

Coordination of Community Sport Development in Wales

An investigation of stakeholder perspectives concerning the
organisation and structure of community sport in Wales

A report prepared by Dr Colin Baker for the University of South Wales

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The views expressed are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the University.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Vision for Sport in Wales (Sport Wales, 2010) encompasses a revised approach to the delivery of sport, prioritising sustainable partnerships between all of the players in the delivery of community sport including National Governing Bodies (NGBs), public, private and voluntary sectors. This recognises sport as multifaceted and capable of impacting multiple health, social and economic domains. A number of impediments have been identified which challenge the successful implementation of the Vision. A renewed focus on partnership working, targeted investment, user-led approaches and improvements in efficiency are likely to help create conditions for more effective delivery community sport development initiatives.

Aim

To to establish evidence to inform current debates with respect to the organisation and structure of community sport in Wales.

Summary of findings

A total of 7 in-depth semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with participants representing local sports clubs and organisations, Higher Education Institutions, and governing bodies of sport. The level of experience within the sector ranged from 2-3 years to more than twenty five years. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Three interconnected themes emerged including:

1. Fragmentation

The community sports development system appeared to lack cohesiveness and was disjointed by nature. The role and function of Sport Wales was questioned with respect to broader sport and health objectives and there was a concern that policy objectives and the ways these were pursued were not necessarily reflective of local perspectives, needs or preferences. Greater collaboration and consultation was both desirable and essential for tackling fragmentation.

2. Collaborative dissonance

There was a general sense that organisations working within the sports development structure were not establishing high quality links between themselves nor able to connect meaningfully with strategies. Funding arrangements, competition for resources and entrenched historical approaches hindered genuine partnerships. A need for local leadership and support was recognised, with a stronger focus on broad supply and demand issues in sports development.

3. Future roles

The necessity of revising the way in which community sports development was delivered was widely recognised. A successful future depended on clarifying the role of Sport Wales, identifying the most appropriate delivery partners and increasing the effectiveness of investments through more flexible, innovative and responsive approaches.

Recommendations

Based on a brief review of literature and consideration of the findings the following recommendations are made:

Clarifying roles and purpose

Recommendation 1: The role and function of Sport Wales should be clarified so as to establish understanding concerning its place and relevance within the Welsh sporting landscape.

Recommendation 2: An inclusive consultation exercise conducted with stakeholders delivering sport programmes would help identify key strengths and weaknesses in the present system and identify gaps, opportunities and methods to enhance delivery. Specific consultation with HEI institutions to explore the opportunities and challenges of adopting an RSA approach which emphasizes HEI institutions.

Creating conditions for stability and success

Recommendation 3: Introducing longer term funding cycles would provide certainty and confidence for deliverers to work towards longer term outcomes.

Recommendation 4: Funding approaches that are competitive and which provide flexibility may drive innovation and best practice. Clear agreements on performance would promote efficiency and productivity.

Recommendation 5: The skills and expertise of sports bodies, including sports clubs and universities should be harnessed to create strong relationships between diverse stakeholders. Engaging and utilizing the strengths of non-sport bodies and professionals from other sectors would help enhance and consolidate these relationships.

Recommendation 6: Regional approaches such as RSAs should act as facilitators with respect to building networks, promoting best practice, promoting collaborative approaches and supporting evidence-based approaches.

Building effective partnerships

Recommendation 7: An effective means of communication between diverse stakeholders should be established to provide a basis for managing complex relationships. RSAs might perform this function.

Recommendation 8: The benefits of partnership working should be clearly articulated, promoted and grounded in reality i.e. support, funding, goal attainment.

Recommendation 9: Formalizing partnerships through plans, structures and processes and expectations would help maximize effectiveness via: agreeing complementary approaches; encouraging and supporting the active participation of stakeholders, and promoting approaches which are sensitive to local needs and preferences.

Demonstrating impact

Recommendation 10: Monitoring and evaluation should seek to establish local level evidence of impact that reflects the diverse nature of sports development initiatives.

Recommendation 11: Evaluation should be an embedded aspect of sports development initiatives. Linking local evidence with national and regional level data e.g. e.g. census, sports participation surveys would provide composite and comprehensive accounts of impact.

Potential RSA outline model

- Teams of cross-cutting staff capable of brokering local relationships, communicating with and coordinating local partners, and providing leadership in respect of collaboration and the development of initiatives.
- Core funding from Sport Wales to staff the RSAs.
- Greater emphasis on HEIs as key partners to deliver and / or coordinate delivery of local sporting opportunities.
- Additional funds would be contingent on the delivery of national programs and the development of local initiatives with stakeholders.
- Work to facilitate local opportunities through collaboration and funding.
- Grant-based awards, performance managed with locally defined and agreed outcomes within a national delivery framework.
- Primary goals: interpret and integrate policy; provide advice; distribute funding and support applications, provide monitoring and evaluation
- Act as deliverers or as partners within collaborative approaches.
- Capable of bringing together diverse organizations.
- RSA boards would include NGBs, health partners, local authorities, universities, in addition to local organizations and businesses.

