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## The demise and demise of PE and school sport

Earlier this year Wayne Allsop had the ear of parliament. Today he tells the readers of *The Leisure Review* what's wrong with school sport.

Cast your mind back approximately three years to a point when our three main political parties shared a live debate on PE and school sport and all three expressed their support for the then school sport partnership (SSP) network. Now consider a post-Olympic scenario where that support has apparently dissipated and we are faced with 84% of primary and 92% of secondary schools stating that the Games legacy amounts to PE and school sport either staying the same or declining. This is an even more worrying statistic when you consider the amount of funding that has been put into the current PE and school sport system. That Messrs Gove and Cameron could show their faces at the Olympic Park having made the decision to scrap the PE and school sport network was hugely hypocritical, to say the least.

One year on do we really have a system or any coherent strategy? I am amazed that approximately £9,000 has been allocated to most primary schools, with a general instruction to increase competition. I know the Youth Sport Trust has tried to suggest what this should be used for but unfortunately the body that drove PE and school sport for a decade can only advocate. The reality is that internal competition in both primary and secondary schools has declined and competition between schools is also suffering significantly.

The naïve way in which the school games organiser (SGO) funding was brought into the sporting landscape was not thought through. We have county sport partnerships deciding on what sports should be done in a county and in some cases these have been decided not for the good of mass participation by young people but because it ticks a political agenda locally. Some school games organisers just concentrate on their chosen county competitions at a local level, which is exactly what they should be doing, but unfortunately while they focus on sports such as rowing, dodgeball or ultimate Frisbee, competitions in other sports have been left to rot.

For coaching companies the new system is a potential cash cow with every primary headteacher having approximately £9,000 for PE and sport in their budget but very few having the vision to utilise the funding to make an impact. I have seen schools put the funding towards their existing "PE coordinator" without thought as to what it will achieve. I have seen schools appoint inexperienced Level 1 coaches to deliver "sport" while teachers do planning, preparation and assessment – or PPA as it is universally known – and in some chilling cases I have seen "coaching organisations" contracted to deliver their PE and sport with the headteacher not even knowing who the coach on the ground will actually be. Commercially motivated coaches have a massive part to play in school sport but only highly qualified coaches and teachers should be anywhere near inspiring a generation of young people. In one SSP area a primary schools' football league that had been running since the beginning of time was not supported by the local SGO and has ceased to exist. County events in the new Sainsbury's School Games have been cancelled and not re-arranged, wasting tens of thousands of pounds on one day. Sports are delivered so differently

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**"To ensure the health, wellbeing and future sport participation of children in this country we have to take politics away from school sport."**

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across each county that there is absolutely no consistency with any national governing body (NGB) plans and it becomes difficult to get local buy-in.

Another frustration is that in all the time since the inception of school sports partnerships we have not tackled this country's main sports, namely football, cricket, rugby and tennis, followed closely by gymnastics, swimming and athletics. If we added basketball and netball and really focused a policy on getting these right surely we would have some major impact across the whole country.

Take a step back to the Millennium Youth Games some thirteen years ago. They were introduced in an attempt to put together a national structure together and celebrate success and achievement. The programme linked inter-school competition through high-profile county events to a national final with thousands of young people descending on Southampton to take part in a real pinnacle of school sporting competition. Although the programme had its issues, at least it gave competition a structure that could be built on, linking participation through to performance. Now we only really have NGB competition structures, which are sporadic and sometimes disorganised, relying nationally on volunteers who have little support and less funding to put on these events. Where NGBs do take a proactive lead, as in kwik cricket, tag rugby and tri golf there are better structures and the amended versions are part of the accepted system.

If Michael Gove would listen to me, which I very much doubt he will, what would my action points be for him to consider for a PE and sport system?

Any policy needs targets. Just saying "increase competition" will not wash. I think maybe a SMART goal-setting training course for Mr Gove would help our current system. We must have national expectations, not just for PE but also for school sport and participation in competition if that is a priority.

Competition should become integral to the national curriculum. This is a radical statement but competition was the cornerstone of good physical education when school sport thrived and could do so again.

A support structure of highly competent people to manage the system needs to be in place. A regular comment from teachers for the past ten years has been "We don't have the time" and I would add that many also do not possess the skills to implement their own PE and sport programmes without someone to support and drive towards national targets.

Staff training is core to all programmes and I would suggest being as draconian as stating that all teachers must receive three CPD courses or team teaching throughout the year if a school is to pass an OFSTED PE inspection. My sister has taught in a primary school for eight years and has only ever had four hours of training to support her to deliver PE.

Coaches have a real part to play in school sport and supporting teachers to gain technical knowledge in PE. They are not, however, the answer that an ever-increasing number of schools seem to think they are to PPA cover or to delivering the curriculum. I know some schools

where children have received nothing but football coaching within the curriculum for a whole academic year. Is this acceptable?

To ensure the health, wellbeing and future sport participation of children in this country we have to take politics away from school sport. Mr Gove aside, all political parties would appear in general to want to increase participation, improve competitive opportunities and ensure staff are trained and supported to deliver great PE and sport with have suitable extra-curricular provision. A ten-year vision for PE and school sport is needed, a vision that is refreshed every three years as needed. We must continue to fund this area as it will never be sustainable within a school without direction and clarity regarding targets. Certainly cutting PE and school sport funding has had a devastating effect on participation rates in both the curriculum and in competition in just two years.

Throwing money back into a structure with no parameters or targets is just crazy. Many millions of pounds will be wasted with only more decline once this is eventually pulled from the system in a few years time. Please, please, please, for the health of our nation and future sports participation and competitive success, bury the egos and realise the need for a cross-party strategy, targets and outcomes. Is there a business anywhere in the world that would invest millions before first thinking what they want as an outcome? Come on Mr Gove, be SMART!

**Wayne Allsopp is the business development for New College in Leicester. Earlier this year he gave evidence to a House of Commons education select committee looking at the sporting legacy of the London 2012 Olympics in schools.**

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