

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Bangor University and Cardiff Metropolitan University
Unit of Assessment: 26 – Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism
Title of case study: Sport and physical activity policy in Wales: The impact of evaluation research on ‘roll-out’ and revised implementation
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This case study focuses on the impact of our research on the Welsh Government’s policy and delivery of national flagship programmes for sport and physical activity. The evaluation of a pilot study of the **Active Young People** secondary school sport intervention **informed the implementation and ‘roll-out’ of the pan-Wales 5x60** physical activity programme to 218 schools by 2009. The evaluation of the pan-Wales **Free Swimming Initiative** resulted in **revised policy objectives for sustainable sports development in Wales, and influenced the type of public swimming opportunities that exist, improved their availability, and increased the extent of engagement with them.**

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)
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The Principal Investigator for both projects, Bolton, began conducting research in 2002 on corporate strategic planning in the public sector, specifically local government [1]. The portfolio of evaluation research that has been established since then (including outputs returned in the Research Assessment Exercise 2008) underpins this case study and acted as a platform for the investigation into two national pilot schemes that are central to the Welsh Government’s 2005 national strategy, *Climbing Higher*, which has the aim of increasing participation in sport and physical activity.

Research on the pilot study of the **Active Young People** programme [2] was undertaken at a cost of £9,000, and was the first substantive secondary school based sport and physical activity policy for young people in Wales. The first phase of the research occurred during 2004 and involved a quantitative survey of 1,834 twelve to fourteen year olds from the six secondary schools involved in the pilot. In order to avoid focusing on only ‘sporty’ or ‘active’ children all year seven and year nine pupils were invited to take part. Through the support of sport development officers and teachers an overall response rate of 81% was achieved, and contextual data about the young people themselves were captured. The second phase of the research included individual interviews with gatekeepers and 11 focus groups involving 43 pupils who had completed the initial survey and were grouped according to gender and level of interest in sport and physical activity. The design and delivery of the **Active Young People** programme was informed by the analysis of the participation patterns, the activities provided, the reasons for participation and the important role that the sports development officers played within the schools themselves. In turn, **this research shaped the phased ‘roll-out’ of 5x60** – a national scheme intended to increase the number of secondary age pupils taking part in sport or physical activity for 60 minutes, at least five times a week.

The other national pilot is the Free Swimming Initiative, and its evaluation is the second element of this impact case study. Commissioned by the Welsh Government at a cost of £193,000, the body of research was reported in a series of six Interim Reports leading to the Final Report [4]. A mixed methods approach was adopted that used multiple sources combining primary and secondary data. Five national surveys were undertaken during the pilot period reflecting the different settings in which the Free Swimming Initiative had been implemented. Two of the surveys were with twelve to fifteen year olds from 14 schools in 10 local authorities – first in 2005 (n=1,585) and then repeated in 2006/07 (n=1,864). Two more were with the managers of all pools offering free swimming – first in 2005 (n=119), and then in 2005/06 (n=123) – response rates were 76% and 66% respectively. Evidence was also gathered in 2005 about participation by older people from a survey of 404 swimmers at 26 swimming pools in 10 local authorities. All local authorities were also required to submit bi-monthly pool usage data which, once verified independently, were analysed and reported on by the research team. Secondary data were captured from each local authority’s

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annual plan from 2004/05 to 2007/08, and through Sport Wales' national biennial surveys which, for young people, introduced specific questions on free swimming.

The qualitative research involved individual interviews with members of the Steering Group (n=7) in 2004/5 that focused on national implementation and co-ordination matters. These were followed up in 2005 with 26 interviews that focused on local operational issues with chief leisure officers, lead support officers and swimming pool managers from a geographically varied sample of six local authorities. In 2006 further qualitative research was undertaken through the use of 12 focus groups (a total of 48 participants) with different sets of professional stakeholders including, again, chief leisure officers and swimming pool managers, but also policy officers, and sports development officers.

The initial collection of primary data informed the evaluation of the Free Swimming Initiative and shaped its implementation as a public health policy. Specifically, **it included, methodological and other challenges faced in conducting this kind of research [5], and some of the public policy tensions that can exist when there are competing priorities for public funding.** The experiences of older (60 plus) swimmers were also analysed and became the basis of a micro-case study of policy implementation and stakeholder engagement [6] and builds upon the earlier public sector sports development research in the same area, Blaenau Gwent [3].