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to deliver on national objectives via closer collaboration with local stakeholders • Shared agenda in which all partners can identify opportunities for meaningful engagement and outputs • Leadership approach which circumvents the traditional shortcomings of organizational boundaries • Gives prominence and due consideration to local issues • Flexibility in location, funding, communication and networking • Opportunities for innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a recognition of the need for change • People want stronger leadership and coordination • Many structural elements required to implement an RSA approach are already in place • Local organizations want to be trusted to deliver initiatives • There is a wealth and breadth of local knowledge and expertise
Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approach is without precedent • It challenges traditional roles and processes • How the RSAs will be funded is not clear • RSAs are unproven with respect to impact • The genuine level of enthusiasm for RSAs is unknown • There is a lack of understanding concerning how HEIs might support the RSA model • The benefits of the RSA model need to be unequivocal and provided 'up front' to stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instability in the wider financial environment • Potential negative effect of unrealistic short, medium and long term expectations • Onus on national programs would divert attention away from needs-led approaches • Establishing an appropriate performance management system is challenging

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1.0 Introduction

The Vision for Sport in Wales (Sport Wales, 2010) encompasses a revised approach to the delivery of sport, prioritising sustainable partnerships between all of the players in the delivery of community sport including National Governing Bodies (NGBs), public, private and voluntary sectors. This recognises sport as multifaceted and capable of impacting multiple health, social and economic domains.

The disjointed coordination of resources and investment and variations in partner performance has been identified as impediments to the successful implementation of the Vision. These are set against a number of important background factors which need consideration including: significant demographic and societal change; actions to tackle social inequality, and investment in health with a sustained exposure to sporting activity (Sport Wales, 2015).

Given the complex interplay between sport and physical objectives and wider social, economic and cultural outcomes it is clear that addressing the shortcomings provides a significant challenge. Establishing the conditions for success is likely to necessitate a focus on partnership working, targeted investment, user-led approaches, and improvements in efficiency via reduced duplication and a reduction in overheads in order to ensure financially sustainable approaches.

To help inform current discussions concerning the current investment strategy and delivery framework this report provides feedback from one-to-one discussions with those involved in the delivery and direction of sport delivery in Wales which is contextualized in light of literature from the field of sports development. The following brief review of literature highlights three case studies concerning sports development which in their own way have potential usefulness with regard to informing debates within the context of community sports development in Wales.

1.1 Brief review of literature

There is little doubt that sports development is taking place within an increasingly fragmented policy context and entrenched period of austerity (Bolton et al., 2008; Mackintosh, 2011; O'Reilly and Brunette, 2014). It is evident that policy has responded to these challenges by seeking greater efficiencies through partnership approaches which are tethered to tight controls in order to ensure accountability to performance outcomes (Grix, 2010; Phillpot, Grix, & Quarmby, 2011). Problematically, how the targets of policy instruments i.e. local sport develop stakeholders react to policy instruments is often overlooked. Consequently there is an inherent danger that the desired behavioural and organisational responses are unlikely to come about given a lack of sensitivity to values, beliefs, behaviours and use of appropriate incentives (Rist, 2010). This underlines the importance and necessity of talking to the intended recipients of policy instruments so as to create a relationship between the policy problem, the policy instrument, and the policy target to ensure as far as possible the conditions for success. Three examples of approaches to community sport are highlighted below in order to highlight a range of factors pertinent to the current challenges in Wales.

1.1.1 Kiwisport

In 2009, the New Zealand Government and the Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC) abolished programmes aimed increasing general physical activity in favour of an initiative to get more school-age children involved in organized sport. In an attempt to reduce bureaucracy and financial inefficiency, the *Kiwisport* targeted regional sport trusts (RSTs) as frontline deliverers with SPARC acting in a supporting rather than a directing role. RSTs were mandated to consult local communities

to determine needs before funds were released by SPARC. While this empowered RSTs with status as a funder within communities there remained inherent challenges of minimising bureaucracy, a tension between integrating national–regional delivery demands, and sustaining activities in an unstable financial environment.

This example demonstrates that efforts to increase responsiveness and efficiency within local contexts may ultimately be frustrated by a bureaucratic paradox in which flexibility sits awkwardly alongside reporting and accountability demands. Similarly, greater discretion and local autonomy ultimately needs to be reconciled within broader national policy objectives which can create a series of competing goals. In a time when outcomes are being demanded in ever shortening time frames (Bloyce and Smith, 2010), this implies a potentially degree of vulnerability with respect to effectiveness.

Key messages:

- There is likely to be an inherent, unavoidable and ongoing tension between efforts to provide greater local flexibility and responsiveness and the need to embed monitoring and accountability systems.
- Policy aims and objectives must be clear and unequivocal.
- Assessing the disjuncture between local and national sporting organisations will likely help understand what adjustments are required so as maximize effectiveness via the identification of complementary approaches.

Key sources:
Keat & Sam (2013).

1.1.2 Integrated Sports Development, Dresden

The 2002 integrated sports development planning sought to increase sport and physical activity participation by improving sports services, facilities and options via a strategic approach to sport and physical activity in Dresden. Central to this was a move towards a collaborative planning approach which incorporated all relevant aspects of urban development and placed equal importance on sports facilities, sports centres and physical activity environments.

The sports development planning initiative was part of a broader regeneration scheme in the city. Lessons from this scheme indicate that the purposeful involvement of all stakeholders was difficult and time consuming due to diverse interests, goals, attitudes and personnel capacities.

In response, a cross-sector steering group was established to provide leadership and decision making. This helped realise the potential of the various stakeholders and thus secured greater participation. In addition, linking to existing regeneration programmes helped to identify new opportunities and supported programmes that needed support. The success of the program was premised on inter-agency approaches which encouraged active participation, ongoing dialogue and sensitivity to local perspectives with respect to needs and preferences.

Key messages:

- Establishing a means of communication between diverse stakeholders provides a basis for managing complex relationships.
- Encouraging and supporting the active participation of stakeholders can foster an inclusive and collaborative approach which is sensitive to local needs and preferences.

