

Interactive's formal response to the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Sport Committee's report into sport and physical activity participation among disabled Londoners

1) Overview

As the key London agency for increasing participation levels of disabled people and the main delivery agent for the Mayor's Inclusive and Active strategy, Interactive welcomes the Economy, Culture and Sport Committee's decision to examine progress in boosting participation amongst disabled Londoners. Interactive has played a willing and full part in this examination submitting a detailed response, meeting with the officers serving the Committee on numerous occasions to support their understanding of the issues, providing details of the appropriate agencies to liaise with and attending the public examination.

Interactive welcomes the resulting update report and overall feels that it makes a number of pertinent points such as the need to shape the views of those working with disabled people and the fact that more needs to be done to encourage disabled Londoners to be active.

Within the report there are a number of issues that Interactive would like to comment further on. In addition Interactive believes that Committee's identified areas of further work may have missed pertinent and optional areas of development and would therefore like to present potential recommendations that could be taken on after the Mayoral election.

2) Taking Part Counts

Interactive acknowledges the fact that the targets set in the first Inclusive and Active have been missed. This, as stated in the 'What is it About' section of Inclusive and Active 2, was the main reason for producing a re-focused version of the strategy. Therefore, whilst interactive shares the Committee's concern that the 2007 target still seems a long way off, it would like to stress that itself and the Mayor's office have already shown that they are being responsive to the lack of movement.

Interactive supports the statement that it is not only London that has struggled with hitting targets. In addition to this, Interactive would like to bring to the Committee's attention that achieving a statistically viable increase in participation is an ongoing problem for sport in general in London (be it by disabled or non-disabled people). This is one of the key reasons Interactive has sought to work in close partnership with the Mayor's office and ensure that all potential initiatives treated disabled people as part of society in general rather than a separate grouping.

Having said all this, Interactive would like to draw the Committee's attention to Sport England's submission which states, "In terms of overall participation rates for disabled participants, the latest Active People Survey (APS) figures indicate that there has been an increase since 2006. Our latest figures from APS 5 (December 2011) show that 10.8% of disabled Londoners participate regularly in sport." This is an increase of 2% on the targets set in 2006. Whilst this is not the level predicted, this does indicate that the approach in London is working.

3) Supply and Demand

Interactive particularly welcomes the Committee's acceptance that key to raising disabled people's participation levels is increasing the level of demand as opposed to increasing the level of supply, but we are disappointed that further reference is not made to this in the rest of the report. Furthermore Interactive would like to have seen the need to develop the role of the disability sector (both disability charities and user led Disabled People's Organisations (DPO's)) in promoting an activity as a viable lifestyle choice being one of the identified areas of further work.

Both in its submission, and during the meeting with the Committee Interactive stressed that the involvement of disability organisations was vital in advocating being active as a viable lifestyle choice but that a major issue was getting those organisations to view promoting activity as part of their remit. A formal recommendation from the Committee that both national government and the Mayor should require the disability sector to take a much more pro-active and co-ordinated role in advocating an active lifestyle to the community could have major impact. Interactive hope is that this could be adopted in a future update of the report.

4) Lessons Learnt

Interactive agrees wholeheartedly with the report's assertion that shaping and informing the skills and attitudes of those working with disabled people is vital if we are to encourage increased physical activity and stimulate the demand for opportunities. Interactive agrees that there is a problem in regard to PE for disabled children in mainstream education; however Interactive feels that this is just one of the issues around shaping the attitudes of those who provide sport.

Disabled children within mainstream education make up just 12.6%¹ of London's disabled population. Whilst Interactive would in no way argue against the need for better PE opportunities for disabled children in mainstream schools, it is however disappointed that the Committee has chosen to focus exclusively on this issue to the potential detriment of other areas. Interactive believes that alongside better education and training for PE teachers there needs to be sport/physical activity specific Disability Equality Training as standard for those who work in sport but also those who work with disabled people of all ages.

As Interactive stated within the meeting, one out of every two people over the age of sixty is disabled. For that reason adequate training for those working with this part of society is as important as training for those working with disabled children.

5) Getting There

Interactive supports the Committee's view that more accessible and convenient transport is needed for some disabled people to take advantage of new opportunities. However this is an issue across the board for disabled people, as

¹ Based on the 2006 London Public dataset which stated that 185,205 disabled children are within mainstream education, 12.6% of the total disabled population of 1.5 million people.

opposed to being sport-specific. Therefore Interactive has seen the influencing role here being more with agencies such as 'Transport for All'.

In specific regard to sports participation Interactive is sceptical whether a fully accessible transport system in London would actually have a visible impact on activity levels amongst disabled people. This is because whilst over the last ten years London's transport system has become much more accessible (the introduction of talking buses and no-step access on all buses as two examples) there is no evidence that this has had any impact so far on the amount of disabled people being active. Therefore Interactive feels that whilst pushing for accessible transport is an imperative, with finite resources there are other areas and issues that will have a more immediate effect on participation levels.

Interactive supports the Committee's request to TFL to consider promoting providers of disabled cycling equipment alongside the Mayor's Cycle Hire scheme. However Interactive would add that specialised cycling equipment is only required by those who have certain impairments and that there are many impairments where the barrier is not the lack of equipment but the fact that the Cycle Hire scheme is not viewed by disabled people as appropriate for them. Interactive would suggest that any request to TFL should ask that alongside any provision or promotion of specialised cycling equipment that the scheme is promoted as being already accessible to many impairment groups (neuro-diverse, Deaf, mild learning disabilities as three examples).

