

**National Assembly for Wales**

**Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee**

**CELG(4) PS 02**

**Inquiry into participation levels in sport in Wales**

**Response from : Diverse Cymru**

**Respondent's name:** Ele Hicks

**Respondent's Role:** Social Policy Officer

### **Organisation Background**

Diverse Cymru is an innovative new organisation in the Welsh Third Sector, created in recognition of the realities faced by people experiencing inequality in Wales.

Diverse Cymru promotes equality for all. We believe that we can work together to challenge discrimination in all its forms and create an equitable future for the people of Wales.

Diverse Cymru aims to make a real difference to people's lives through delivering services that reduce inequality and increase independence; supporting people to speak for themselves and to connect with decision makers; creating opportunities for participation and development; raising awareness of equality issues; and inspiring people to take action against inequality.

Our current services include direct payments, self directed and independent living support, befriending and advocacy. We produce information resources, run a service user involvement project and co-ordinate volunteer placements. We facilitate forums and groups that work on various issues, from improving disability access to equality impact assessments. We provide consultancy services and deliver a range of training courses on equality related topics.

This response focuses specifically on participation and impacts on people from protected characteristic (equality) groups. We would be delighted to assist with the development of specific work programmes, and with engaging service users in future. We are happy for our response to this consultation to be published and would welcome the opportunity to present oral evidence to the committee.

## **Inquiry response**

### **The extent to which the Welsh Government and Sport Wales are achieving the goals set out in the *Programme for Government*, the *Creating an Active Wales* action plan and the *Vision for Sport in Wales* with regard to participation levels in sport**

1. We have found a great deal of enthusiasm and forward planning from Sports Wales in our engagement with them, as regards both improving the health, wellbeing and inclusion of staff and making sports accessible to all protected characteristic groups, with a focus on women and young girls; LGBT people; BME and disabled people in particular.
2. However there is little evidence that this strategy is communicated to smaller, grass-roots sports clubs and organisations. As the majority of people from protected characteristic groups who do participate in sport will often do so at a local, small club level, training and development of these organisations in inclusive policy and practice, attracting people from protected characteristic groups, eliminating discrimination, and adapting to individual group needs is provided to all groups and organisations.

### **The availability of datasets and statistics to measure participation levels in sport, particularly those disaggregated by equality strand and socio-economic groups**

3. There is a lot of information available regarding equality policies within organisations and strategic, high-level actions to improve participation of protected characteristic groups, however there is a severe lack of information regarding participation levels.
4. This is particularly true regarding hidden disabilities, as there is an assumption that disability is only relevant in sports where adaptations are required or where an individual can only participate in 'disability sports.'
5. There is also a perception that sexual orientation is irrelevant. This is often combined with fears and/or experiences of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in sports to create an atmosphere where sports participants are fearful of disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity and clubs do not know how to support LGBT individuals or promote that support.

### **The opportunities and barriers to sports participation that exist for different groups of people, including by equality strand and socio-economic groups**

6. Many barriers exist to participation in sports for people from protected characteristic groups.
7. For LGBT people one of the key barriers is the lack of role models, as many sports professionals are still fearful of the reaction of fans if they come out. Recent experiences of Gareth Thomas coming out, for example, have improved the situation, however the homophobia he encountered on changing teams from fans has underlined why professional sports people are fearful of coming out. This is particularly true in sports which are seen as 'macho', as underlined by the fact that the only premier league footballer to come out as gay subsequently committed suicide.
8. There is an urgent need to place tackling homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in sports on the same footing and priority as tackling racism in sport.
9. In relation to barriers for disabled people, not only is there still a lack of understanding of the variety of sports which cater for different impairments and individual skills, but many sports clubs assume that disabled people can only play 'disability sports'. This leads to clubs not considering accessibility and inclusion and not advertising where they do have accessible facilities, such as changing rooms.
10. There is also a need to ensure that strong links are made between disability sports clubs and organisations and mainstream sports clubs. Disability Sports Wales plays an invaluable part in promoting disability sports and participation in sports by disabled people, across the vast range of impairments. However many mainstream organisations are not aware of the disability sports clubs locally and disability sports clubs are simultaneously not aware of the mainstream clubs and organisations that have facilities for and can integrate disabled participants. For many disabled people mainstream sports are more appropriate and they would not qualify for disability sports at a professional level. These links and active referrals to the most appropriate clubs for each individual disabled person need to be developed and promoted.
11. We have anecdotal evidence of a relatively high rate of participation in community sports by people from lower socio-economic groups and young people living in poverty, due to a lack of finance to be able to enjoy other community activities. This encourages sports participation, especially in sports that do not require expensive kit, such as football or rugby. However these young people often lack the support to develop their hobbies to a professional level, where they have the skills to do so.

**The impact of the Olympic and Paralympic legacy, the Ryder Cup and other high profile Welsh sporting events and achievements on participation levels in Wales.**

12. Regarding the Ryder Cup, local residents have informed us that there was great local anticipation of the benefits to both businesses and participation in sport. However these possible positive impacts were not capitalised with businesses receiving little increase in trade and many local residents, especially those on low incomes amongst whom protected characteristic groups are over-represented, finding ticket prices too high to be able to attend.
13. Regarding the Paralympic legacy in particular, we have seen both a positive impact, in terms of a general public awareness that disabled people can participate in sports and be successful and are not helpless, and a negative impact as there is now a perception that all disabled people can do anything they put their minds to. This negative perception has underlined media portrayals of disabled people as benefit scroungers who could work if they wanted to and are just lazy. In the current climate, whilst the Paralympics have encouraged some disabled people to try out new sports and to be accepted, many disabled people find they now face even more pressure to conform to social norms and overcome barriers, which may not be possible for them.
14. There is an urgent need to present realistic images of disabled people, underlining both the possibilities for some people and the limitations and adaptations needed for other disabled people.