Key sources:
Broll & Kasimir-Glaeser (2010).
Egerman, Reichel, & Küttner (2006).
Kocks & Zarth (2011).

1.1.3 County Sports Partnerships in England

In the past 15 years sports development policy in England has undergone significant changes that have seen something of a cycle between a focus on sport and health as reciprocating objectives, sport as an end itself with regard to national success, and a return to sport and health as mutually beneficial priorities (HM Government, 2015; Sport England, 2016). Within this context, partnership continues to be pursued as a principal means of enacting local level strategy.

Central to this has been the creation of the County Sports Partnerships structure (2004) which was designed to bolster the effectiveness of the sport delivery system by providing greater coordination and oversight for partnerships with a range of local public and private sector organisations, National Governing Bodies of Sport, and third sector organisations. The shift to market-based rather than network brought about by the succession of the Coalition government in 2010 heralded the arrival of stronger performance management and accountability controls (Grix, 2010; Phillpots, Grix, & Quarmby, 2011).

In practice, communicating the role, purpose and organization of a CSP has proved to be a significant challenges facing partnership working. This might in part be due to evolving strategies for sport and physical activity to which CSPs need to constantly their core activities (Reed, 2016). Power struggles between ‘traditional’ coordinators of community sport i.e. local authorities and CSPs is also demonstrative of the complex historical, cultural and individual factors influencing how local sports development is played out. This has led to sometime fractious and inherently fragile relationships within and between local sports development structures in which it is difficult to define appropriate or meaningful measures of success (i.e. those that can be traced to the activities of CSPs or other local organisations); all the more challenging against a backdrop of frequent policy upheaval.

There is also a concern that CSPs merely represent an additional level of bureaucracy that struggle to maintain effective communication across local networks which, to some extent, be explained by local contextual factors. Perhaps more significantly is the potentially limiting role played by instability and fluidity within the policy context which serves to undermine the potential influence of local preferences and needs on decision making.

Successes in enhancing local sports services have been driven by developing and maintaining effective communication and inter-organisational relationships and by positioning NGBs as key influencers in the way services are devised. A review in 2016 suggests: a need for greater clarity and consistency in the core specification for CSPs set out by Sport England; more flexibility to adapt to local circumstances, and selective intervention and management of CSPs by government; greater alignment with Governance Codes and efficiencies through shared services.

Key messages:

- Clarifying the role and purpose of key players in local sports development structures is essential for staff and stakeholders alike.
- Instability in the wider policy context can introduce uncertainty at a local level which impeded efforts to implement initiatives.

- Developing and maintaining effective communication and inter-organisational relationships is critical for building trust and identifying synergies between local stakeholders.
- Where feasible, focusing on broad sport and physical activity-driven initiatives rather than specific outcome-focussed programmes may provide a means of harnessing local resources in contrast to those that restrictively delimit activities and thus the potential for collaboration.

Key sources:

Phillpots, Grix, & Quarmby (2011).

Baker, El Ansari, & Crone (2016).

Mackintosh (2011).

2.0 Study aims and objectives

This section outlines the aims and objectives which provide the basis of the study.

2.1 Aim

To establish evidence to inform current debates with respect to the organisation and structure of community sport in Wales.

2.2 Objectives

Objective 1: to review existing models of community sport and identify examples that can be used as a basis for discussion within the SRG.

Objective 2: to undertake a series of telephone interviews with stakeholders in order to assess perceptions and attitudes concerning the organisation and structure of community sport in Wales, and potential opportunities for improvement.

3.0 Methods

The study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders within the Welsh community sports development system.

3.1 Ethics approval and data protection

All procedures were reviewed and approved by the University of Gloucestershire Research Ethics Panel (ref: CBAKER2A2015-16). All participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendix A) outlining the purpose of the study. This made clear that they were free to withdraw at any point of the study. Data protection was assured through the use of anonymised participant data, with electronic records held on password-protected University computers. Raw data and associated notes and diagrams were stored in locked filing cabinets within a secure office.

3.2 Participant selection

A purposive sampling strategy (Ritchie et al., 2014) was established in consultation with the study commissioner to ensure that data-rich participants were identified and recruited. An initial sample of 18 participants was developed including representatives of local sports clubs, local and national level government, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), leisure providers and third sector providers. In total, seven participants (female $n = 2$) consented to being interviewed, four were not available, and seven did not respond. The level of experience within the sector ranged from 2-3 years to in excess of twenty five years.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with each participant lasting between 20 minutes and one hour in duration. Semi-structured interview guides are useful in research as a means of eliciting data based on the experiences of those affected by phenomena. The interview schedule was based on a review of existing literature and consultation with the commissioner in order to investigate particular aspects for example, the role of Universities in community sports development (Appendix B). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse data in order to organise, identify and report the emergent themes in the data. Interview transcripts were read and re-read and initial ideas noted down. Initial codes were generated across the entire data set and then collated into emergent themes whilst ensuring that data relevant to each theme was collated from the entire sample.

