

**JOINT MEETING OF
THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY OBESITY
GROUP**

AND

**THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY ASTHMA
GROUP**

SUPPORTED BY

**THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY
CHILDREN'S GROUP**

Meeting Report

**Tuesday 14th February 2006
House of Commons**

Children and Young People's Health and Physical Activity
14th February 2006, Attlee Room, Portcullis House
MEETING REPORT

Introduction

This is the report of a joint meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Groups on Asthma and Obesity, held at Portcullis House, Westminster, on Tuesday 14th February 2006.

The meeting was jointly chaired by Baroness Massey of Darwen and Dr Howard Stoate MP.

Asthma UK, Cancer Research UK and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy recently launched a joint campaign to promote the importance of physical activity on health, based around their manifesto – *Active workplaces? Active communities? Active Government...?*

The meeting formed the second in a series of three parliamentary seminars held by these groups on the subject of physical activity and occupational health, children and young people, and older people. The focus of this meeting was on improving physical activity levels in children and young people and in particular:

- How to guarantee that children and young people across the UK have access to physical activity facilities that are affordable, safe and accessible;
- How to encourage schools to provide sufficient time for high quality physical education and make the school day a more active experience;
- How to reduce “drop out” rates of participation in physical activity and successfully manage the transition between school, university and community sport;
- How to ensure that the benefits of exercise for children with existing medical conditions as well as the role of exercise in preventing future conditions such as obesity are better understood.

Three speakers addressed the meeting:

Graham Hastings Evans – Chief Executive Officer, Office of the Children's Commissioner for England

Alison Oliver - Implementation Director, Youth Sport Trust

Melody Hossaini - Co-Chair, UK Youth Parliament

63 people attended the meeting, representing a wide range of commercial and public sector organisations, government agencies, MPs, Peers, academics and healthcare professionals. A complete list of the organisations represented is appended.

Speaker Presentations

Graham Hasting-Evans, CEO of the Office of the Children's Commissioner

There are 11.8 million children in England, representing one-quarter of the population. Approximately 3 million of these children are classified as overweight or obese and the number of obese children is growing. Therefore, this topic is very relevant.

Since taking office 7 months ago, the Children's Commissioner and his team have been talking to children and young people around the country. They want the Office to be their voice and for their voice to be heard by government and local government alike. The Office

is exposing issues, raising debate, informing the debate and getting the issues across to government. Children see things very clearly and they say it as they see it; this means that there is a clarity about the messages that they give, which is very powerful and refreshing.

On the subject of nutrition, for example, many children understand the theory about healthy eating, but they don't necessarily see it as a priority for them. They all complain about school meals, of course! And children are very influenced by the media. They see the problems around eating as not just a problem in their own right, but as being linked to other things – e.g. home life, pressure they're under at school, and their community.

With regard to physical activity, children want more things to do and more places to go. That is a common view. They want local activities and places to visit, not just national leisure centres or facilities. Cost is an issue for many and ease of access, transport and travel are very important issues that need to be addressed.

A common theme for children is a fear of traffic; young people's use of cycling is falling as traffic congestion increases. There's also an issue about motivation – it's easier to watch the television than go out and play.

A lot has been done to increase young people's participation in physical activity (for example, the national physical activity programme in schools). With some sub-groups, however, such as Asian girls, it is very difficult to increase the levels of participation because of cultural or ethnic issues. Socio-economic circumstances are also a factor. Some 6-8% of children are excluded from activities and sports because their families cannot afford to pay for them to get involved in physical activity.

Mr Hastings-Evans then set out a "shopping list" of the initiatives and developments he would like to see in order to make a real difference to physical activity opportunities for children and young people:

- More progress with the national strategy on physical activity – there will still be 11.8 million children after 2008, so what happens to them after then?
- A continued focus on nutrition
- Better links between schools and colleges - engaging with school nurses, community workers, links into the 2012 Olympics
- The aim is for children to have approximately seven hours of physical activity per week. If the schools/extend school environment can deliver half of that, the other half needs to be delivered via other community projects. That requires a rethink on how we plan our community infrastructure – housing, amenities, transport. The opportunity for children to be active outside of the wider school environment is becoming more difficult and this needs to get raised in the debate.

