



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Participation in Sport and Physical
Activity in Northern Ireland**

18 February 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

**Participation in Sport and Physical Activity in Northern
Ireland**

18 February 2010

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr P J Bradley
Lord Browne
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Billy Leonard
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Raymond McCartney
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Mr Paul Donnelly)
Mr Nick Harkness) Sport Northern Ireland
Mr John News)

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

I invite representatives from Sport NI to give evidence to the inquiry. I welcome formally Nick Harkness, John News and Paul Donnelly. I ask Nick to introduce his team, to explain their respective jobs and to brief the Committee. Afterwards, I will invite members to ask questions. It is over to you, Nick.

Mr Nick Harkness (Sport Northern Ireland):

I thank the Chairman and the Committee for inviting us to give evidence to the inquiry into participation in physical activity. Obviously, that is a big challenge that faces everyone in Northern Ireland, the UK, Ireland and further afield. Current figures show that only 59% of the UK population are active enough to reap health benefits from their level of activity. We appreciate that the Committee, in its inquiry on the subject, values the views of Sport NI.

Obviously, the timing of the Committee's inquiry is appropriate, given that Sport Northern Ireland will work with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in the coming months in the preparation of a bid for the comprehensive spending review. We are delighted that Assembly Members' awareness of issues that relate to participation in physical activity and its importance will be raised in the run-up to the comprehensive spending review.

In addition, Sport Northern Ireland has worked with DCAL and has commissioned a piece of bespoke research into adult sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland. We have received some of its early headline findings. We expect the final report to be published in the next six months or so.

By way of introduction, I look after participation and facilities in Sport Northern Ireland. John News is our participation manager, and Paul Donnelly is our policy, planning and research manager.

Between us, we will cover four key areas. We will provide a little information on the strategic context of sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland, update you on some of the scientific evidence on the nature and extent of adult participation, and provide some examples of the contribution that Sport NI makes directly and indirectly to address participation in sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland. In summary, I will give you some examples from programmes and personal stories of what actually works, and I will suggest priorities for action that the Committee might consider in its investigation.

I want to draw members' attention to a quotation that Sir Liam Donaldson, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), made in 2005. His remarks are pertinent to the subject of the Committee's investigation. He said that:

“The scientific evidence is compelling. Physical activity not only contributes to well-being, but is also essential for good health.”

He continued:

“There are few public health initiatives that have greater potential for improving health and well-being than increasing activity levels.”

I think that that gives substance to the importance of the work that you are embarking on.

However, there must be some caution. Obviously, Sport Northern Ireland, the Department, and the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure are important players in the area. However, it is such a multi-faceted area that it cannot be limited to the work of Sport Northern Ireland or sporting bodies. It is a multi-departmental, multi-sectoral and multi-organisational issue. It is about changing cultures and improving physical activity.

An example that reflects that is Finland, which, during the 1970s, was regarded as the sick man of Europe. It identified the need for cultural change to improve physical activity levels and help the state of the nation’s health. The Finns came up with five key principles in their interventions to turn the situation around. They focused investment on physical activity and participation in sport. They clearly took a long-term, rather than a short-term, view of how interventions might work. They commissioned and engaged heavily in social marketing to change the culture, values and aspirations of the population. They targeted their investment at known success stories and at interventions that they knew would happen, and they created an environment that promoted physically active lifestyles.

Members will be aware that the Executive approved the strategy for sport recently. The vision of the strategy is the creation of a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport. The three key pillars of the strategy are participation, performance and places.

The Finnish example illustrates how it is possible to create cultural change. The 26 targets and actions proposed in the strategy for sport detail how a cultural change can be achieved in Northern Ireland, and they provide a road map for creating physically active lifestyles in our population.

I should have mentioned another example of how to change culture. That example is much closer to home and demonstrates the cross-cutting nature of the matter. The Health Department in Scotland is spending £24 million over three years to set up and support an active schools network. The aims of that investment were to encourage young people to become motivated to have healthy and active lifestyles that would support their development into adulthood. There is a lot to be learned from that example of how investing in encouraging young people to be physically active can come from budgets and Departments outside those that deal with education and sport.

There are 26 targets in the sports strategy, 14 of which focus on improving participation. In summary, those targets refer to a robust research framework, and I have described the work that we are doing with the adult participation survey. Specific targets and actions are proposed in the strategy for all adults, children and young people, people with disabilities, women and people who live in socially disadvantaged communities.

We make proposals in the strategy on sport and physical activity for young people, and, although the Committee's investigation is on adult participation, we propose that such interventions for children and young people are about starting the activity habit early so that people will carry it into their adult lives.

We also propose interventions on access to quality places for sport. Those refer to planning legislation and the need for a physically active environment instead of an obesogenic one. We also propose interventions that look at opportunities for outdoor recreation, for which Northern Ireland is particularly suited. We also look at the huge amount of publicly owned land, and we propose that it should be open for people to engage in physical activity.

My presentation includes a graph that gives information taken from the General Household Survey. That graph details participation in sport and physical activity in the past 12 months. The Committee should be aware that, for participation to have a positive impact on health, the Chief Medical Officer recommends that an adult should take 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five times a week. I understand that some Committee members are making steps in that direction.

Mr McCarthy:

I cannot wait. Is that not right, Dominic? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Harkness:

Significant evidence illustrates the reason for the drop in physical activity. Members will see that in 1999-2000, 59% of the adult population participated in sport once a year, and that dropped by 14% to 45% in 2008-09. Therefore, activity levels are declining. Some of the reasons offered for that decline are evidence based and relate to the sedentary nature of many jobs, the increased use of the car and less reliance on active travel, and the evolving age of technology, which has particularly attracted the attentions of our young people. Another reason for the decline is our ageing population, which is inclined to be less active. In the strategy for sport, we proposed the establishment of a focus group to deal with that issue.

Being active is part of a healthy lifestyle. One aspect of that is the energy that is outside the equation of physical activity, and the other is the energy that is inside the energy equation, which is the amount and the nature of what we eat. Sport Northern Ireland is already working in partnership with the Food Standards Agency to address that. Many members will be aware of the work that Sport Northern Ireland is doing with young people in primary schools through the Activ8 Eatwell campaign. That campaign is about helping young people to establish good habits that will carry them through their adult lives.

Paul Donnelly, who is the policy planning and research officer for Sport Northern Ireland, will go into a little bit more detail about the facts and figures on the issue.

Mr Paul Donnelly (Sport Northern Ireland):

I will cover three main issues in my contribution to today's evidence session. First, I wish to highlight the social and economic benefits of physical activity. Secondly, I will highlight some information on the nature and extent of participation in sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland. Nick has covered some important contextual information on the contribution that sport and physical activity make to improving public health and the quality of life of all citizens in Northern Ireland. Thirdly, I wish to outline some scientific evidence that the Committee should be aware of and that is important to the inquiry.