Three main interconnected themes emerged through the analysis of the data derived from the participant interviews. These are presented in Section 4 together with participant quotations which provide a voice to those interviewed, and include:

- 4.1 Fragmentation
- 4.2 Collaborative dissonance
- 4.3 Future roles

4.0 Findings

Table 1: Fragmentation

Theme title	Description	Example quotations
<p>4.1 Fragmentation</p>	<p>The community sports development system appeared to lack cohesiveness and was disjointed by nature. The role and function of Sport Wales was questioned with respect to broader sport and health objectives and there was a concern that policy objectives and the ways these were pursued were not necessarily reflective of local perspectives, needs or preferences. Greater collaboration and consultation was both desirable and essential for tackling fragmentation.</p>	
<p>At a strategic level there was a perceived lack of consultation with local providers of sport and physical activity was notable as was the lack of attention paid to individuals who were motivated by social / fitness goals rather than sporting success.</p> <p>This was also an issue at the grass roots level where it was recognised that, in some respects, clubs focused too narrowly on performance rather than participatory models which served to limit their potential as resources for wider community health.</p> <p>The structure of funding represented a barrier to collaboration and effective delivery. reduction in administrative layers and bureaucracy was keenly desired, as was greater flexibility and innovation. Competitive funding streams were perceived as potentially useful but there were concerns over the role of private deliverers in meeting the social agenda i.e. addressing inequality.</p> <p>The creation of RSAs could potentially help sports development move with the times but there was a fear that they would merely represent another costly tier of bureaucracy concerned with strategy rather providing the conditions for providers to come together and deliver the things they were good at through effective leadership and expansive “business-like” thinking to introduce new approaches.</p> <p>Organisational fitness for purpose was a general concern i.e. the ability of organisations to work effectively and productively, as was fitness of purpose i.e. what it was that organisations, particularly Sport Wales, were trying to achieve. The salience of broader health and sport strategies was recognised as was the challenge in identifying the organisations best positioned to deliver across these.</p>		<p><i>“Sport Wales really need to step up, to support change, to encourage and help others make the changes they can to address issues. But there is a lack of leadership in this respect at the moment...”</i></p> <p><i>“What we need is a more involved consultation process that comes before decisions are made rather than after the fact. A more succinct bottom up approach that is sensitive to the challenges facing all the different types of organisations in Wales.”</i></p> <p><i>“...it seems that a lot of the team at Sport Wales have not moved with the times, they have slow staff turnover; the bigger picture and role of sport is not being addressed and they have limited capacity to address wider issues in sport.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s been a bit of jobs for the boys; people who have been in sport all their lives just regurgitating things without fresh thinking or challenge, and when it does it gets swamped with public sector approaches which introduces lethargy and slowness.”</i></p>

Table 2: Collaborative dissonance

Theme title	Description	Example quotations
<p>4.2 Collaborative dissonance</p> <p>There was both a recognition of the need for collaboration between local partners and a desire to explore opportunities for more innovative delivery of opportunities. Thinking and acting in a collaborative way were impeded by performance demands placed on providers. This impeded the ability to think about the bigger picture in which aspects of health, sport participation, social equality and community development were considered as mutually reinforcing targets.</p> <p>Systemic issues relating to the way things were done for example, inflexible approaches to booking facilities, cost of facilities, conservative thinking, lack of appetite for risk and historical practices represented significant barriers to the collaborative potential inherent in the sporting structure that was recognised by all those interviewed.</p> <p>There was a clear interest in developing mutual alliances and shared approaches to the delivery of opportunities. It was perceived that some local providers who could play an important role in delivery were being excluded. Equally, to some extent it was also perceived that the potential for new providers to emerge and flourish was also being hampered. This was attributed to the strong influence and control of local authority bodies and a sports development framework that limited ability to share best practice, manage expectations, demonstrate impact, and the flexibility to respond adequately to local variations in demand.</p> <p>The potential for collaboration could be increased through stronger leadership and the promotion of bolder and more innovative approaches which encouraged (managed) risk, greater trust between organisations, and time for relationships and systems to evolve.</p>	<p>There was a general sense that organisations working within the sports development structure were not establishing high quality links between themselves nor able to connect meaningfully with strategies. Funding arrangements, competition for resources and entrenched historical approaches hindered genuine partnerships. A need for local leadership and support was recognised, with a stronger focus on broad supply and demand issues in sports development.</p>	<p><i>“Sport seems to be disjointed, there’s limited sharing of best practice and other updates and we lose out financially through duplication. Sports development seems increasingly competitive between organisations and NGBs rather than focusing on the best way to deliver things.”</i></p> <p><i>“Partners need more freedom but KPIs can limit that because of concerns over funding and long term survival...think the people in sport are already here [to deliver] but collaboration needs to be the norm, it needs to be mainstream and embedded in the way we do things...”</i></p> <p><i>“The system is not effective. Winning medals and getting people active are different things needing different approaches. Being more commercially minded, more business-focused would help steer away from rolling out strategies all the time, instead thinking of shared services and looking for mutual alliances.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s easier to say who shouldn’t be involved, like local authorities. We need to create space for new providers to develop and flourish...allowing entrepreneurialism to take place, for new thinking to emerge...”</i></p>