The researchers involved in this work are **Anderson** (appointed in 2005 as a Research Assistant, now a Lecturer), **Bolton** (appointed in 2001 as a Senior Lecturer, now a Principal Lecturer), **Davies** (appointed in 1983 as a Lecturer, now a Principal Lecturer), **Fleming** (a Senior Lecturer 1994-1999 who returned in 2005, now a Professor), **Galdes** (appointed in 2003 as an Academic Associate who left in 2009), **Jennings** (appointed in 1992 as a Senior Lecturer, now a Principal Lecturer), **Smith B** (appointed in 1998 as a Senior Lecturer, now a Principal Lecturer), and **Elias, Leach** and **Martin** (all external collaborators).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The selection of underpinning research includes five international peer-reviewed journal articles. Three are in a research outlet with a practitioner focus [2, 3 & 6], one is in an outlet concerned explicitly with sport and public policy [5], and the other is in a leading journal for the study of local politics and public administration [1]. Building on the second Interim Report of the evaluation of the Free Swimming Initiative returned by Bolton in the Research Assessment Exercise 2008, the Final Report is also included [4]. The journals in which research has been published are not listed by Scopus, hence citation data are not included.

1. Bolton, N. & Leach, S. (2002) Strategic planning in Local Government: A study of organisational impact and effectiveness. *Local Government Studies*, 28 (4), 1-21. DOI:10.1080/714004169
2. Bolton, N., Fleming, S. & Galdes, M. (2007). Physical activity programmes for secondary schools in Wales: Implications from a pilot scheme. *Managing Leisure*, 12 (1), 74-88. DOI: 10.1080/13606710601071579
3. Bolton, N., Fleming, S. & Elias, B. (2008). The experience of community sport development: A case study of Blaenau Gwent. *Managing Leisure*, 13 (2), 92-103. DOI: 10.1080/13606710801933446
4. Bolton, N., Martin, S., Anderson, M., Smith, B. & Jennings, C. (2008). *Free swimming: An evaluation of the Welsh Assembly Government's initiative*. Cardiff: Sports Council for Wales. ISBN: 1-871553-05-09.
5. Bolton, N. & Martin, S. (2013). The policy and politics of free swimming. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 5 (3), 445-463. DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2012.656689
6. Anderson, M., Bolton, N., Davies, G. & Fleming, S. (2013, online). Implementation of national policy – A case study critique of the Free Swimming Initiative for the 60 plus population. *Managing Leisure*. DOI:10.1080/13606719.2013.859456

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact of our research can be traced directly to the policy decisions about the two key policy imperatives of the *Climbing Higher* strategy. Evidence of the impact is provided below. Numbers in superscript refer to particular sources to corroborate the impact (in section 5).

Public policy linked to sport and physical activity in Wales was addressed explicitly in the Welsh Government's first national strategy, *Climbing Higher*. Research conducted at Cardiff Met has **informed policy decisions, influenced changes to the capture and management of data linked to physical activity provision, and altered the nature of that provision for the engagement of two particular age groups (60+ and 16 and under)** – together, 45% of the Welsh population in 2012. Indirectly, it has also reduced public spending on less effective alternative provision and enhanced the health and well-being of these segments of the population. The main beneficiaries of the impact of this research have been the Welsh Government, Ministers with relevant portfolio responsibilities, Sport Wales (as a Welsh Government sponsored body), local authorities, schools, national governing bodies for sport and community providers of physical activity. Importantly too, the findings of the national School Sport Survey released by Sport Wales in October 2013 indicate that the number of young people taking part in sport or physical activity three or more times a week has risen from 27% in 2011 to 40% in 2013.

Physical activity levels amongst children and young people have been a focus of sustained work by Sport Wales. The evaluation of the Secondary School Sport Pilot Programme was reported in 2006 by researchers at Cardiff Met, and published in 2007 [2]. As a result of the findings of that evaluation there was a recommendation for the 5x60 programme to be 'rolled-out' across Wales⁹. The recommendation was accepted and implemented by Sport Wales. By November 2009, there were 218 secondary schools involved, and 99% of all secondary schools had a '5x60 Officer' in post⁸.

The Free Swimming Initiative in Wales was the first free-to-use national public health programme linked to swimming in Europe, and the Welsh Government currently invests **£3.5 million per annum** in its delivery. The impact on its continuation made by the 42 page Final Report [4] was made explicit by the Audit Committee of the National Assembly for Wales in 2008: "The Assembly Government's flagship scheme for increasing physical activity, its Free Swimming initiative, contains a number of weaknesses. **We recommend that the Assembly Government implement the recommendations in relation to the Free Swimming Initiative made by both the Auditor General and the evaluation report produced by the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff**" [original emphasis]⁷.