A significant body of literature exists that highlights the social and economic benefits of

enhancing physical activity for health. However, the consequences of physical inactivity are increasingly becoming a global problem for this and future generations. At a UK level, the Foresight programme reported that obesity levels have doubled in the past 25 years. It also predicts that the obesity level in the adult population will rise to 60% by 2050. It predicts that obesity will cost the UK Governments around £10 billion per annum if obesity levels are not addressed in the short, medium and long term. From an NI perspective, that direct cost could equate to about £250 million a year. Given our current difficult economic pressures, particularly where public spending is concerned, that is certainly not a nice figure to hear. However, those figures are by no means surprising. Thirty-two per cent of the UK population meet the CMO's physical activity recommendations, which is five 30-minute bouts of moderate to intense physical activity a week. At a Northern Ireland level, that picture is no different. Fifty-nine per cent of adults are either overweight or obese, and 30% of adults are achieving the CMO's recommendations. About 2,000 deaths a year can be attributed to physical inactivity.

Members may also wish to know that Sport NI has commissioned an independent piece of work that will produce a report outlining the contribution that sport and physical activity make to public health outcomes. That should be available to the Committee at the end of March 2010.

I now wish to address the evidence on participation data from the continuous household survey (CHS) for 2007-08. It indicates that 49% of the population claim to have participated at some level in the past 12 months. I am sure that many of us in this room have participated in physical activity more than once in the past 12 months. That is a not discrete measure of participation; rather, it is an indication of participation. As Nick outlined, participation has essentially declined in the past number of years.

In 2006-07, the actual baseline that was set for the comprehensive spending review and the public service agreement (PSA) framework was 53%. The level of participation using that indicator has declined by four percentage points in the past number of years. The survey also highlights the growing disparities in participation that exist in Northern Ireland. The data that other UK Governments have generated confirm the fact that those are common themes throughout the UK.

I will now address the specific disparities that exist. Men tend to participate more than women, people with disabilities tend to participate less than those without disabilities, older

people tend to participate less than their younger counterparts, and people from lower socio-economic groups tend to participate less than those from higher socio-economic groups. In developing the Sport Matters strategy with the Department, we have recognised those participation-orientated challenges.

As Nick highlighted, a number of high-level targets are associated with trying to address that situation. One particular target relates to the need for a robust research and evaluation framework. In recent months, we have worked with the Department to commission a large-scale bespoke adult participation survey that looks specifically at participation in sport and physical activity.

That piece of research is still at the fieldwork stage. We expect to have the full and final report available to us in October or November 2010. In essence, we believe that it will provide us with more robust data so that we can formulate and develop policy from a Sport NI point of view and help others to formulate and develop policies at a more local level.

The survey is the largest that has been commissioned since 1994. It will provide statistically robust data on participation rates, information on club membership, volunteering and coaching in sport, as well as information on many other lifestyle factors, such as smoking, alcohol consumption and fruit and vegetable consumption.

We developed a new research instrument because we felt that the CHS did not provide the data that we needed to formulate and implement policy. The sport and physical activity survey (SAPAS) will provide us and this Committee in particular with the information that is needed to get the full picture of what happens with sport.

Mr John News (Sport Northern Ireland):

Members have heard a lot of facts and figures today, all of which are important. Mr Donnelly said that the issue is to get those facts and figures so that policy can be informed and a difference can be made to people. If the Committee will indulge me, I will spend the next few minutes talking about some of the projects and programmes that have been happening on the ground over the past five or six years. I will also discuss the difference that the investments that have come from the Assembly, the Executive and the Department through Sport NI have made to people's lives across Northern Ireland.

Increasing participation has been a big policy driver for the Sport Matters strategy and for Sport NI since its inception. Our two core purposes are to increase participation and to improve sporting performances. In particular, since the Millennium Fund was introduced back in 1999-2000, there has been a huge emphasis in Sport NI on trying to increase participation among under-represented groups. That manifested itself in a number of investment programmes over that period. The first obvious one goes back to the previous Assembly, when Executive programme funds of £600,000 were approved for a pilot programme. At that stage, that money was approved to develop a model that would work and that would produce measurable benefits to people on the ground.

The Executive programme funds paid for six projects across Northern Ireland, including schemes in Disability Sport and Age Concern and in places such as the Moyle District Council area. However, the real benefit was that we established a monitoring and evaluation framework, which was a way of measuring the difference that participation made to people's lives. That has persisted in all our investment programmes since. A project that bears that out was the community sport programme from 2005-08, which was a partnership venture between us and the Big Lottery Fund. Over those three years, £2.4million was invested, and about 40,000 participants were involved in the programme.

The programme was about improving participation and encouraging those who had sedentary lifestyles to have more physically active and healthier lifestyles. The Sport in Our Community programme has been shaped very much by the learning from the community sport programme. Sport NI is investing £4 million from its own funding streams in the period 2006-2010. The programme finishes at the end of March this year. Over the course of the programme, 113,000 participants will have been involved.

The only reason why I threw in those two figures is because over the past five or six years, we have been able to demonstrate that we have become much more efficient and effective at involving people in sport and physical activity programmes. When the community sport programme hit the ground, we evaluated the figures. At that stage, it cost about £60 a person to involve a participant in the programme. By the end of the Sport in Our Community programme, that cost was down to about £32 for each participant. The system is much more efficient because those structures now exist across Northern Ireland in community and voluntary organisations,

district councils and sports clubs.

Our new Active Communities investment programme is due to come on stream in April, and the target has been set to get 425,000 participants involved in that programme over the next five years. Over the same period, £13.5 million will be invested, and again, the same aim exists of driving down the cost of delivering more participants.

However, I have been talking about programmes, which are not real projects on the ground. A number of evaluation reports have been completed over the past four or five years that talk about projects that serve members' communities and constituents. I will briefly describe a couple of those.

Mums in Motion was a post-natal intervention programme in the upper Springfield area of Belfast involving 10 community centres from right across the city. It is recognised that there is a drop in participation in sports after children are born. Whenever a busy lifestyle becomes hectic, people have less time for themselves. They also face the additional problems of getting childcare and crèche facilities and finding the personal space to get out and be active.

Mums in Motion was an intervention that was aimed at involving young mothers and new mothers with young children by providing crèche facilities at community centres and by putting on activities in which the mums wanted to get involved. For those of us who are involved in competitive sport or field sports, it is great to have a football pitch or leisure centre, but the mums told us and Belfast City Council that salsacise, yoga, aerobics and boxercise were the sort of activities that we needed to organise and that they wanted to be involved in. The 40 young mums who took part in that programme in 2005 have continued their activities since.

