

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: OPEN CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Q1 How can we encourage more people to be physically active, on a regular basis?

The Western physical environment is now less conducive to incidental, or integral, physical activity than in previous decades. This is having a range of negative physical, psychological impacts for the individual and wider social and economic impacts for communities and nations.

Reaping the benefits of physical activity requires regular and habitual participation, underpinned by healthy lifestyle choices over the long term.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to galvanizing and sustaining participation and effecting lasting lifestyle changes. Doing so requires a policy framework and coordinated action by a range of stakeholders, at all levels, from the national to the local targeted at areas of most need¹.

Building on Game Plan (2002), an updated cross-departmental 'physical activity' strategy would provide an effective framework for engendering action by all. This policy framework should:

- 1) Be underpinned by a holistic approach: engendering and tracking wider, permanent changes in lifestyle rather than simply focusing on physical activity.
- 2) Adopt a broad definition of sport and physical activity to include all forms of sport, workplace physical activity and leisure time physical activity as well as active travel.
- 3) Adopt a long-term approach that promotes sustainable lifestyle change.
- 4) Promote multi-departmental and sectoral engagement: consultation (with providers and participants/non-participants) and genuine and transparent collaboration between all stakeholders.
- 5) Specify actions to improve
 - a) the provision of activities, facilities and their staffing; and
 - b) the marketing/promotion of physical activity and of the related behavioural changes (social marketing) to change the perception of/negative relationship with physical activity.These actions should aim to stimulate demand and achieve effective, appropriate and market-oriented supply, by overcoming the multitude of known barriers to participation and tapping into motivational triggers.
 - Stimulating demand: Research shows that motivational drivers/triggers are: fun and enjoyment; health and fitness; challenge and achievement; sociability and friendship, reward (payment, praise); philanthropy (fundraising) and competition. Barriers are: practical (availability of/access to activities and facilities/lack of access to information), financial (costs of participation), personal/psychological (lack of confidence, perceptions of ability/body image, parental and peer support) and cultural (participation is not the cultural norm in either social class or national/religious culture).
 - Stimulating and supporting supply: barriers experienced by activity providers include resource constraints (finance, staff), lack of collaboration with others and lack of awareness about the latest research into effective social marketing of physical activity participation and

¹ Including: Governmental departments and NDPBs; NGOs; education establishments; health providers, transport providers; physical activity providers (gyms, leisure centres); international and member federations; event organisers; elite athletes and teams, private sector; employers, the media and the public.

individual, social and cultural level barriers. Motivational triggers for improving physical activity provision include the economic, social and cultural gains for organisations and communities associated with improved health and increased social/physical/cultural capital.

Such actions should be:

- tailored to different socio-demographics (age, gender, location, religion, ethnicity, or socio-economic status).
 - based on evidenced need/demand.
 - targeted at areas/groups of most need
 - guided by best practice examples and thorough research.
- 6) Engender thorough, long term and transparent monitoring and evaluation – using reliable and valid benchmarking measures.

Specific suggestions to increase participation are as follows:

Provision of facilities

1. Improve observational research and evaluation to monitor the disparities in resource availability and utilisation, including gaps in provision.
2. It is important to ensure that locations or facilities are clean, safe and appropriate for all. Facility development should be informed by in-depth research to better determine what environmental characteristics enhance physical activity levels; e.g. features, condition, access, aesthetics, safety, for leisure centres, gyms, schools, workplaces, parks and so forth. Consolidate and disseminate data and information on effective programmes and facility design.
3. Prioritise resources and provide incentives for community design, economic development, land use and infrastructure projects and initiatives that integrate physical activity into their development.
4. Promote, through strategic social marketing initiatives, the incorporation of movement into daily lives; e.g. using the stairs, standing not sitting, walking to school, cycling to work.
5. Improve provision of indoor and outdoor facilities in urban and rural areas. Increase access to public land and water on a permanent basis, as well as on an informal temporary basis. Develop and institute policies and agreements that encourage multi-use of facilities; e.g. opening school sports fields to external groups; school use of public or private gyms/pools; sports events in local parks. Develop programmes such as ‘green gyms’ that promote physical activity through volunteering opportunities (e.g. community gardening, ecological restoration).
6. Address urban bias: expand projects to facilitate mobile provision of equipment in rural areas, such as schemes to transport sports equipment from village to village, or ‘mobile gyms’ that can visit rural schools and colleges on a regular basis. This must be coupled with capacity building to ensure personnel can catalyse interest and safe use of such facilities.
7. Reduce bureaucracy and time taken to register for clubs/sports facilities, including through new technology: e.g. online booking systems or smart leisure cards.
8. Encourage employers (e.g. through tax incentives and marketing measures) to provide work-based facilities including those that encourage active travel to/from work, such as gyms, changing, showers and cycle parking. Companies should be encouraged to systematically collaborate to create and share facilities.