Table 3: Future roles

Theme title	Description	Example quotations
<p>4.3 Future roles</p>	<p>The necessity of revising the way in which community sports development was delivered was widely recognised. A successful future depended on clarifying the role of Sport Wales, identifying the most appropriate delivery partners, and increasing the effectiveness of investments through more flexible, innovative and responsive approaches.</p>	
<p>Rather than sweeping away current structures and systems, it was recognised that the future roles of organisations needed consideration. RSAs needed to be facilitative rather than managerial in style and promote genuine and productive partnerships between diverse local providers.</p> <p>Sport Wales’ relevance in relation to contemporary community sports development was questioned, it needing to decide, and make clear, its role and function – whether concerning elite sport, community health, or increasing participation.</p> <p>Local authorities (with exceptions) were seen as the traditional providers whose role was outdated in respect of the demands placed on the system by social and economic developments. A reluctance to relinquish traditional power over the sport agenda was a concern.</p> <p>The potential role of Universities was significant given the diversity and depth of resources, particularly student workforce, subject expertise and research. Partnership models needed developing in order to increase and understand links between universities and local communities and more work was needed to understand how to embed universities in an RSA model. Contributions made by universities needed recognition as did the danger posed by flux within the HE sector. Sustainable approaches required strong agreements and understanding between deliverers.</p> <p>Bringing in people from “outside of the system” was recognised as a useful and important means of bringing challenge, innovation and business-thinking in respect of seeking performance, efficiency and effectiveness. “Natural fit” between organisations was not sufficient to guarantee success. Strong leadership, clarification of roles and consultation were perceived as essential in determining future roles.</p>		<p><i>“Universities are a massive untapped area. They have resources in terms of expertise, research, facilities, student volunteers, sports experts. We have a six really strong universities who could play a really important role. It’s got to be the right people, but they could act as hubs for community sport with the right approach.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sport Wales have a real role in the future in terms of determining what approaches we need in sport and how this unfolds in terms of planning and delivery. I’m not sure in a position to do that at the moment. We still have a lot of people with that focus on sport for sport sake...”</i></p> <p><i>“The greatest gains come through good partnerships. We work in a small area, a small patch, we need to make the most of that...the RSAs can’t just copy what’s been done in England, but the funding in local authorities has not been effective and they continue to be funded...”</i></p> <p><i>“There needs to be a more collaborative approach between commercial organisations, public health. That’s different from what Sport Wales have done...”</i></p>

5.0 Discussion and recommendations

This section provides a brief discussion of the qualitative data in the context of the existing literature and makes a series of recommendations for consideration.

5.1 Introduction

Sport Wales' vision (2010) is clear and unambiguous with respect to fostering and promoting a different mindset that seeks greater innovation, collaboration and responsiveness to local needs. The importance of revising approaches so as to promote greater collaboration and mutuality is evident in other sports development systems. For example, in 2010 the Australian government released its Pathway to Success strategy which sought to move *'away from the divisive community versus elite sport debates of the past and developing a collaborative, efficient and integrated national sports system focused both on growing participation for the benefit of our community as well as the high performance system'* (Commonwealth of Australia 2010, p.1).

What is apparent is that there has been difficulty in understanding how to embed new ways of working within the Welsh sporting landscape. Diverse practical, ideological and cultural aspects pose significant challenges to the ambition of reinvigorating approaches to sports development. The points below are intended as prompts for consideration and further discussion concerning practical steps to address these issues.

5.2 Clarifying roles and purpose

- Establishing clarity concerning the role and purpose of organisations working in sports development is critical. Policy aims must be clear and unequivocal to help organisations identify their place and contributions in pursuit of policy objectives.
- RSAs could consider adopting a facilitative approach rather than one of key delivery partner that supports networks and partnerships by sharing good practice and coordinating local activities.
- A hub approach has the potential to bring together multiple and diverse organisations which would help identify the relative strengths and weaknesses inherent within local areas.
- Sport Wales and the traditional focus on local authorities seem to represent outdated ways of working that are inadequate for addressing complex social objectives in a time of political and economic upheaval. Sport Wales' current role is questionable with respect to elite sports development and the wider sport participation agenda.
- Universities, private and public organisations and the third sector have a pivotal role to play in delivering on strategies around sport participation, health, and wider social outcomes.

5.3 Creating conditions for stability and success

Recommendation 1: The role and function of Sport Wales should be clarified so as to establish understanding concerning its place and relevance within the Welsh sporting landscape.

Recommendation 2: An inclusive consultation exercise conducted with stakeholders delivering sport programmes would help identify key strengths and weaknesses in the present system and identify gaps, opportunities and methods to enhance delivery.

- Avoiding outcomes-focused approaches that limit flexibility in delivery style may help introduce flexible approaches that make better use of local resources.
- A move away from short term funding approaches would provide a behaviorally distinct approach whereby planning and investment decisions are made with longer term outcomes in mind. This would provide a means of encouraging higher quality links between organisations and between different but mutually reinforcing policy areas. This would help address some of the instability in the wider policy and economic contexts.
- There appears to be a contradiction between traditional approaches to sports development which have relied upon top-down managed approaches and contemporary conceptions of sports development which necessarily rely on bottom-up responses to complex local needs. The evidence suggests there has been a failure to respond to locally defined needs and preferences.
- Defining, agreeing and reviewing sports development goals is challenging but is essential for bringing together diverse local stakeholders in order to identify common values and interests and reconcile different cultures and practices (Phillpots, Grix, & Quarmby, 2011).
- Funding is a persistent concern for local deliverers in sports development. Seeking opportunities to align sports development strategies with community concerns, needs and preferences is likely to foster greater involvement of those at which strategies are targeted.
- Exploring opportunities for stakeholders to take ownership of sports development initiatives is important for securing commitment, satisfaction and effectiveness at the local level.

Recommendation 3: Introducing longer term funding cycles would provide certainty and confidence for deliverers to work towards longer term outcomes.

Recommendation 4: Funding approaches that are competitive and which provide flexibility may drive innovation and best practice. Clear agreements on performance would promote efficiency and productivity.

Recommendation 5: The skills and expertise of sports bodies, including sports clubs and universities should be harnessed to create strong relationships between diverse stakeholders. Engaging and utilizing the strengths of non-sport bodies and professionals from other sectors would help enhance and consolidate these relationships.

Recommendation 6: Regional approaches such as RSAs should act as facilitators with respect to building networks, promoting best practice, promoting collaborative approaches and supporting evidence-based approaches.