The Step Up exercise referral programme involving Derry City Council in partnership with the Old Library Trust had 100 clients over 12 weeks, during which participants received personal training in council leisure centres and community centres across the city. As well as receiving personal training in how to use gym equipment and in the right type of exercise to do, they got personal development coaching. They were given information about how to improve and to take control of their lives and about how to make better decisions for them and their families.

Sport NI ran a Fit for Life ladies' programme with Larne Borough Council to engage women

of all ages in exercise, but with the slightly different slant of including a social dimension. Many of the participants were older women, some of whom were in the house on their own. They found that being involved in exercise, sport and physical activity programmes provided an outlet and an opportunity for them to come together. They do their yoga, aerobics, t'ai chi or whatever, but afterwards they have a cup of tea and a scone or a biscuit and a chat and they find out what else is happening down the street or in the community next door. That programme gave them a degree of social interaction.

We have had quite a number of very successful disability sports projects. At some point, the Committee may hear from Disability Sports NI. An activity called bocce has been one of our most successful disability sports projects. For those who are not familiar with it, bocce is an inclusive game that enables people with a disability and those without to participate in a bowls-type activity.

Bocce in Northern Ireland grew out of a training programme that we ran for 15 community sports development officers in the original community sport programme. During that programme, we did some inclusive games training with Disability Sports NI. The game was picked up independently by the community sport programmes in Castlereagh Borough Council and Craigavon Borough Council. Both councils realised that, because we are all naturally competitive and want to play against somebody else, at the end of their 12-week programmes, it would be good to come together and have a competition. Initially, those two councils got together, after which other councils started bocce leagues. The likes of Ards Borough Council then got involved, and bocce has now sprung up on the Strangford peninsula. Places such as Cookstown and Dungannon then got involved, and, before we knew it, we had a Northern Ireland bocce league, which brings together disability sports groups from across Northern Ireland.

Sometimes people wonder about the connection between participation and performance in sport. As a result of its involvement, Disability Sports NI has been working with us to get a recognised government body for bocce in Northern Ireland, and, in conjunction with the University of Ulster at Jordanstown and Belfast City Council, we are bidding for Northern Ireland to host the 2011 world bocce championships. We are in the running with Portugal, and we hope to know the outcome in the next few months.

That is the story of how what started as a community sports programme for 12 people in

Castlereagh grew to be something that has an impact across Northern Ireland. I could go on. There are projects such as that that is run by Down Clubmark Sport Association, which works with the East Down Gaels to involve children with learning disabilities. Your inquiry is about adult participation, but as I said, to involve young people, the focus must be on giving them a solid foundation so that they become active adults in the future.

Two personal stories bring the benefits of participating in sport to life for me. Georgina, Flockey and Declan were involved in programmes that we have supported for a number of years. Georgina attended one of our physical activity programmes. She presented with ongoing and persistent mental health problems that led to her confining herself to her home. She elected not to leave the house, she had very little interaction with others, and she had attendant weight-management problems. She became one of the 59% of the population who are overweight or obese. As a result of getting involved in the bocce programme, which, initially, lasted for five or six weeks, she decided that she would like to become a coach. Rather than depending on someone else, she thought that maybe she could be the coach and leader of the bocce group. Therefore, she was trained to be the coach. Subsequently, she undertook a range of other coaching and training programmes, including for golf and archery, and she now talks about how sport gets her out of the house and has become a new outlet for her.

Flockey and Declan have similar stories to tell about how sport has changed their lives. They are two young men who were on the margins of society, were at risk of offending and had been referred by residents associations in the area. They were seen as “problem children”. At the age of 16 or 17, they were on the verge of entering the formal custodial system, costing tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds per annum. They have since become involved in midnight street soccer programmes, initially as participants and subsequently as volunteers. They gained coaching qualifications, and one of them has gone back into full-time adult education.

Those programmes have made a difference to people’s lives, and we envisage Sport Matters providing a way to make a difference to everybody’s life in Northern Ireland. As Nick said, Sport Matters incorporates 26 high-level targets, but I shall draw members’ attention to 10 factors in the projects that would make a day-to-day difference to people. Three factors are at policy level. First, we need clear and accountable leadership from the Executive. We, and the projects with which we have worked, welcome the fact that the Executive have now approved Sport Matters, although we need more integrated, cross-sectoral and cross-departmental planning. This

is an issue for health and education as well as for sport, social development, planning and other sectors. We suggest that including more PSAs in the next Programme for Government and sharing those among Departments can make a difference and can enable people to see where they fit in and what role they have to play. We needed a number of specific actions, such as more coaches being deployed in health and education. If we are to use sport and physical activity as a primary health-improvement tool, we need coaches who understand what it is to work in a health setting. We have given the Committee other suggestions, but I will not read through them all.

Paul mentioned a document that we will publish on the impact of sport on public health. The Committee can have copies of that by the end of March. I will read two or three quotations from participants who have been involved in programmes over the past four or five years. One said:

“I am a person with a physical disability. The opportunity to take part in physical activities up until now was very limited but, as a result of this programme, I feel better about myself and more confident in myself.”

This is what a mother who was involved in the programme said:

“I used to sit at home all the time. Now I enjoy going to the gym and taking my children. My daughter was obese as well and now we are both losing weight because of the exercise, and we eat better as well.”

A programme for taxi drivers in Creggan and Waterside in Derry gave them access to healthier lifestyles. One taxi driver said that they can now bend down enough to tie their shoelaces. However, the most telling quotation came from one taxi driver, who said:

“Physical activity has acted a relief. It is a distraction from some of the everyday problems, and we have fun. That is why we do it.”

The Chairperson:

Thank you for your presentation.

Mr Harkness:

I realise that time is pressing, so I will give you a quick summary. Evidence exists about the social, health, economic and personal impacts of participation in sport and physical activity. However, there is also overwhelming evidence about the declining nature and extent of participation. Any action for the future needs to be collaborative and needs to involve long-term

planning. There are no short-term fixes, and some of the examples that John referred to show that there are viable and sustainable delivery models that will enable increased participation in physical activity.

To date, we have only been scratching the surface. I can see the elephant in the room, which is that we have so much money, and, given the money that we have spent over the years, why has participation decreased? We are only scratching the surface; we really need to extend the programmes. We can consider the matter to be complex or simple, but we need to invest more in physical activity. Three things are essential. First, we need to use social marketing to convince people to be active. Secondly, we need places and facilities for people to be active in, and thirdly, we need people to take the lead on physical activity. We need a competent and available workforce that enables and supports people who want to be physically active.

