

Promote, protect and provide

The Leisure Review talks to Andrew Hanson, the CCPR's head of policy, about all things sport and where the unintended consequences of political progress might take the sport and recreation sector over the next decade.

The CCPR is an organisation that sits quietly among the plethora of bodies that compose the world of sport in the UK. The majority of those who work in the sport and leisure field are well aware of its existence and its role, while the general public finds it in their news reports a couple of times a year commenting on some element of government policy that has or may yet impinge on the quiet but determined progress of bat on ball. Or paddle on water. Or hoof on turf.

Once known as the Central Council for Physical Recreation but now, like so many organisations, much keener on its initials, the CCPR has a membership drawn from governing bodies of sport and sporting organisations of various hues and pursuits. Almost all interests and activities are sheltered under its umbrella and those that are not in formal membership can be confident that the CCPR has the broadest understanding of what sport and recreation is all about.

As the CCPR's head of policy, Andrew Hanson's work is central to the CCPR's mission to "promote, protect and provide for" sport and recreation, and, while he now spends much of his time immersed in the arcane world of policy and legislation with meetings across Westminster and Whitehall, he is able to include time on the poolside among the highlights of his career in the sport and recreation sector. A quick run through his CV reveals student days lifeguarding and running playschemes, two years in leisure centres in Kingston and then SPRITO, the forerunner to SkillsActive, with a growing interest in training and professional development. The next move was to Sport England as part of the Running Sport programme, which, he is happy to note, is still going strong training sports club volunteers.

"From there to CCPR," Andrew explains, "initially working on education and training matters, helping our members get their heads around the national qualifications framework and getting government accreditation for their qualifications. It was at that point that I began to get more involved in the policy side of things because it became clear that although governing bodies could get accreditation for their qualifications government funding for those qualifications wasn't necessarily flowing through so we had to start doing some policy work alongside SkillsActive to get that resolved."

With SkillsActive as the acknowledged lead on skills issues and volunteer funding, the CCPR has its own policy priorities which reflect its 'promote, protect and provide' mission. Providing for sport includes a wide range of membership services for its members. Promotion includes the value that sport and recreation can deliver to society, including an increasing amount of work with the Department of Health. The protect side involves keeping an eye on all the legislation, policies and business decisions that might affect sport.

"It's all the things that happen to a sports club that might stop them doing what they do best," Andrew says, offering the impact of changes to music licences, drainage costs and United Utilities as a few recent examples. "It's about trying to intervene to stop the unintended consequences that burden sports club volunteers."

It is no coincidence that the CCPR head office is in St James in London, a short stroll from Parliament Square. "A lot of our work is in Westminster," Andrew says. "Obviously if you can speak to MPs and politicians and get them to understand the issues then you have a better chance of generating policy or influencing policy before it comes to fruition. You need to speak to civil servants once policy is made, so we're speaking to Whitehall as well as Westminster."

The distinction between Whitehall and Westminster – the former the collective domain of civil servants, the latter that of politicians – is telling, the mark of someone working within the complex and complicated world of national politics where detail, definition and precision matter. While the CCPR's working



Andrew Hanson: on the spot for *The Leisure Review*

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relationship with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is good, Andrew acknowledges that it can be more difficult with other government departments, many of which do not include sport and recreation at the top of their list of interest groups. Good progress has been made with the Department of Health but the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Communities and Local Government are still being worked on. The Treasury is a case of 'done quite well, could do better'.

What impact, The Leisure Review wonders, does this proximity to the political corridors of power have on the workload and aspiration of the CCPR as an organisation? "We're very much an independent voice free and able to lobby," Andrew says. "Other organisations in the sporting landscape may not have the freedom we have. We approach that role constructively and try to engage positively wherever we can."

The approach, he explains, is to look at each policy that emerges on its merits, looking to see how it might impact upon sport and recreation. Sometimes the CCPR is able to serve as the proverbial critical friend, while at other times they may have to be a little more strident in pointing out the damaging effect that a certain decision might have on the sporting landscape.