Big government departments and organisations find it very difficult to join up the dots and see the bigger picture. We need to find a way to do this - and soon - if we are to deliver the facilities, services and opportunities that our children want and need.

Alison Oliver, Implementation Director for the Youth Sport Trust

The Youth Sport Trust (YST) has been around since 1994. Its mission is to try and create a brighter future for young people through sport

The YST has had a long-held belief that physical education (PE) and school sport have a value in terms of improving physical and mental health. Also, however, physical activity is a great vehicle in itself for wider learning and education. Consequently, the YST tries to ensure that participation in activity is increased across the board, as well as ensure that educational other opportunities through sport are followed up. The YST has a pathway of

physical activity and sport programmes which encompass the whole age range, from 18 months to 18 years.

The YST plays a central role in supporting the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the delivery of the national strategy for PE, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL). The overall aim of PESSCL is to enhance the take-up of sporting opportunities by 5-16 year olds. By 2008, the aim is for the percentage of school children who spend a minimum of two hours per week in high quality PE and school sport within and beyond the curriculum to be 85%.

The PESSCL strategy has eight different strands, each designed to maximise opportunities for young people to access high quality PE and school sport.

One key strand is the development of Specialist Sports Colleges and School Sport Partnerships (SSP's). Each partnership is led by a Partnership Development Manager who works with School Sports Coordinators and Primary Link Teachers in a given locality. At the moment there are 411 Schools–Sport Partnerships in England and by September 2006 all schools will be part of a partnership: by which time there will be 450 SSP's.

Last year's PESSCL survey reveals that 69% of children are accessing 2 hours of school sport per week, up from 62% last year. The target is to reach 75% by this summer and Ms Oliver believes this target will be met. The PSA target is 85% by 2008.

Ms Oliver emphasised that, in order to reach the participation target, there is a need to get at the harder to access groups – certain ethnic groups, girls, and, for example, the 10% of children in the UK who have asthma.

Ms Oliver explained that there is a real desire for innovation and change, both within the education system and at grass-roots level. Many of those involved in these areas are traditional sport and games players, but it is apparent that young people of today want something very different, and this has had to be taken into account when looking at national PE and school sport strategies and local delivery mechanisms. This has proved to be a real wake-up call for some and an opportunity for others. It is possible to interpret the national curriculum in different ways, and away from traditional team games like netball, football and rugby, towards a focus on activities like 'street dance' and "ultimate Frisbee"! As the influence of schools can diminish beyond the school gates, there are real challenges in the PESSCL strategy to ensure that community providers are partners in its implementation: the post 16 gap is still a challenge for us all and as PE and school sport is modernised so young peoples expectations of community provision will change. The young people of today will demand a different club and recreation structure to the one that exists at the moment. As a result we will need human resources to drive such change, perhaps similar to the Partnership Development Managers in SSP's and a bigger and more diverse coaching infrastructure.

If we are to sustain long term involvement in physical activity, secure the promotion of healthy diets and ensure young people are encouraged to participate (regardless of medical conditions) they will also require supportive parents and carers who are active and encourage participation. If we are serious about improving the physical activity levels of children and young people we have to be equally serious about educating adults about the benefits of a healthy and active lifestyle and providing them with accessible and appealing recreation activities which attract and re-engage them. With parenting support being part of the core offer of Extended Schools we hope SSP's will be able to play a role here, however, to really effect change strategies will need to include activity in the workplace and at home as well as within the community.

Changes to the built environment will be important if we are to provide safe and accessible facilities for young people to engage in positive sport and physical activity experiences.

While other places frequented by young people have ‘moved with the times’ e.g. cinemas, shopping malls and nightclubs, the sporting infrastructure is often outdated and unappealing. However, it is not all about building new facilities, research has shown how small changes can make a big difference. By changing the colour of the tarmac in the playground and creating different zones for children wanting to take part in different activities: ball games, multiskill activities and quieter activities, playtime activity has been shown to increase significantly. Improving the changing room facilities to make them more appealing and inviting for girls has also been shown to have an impact on participation. Also, ensuring that there is sufficient safe, local and lit ‘green’ space will be as important as improvements in the built environment.