The Chairperson:

I thank the team. How big a factor is social deprivation, including low income, in preventing people from taking part in sport and physical activity? John mentioned some of the projects, which are very welcome. However, what specific actions is Sport NI taking to address the hurdles and barriers that prevent people who are from socially deprived areas, or who are on low incomes, from actively taking part in sport and physical activity?

I am glad to have the Sport Matters document in my possession. Until now, we have been working largely from a draft strategy. We know that it has come through the Executive, but will it be launched publicly, or has it been officially launched?

Mr Harkness:

Information that members have shown shows the disparities that exist in participation levels. There is a 17% gap between levels of participation of people who live in socially disadvantaged versus participation levels in more well-off areas. Therefore, you are undoubtedly right to say that a gap exists. Through our Active Communities programme, we have invested around £13 million over the next five years to encourage district councils to take some of the targets of the strategy, one of which relates to areas of high social need, and to invite the new group of 11 councils to propose actions.

Each of those actions will be specific to an area and will be developed in consultation with the

local community on what will make a difference to that community. The difficulties and the barriers are diverse, as are the communities, so bespoke solutions, rather than one simple solution, are needed to address the needs of communities.

Mr News:

Undoubtedly, there is a correlation between social need and participation. Under the Active Communities programme, we identified models of how money could best get into areas of social need. Therefore, social need was one of the main factors in the councils' allocation of that money.

We also took into account the fact that large parts of Northern Ireland have a rural hinterland. One often thinks of areas of high social need as being large urban areas, and, undoubtedly, there are issues in those areas. However, need can also refer to access to services. The Active Communities programme used an allocation model that took into account not only targeting social need criteria but the geographical area. We did not want places with large rural hinterlands such as Omagh, Fermanagh and Strabane to be disadvantaged because the wards with the highest levels of social need, as it is traditionally measured, are in urban settings.

Mr Harkness:

We are working on a print-ready version of the strategy. It is currently at the design stage.

The Chairperson:

Six members have indicated that they wish to speak. Ken will speak first, followed by Dominic, Kieran, Trevor, Billy and Wallace.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you for your presentation and your enthusiasm. It is obvious that you are wedded to the scheme with which you are involved.

What role do the Departments other than DCAL have in increasing participation rates, and what do those Departments need to do? You started to venture down that path. Your organisation and other Government branches operate worthy schemes that sometimes complement each other, but it puzzles me that sometimes they do not complement each other and simply fizzle out. How do you build schemes in the community?

You gave lots of examples, so I will give an example. In the 1970s, I lived in the former West Germany, which, at that time, had the highest rate of heart disease in Europe. The whole nation undertook a scheme called “trim dich”, which encouraged everyone to get involved in some sort of activity. It benefited from the merits of German organisation. The main thrust of that scheme was for families, who would go out for a walk through the woods. They would meet a tree trunk that had steps cut into it, and the children and the adults would make a game of going up and down those steps. Further along, they would meet another tree trunk that was intended for people to press against. There was a series of such activities, all of which were fun and involved families. That scheme was backed by a government campaign and a local government campaign.

Could we learn from that to introduce something that is more cost-effective than some of the schemes and the extension of those schemes that you mentioned and that cost £60 or £35 a head? Can something simple be introduced that would change the approach of individuals, family groups and smaller groups in communities and provide a thrust for the whole community to improve its health much more cost-effectively than some of your schemes?

Mr Harkness:

Yes, we are working with the Department of Health, Social Service and Public Safety (DHSSPS) on an obesity strategy. I chair the physical activity committee of that strategy, which will put physical activity on the agenda. Hopefully, the strategy will come before the Assembly at some stage with some far-reaching recommendations, including one for a social marketing campaign similar to the one that you referred to in Germany, where people needed to be convinced of the need for exercise.

People also need places where they can be active. Some people have a chosen activity that involves a ball and a pitch, and for others an activity may involve a piece of parkland and a bicycle or a pair of walking shoes. The challenge for us all is to work across Departments, government and organisations to put all those measures in place.

As you quite rightly said, some of the activities do not involve a lot of money. For example, the public estate in Northern Ireland is controlled by many different Departments, and there is an opportunity to open that estate up for physical activity, which would cost very little. There would be some management costs, but it would provide a great deal of opportunities.

The Sport Matters strategy proposes the creation of a strategic monitoring group, which would be chaired by the Minister and would involve senior representatives from all Departments. A key issue is to get physical activity and participation placed on the agenda of all Departments rather than residing solely with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The resources, ideas, controls and influence are not all in one Department; rather, they exist across a series of Departments.

The Department of the Environment has a responsibility for implementing the review of public administration (RPA) and developing a framework for community planning, and Sport NI feel that physical activity and participation in sport should be a compulsory element in that. Well-being is so linked to physical activity that it would be totally inappropriate if community plans did not involve elements to make the community more active. I do not know whether that answers your question.

Mr K Robinson:

It does. Before you came in, we were teasing out the role of local government and we talked about how the Committee missed just how important it is, and can be, in driving such schemes forward.

Mr Harkness:

Sport NI feels that the way to get local authorities to take the issue seriously is to ensure that physical activity has a statutory requirement in community plans. I am not saying that they do not take it seriously, but, if it is made a statutory requirement, those authorities will have to plan for and deliver on it. That is our ambition.

Mr K Robinson:

Sometimes those schemes are locked away in buildings or little localities. They must be more exposed to the general public. That would mean that people would be aware of them and feel that they are missing something by not participating in them. It will also make their profile much higher and wider.

Mr Harkness:

Sport NI has created an Active Places website, which maps all the places that people can go to in

Northern Ireland to be physically active. Those maps are geographic information system (GIS) compatible, so people can type in where they live and what their sporting interests are, and the website will tell them where they can go. It also provides telephone numbers and information on how to get involved.

Mr K Robinson:

Do not forget that there are people who are not involved in any sport, but who want to be physically active. Sport NI must fit them in also.

Mr Harkness:

Absolutely. The Countryside Access and Activities Network has also developed a database. Sport NI hopes to merge that database with ours to include outdoor activities, pathways and other such activities.

Mr K Robinson:

I was particularly interested in John's comment about the Fit for Life ladies' programme in Larne. However, I see that you have spoiled it all by going for a cup of tea and a bun at the end of it. *[Laughter.]* However, do not worry; the Chairman spoiled it by going for a big heavy meal after those members who were taking part in Sport Relief had finished their exercise.

Mr Harkness:

It was only a small bun.

