabled people and ethnic minorities are also improving with many sports now developing veteran/senior categories and championships. However, the participants are generally required to self finance their activities and this can provide a barrier to some. The benefits of exercise and healthy lifestyles through participation in sport are well known but the sector cannot finance this growth from its own limited resources. There needs to be a much closer partnership with the health sector, with additional financial support coming from that sector.

Access to participation for disabled groups now has a higher profile but can provide difficulties for some sporting governing bodies in terms of physical access, specialised equipment and qualified coaches. Finally in most cases, access to sporting participation is open to all groups within society, including ethnic minorities, providing the necessary funding is available.

Infrastructure and Facilities

See my opening comments. The local authorities, aided and advised by the Sports Council for Wales, are doing an excellent job in difficult circumstances, given that sport and leisure provision is not a statutory requirement in their budgets. However, in some areas, facilities are badly in need of upgrades and refurbishments.

The impact of major events in participation levels can be quite considerable, as can the impact on economic regeneration, e.g. The Commonwealth Games in Manchester, the Olympic Games in Sydney and the forthcoming Ryder Cup in Wales. However, in many cases, further financial support may need to be provided to governing bodies of sport to respond to the new demand by the general public.

Elite Sports

The impact of elite sports can and does have an impact on participation levels because the concept of elite sports is closely associated with success and winning medals. Success on sports fields and on sports hall floors is good for national pride and helps to provide a feeling of well being in the population at large. For example, Welsh success at the Commonwealth Games is acknowledged and applauded through the countries participating in that prestigious event. In this regard, the Elite Cymru scheme has been an outstanding success and with further financial support could assist even more young people to reach the highest levels of excellence in sport.

Bob Turner

Chairman, Welsh Sports Association