"At grassroots level the key challenge for clubs is the increasing amount of regulatory burden that hits them day by day. Every bit of regulatory burden that comes along costs money. If you've got to pay £370 for your PRS licence and the law changes so that you need a public performance licence as well, which is another £106, that's a little bit more money taken out of the club, money that doesn't go into promoting and developing sport. If drainage costs suddenly go from £600 to £3,000 that's a significant amount of money taken out. All these things just chip away at the finances of the club and sap the energy of the treasurer and the secretary who are dealing with it. It's those sorts of things that we want to stop happening so that sport can flourish and thrive at grassroots level, otherwise we'll have a lot of money going into sport which then leaks out at the bottom end."

However, Andrew does agree that not all regulation is necessarily a bad thing for sport. "There are things that sport has recognised as necessary and things that people in sport can be proud of. We can say that sport is now one of the better sectors, for example, when it comes to safeguarding children. That's a positive thing for sport and that means parents can be happy that there is a safe environment. There's an increasing number of Clubmark clubs, clubs stepping up to the mark and doing the right thing, but it does all take time, energy and effort. Most clubs are willing to put that effort in for things that they see as positive and moving their club forward but we do need to be aware of that effort as people step up as volunteers involved in running a club. They need to be aware of what they are taking on in this day and age. At the same times it needs to be affordable and accessible to the community at large."

Given that the machinations of politics in Westminster are surpassed in complexity and viciousness only by politics within and among the family of UK sports organisations, how is the CCPR able to work on behalf of its membership when the governing bodies' individual interests are often seen to be at odds?

"They are all our members and we provide a service to them all but there is a huge amount of common interest. Some of the bigger issues, such as sports betting at the moment, affects all our members and their ability to protect the integrity of their sport and a fair return to their sport. If you look at health, everyone of our members, whether they are funded by Sport England or not, has something to contribute to getting the nation more active. The amount of common interest outweighs the sector-specific interests. There are specific sections in CCPR to deal with these areas, for example the outdoor sector and outdoor sports but CCPR calls itself 'one voice for sport' and we strive to provide that one voice."

Over recent centuries having a concerted and coherent voice is not something for which British sport has been noted and adding several layers of bodies representing the interests of sport to the outside world has not simplified things. How does the CCPR manage these relationships?

"In the mainstream media we are increasingly looked to for comment and I think sport itself is clear about those relationships now," Andrew says. "Everyone knows that UK Sport does high-performance sport, everyone knows that the Youth Sport Trust does school sport, that Sport England does community sport. Whether we in sport have more to do communicating that message to the general public, or whether we need to, I don't know."

With so many pressures on sport and community activities from so many directions, we hesitate to ask what the sporting landscape might look like a decade into the future; but only for a moment. Andrew takes up the task of www.theleisurereview.co.uk

speculation. "We did our first sports clubs survey in 2007. We're repeating it now in 2009 and we hope to see some trends from that. I would hesitate now to say what the landscape is going to look like in ten years time but I do think sports clubs will need to adapt to a more consumer-based society, perhaps a more transient community, rather than one where people participate in their communities. I think that is the challenge. It might be that you have the same number of sports clubs in the same places but they look at their memberships and fee structures. The other aspect of it is looking at the whole social networking side of things and the impact of internet technology, how you present yourself as a club, how you manage leagues, and so on."

Would it, we wonder, be fair to say that sports clubs are now better run and better managed than they were ten years ago? "The quality of their management is now more measurable," Andrew says. "You will know if a club has CRB [Criminal Records Bureau] checks or if they have Clubmark. I would say that the vast majority of sports clubs are putting the requirements in place to be a well-run club. I would like to think that ten years ago they would have been able to do so but those benchmarks and measures were not there to prove it. These give the measures to see if the situation is improving, falling back or if the burden is just getting too much. We need to make sure that sports clubs are quality environments and that the requirements on them are only related to the quality of what they do rather than unnecessary left-field things."

With that, we finish our coffee and let Mr Hanson return to work, safe in the knowledge that we will be able to spot the hand of the CCPR policy department in the sports pages of the broadsheets before too long.

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