The Chairperson:

It has to be fun too. You have to be allowed to eat a scone in the middle of it all.

Mr Harkness:

That was the energy-in part of the equation.

Mr D Bradley:

Good morning. I also thank the witnesses for the presentation. You could say that the work of Sport NI is all about health. It is about physical health, mental health, general well-being and social engagement. Indeed, you said that you have commissioned a piece of work on the impact of physical activity on health, which is to be published soon. Is the promotion of the participation

in sport, recreation and physical activity sufficiently embedded in the work of the various health agencies from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety right through to GP surgeries? Quite often GPs recommend that a patient does more exercise, but the advice ends there. Should there be more specific signposts, directions, support and help to get people to do some form of physical activity?

Mr News:

That picks up on one of Ken's points. One of the key actions that is proposed in the Sport Matters strategy is that sport and physical activity should be seen as primary health interventions. Consequently, GP referral schemes, a number of which across Northern Ireland are successful, would become the norm and part of the prescribing book for every GP in Northern Ireland. People talk about barriers, but sometimes encouragement is all that is needed. A pill need not be taken to lose a bit of weight or to treat blood pressure. A walk would do. That might be a walk along a towpath or in the Mourne. Alternatively, a cycle around a town would be beneficial. More people are recognising that message, and it is part of the UK-level social marketing campaign supporting Change 4 Life, but that is more evident in broadcasts on English channels. The Department of Health has been considering extending that to Northern Ireland broadcasters, but it is a social marketing campaign linked to a health message.

I did not talk about every one of those programmes, nor did I list all of the partners involved. I spoke for too long as it was. I could have spoken for an hour about all the partners. When it is published at the end of March, the public health impact report will list all the partners who are involved. Many of those programmes have had district councils and community voluntary organisations as key partners. Many Northern Ireland health and social care trusts have also been involved in providing programme funding to roll out some activities, such as the food, relaxation, exercise, self-esteem and health (FRESH) programme in greater Belfast and Lisburn, which is funded by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Therefore, although there are examples of partnership working, we must see more of it, because it ties in with social marketing. Everyone has a responsibility to achieve that.

Mr Harkness:

An early recommendation that has emerged from the anti-obesity work is that there should be more "joined-upness" in those health promotion messages. We support that and are delighted with the recent success we had with the Food Standards Agency. The agency was working out

how to get a healthy eating message into schools, when it realised Sport NI was already in there preaching a get physically active message. The agency asked to piggyback on that and brought some of its own resources, so we doubled the impact with a reduced resource. It is critical to get public health messages more tied together.

Mr D Bradley:

Does Sport NI have any formal mechanisms to engage with the Department of Health to promote your message of greater participation?

Mr Harkness:

Our main engagement in that area is through our contribution to the Department's anti-obesity work. The strategy that will be brought to the Assembly will relate to the physical activity message, so the short answer is that yes, we are.

The Chairperson:

Was the working group or interdepartmental working mentioned earlier?

Mr Harkness:

Yes, that is correct. The obesity prevention steering group (OPSG) is supported by four work streams, one of which is on physical activity. I chair that working group, which will make recommendations to inform the anti-obesity strategy.

Mr News:

The Public Health Agency (PHA) is also represented on Sport NI's committees, which is another formal mechanism. We have a participation committee, and, about three years ago, the then Health Promotion Agency and Sport NI signed a joint charter on their approach to participation and encouraging physically active lifestyles. When the PHA came into being, we had an early meeting with its chief executive and senior management team. We are heartened that the commitment of PHA to work with Sport NI continues. Swine flu has recently been a huge priority for PHA, but we welcome the agency's continued involvement in many of our commissioning processes in research as well as policy development.

Mr McCarthy:

I have three questions. Ken Robinson referred to the first. Germany and Finland have been cited

as examples, but are there any European countries that Sport NI could use as a service delivery model? Secondly, the graph in the submission must be disappointing. Is Sport NI hopeful that that trend can be turned around in the next five to 10 years? Thirdly, a lot of people who may not be involved sport are out walking or jogging, or, like me, are on a bicycle on the back roads. They are not monitored, but they would increase the figures. People do things on an ordinary voluntary basis to try to be healthy.

Mr Donnelly:

I will cover the first and last questions, and Nick will cover the second one. Our submission states that two countries, namely Finland and Canada, are the benchmark for many of us. Over 25 to 30 years, they have turned around levels of participation significantly. In Finland, 64% of the population achieves three bouts of moderate activity per week, which is astounding. A number of decisions were made by the Finnish Government, one of which was to have a dedicated and high-level commitment to increasing levels of participation, with significant investment and a massive public awareness campaign to support it. Most importantly, they were given the time to do it.

Mr McCarthy:

Does that not happen here currently?

Mr Donnelly:

As Nick and John said, measures are being taken to address that issue. One such measure is the obesity prevention steering group and the work with which it is involved. However, that needs time, resource and a clear and concise message.

I did not provide any detail about SAPAS. Essentially, it is unique because it will provide us with participation data across four life domains. Many of us could talk about what sporting activities and physical recreation we undertook in the past seven days. However, how much time did we dedicate to physical activity in the home and work, and in respect of getting about? That instrument is able to pool all that information and give a true indication of the level of participation in Northern Ireland.

We considered more than 30 instruments throughout the UK, Europe and beyond. We believe that we have an instrument that best suits our needs and will help us to plan for the future.

SAPAS will capture information about the people who walk or cycle on the back roads, or walk or cycle to and from work.

Mr McCarthy:

When I am out on the back roads, is somebody is watching me? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Harkness:

We are in a hedge with a clipboard. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Donnelly:

SAPAS is a baseline study, so we need to get a picture of the current position. A sampling approach goes with that to ensure that we get a representative sample. We will pick up people such as you to see what they are doing. We hope to repeat that in three years if we have the resource.

Mr T Clarke:

Maybe they will put you in a white van and straitjacket, Kieran. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Harkness:

Kieran's second point was about the graph and the disappointment. We are disappointed, but, as I said earlier in the presentation, we are scratching the surface. John illustrated some interventions that can and do make a difference. In the future, the Assembly, Executive and Government will have to ask whether they can afford to resource the strategy for sport, which is expected to cost something like £700 million over a 10-year period. Obviously, those are difficult questions.

The question that I would ask in reverse is whether we can afford not to do that. Earlier, Paul illustrated that the declining physical nature of our society could lead to a situation in which the cost of inactivity in Northern Ireland would be £250 million per annum. A strategy that is delivered fully, using properly targeted money that is in the system already, could cost £700 million over 10 years, so there is an economic argument.

Mr McCarthy:

The invest to save strategy comes to mind.