‘Step into sport’ is the Leadership and Volunteering strand of the PESCCCL strategy. This programme encourages and trains young people to lead and coach both within school and in the community. Young people are incredibly powerful agents of change working within their own peer group and with younger children and the YST believes that we are only just starting to scratch the surface of that peer group potential to increase levels of participation. We would encourage all programmes having the aim of increasing physical activity among young people, to not only ensure they are consulted, but that their active involvement in supporting and implementing change is secured and invested in.

Melody Hossaini - Co-Chair of the UK Youth Parliament

The UK Youth Parliament comprises young MPs (Members of the Youth Parliament or MYPs) who meet nationally once a year to produce a manifesto. The UKYP also has a series of select committees, mirroring those in the UK parliament. There are over 300 MYPs across the UK and their views represent the views of thousands of young people across the country.

In its manifesto, the UKYP’s Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee has called for facilities to be made available for children and young people. The government should encourage the promotion of a wider variety of facilities that appeal to all tastes, which are designed to combat inactivity, including funding equipment and specialist teachers. Services should be discounted to encourage more young people to participate. Leisure facilities should offer low-cost ‘taster days’ for young people.

In short, young people are not currently provided with sufficient facilities of interest or that they can afford. Many existing facilities are not simply accessible to young people, particularly in rural areas where transport can be a particular problem.

The UKYP’s Environment and Rural Affairs Committee calls for similar facilities and opportunities for young people in rural areas, such as low-cost access to a wider range of facilities in non-peak tourist seasons.

The subject of anti-social behaviour also plays a part here. The UKYP believes that there should be more research into anti-social behaviour and the multiple causes behind it.

Ms Hossaini provided a number of examples of initiatives which might be considered:

- Introduce a UK-wide young people’s concession card for sport and leisure facilities. There is no such concession for young people at the moment.
- Conduct a questionnaire to ascertain what young people really want and identify solutions to address their key concerns.
- Mirror some of the schemes being run in other European countries, such as in Sweden, which are proving very successful, e.g. “Fun in Five” – 5 days of fun which are run once a year. The Swedish government invests the money and young people get a taster session and a chance to participate in all kinds of activities,

which can include anything from break-dancing and drama, to singing to badminton. This is a fantastic way of introducing a wide range of activities into one's daily schedule without having to think about it and could perhaps be tried as a pilot programme in the UK

Youth clubs could run activity days – all of these things are possible to do and can make a difference.

After thanking the three speakers, Baroness Massey summarised some of the key issues and themes which had emerged from the presentations. In particular, she stressed the need to think collectively about what Parliamentarians should be doing to encourage physical activity in young people. What can we do to take this forward?

The key issues seem to be:

- A lack of leisure opportunities
- The physical environment
- The influence of the media and of the home
- Youth culture – how do we consult with and engage young people in decisions about issues that affect them?
- Peer group influence
- Community sport
- Special needs groups and other marginalised groups – ethnic, socio-economic, disabled and those with long-term medical conditions
- The role of schools and the education system – especially School Nurses
- Training for specialists and volunteers
- Local authorities input – links between services
- The role of Children's Trusts and Children's Centres as they develop.

Audience discussion and questions

The following points or views were expressed during the audience discussion that followed:

- A School Sports Coordinator noted that it is very difficult for schools to prioritise sport further in light of the curriculum's current demands and that the Government might do more to ensure that children and young people participate more in physical activity. Alison Oliver from the Youth Sport Trust added that the 2006 and 2008 PSA and the 2010 ambition that the Government has set for young people's involvement in PE, School Sport and sport beyond the school day is a significant step in encouraging all schools to provide adequate time within both the curriculum and wider school day.
- Looking at the community perspective, there is a new group called Youth Active, funded by Sport England. The YMCA is one of their partners. The YMCA is currently delivering a lot of community projects aimed at engaging and empowering children and young people. It tries to link the voluntary sector with other sectors such as Primary Care Trusts and the schools. Unfortunately, these organisations are unclear about how they can best work collectively at the moment; everyone talks a different language (health focus on GMS contract and evidence base; the fitness people talk about fitness) and this can sometimes be prohibitive.
- There should be a move away from talking about sport, towards talking more broadly about participation in physical activity.
- Initiatives should not forget pre-school age children. Children are more likely to stay involved, if they've been active from year one.
- An organisation called London Play aims to promote children's play across the capital. This encompasses sport, active play and also other play like cultural play. London Play