5.4 Building effective partnerships

- The relevance and potential of partnership approaches is understood in respect of the potential to combine resources, reduce duplication and identify innovative approaches to community sports development.
- Partnerships are inherently complex and reflect the goals, practices and cultures of diverse stakeholders. Understanding the context in which partnerships arise is essential so as to identify common interests and opportunities for meaningful interaction.
- Communication is critical for effective partnership working by providing a mechanism through which trust is built, synergies identified and organizational differences reconciled.

- Delimiting sports development through narrowly defined program-focused initiatives may impede partnership working. Focusing on broader participation, sport, health and social goals is likely to provide a means of fostering greater collaboration.
- Partnerships need careful management. There is the danger that those in partnerships lack capacities to manage effectively (Frisby, Thibault, & Kikulis, 2004). Developing existing partnerships can help build on existing relationships and avoid the challenges of establishing new partnerships.

Recommendation 7: An effective means of communication between diverse stakeholders should be established to provide a basis for managing complex relationships. RSAs might perform this function.

Recommendation 8: The benefits of partnership working should be clearly articulated, promoted and grounded in reality i.e. support, funding, goal attainment.

Recommendation 9: Formalizing partnerships through plans, structures and processes and expectations would help maximize effectiveness via: agreeing complementary approaches; encouraging and supporting the active participation of stakeholders, and promoting approaches which are sensitive to local needs and preferences.

5.5 Demonstrating impact

- Designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation systems that support effective sports development initiatives is likely to be complicated by the need for performance management and accountability. This might lead to tensions between local, regional and national actors which require careful management and ongoing consultation.
- Measures that extend beyond traditional engagement and participation statistics will help demonstrate the wider social and economic impact of sports development initiatives for example, qualitative case studies concerning participant impact and reduced duplication, evidence of costs savings, reduced burden on services, and social return on investment (SROI) exercises.
- Routinely establishing and disseminating evidence concerning impact will help identify examples of best practice, instill a sense of partnership satisfaction and develop innovative approaches that encompass previous learning and experience concerning effectiveness.

Recommendation 10: Monitoring and evaluation should seek to establish local level evidence of impact that reflects the diverse nature of sports development initiatives.

Recommendation 11: Evaluation should be an embedded aspect of sports development initiatives. Linking local evidence with national and regional level data e.g. census, sports participation surveys would provide composite and comprehensive accounts of impact.

5.6 Outlining a potential RSA model

The diversity, complexity and contextual variation within and between the regions of Wales and England make comparison of geographic, demographic, cultural, socio-economic factors and their relation to community sport development models a challenging and to some extent unrealistic proposition. More usefully, it is possible to extract key messages from case studies and literature that identify aspects that have, in a general sense, much in common with the challenges facing the future of sports development in Wales. These are outlined in Sections 5.1 to 5.5.

Based on these aspects, this section presents an outline of what an RSA might look like in more detail. The intention is to promote discussion by outlining a model which might usefully address the identified inefficiencies and limitations of the present approach. At the heart of this model is the notion of settings based approach which considers that individuals live in diverse contexts in which a diverse range of social, political and economic factors impacting participation and health. These need to be understood and responded to in order to maximize the effectiveness of sport development initiatives of any type i.e. it is participant-led.

5.6.1 RSAs as funded local bodies

Broadly reflecting the CSP model in England, RSAs might be conceived as teams of cross-cutting staff capable of brokering local relationships, communicating with and coordinating local partners, and providing leadership in respect of collaboration and the development of initiatives. Core funding might be provided by Sport Wales to staff the RSAs. Other funds would be contingent on the delivery of national programs and the development of local initiatives with stakeholders. Delivery partners could include schools, universities, health teams, community and crime teams, sports clubs and associations and third sector organizations with a material interest in sport, physical activity and health.

An important distinction with the English approach might be that RSAs are not seen as key delivery partners *per se*; rather that they are key funding facilitators. That they are made up of sport and non-sport professionals with a range of knowledge and expertise would create a more dynamic organization than might otherwise be the case. This is reflected in Table 4 which outlines the potential RSA function, aim, goals and membership. Here, the primary goals are to interpret and integrate policy, provide advice, distribute funding and support applications, and providing monitoring and evaluation.

RSAs could act both as deliverers of initiatives where appropriate or as partners within collaborative approaches. In the first instance, they could secure funding provided via Sport Wales to implement local projects to which staff might be recruited or volunteers supported. In the second scenario they could act as the conduit between local organizations and Sport Wales in respect of leading, supporting or collaborating on applications for funding.

As facilitating bodies, RSAs should be capable of bringing together diverse organizations without necessarily overlaying cumbersome delivery objectives i.e. they would be capable of balancing nationally-defined objectives with locally defined need. RSAs would need a level of formality and leadership to ensure sustainability and viability. As a principle means of ensuring accountability (Reed, 2016), RSA boards would include as far as possible those that represent NGBs, health partners, local authorities, universities, in addition to local organizations and businesses. This would ensure a high degree of strategic relevance and oversight.

Table 4: Potential RSA function, aims, goals and membership

Function	Strategic aims	Primary goals	Secondary goals	Board level
Facilitator	1. Learning & skills	1. Interpret & integrate policy	1. Increase participation	1. NGBs
A core team made up of sector & non-sector specialists to provide leadership, communication and coordination	2. Stronger and more connected communities	2. Provide advice	2. Support talent dev't	2. Health partners
	2. Sport & PA	3. Distribute funding	3. Support competitive sport	3. Local authorities
		4. Monitoring /evaluation	4. Support facility development	4. Universities
			5. Coaching / coach development	5. Others e.g. businesses
			6. Research	

The current intention with respect to the management and leadership of RSAs is unclear and presents an opportunity to apply creative thinking in respect of the roles traditionally performed in sport development. A 'cross-sector' team would potentially be able to bring fresh and creative thinking in respect of business development, marketing, finance, leadership and research skills.

