

News release

Academy of Social Sciences

10 November 2011

Sport has a profound impact on society...

World-leading research provides hard evidence

With the Olympic Games less than nine months away the focus is not just on how Team GB will perform, but also on the legacy of the Games. So the launch of a new publication containing evidence of the impact of sport on people's lives is timely.

Making the Case for the Social Sciences – Sport and Leisure (published by the Academy of Social Sciences) contains leading research by social scientists showing the impact of sport on reducing youth crime, raising pupils' achievements, improving mental health and on general wellbeing. Much of this is assumed, but this publication provides hard evidence. It also shows how Government policy in sport has been influenced by research and how athletes can make transitions to new careers.

A study of former Olympic and Paralympic athletes (carried out by Professor David Lavallee at the University of Stirling) highlights the loss of identity they experience following retirement from competitive sport. The research presents a model showing how transitions to new careers can be made. David Lavallee says: "UK sport and leisure research is world leading. It needs to be given more of a chance to be heard and used."

Other research highlights.

An evaluation of the School Sports Partnerships programme showed a significant improvement in school attendance, as well as participation in sport. Findings from the research were referred to in Parliamentary debates and the funding, that was threatened with being withdrawn, was partially restored.

Two corporate-funded programmes - Living for Sport (developed by BSKyB) and Outward Bound (developed by HSBC) – showed marked improvements in the ability of young people to establish positive relationships with adults and take responsibility for others. Research provided evidence of the 'distance travelled' by over 7,000 young people that went far beyond sporting achievements.

People with poor mental health who had previously been athletic participated in sport again were able to rebuild a sense of identity that had been damaged through illness. Others found that sport helped them discover a new way of looking at themselves and their lives. This led to a mental health trust hiring specialised sport coaches with mental health training to deliver sport opportunities.

Speaking at the launch of the publication on 1 November, Tessa Jowell, former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (and current member of the Olympics Committee), stressed the "multitude of benefits that sport provides". Calling for a rethink on cuts to funding of school sports she said: "Sport is not an optional extra. It is a fundamental instrument in reducing offenders and engaging young people ... We can rest comfortable that we know sport works".

Professor Cary Cooper, Chair of the Academy of Social Sciences, added: "This research shows the role of social scientists in providing robust evidence on what works – and what doesn't work. This often involves revealing the complexities behind issues rather than accepting simple explanations. We often challenge assumptions so that policymakers and practitioners are better equipped to deliver social benefits. The research presented here illustrates how just a small part of that body of work has had an impact on policy and practice,

and thereby on people's everyday lives. But we need to develop a cost-benefit analysis to help persuade policy makers to focus more on this important area and show how engaging in sport can have an impact on Britain's economy."

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Notes to editors

The Academy of Social Sciences is a membership organisation of over 700 academicians and 41 learned societies. Its mission is to promote the value of social sciences in the UK for the public benefit. The Campaign for Social Science has been established to raise the profile of social science in the public, media and Parliament to address changes to funding teaching and research. A key objective is to create a popular vision of what social science can do and demonstrate its impact in government and the wider society. The Academy set up the Campaign for Social Science in January 2011 to promote the value of social science to politicians, the media and the wider society

The launch of *Making the Case for the Social Sciences – sport and leisure* took place as part of the Festival of Social Science, which is an annual event staged by the Economic and Social Research Council. To download a copy, follow this link:

<http://www.acss.org.uk/docs/Making%20the%20Case/MakingtheCase5-Sport%20and%20Leisure.pdf>

Research featured in the publication (These are mentioned above*)

- Helping athletes prepare for life after sport (Professor David Lavalley, University of Stirling)*
- How do we know if projects are working? (Professor Tim Crabbe, Home Office)
- Sport as a remedy for youth disaffection – it's complex! (Professor Kathy Armour, AcSS, then at the University of Loughborough)*
- Sport and mental health (Dr David Carless, Leeds Metropolitan University and Dr Kitrina Douglas, the University of Bristol)*
- Lifestyle sports (Dr Belinda Wheaton, University of Brighton)
- Safeguarding children in sport (Professor Celia Brackenridge, Brunel University)
- Tackling racism in sport (Professor Jonathan Long, AcSS, Leeds Metropolitan University)
- The value of school sport (Professor Barry Houlihan, AcSS, Loughborough University)*
- Making physical education more effective (Professor David Kirk, AcSS *et al*, University of Bedfordshire)
- The performance of public sports and leisure centres (Professor Peter Taylor, Sheffield Hallam University)
- Helping sports run themselves better (Dr Geoff Walter, Dr Linda Trenbeath and Richard Tacton, Birkbeck)
- A new dawn for British waterways (Professor Neil Ravenscroft and Professor Andrew Church, University of Brighton)
- Allotments (Professor David Crouch, University of Derby)

- How far is gambling a problem? (Professor Mark Griffiths, Nottingham Trent University)
- Gambling and debt (Dr Carolyn Downs, University of Salford)

Speakers at the launch on 1 November:

- Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP, former Secretary of State for Culture Media and current member of the Olympics Board.
- Sir Keith Mills, Deputy Chairman of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Professor Kathy Armour, University of Birmingham (formerly at Loughborough University).
- Prof Debbie Lye, International Development Director, UK Sport
- Professor David Lavelle, University of Stirling.
- Stephen Day, Chief Executive of Fulham FC Foundation