Type/range of activities

1. Regularly consult participants and non-participants (particularly users - and non-users of facilities) on activities offered (what, when, where and how they are undertaken), and on the customer experience of these activities.
2. Offer a wider variety of competitive and non-competitive sports and physical activities, by a range of providers, in formal and informal environments.

3. Offer shorter classes and games where benefits can be gained in a short time frame. Enable people to combine activities such as sport and shopping (e.g. retail outlets that provide yoga classes).
4. Promote home-based exercise (e.g. DVDs, music/motivational CDs) and the development of cost effective/free training programmes that can be downloaded. All public libraries, schools and work places could offer 'exercise DVD' rental.
5. Encourage technology companies, such as games-console manufacturers, e-gaming and mobile phone providers, to develop products and applications that encourage physical activity, rather than sedentary behaviour. The use of innovative online resources and mobile phone apps for the self-monitoring of physical activity participation should be actively promoted
6. Offer activities that are open to all and provide opportunities for parent/children co-participation, whilst also acknowledging the need for acceptable grouping and class composition, e.g. option of single-sex activities and events.
7. Relax dress codes.

Finance/cost of participation

1. Gyms/clubs: offer free introductions/inductions/trials, provide flexibility in the length of sign-up periods and a variety of payment options (monthly or 'pay as you play'), support a variety of family structures/compositions in membership packages and offer vouchers/discounts for other products with membership.
2. Provide targeted, needs based subsidies for children's participation: entry to sports facilities, club membership or classes.
3. Encourage the provision of, and actively and effectively market, activities that are free to the end user and incur minimum outlay for equipment/membership (see parkrun case study below)
4. Where equipment is necessary, offer and publicise opportunities to borrow, exchange or hire equipment, or buy second-hand.

Workplace

1. Identify, summarise, and disseminate best practice interventions in the workplace, and develop guidelines for what constitutes workplace 'best practice' and create a model of universal best practices that business and industry can adopt.
2. Employers could incentivise employees to participate in physical activity, or contribute to the CSR agenda through volunteering at events or for clubs – incentives can include tax breaks for sports equipment purchases, bike to work schemes, days off in lieu, monetary bonuses or rewards.
3. Systematic marketing campaigns should be used to highlight the strong commercial and productivity case for employee health/wellness.

Staffing

1. Improvement in facilities must be coupled with long-term investment in capacity building of coaches, leaders and organisers who can engage, encourage and inspire people to gain skills and confidence. Training should be informed by the latest research into the barriers and motivations to physical activity participation for various groups, and methods for stimulating demand.
2. Ensure equity in recruitment of staff and volunteers at all levels (coaches, teachers, managers, NGB Boards), especially with minority and underserved populations to enhance engagement with underserved segments.
3. Regularly collect and update information on innovative and best-practice club practices in order to develop resources to assist clubs to implement such practices. These resources should be available in multiple formats including print and electronic (on-line) access and be supported by a statewide dissemination and 'train the trainer' strategies.

4. Ensure appropriate volunteer education and training opportunities, as well as effectively managed volunteer leadership succession processes. Strategies for attracting and retaining suitable volunteers should be widely disseminated, including through campaigns to increase public awareness and support for volunteering.
5. Impressing a message and effecting change requires inspiration, motivation and leadership from sectors that have integrity and gravitas within the culture that needs to be benefitted. Encourage and train acceptable and trusted outreach workers/peer mentors/brand ambassadors, to promote participation within local communities with whom they have developed social bonds.
6. Train staff to be able to provide advice and support during key transitions where levels of participation may be affected e.g. during transition from school to employment, pre- and post-natal and on retirement. The use of the latest research into transition points will be essential in this training.