Mr T Clarke:

Why are we trying to reinvent the wheel if Finland and Canada have done so much work? Why do we not mirror what they have done rather than trying to reinvent a strategy? The graph shows a steady decline until 2005-06 and an increase in 2006-07. Is there any evidence to explain that increase?

Mr Donnelly:

I completely agree with the first point. We do need to study the ingredients of success in Finland and Canada. There are fairly knowledgeable people in the Department of Health and in other Departments who are probably aware of what has happened in Finland and Canada. I would like to think that we will consider that as we move forward. The starting point is the obesity prevention steering group that has been established, which is representative of a range of Departments, agencies, practitioners, and so on.

Mr Harkness:

We are bringing that knowledge to that group.

Mr T Clarke:

I have a difficulty with that. From my recollection, Canada/America probably has one of the highest rates of obesity in the world. However, those countries seem to have the correct physical exercise strategies. Therefore, given that obesity and physical activity are not necessarily related, why are we targeting obesity?

Mr Harkness:

There is good evidence that people who are overweight and physically active are much healthier than people who are overweight and not physically active. Therefore, even if exercise does not help people to manage their weight, it is still likely to result in better health.

Mr T Clarke:

That is my point. You highlighted Finland and Canada as the market leaders in that area. If Canada/America has the highest rates of obesity, the programmes that they have in place —

Mr Donnelly:

Rates of obesity in Canada are lower than in any other country. The situation is a bit different in the USA. On levels of obesity, around 28% of the US population achieves the same recommendations, and 2% is less than what we report. Levels of obesity are going through the roof. I am not sure whether that answers the question.

The Chairperson:

It is perhaps a bit erroneous to add Canada to that example. The strategy in Canada is working; we could copy that.

Mr T Clarke:

It is the same as everything that we do here: we try to come up with a solution ourselves, reinvent everything and invest so much in it. On other occasions, we mirror what other countries are doing. If they have a proven track record, why are we not already following their example or, if we have to do it differently, continuing to examine that? It seems to me that we are looking for solutions even though somebody else already has a solution.

The Chairperson:

When we visited the Scottish Parliament, I was impressed that it has Minister for Public Health and Sport. Some of the work that we are undertaking was inspired by that experience. For example, Liz McColgan addressed a Scottish Committee on this subject. We are following best practice.

Mr Harkness:

It is fair to say that we are learning from examples around the world. We continually scan those. The models that we are implementing and recommending now in the strategy take account of research that we undertake on what works around the world. Different societies have different outlooks. The significance of the Finnish model is that the community was convinced by government-funded social marketing that a physically active lifestyle was beneficial. People listened, believed and responded. Large sums of money are involved. We do not have the resources to deliver a social marketing campaign of that scale.

Mr News:

The Sport Matters strategy contains about 60 difference references. They are included because,

although we are delighted with the strategy, we had to conduct an environmental survey of what else was out there — Trevor’s point exactly — what works elsewhere and take the best bits and plug them into our strategy. It could be argued that our strategy is an amalgam of the best bits that work elsewhere but that is tailored for a Northern Ireland context and for the Northern Ireland population.

I want to emphasise that we sometimes come up with the good ideas. The oft-quoted Scottish example of health investing in education through sport is a Northern Ireland idea; it did not come from Scotland. It is our model from 10 years ago. The resource was not available 10 years ago to make it work as Scotland has made it work. There is a new paradigm now. The Assembly has given us more accountability and more control over our own destiny, and politicians have more opportunities to say what needs to happen in Northern Ireland. That was not the case 10 years ago.

Mr Donnelly:

In Finland and Canada, a key ingredient is a clear and concise message on physical activity. There is a mixed message here. Social marketing has happened here and there, and only some people have picked up the message.

Mr T Clarke:

Whose fault is that?

Mr Donnelly:

I will not blame anyone or say who the message should come from.

Mr T Clarke:

There is a responsibility to get the message out, and, if it is not getting out, there is blame. If the message is important, it should be getting out.

Mr Donnelly:

We carried out a survey of public attitudes to sport and physical activity in 2008. Only 7% of the adults who were surveyed indicated that they were aware of and understood the recommendations on physical activity. That tells us straightaway that there is work to be done. A revision of the UK physical activity guidelines is being carried out by the Department of Health and others. The

plan is for those guidelines to be issued in November 2010. The key aspect of that 100-page document, which will be supported by evidence, will be to set out the key messages on physical activity that we want to put out via the various social marketing campaigns. We have not yet got to that point.

The Change 4 Life programme has worked to some extent in England, Scotland and Wales, but it is too early to say whether it has had an impact. Similarly, it is too early to say whether our Activ8 campaign, which is targeted at children and young people, is having an impact. The least that we should try to do is let people know what level of physical activity is required. We are not sure that the general public know what is expected of them.

Mr T Clarke:

Sorry to keep harking back to this point, but your campaigns are irrelevant if the message is not getting out. How will you deliver the message better than it has been delivered in the past?

Mr News:

Sport NI puts out one message, and the Department of Health puts out a similar message with a different finesse. The Department of Education puts out another similar message, and so on. People get confused. Someone used to talk about a single transferrable speech. Social marketing should be about a single message: be physically active. Adults should be physically active five times a week, and we need to ensure that people hear that message consistently.

The Activ8 campaign has been running in schools for almost 12 months. We are delighted with that campaign because it tells teachers, pupils and parents what it takes to be physically active and to have a healthy lifestyle. It provides a simple, clear message in a language that children and parents understand. It does away with the scientific jargon and confusion about what certain recommendations mean. It tells children to play with their friends; run about at lunchtime; play with their brothers and sisters; and get their mum and dad involved.

The message is couched in simple terms that people can understand. Social marketing works only if it is communicated in language that everyone understands. In America, they talk about water-cooler moments. We hope that people will go into work and ask a colleague whether they saw the message in an advert on TV, heard it on the radio or saw it in a newspaper. All those organs of communications should carry the same message.

Mr Harkness:

Many organisations touch on the message, and each one has a slightly different perspective. We need to get past the danger of every organisation wanting to have its logo attached to the message. The message is what is important, not who funds it or whose logo is on it. The challenge for us and for our partners is to get a single message across. We are not there yet.

Mr Leonard:

You talked about changing the culture, and, indeed, social marketing has been mentioned about 20 times. You already made some of the points that I was going to make, but I want to take the discussion further. Our society is not fantastic when it comes to changing cultures. Some people may argue that we are winning the battle on recycling, but we are not winning as regards young men's driving. Changing the culture is extremely hard. The previous questions have begun to unpack how we will achieve that change in culture and bolt it down.