A (relatively) flat organizational structure would emphasize partnership processes rather than partnership structures as the main focus of attention. In this sense, partnership is seen as fluid, evolving, responsive and pragmatic. This is in contrast to inflexible structures that sit within the confines of organizational boundaries and practices. Hence, consideration should be given to the necessity of 'hosting' RSAs within traditional settings i.e. local authorities, or new settings that might appear to have 'better fit' for example, universities. However, while the potential benefits of such an approach may be convincing, ceding lead responsibility from one organisation to another may only serve to displace issues without seeking to understand or address their underlying causes.

If indeed local authorities are no longer best positioned to oversee community sport development the question must be asked as to why universities might be better placed to do so. Among this study's participants there was enthusiasm for greater university involvement particularly with respect to the diversity and depth of resources, particularly student workforce, subject expertise and research. Yet, as with local authorities, universities have their own operating models, objectives, and business plans.

Further, universities were not necessarily perceived as key local stakeholders in respect of the delivery of opportunities or the provision of facilities. Moreover, they were seen as developers of future workforces and suppliers of student support through placements or volunteering. Incorporating the functional aspects of an RSA into a university structure would necessarily require a number of issues to be explored including those relating to finance, location, governance and the extent to which the RSA and the university are essentially one and the same. It was clear from the interviews with university representatives that while it seemed 'a good idea in principle', there was little understanding about how the complexity of HEI institutions could be reconciled within an approach that sought simplicity and efficiency.

The compatibility of exiting organizations with wider sport development objectives must necessarily be explored to ensure that the end-participant's needs and preferences remain at the core of decision making. Considering an approach that is able to tap into the collective strengths of *any* organisation

perhaps provides a point for discussion. Conceptualizing RSAs strategic partnerships may provide the starting point.

5.6.2 Strengths

- The potential to bring clarity concerning expectations and responsibilities between influential stakeholders;
- The ability to deliver on national objectives via closer collaboration with local stakeholders;
- A shared agenda in which all partners can identify opportunities for meaningful engagement and outputs;
- A leadership approach which circumvents the traditional shortcomings of organizational boundaries, histories, practices and cultures;
- The ability to give prominence and due consideration to local issues;
- It elevates the role of existing organisations. Participants in this study recognised that there are sufficient organisations to deliver initiatives, but coordination is lacking as is their ability to effect change.
- The potential to develop local responses which augment national / sub national programmes already in place and which are likely to arise in the future.
- Flexibility is evident in, but not limited to, the following ways:
 1. **Location** – the RSA core team can be located in single / multiple locations. For example, the decision might be to locate the team within a university. This provides access to knowledge, research expertise, student workforce, and other technical services / facilities.
 2. **Funding** – funding can be used to encourage innovation and creativity particularly through investing in collaborative approaches and those which reduce duplication. Small grants schemes (applications assessed under agreed but not onerous criteria) could be used to support smaller local organisations that traditionally lose out to bigger more experienced and well organized groups. The competitive nature of a Capital investment scheme could be used to promote investment in high quality community facilities and upgrades that are defined in consultation with those that use them, and in collaboration with other providers of sport / PA / health.
 3. **Communication** – RSAs could act as communication hubs providing a channel between diverse partners that provides two-way communication in respect of local and national issues, funding opportunities strategies and initiatives. RSA team members might be conceptualized as navigators who bring people and resources together, identify synergies, provide technical support and advice, and signpost to other opportunities and information. Embedding navigators within their ‘patch’ will help to bring greater understanding of local issues and need.
 4. **Innovation** - in the way funding is managed would allow greater flexibility in terms of the outcomes are produced, how outcomes are measured and valued, and promote longer timeframes. Outcomes-led commissioning does not help instill trust and creativity within local communities. Trust is the ‘glue’ that holds partnerships and communities together.

A ‘light touch’ approach, particularly for small grants, would help instill trust and motivation. This, in turn, is likely to produce a number of unanticipated outcomes that extend beyond traditional sport / participation metrics e.g. community cohesion and connectivity, happier people, empowered clubs, organisational sustainability, and better networked organisations.

5.6.3 Weaknesses

- The approach is without precedent. It challenges the status quo i.e. the roles and processes traditionally accepted as the legitimate function of, for example, local authorities, and how sport development is 'normally' operationalized.
- How the RSAs will be funded is not clear. A clear funding model is required that clearly outlines the nature of funding and long term sustainability but that incorporates sufficient flexibility to foster collaboration and innovation.
- RSAs are unproven with respect to impact. The RSAs need to demonstrate quickly that they are capable of making some sort of impact. This necessarily, and unfortunately, places a need for some quick wins to be demonstrated whilst longer term plans unfold.
- The genuine level of enthusiasm for RSAs is unknown and the model untested. The sporting landscape is complex and competitive; piloting and meaningful consultation is needed across diverse stakeholders and deliverers of sporting / PA opportunities.
- With no previous history or experience of an RSA-style approach, local level knowledge and understanding may be limited. The model ultimately relies on the ownership and commitment of numerous and diverse stakeholders and significant relationship and trust building might be required.
- The benefits of the RSA model need to be unequivocal and provided 'up front' to stakeholders which requires strong leadership and potentially a longer time frame that might be expected.