has worked with the Greater London Authority to produce a guide to developing play strategies for young people. It would like to see Parliament look at the guidance under Every Child Matters and Youth Matters – this guidance specifically requires Directors to look at play and recreation for young people and children.

- It is vital that children and young people are involved in the development of the projects. Also, there is an issue around the sustainability of many of these projects, e.g. in terms of ongoing funding. This will require greater partnership.
- Whilst we're waiting for the environment to change, GPs have to try and tackle the obesity epidemic on a one-to-one basis in surgeries on a Monday morning. GPs are rewarded and judged by the GMS contract, but not one incentive point is given to GPs to do anything about physical activity or childhood obesity.
- Why is the Government strategy so sport-oriented? And why are the DfES and DH not so engaged in this? Young people tell us that they want to cycle, but are prevented from doing so by the environment and by their parents. These issues need to be addressed. Sustrans is developing a proposal to use the Olympics as a significant opportunity for making real environmental change in London – Greenways GOAL programme.
- Obesity is not a ticking time - bomb; the bomb has already exploded. For the first time ever, we've managed to get obesity/BMI included into the GMS contract. But it has not gone far enough and there is nothing in that contract to reward GPs for addressing childhood obesity.
- Asthma should not be a barrier to activity if that is properly managed and treated. It is very sad when parents say, "my kid can't..."
- The built environment is a big barrier. It should be the rule that unless developers can prove how people can walk and cycle to new facilities, they should not be allowed planning permission. It is not difficult to make small alterations to traffic lights and footpaths so that people can walk and cycle without fear.
- The Government has provided £14 million to the Parenting Fund. Foundations submitted a proposal for funding for a project to get parents and children together through sport, but were told that that was not a relevant proposal for the Parenting Fund.
- In MEND's experience, when you get a group of overweight and obese children together, it takes away the stigma that those children feel in a broader environment, where they can feel self-conscious and/or disabled. There is a need to create more opportunities for these groups to play and be active together.
- We are a long way from where we want to be in terms of primary care, and it will be up to local practices to decide what priority they want to devote to obesity. Practice-Based commissioning should be a vehicle.
- The Food Advertising Unit is working with the DH at the moment on its social marketing programme. There is a real focus on food and nutrition in the DH, but very little talk about the physical activity side of things and the FAU is concerned that this part of the debate is being lost.
- Recent research shows that cross-generational programmes (i.e. programmes involving both parents and their children) work best and that physical activity can have a real positive impact on children with behavioural problems. Therefore, whilst school is important, we need to be looking at programmes that involve the wider family as well.
- The National Obesity Forum is setting up a virtual network to pull together all of these examples of best practice and local initiatives taking place around the country.

Appendix

The following organisations were represented at the meeting:

- Asthma UK
- Biscuit Chocolate Cake and Confectionery Association
- British Retail Consortium
- British Heart Foundation
- British Toy and Hobby Association
- Cancer Research UK
- CCPR
- Chartered Society of Physiotherapists
- Child Growth Foundation
- Department of Health
- Food Advertising Unit, Advertising Association
- Foundations
- Home Start
- London Play
- MEND (Mind, Exercise Nutrition and Diet)
- National Centre for Eating Disorders
- National Family and Parenting Institute
- National Obesity Forum
- National Children's Bureau
- NHS Diabetes
- Office of the Children's Commissioner
- Roche Products Limited
- Royal College of Nursing
- Sustrans
- UK Youth Parliament
- Weber Shandwick Public Affairs
- Whitehouse Consultancy
- Youth Sport Trust

Parliamentarians

- Lady David
- Annette Brook MP
- Earl Howe
- Howard Stoate MP
- Baroness Massey of Darwen
- Tim Loughton MP