Transport

1. Ensure local transport and school travel plans are fully aligned with other local authority plans and strategies around physical activity.
2. Increase accessibility to essential community destinations and their connectivity by physically active modes of transport (cycling, walking, jogging), including the development of a safe network of cycle lanes and footpaths.
3. Promote community-based physical activity that does not require motorised transport for access.
4. Support the awarding of transportation funding based on the anticipated positive impact on active transportation levels and related benefits, such as safety improvements, congestion reduction, air quality and overall health benefits. An example is Bristol's LSTF (Local Sustainable Travel Fund).

Access to information/marketing

1. The implementation of high quality, contemporary advertising and social marketing campaigns around physical activity and healthy lifestyles should take place in order to effect behavioural change. Imagery and language must take into account different cultures, demographics and their specific needs, barriers and motivations². Marketing interventions and their impact should be closely monitored.
2. Create, maintain, and disseminate (using a various media channels, including social media) a full inventory of facilities, providers and activities, at local to national level.

Media coverage

1. Use venues (including major sports stadia) and positive (sporting and non-sporting) brand ambassadors to deliver messages about healthy lifestyles.
2. The media and NGBs should collaborate to expand the quantity and quality of television coverage of a range of sports events, teams and athletes (including both live, highlight and lifestyle programmes). NGBs, event organisers and teams can encourage media attendance and coverage including though VIP access and hospitality, detailed information and accessible imagery.
3. Local clubs, groups and fans can develop relationships with, and feed information to, local media about their sport and available activities.
4. Social media and related viral activity represents an exceptional opportunity to create direct relationships with audiences that transcends traditional media's reach.

² Social marketing offers a 'product' (the desired behaviour, such as walking to work rather than driving) and also ensures the 'price' of that behaviour (e.g. time or social costs), 'place' (e.g. the walking route) and 'promotion' meet the target audience's needs.

Q2 What fundamental policy changes need to be made to increase the levels of physical activity across the UK?

See above for suggested policy changes.

Q3 What existing best practice is being delivered in or across sport, health, transport, urban planning and education which addresses the issue of physical inactivity? How and why are these examples successful?

Case study: parkrun Ltd (www.parkrun.org.uk)

Background

1. parkrun is an innovative ‘not-for-profit’ that organises free, weekly, timed 5km runs in UK and around the world. These safe and welcoming events take place in areas of open space (e.g. parks, recreation fields, National Trust land, school playing fields) and are open to all, regardless of ability, background, age, gender or disability. They take place at 9am (9:30am in Scotland and Northern Ireland) on a Saturday. The events are simple to organise and are managed by a local volunteer team. They are not races, and the parkrun branding and social marketing helps to reinforce this.
2. The first parkrun was held in London’s Bushy Park in 2004. As of December 2013, there were 236 weekly parkrun events in UK; with 23,874 events held, involving 384,430 participants running 3,353,094 times. In 2013, 236,652 individuals did their first parkrun in the UK. parkrun events have also been established in Afghanistan, Australia, Denmark, Iceland, Poland, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, South Africa, New Zealand, Russia and USA. A full list is available at <http://www.parkrun.com/events>.
3. Independent research by Loughborough University and Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust into the impact of parkrun suggests that parkrun is attractive to non-runners; with women, older adults and overweight people well represented. Fitness improvements were observed and there were many positive perceived benefits, suggesting parkrun may be an effective community-based intervention for improving public health. Specifically, it found that members of the local community predominantly receive the benefits of parkrun, with 71% living within five miles of their ‘home’ event. Social benefits of parkrun include feeling part of a community (84%), meeting people (66%), friendships (57%) and family relationships (27%). 76% of participants are over 35 years old, and 14% over 55. Among participants with no history of running before parkrun, 25% have joined a club, and many take part in local races³. In addition to observable fitness changes, subjective ratings of the impact of parkrun suggested that the majority of participants benefitted in terms of health, weight control and psychological well-being.
4. In response to need and demand, parkrun has recently launched a series of 2km Junior parkrun events targeted at 4-14 year olds. They are held weekly, on a Sunday morning.
5. parkrun relies on private sector sponsorship, and the £3k (inclusive of VAT) one-off service fee paid by the local community on the establishment of their event. This fee is usually provided by local councils or health authorities, but can also come from other sources such as private sector donors or local philanthropists. Note that parkrun has never been awarded national government funding despite being the single largest contributor towards the Sport England participation targets placed on England Athletics for 2013-2017 (UKA will invest over £14,000,000 into a 2013-2017 Run England programme that aims to deliver over 240,000 new runners. parkrun will deliver achieve this target at a fraction of the cost).