5.6.4 Threats

- Instability in the wider financial environment is likely to pose challenges to start-up and long term financial sustainability: growing and diversifying funding sources to improve sustainability.
- Deep-seated issues e.g. competition between organisations, lack of information and understanding of organisations, and traditional loci of power may serve to destabilize the approach and derail progress towards a fully-fledged partnership model.
- Unrealistic short, medium and long term expectations will undermine the efforts and activities of the partnership and thus need careful consideration.
- A failure to demonstrate performance i.e. planning, and meaningful impact i.e. recognizable and valued outcomes, will damage good will and the level of ownership needed for partners to make the contributions necessary for success.
- An onus on national programmes would divert attention away from needs-led approaches that seek cross-cutting solutions to local issues thus potentially frustrating attempts to work collaboratively to devise innovative initiatives.
- Establishing a performance management system that provides accountability and oversight without being overly bureaucratic or burdensome is critical. An emphasis on performance indicators and strict outcomes negatively influences behavior with respect to exploring collaborative opportunities and broader outcome types. A tiered approach is likely to be needed whereby larger more complex funding is controlled more tightly than smaller grants.

5.6.5 Opportunities

- There is a recognition of the need for change. Participants in this study wanted to see stronger leadership and coordination that brought genuine improvements to the ways things are done and which lay to rest historical issues.
- Many structural elements required to implement an RSA approach are already in place including local authorities, universities, health teams, sports clubs and associations, third sector organisations. As key resources, these partners bring a wealth of resources which have synergistic potential in developing innovative initiatives that take account of people's needs account for geographical, social, economic and cultural variations.

- Local organizations want to be trusted to deliver initiatives. Establishing structured funding opportunities i.e. Small Grants Scheme, Large Grants Scheme, and Capital Grants could empower and motivate local organizations to deliver high quality initiatives via communicative and trusting relationships with funders.
- There is a wealth and breadth of expertise already in place. Recruiting sport and non-sport staff into the RSAs provides a means of brokering new relationships with diverse organizations and exploring untapped potential within existing situations.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant information letter

Title of project:

Organisation of Community Sport in Wales

What is the purpose of the study?

Sport Wales has expressed a belief that there is a need for a step-change in the way sporting opportunities are planned, developed and promoted in order to fulfil the Welsh Government's vision for Wales. To explore potential alternative strategies for community sport we are interested in speaking with a range of stakeholders including Governing Bodies, sports associations, education, and sports clubs. This is to develop a picture of what the future organisation of community sport might look like.

What will we do with the information?

We will produce a report providing a summary of the findings. This report will help us to understand what the future organisation of community sport might look like in Wales, as perceived by a range of stakeholders. We may also produce papers for academic journals based on the findings.

Do I have to take part in the research project?

Taking part is entirely voluntary. It is up to you whether or not to take part. Even if you decide to participate you are free to withdraw from the research project at any time without stating the reason.

What will you be asked to do if you decide to take part?

If you agree to be involved in the research project you will be asked to take part in a telephone interview to discuss your experiences, perceptions, and thoughts concerning community sport in Wales.

During the interview you will be asked to answer only the questions that you want and there are no right or wrong answers; it is only your experiences and perceptions that are of interest to us. The topics of conversation will include questions about your experiences in sport, challenges you face, and what you think might be a good way of developing community sport in the future.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during the interview, without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected. You are also free to request that the information you provide in the interview will not be used in the final analysis or reporting. Your identity will never be revealed. All data used in reporting or other dissemination will be anonymized and stored in a locked office at the University of Gloucestershire.

Following participation in the interview, if you would not like the information you provide to be used you must contact us within 4 weeks after the interview has taken place.

What are the possible benefits to taking part?

1. It will establish evidence that might help inform the development of a new strategy for community sport in Wales;
2. It will provide stakeholders representing diverse organisations e.g. Governing Bodies of Sport, local government, and other delivery organisations e.g. sports clubs, to share their views concerning the future of community sport in Wales.

Who has reviewed the study?

The University of Gloucestershire Research Ethics Committee has approved the study.

What do you do know?

If you would like to be involved in the interview, please complete informed consent form which has been provided. Please bring this with you to the workshop, ensuring that you have read, understood and signed the form.

If you need further information on this study, please contact:

Dr Colin Baker, University of Gloucestershire, QW138, Francis Close Hall, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 4AZ. Email: cmbaker@glos.ac.uk

Appendix B: Interview schedule

Title of project:

Organisation of Community Sport in Wales

A. Background

1. Name of organisation and activities involved in
2. How long involved in?

B. Past & present

3. In general, what are your experiences of working in sport in Wales?
4. What have been the most positive aspects of working in sport in Wales?
5. What have been the most challenging aspects of working in sport in Wales?
6. What lessons or understandings, if any, have you learned that have remained relevant to you?
7. Overall, what is your opinion of the current situation (policy / direction / delivery, etc.) in community sport in Wales?

C. Future

8. Who might the key partners be in delivering community sport in the future?
9. Are there any partners who do not currently play a significant role/reliance on the same organisations?
10. If money/resources were no object, what features do you think would help Wales achieve its sporting ambitions?
11. What role do you think Sport Wales should play in the delivery of sport in Wales in the future? Is their role clear currently? Recognising resource limitations (etc.), what factors do you think are most important to delivering successful community sport strategies / outcomes in Wales?
12. If you had to identify three priorities, above all else, that would help achieve this success, what would they be?
13. How might these be pursued, and what would help this to happen?
14. How do we measure success/what does success look like?