The first clear evidence of the impact of the research was concerned with data capture and management of information about free swimming. The Interim and Final Reports of the evaluation led to a recognition of the inadequacy of the previous arrangements for monitoring participation. As a result, a joint report published in January 2008¹¹ acknowledged the work conducted at Cardiff Met to establish the method and to collect important baseline data. It also contained recommendations about the practical requirements.

The Final Report was presented to the Welsh Government and the Free Swimming Steering Group, chaired by Sport Wales, in February 2008. Various pieces of policy-related correspondence make clear how the research shaped policy implementation in each of the 22 local authorities in Wales. In 2010, a 'Restricted – Cabinet Business Paper'², drew upon findings from the evaluation some of which were circulated by Sports Wales¹⁰. From this, the Minister for Heritage presented proposals that were directly influenced by the list of policy implications identified in the Final Report [4]. These were accepted and put into effect³. They included:

- The Free Swimming Initiative to become embedded into 'Local Authority Partnership Agreements' produced by each local authority²;
- The extension of the entitlement to free swimming for young people outside of school holidays to include weekends²;
- An increased variety of activities to attract a wider range of young people²;

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- A review of target groups² – most recently, between 2012 and 2013 a pilot has been conducted on Free Swimming for Veterans and Armed Forces Personnel⁴.

There were also findings from the Final Report that informed the amendment to the previous arrangements for free swimming:

- The requirement for a robust performance measurement system²;
- A move away from ‘free splash’ towards developing structured water based activities.

As a result new minimum levels of provision were implemented throughout Wales².

Additionally, the Free Swimming Programme in England launched after publication of the Final Report in Wales was symmetrical in the choice of targeted groups and main beneficiaries. The Research Brief for the ‘Evaluation of the Impact of Free Swimming’ in England, released in January 2009, noted specifically the evaluation of the Free Swimming Initiative in Wales⁵. A Briefing Paper from the Association for Public Service Excellence⁶ also drew attention to the lessons learnt from Wales in relation to the Initiative and reported relevant data¹¹. It concluded: “The benefits of free swimming initiatives have been evidenced (...) from the lessons learnt in Wales, particularly in relation to the over 60s” (p.5) – two research references [5, 6] also refer.

Commenting on the two main policy imperatives of the ‘Climbing Higher’ strategy, the former Chief Executive Officer for Sport Wales notes [emphasis added]¹, **“the research produced by the Cardiff School of Sport in relation to the Free Swimming Initiative and ‘5x60’ has impacted on the future policy direction and implementation that these programmes have taken.** The researchers have demonstrated an ability to shape the policy framework and also consider its implementation by organisations operating throughout Wales.”

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

The evidence of the impact of the research conducted takes the form of public reports, government department papers, ministerial letters, a briefing paper, an information sheet and individual testimony. Some of these refer to both the Free Swimming Initiative and 5x60 programme^{1, 7 & 8}, others are concerned only with the Free Swimming Initiative^{2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10 & 11}, and the other only with 5x60⁹.

1. Sport Wales (5th July 2013). Developing Research Impact – National Policy Development and Implementation. Testimonial: Chief Executive, Sport Wales.
2. Minister for Heritage (2010) *Free Swimming*. Restricted Cabinet Business Paper CAB (09-10) 33. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.
3. Minister for Heritage (February 2010) *Free Swimming Initiative – Revised Scheme*. Letter to the Chair of the Sports Council for Wales. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.
4. Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage (2013) *Sports Wales Remit Letter 2013-2014*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
5. Sport England (January 2009) Research Brief – Evaluation of the Impact of Free Swimming. London: Sport England.
6. Association for Public Service Excellence (July 2008) *Free Swimming Initiatives*. Briefing Paper 08/36. London: APSE.
7. National Assembly for Wales (2008) Audit Committee. Increasing physical activity in Wales, Committee Report AC (3) 06-08, July 2008.
8. Sports Council for Wales (September 2009) *Young people’s participation in sport*. Sports Update 62. Cardiff: Sports Council for Wales.
9. Sports Council for Wales (2009) *Evaluation of the 5x60 Programme: Report on Progress to the Welsh Assembly Government*. Report to Welsh Assembly Government, November 2009.
10. Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Free Swimming 2010 – Minimum Provision and Guidance: 16 + 60*. Cardiff: Sport Wales & Welsh Assembly Government.
11. Welsh Assembly Government, Sports Council for Wales & Local Government Data Unit – Wales (January 2008) *Welsh Assembly Government – Free Swimming Initiative Data Summary Report*. Cardiff: Local Government Data Unit – Wales.