I do not want to be unfair, but when there is a great deal of emphasis on the anti- side of things, particularly if a major part of a campaign is anchored to anti-obesity, people switch off. They feel that it is about obesity, and x per cent of them will feel that it is of no concern to them.

There is a fundamental flaw in the culture in social marketing, because the messages are often couched in anti- terms. I am not saying that Sport NI is doing that with this campaign, but a great deal of the public discourse and mindset is that campaigns often involve an anti- something element. Where are the positive messages and how are they being distilled? Logos are important, but what will the key messages be? Changing that culture will be one of the hardest things to do.

Mr Harkness:

Selling the benefits, rather than being negative, is an important point. We referred to the Change 4 Life campaign in England, Scotland and Wales, and that scheme has a positive aspect. It is about changing a person's quality of life and life experience.

Lord Browne:

I apologise for not being a very good role model for this inquiry. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

You have just signed up to the Sport Relief challenge. Well done. *[Laughter.]*

Lord Browne:

I may come at the bottom of those graphs.

Earlier, the witnesses referred to the Active Communities programme, and it is important to encourage people to take part in simple exercise such as walking. In east Belfast, we have just had a £34 million investment in the Connswater Greenway scheme, and it is important that, when the project is up and running, people are encouraged to use it for walking. However, has Sport NI examined more innovative schemes such as a swipe card facility similar to those used at Tesco? Users could build up points each time they use the walkway, which could be exchanged for —

Mr Harkness:

Mars Bars? *[Laughter.]*

Lord Browne:

No. I was thinking about council facilities, perhaps a reduction in rates or a reduced price for a visit to a leisure centre. Furthermore, are you engaging with the business community with such schemes? If swipe card facilities were installed, Tesco and other shops could offer money off healthy foods.

The Chairperson:

I know someone who would have no rates bill if that scheme was introduced. *[Laughter.]*

Lord Browne:

Our young people here are encouraged to take part in sport in schools and, although some go on to join sports clubs, we do lose a great deal of them when they leave school. In Europe, I believe that clubs actually run the physical exercise and sporting activities in the schools, rather than the schools themselves. Could that be introduced here, so that people are involved in clubs at an early stage, and would therefore be more likely to continue with exercise in later years?

Mr Harkness:

That integration of schools and clubs is something that Sport NI is taking very seriously. Our

Youth Sport programme attempted to do that, and it would be very useful in the provision of facilities, which Sport NI has spoken to the Committee about before.

When my own son started to play rugby at a very early age and then decided he wanted to play hockey, he had to build up the confidence to go to a different club in a different location. If he had been playing those sports at school, he would have been able to make that change in the same physical estate more comfortably.

It is all about integrating the infrastructure that exists. In France, there are sports hubs at schools and schoolchildren use them during the day, and they are awash with club and out-of-school activity in the evenings and at weekends. Unfortunately, we have been handcuffed by the history of our local authorities, and the fact that our schools have been governed by different organisations. In England it is slightly different in that the local council also look after the education system, and it is much easier to have one estate servicing both needs. We must move towards that. I totally concur with what the member said.

Mr News:

Clubs are a determinant of lifelong participation. All the data sets and the information suggest that there is a definite link between being a member of a sports club and being physically active. Members of those clubs may not play everyday, but there is a social network of people in those clubs and members speak the same language as each other. There will be somebody at the end of the phone to encourage others to come on a Tuesday night or Saturday morning and go for a walk, a cycle, have a game of squash or go to the gym. That was certainly one of the big learning points that came from the community sport programmes over the past number of years.

You are absolutely right about relationships with Tesco and Sainsbury's: they see it as pester power. Sainsbury's have active kids vouchers, which schools collect through parents doing their shopping. People collect vouchers and schools can collect activity bags or use vouchers that they bring into local shops and so on. The only concern is that Tesco and Sainsbury's do not care whether people buy full-fat milk, burgers and chips; they just want people's money. However, we have tried to develop Tesco and Sainsbury's schemes that are in place. We have also spoken in the past to Asda in Northern Ireland.

The greenway was also mentioned, with which I am familiar. Last year, I spoke to some

people who are involved in the delivery of the programme about how swipe cards could be used to monitor activity. That is done in parts of Europe, and I think that I heard of an example in Holland. It goes to the heart of trying to encourage active travel. When town planners there look at infrastructure and movement around or into a town centre, they prioritise walking and cycling use over the car. It is no wonder that town centres get clogged up with cars, because we give cars the right of way. The car is king in this country.

We need more schemes such as the greenway that was mentioned to take cycle tracks into the heart of local communities, rather than providing spurs that link to main roads. Those result in children getting to main roads and suddenly being confronted with several hundred cars whizzing past at 50, 60 or 70 mph.

We need links that take safe routes to schools, particularly in rural areas. There was a successful series of pilot schemes, including the rural safe routes to school initiative, which was funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development a couple of years ago. It looked at building up a culture in schools so that children and parents felt reassured and that it was safe to cycle to school. Provision was made on the school estate for the bikes to be safe. There were also traffic-calming measures to make the people who drove along those stretches of roads aware of the programme.

There are schemes, such as IT solutions, that can be used to monitor such initiatives. Like all such schemes, however, they cost a lot of money.

Mr McCartney:

I have two small points. I apologise if my questions have already been asked; I was not here. Nick made a point about his son's school experience of playing rugby and then hockey. Should schools guarantee that a minimum number of sports are included in the curriculum?

My second point is about physical activity, particularly walking. Statistics show that it is seasonal in that people tend to walk more during the brighter nights. In Finland, a lot of money was put into floodlit walkways. As soon as the clocks go forward here in a couple of weeks' time, there will be an explosion of people out walking. For various reasons, they do not go out on darker nights.

Mr Harkness:

The target for the Government in England is that pupils in post-primary schools should get up to five hours of physical activity — PE or after-school sport — a week. Through the strategy development process, we proposed a target for two hours of PE a week, but I do not think that the Department of Education sets time standards for any of the subject matter. It is up to the boards of governors and principals of the schools to take the new curriculum and work out their own programme and commitment to each of the subject matter.

The strategy refers to an aspiration for two hours of PE a week, but that is not a commitment or a hard target. Children spend a lot of time at home. Schools are only part of the issue, but schools are an ideal environment for children to be introduced to and have dedicated time for physical activity. They should also become hubs for extra-curricular physical activity. The sport does not have to be hard or competitive. Some of our schools are enthusiastic about their first XV or the first XI and kids who are less suited to physical activity are ignored and go home at 3.30 pm.

Mr McCartney:

Many schools have a tendency to specialise in one sport. A student could be the best at a sport that is never touched in a particular school.