6) Identified Areas for Further Work

Interactive agrees wholeheartedly with the Committee's conclusion that London simply has to do better at encouraging disabled people to become active and that this is a complex problem that cannot be solved overnight. Interactive is pleased that the Committee believes Inclusive and Active 2 to have the right approach to tackling the issues and hopes that Sport England's endorsement of a 2% increase illustrates that it is working.

Interactive however is concerned that the Committee has chosen to identify as needing further work areas that both Interactive and the Sports Unit of the GLA have no power over or ability to influence. As previously stated Interactive does not deny that mainstream PE Teachers need the skills to help disabled pupils to participate or that accessible transport is vital for disabled people to take advantage of opportunities. But these are already identified issues that need to be dealt by other more appropriate agencies in order for change to be achieved. Interactive would like any future review by the committee to note that training for PE teachers comes up only three times within the sixteen pieces of written evidence submitted and transport is flagged as an issue just once.

It is Interactive's, and seemingly the written correspondent's, belief that there are other more pertinent issues raised during the review also could have been identified as further areas of work. Interactive has studied the submitted evidence in detail and would request that the below four areas are considered as recommendations within any future update or review:

a) The disability sector is required to take a more proactive role in promoting and developing sport and physical activity for disabled people

Sport England state that there is a need to get the sporting and disability sector working more closely together. In their submission they say, “We know that there are 1.5million disabled people in London, but NGBs find it hard to access them. As a sporting sector, we need to work more closely with organisations that provide services to disabled people so that we can more easily identify those who want to participate in sport.” Cricket for Change also support this by saying, “There are non-governing body organisations that are doing fantastic work, who can work with governing bodies locally and nationally to assist in the provision of opportunities. There is also the opportunity of greater partnership work taking place between local authorities and other organisations such as our own.”

b) More parity in regard to how funding is allocated.

In London Youth Games’ submission they state, “Funding for disability sport is needed outside of curriculum time and to ensure that there is provision beyond the School Gates....The work of Interactive is helping make clubs and community providers more inclusive in their approach, but this is where interventions funded by the GLA should focus attention, rather than on funding curriculum coaching provision which should be the obligation of the school. Further support in ensuring that sport provision is a statutory obligation would help ensure provision.”

c) A more co-ordinated approach both across the GLA and the wider sector in regard to advocating activity as a viable lifestyle choice.

This view is backed by the submission from the Dame Kelly Holmes Legacy Trust which states “....there needs to be a cross-organisation approach to ensuring the inclusion of disabled people. Organisations need to work together with Disabled People’s Organisations to develop not only the opportunities that are on offer to disabled people, but also the initial engagement and referrals to the sports and physical activities and the appropriate promotion of these opportunities”, Inclusion London, “...we very much share Interactive’s view that currently activity and sport is not on the agenda for most Deaf/ disabled Londoners and that real strategic ‘buy in’ at a Mayoral level is needed to help make this shift towards a genuinely inclusive approach to sport and activity”.

d) Adequate and appropriate training regarding inclusion for both those who work in sport and also those who work with disabled people of all ages.

This comes up on numerous occasions across the responses. SkillsActive state that they believe training, “...has a large role to play in this. By giving people the skills to existing clubs and coaches to be inclusive within mainstream clubs you are increasing the number and range of opportunities for disabled Londoners. It ensures that limited funds are used for capacity and project start-ups. Working within the existing structures maximised already invested funding”. In answer to the question “What more could you and other stakeholders do to improve current provision in London?” both England Athletics and Hackney Local Authority reply that Disability Equality Training is key.

Finally Interactive would like to register its concern about the last identified area of further work. Interactive does not dispute that those volunteering at the Olympic and

Paralympic Games could be encouraged to take on volunteering after the Games, within groups supporting disabled people to stay physically active. The issue is that because it features as key finding within a key document by a key agency (London Assembly) it could be seen to cement the assumption that sport for disabled people should be provided by volunteers outside of the mainstream sport sector.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of sport in London but artificially increasing the number of volunteers within disability specific opportunities simply increases the supply side. Inclusive and Active 2 is specifically about ensuring that responsible agents (such as local authorities, National Governing Bodies of sport, leisure providers) view catering for disabled people as being as important as catering for non-disabled people.

By identifying bringing in an influx of volunteers in specially to work with disabled people as being a potential area of further work can be seen as undermining the mainstreaming message and projecting an image that disabled people do not need to be dealt with by existing paid roles.

7) Conclusion

Interactive welcomes the scrutiny of it's and the Mayor's work and supports a number of the assertions made. It practically welcomes the acceptance of the issues around supply and demand and the fact that the Committee have identified that key to raising disabled people's participation levels is increasing the level of demand for those activities. However Interactive believe that the Committee could have been more radical and far-reaching with the conclusions that it reached.

Having reviewed all the evidence submitted, Interactive would like to suggest that the below potential recommendations are considered by the Committee when it next sits:

- a) The disability sector to be required to take a more proactive role in promoting and developing sport and physical activity for disabled people.**
- b) More parity in regard to how funding is allocated.**
- c) A more co-ordinated approach both across the GLA and the wider sector in regard to advocating activity as a viable lifestyle choice.**
- d) Adequate and appropriate training regarding Inclusion for both those who work in sport and also those who work with disabled people of all ages.**

Interactive would also have liked to have seen more acknowledgement that an increase in participation by disabled people is now beginning to be seen in London, as stated in Sport England's response, and that this shows that the Mayor's and Interactive's approach is both working and justified.