³ See <http://jpubhealth.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2013/08/15/pubmed.fdt082.full.pdf?keytype=ref&ijkey=SNORR9uZcgUPWXg>

Value added/reasons for success

parkrun and Junior parkruns are successful in facilitating sustained participation in physical activity because of the following:

1. The unique and innovative operational structure:
 - parkrun responds to local demand - rather than engaging in top-down, supply-driven activation. The community requests an event, rather than it being imposed upon them. This approach ensures community need and ownership, and increases the success and sustainability of events.
 - Events are simple to organise and are held for the community by the community.
 - Events are supported by a clear set of principles that are applied globally.
 - parkrun encourages collaboration between local community groups and organisations, eg schools, sports clubs, health care providers, local councils, other event organisers.

2. Demand side: parkrun helps break down barriers to participation and taps into motivational triggers, as follows:
 - no cost: free to the end user
 - no need to pre-book or be selected
 - events are local and easy to access
 - events take place regularly (weekly) at the same time - habit forming
 - events are open to all, inclusive and friendly
 - not a race, although runners do test themselves against a time/others
 - no dress code
 - no race numbers (retains informality)
 - no need for expensive equipment
 - encourages family/parental involvement
 - encourages volunteering opportunities for those who do not wish to participate
 - focus on fun, enjoyment and friendship
 - feeling of being part of a group/community/tribe
 - participation promotes health, fitness and well-being
 - creates strong bonds within the community
 - philanthropy through volunteering
 - timed and so offers the opportunity to track progress
 - offers incentives for participation (t-shirts are rewarded for 10, 50,100,250 runs)
 - parkrun name and branding and social marketing aims to support the inclusive, non-competitive, open nature of the events

3. Supply side: parkrun breaks down barriers to activity provision
 - Minimal regulatory barriers for event teams to organise and run the events
 - Does not require specialist personnel (with limited training requirements for volunteers)
 - Does not require the purchase of specialist equipment by event organisers
 - No need to regularly process membership fees
 - No need to create a new facility: encourages multi-use of facilities – eg fitness in local parks
 - Provides on-going support to event teams, through parkrun HQ and a network of volunteer Ambassadors

It will be important to learn from and disseminate best practice models, programmes and policies at the local and national level.

Q4 What are some examples of initiatives that have failed and why have they been unsuccessful or not lasted?

Without wishing to highlight specific initiatives, those that have been unsuccessful are generally characterised by one/some of the following:

- They are one-off, short term fixes and do not take a long term approach
- They operate in a silo and lack collaboration/consultation with other providers
- They do not take a holistic approach to healthy lifestyles but rather view one behaviour/behaviour change in isolation
- They do not respond to the needs and motivations of specific demographics and hence fail to stimulate demand and/or change perceptions of physical activity
- They would be successful, but are stymied by a lack of funding (due to funding streams being difficult to access and poorly allocated) or other barriers to delivery: e.g. lack of qualified staff

Q5 In a world with limited financial resources what are the most cost-effective approaches and how can existing resources be realigned to have the greatest impact?

The allocation and use of funding should be:

- Targeted to areas/groups of high need
- Clear
- Transparent
- Accountable
- Creative
- Based on collaboration and consultation
- Means tested

Q6 How can young people be encouraged to take part in more physical activity?

Facilitating children's participation requires an understanding of the barriers and triggers pertaining to specific ages, backgrounds, genders and socio-economic groups of children. It is essential that the lived daily realities of children are fully understood. For example, the importance of material objects such as gaming consols and mobile phones cannot be overlooked as they compete directly with physical activity in a child's leisure time. Children are not a homogenous group and are not adults in miniature. Their lives should be researched and marketing and facility/activity provision be specifically targeted to meet their varied needs.

Role models are key to the marketing of physical activity to children; with children being heavily influenced by parents, siblings and peers. Thus projects and programmes targeting children must also take steps to garner the support parents/guardians/families, including through education, promotion and incentivisation. parkrun provides a good case study of a project that encourages family/children's participation in a safe, enjoyable and relaxed environment.