Mr Harkness:

That is right. As parents, it is our job to try to help find opportunities for our children to take part in the activity that they enjoy and are quite good at, which varies from one kid to another. John has just scribbled a note to remind me that we recently conducted some light-touch research across all primary schools in Northern Ireland. We asked whether they provided two hours PE or physical activity a week. Only 17% of our primary schools confirmed that they did. We are designing a leaflet containing that information, which we will bring to the attention to all education and library boards, primary schools and their boards of governors.

The Chairperson:

Many parents take their children to sporting events on a Saturday morning. Are there any projects that are aimed at involving parents in physical activity? I am thinking of Youth Sports Omagh, which has a running track and a walking track. Its car park is full of parents who have dropped off their children or are waiting for them. Are there any parallel projects that could

involve parents or that use young people to get through to older people?

Mr News:

The short answer is yes. An example is the lads and dads programme in Coleraine. We often focus, quite rightly, on getting more women and girls involved in sport. However, in fragmented communities where antisocial behaviour is evident, young fellas tend, unfortunately, to be more of a problem. The lads and dads programme sought to involve fathers as role models and to involve them in physical activity, because they needed it themselves, while at the same time engaging their sons. There are examples of lads and dads projects across Northern Ireland.

Mr D Bradley:

Involvement in PE seems to taper off by the time pupils reach lower sixth and upper sixth. Many pupils drop out of sport at that stage. Some schools have no framework to encourage them to continue. Such pupils are on the threshold of adulthood, so there seems to be a sports' vacuum that people enter from which many do not re-emerge.

Mr Donnelly:

It is important to answer that question and Lord Browne's. We have club membership statistics that may be of interest. The young persons' behaviour and attitudes survey in 2007 found that 59% of 11- to 16-year-olds were members of one or more sports clubs that were not connected to schools. I regard that as a fairly good sign that things are on the up. The continuous household survey of 2007-2008 presents data that states that 22% of adults are members of one or more sports clubs, so there is a massive drop-off in involvement in sport from the age of 16 until people leave school and get involved in something else.

Our organisation and its partners have identified that as a challenge. We support our partners to develop positive links between schools and clubs in their respective areas. The challenge for Sport NI is to support clubs in their efforts to retain the people who are members of their clubs beyond their departure from school at the age of 14, 15 or 16. We are trying to meet that challenge as we move forward.

Mr D Bradley:

The school regime becomes a bit more relaxed in lower and upper sixth. There may be a greater tendency for pupils to drop out of sport and not become engaged again because class attendance

is not enforced to the same degree as it was pre-lower sixth.

The Chairperson:

We will leave that as a comment for now.

Mr T Clarke:

I want to return to what Paul said about the need for some mechanism to try to keep people involved in clubs. That would have a negative effect. It is similar to what Billy Leonard said earlier when we were discussing obese people. Obese people are not necessarily going to want to join a club, so a barrier is being created by trying to encourage people to join clubs. I know that I am overweight. For that reason, I would not want to join a football club; I would be happier to do something else. As Billy suggested earlier, that may create a barrier for the people who need it the most. You are creating a barrier for obese people by emphasising that they should be part of a sports club, rather than coming up with a strategy for them other than joining a club.

Mr Harkness:

That is an important point. One of the points that I made earlier was that there is a need to make sure that there is a range of abilities. When I was at school, I was no good with a ball, and the thought of joining a football club would not have appealed to me. I discovered training, running, mountain climbing and other physical activities that meant something for me. It is about finding and making available a menu of opportunities with which people feel comfortable, whether that involves a greenway, football pitch or a cycling club.

I give credit to other organisations that are taking steps in that regard. One example is the Grove Wellbeing Centre, where the doctor's surgery is in the same building as some recreational sports facilities, so people can feel comfortable in that environment. When they go to see the doctor they see other, similarly shaped people being physically active, and they feel comfortable to step across the threshold into the physical activity area. There are imaginative examples of how that can work.

Mr T Clarke:

My problem is that a lot of the emphasis of your briefing is on competition, which excludes people who are not naturally competitive. If there are to be at least 700 qualified, full-time coaches, or so many hundred people to obtain medals —

The Chairperson:

Perhaps the emphasis is on two points. The first is participation, which we are discussing today, and performance is another. We heard earlier in the presentation that the work of Sport NI is about participation and performance. Perhaps you are now emphasising the performance aspect.

Mr Harkness:

The word “coaches” should not be misinterpreted. We talk about workforce development. In developing participation, simply making a facility available often does not do the trick. It is important to have people there who are welcoming, sympathetic and empathise with people of all levels of fitness who are likely to come through the door. Outreach work, for example, with the overweight lady with mental health problems who became involved in bocce, is also important. The people who really make a facility come to life help to drive the participation up. There is no doubt that that requires ongoing investment.

Mr Leonard:

Perhaps the goal is to find the one symbol and message that expresses the view that participation in a competitive club is equally as valuable as Kieran going down the road on a bicycle or as the activities of any other groups, whatever their physical capabilities. The core message should be that it is for all. That does not mean that one size fits all, but that we can all participate in various ways in clubs or non clubs, on our own or informally.

Mr Harkness:

For so few words, we spent a lot of time coming up with a vision and a strategy for sport. It is easy to come up with a long message, but difficult to come up with a short one. That is why we came up with “A culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport”. That was attempting to cover both issues. It is up to the Committee to judge whether it did that.

Mr K Robinson:

The vision of Kieran freewheeling down a hill would sell that to many. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson;

Something that Trevor said earlier reminded me of a gentleman who joined a gym in Omagh. I commended him, and said that it was a great first step. He said that he was “mad enough for

anything.” *[Laughter.]* As if someone has to be mad to take part in physical activity or sport. On that note, I thank the team from Sport NI. The session was supposed to last for 60 minutes but it lasted 90 minutes.

Mr Harkness:

I will make one final point in summary. We focused on the need for a single message and for cross-departmental, cross-organisational work. You will know better than I do about the process for setting PSA targets for Departments. I cannot think of a single Department to which a physical activity target would not apply. The message that I have been trying to express through the obesity prevention steering group and the work that I am doing on physical activity is that all Departments have responsibilities on that issue and that there is a need for those to be met. When a new Programme for Government is set in a few years time, I would love to see every Department having a target on physical activity. There will be no accountability for delivering until we have that, then we can all ensure that there is joined-up working.

The Chairperson:

Thank you for that. I remind Members that Dominic Bradley, Wallace Browne, Kieran McCarthy and I have signed up to take part in the Sport Relief challenge on 21 March and a number of us are going to the Sports Institute this afternoon. That is all you need to know for now. *[Laughter.]*