Key recommended actions are:

National Government

1. Expand the arbitrary and non-evidence based funding remit of Sport England (which is exclusively focused on 14-25yr olds) to include projects and programmes aimed at U14s, targeting areas of high need. UKA and the various regional athletics governing bodies should also ring-fence funding, and accompanying capacity building efforts, to activities focused on U14s.
2. Long-term investment must be made in empowering people to lead change. Funding must occur concomitantly with training and capacity building efforts to ensure teachers, coaches, sports administrators, health professionals and so forth can adapt practices to fully integrate physical activity and adopt a holistic approach to active, healthy lifestyles.
3. Consult, and actively involve, young people in all steps of policy and project development and implementation.
4. Develop valid, sensitive, and reliable tools to measure physical activity in children as well as their families. The tools should measure the amount and pattern of activity (including sedentary behaviour), but also take into account wider lifestyle choices (such as nutrition). Measures should not rely on self-reported data.
5. Short-term educational funding strategies that fail to engender long-term commitment and discourage long-term provision should be avoided.
6. Ensure that funding is allocated to both hard (e.g. facilities/equipment) and also soft measures (e.g. social marketing, staff training) to facilitate the delivery of physical education and effective allocation of resources.
7. Social marketing campaigns (using suitable role models as necessary) that are targeted at children and young people would be invaluable in helping to change behavior, and perceptions of physical activity.

School-specific policies/actions

School specific actions must consider: physical education provision; other physical activities during school time; physical activity before/after school; family and community support and involvement; and staff involvement/training. This must be considered in tandem with other aspects of healthy lifestyles, such as promotion of healthy eating.

8. Integrate health and fitness (healthy lifestyles) into all areas of the school curriculum at all ages. Acquiring physical capital is as important as gaining academic literacy to a child's health and well-being, noting that the two are closely associated.
9. Include physical activity training as part of teaching (especially primary school) and childcare certification to ensure staff and volunteers have the skills to design, plan and deliver physical activity sessions that meet young people's needs and abilities.
10. Develop a replacement for School Sports Partnerships, which were widely deemed to yield benefits for many. Co-operation and partnerships between schools, clubs, county sports partnerships and others will be important to ensure effective delivery and increased, sustained participation – this includes sharing of facilities.
11. Monitor quality and quantity of school-based physical education and activity, including setting targets for minimum levels of in-school physical activity per day and require local education authorities to annually collect and track pupil's health-fitness related data).
12. Expand the range of sports to include non-competitive, physical activity, in formal and non-formal environments. Expand funding to include activities that do not fall under the Sports Games scheme to attract those who are not pre-disposed to (competitive) sport. Schools should have, and disseminate, a full database of activities/organisations/facilities in the local area.
13. Develop a 'Safe Routes to School' or 'walking school bus' programme to increase active transportation. Encourage schools to report on the transportation mode choices of their pupils.

14. Embed young people's involvement in activities by assigning responsible roles, such as team captains, leaders or peer mentors. Actively involve those pupils who are unable to take part in PE lessons in other aspects of lesson organisation hence facilitating skill development and involvement.
15. Protect and develop school facilities, especially school playing fields and the development of school gardens.

Out of school initiatives

16. Development of out-of-school projects must be tailored to the specific area/demographic with regards: type of activity, staffing/mentors, location (accessible and convenient, safe, secure, neutral, comfortable), transport/access, timing, cost, incentives, marketing and promotion and strategies for retention.
17. parkrun (and Junior parkruns) provide a 'best practice' example of an organisation which is helping to drive participation by children. The success is the result of the factors identified above and, in particular, the friendly and welcoming nature of the events, the supportive environment, participation of the whole family, low costs of entry and the non-competitive nature, the offer of rewards/targets and opportunities for children to volunteer.
18. Encourage and train acceptable and trusted outreach workers/peer mentors/brand ambassadors, to promote participation within local communities.
19. Encourage the media, including through the use of high-profile role models, to actively promote healthy lifestyles amongst children.
20. Local authorities, schools, local councils, community organisations and local businesses can partner to develop or enhance day and after-school programs that incorporate physical activity.
21. Encourage electronics companies to produce games that promote physical activity amongst children.