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Submitted via e-mail at PEACTIVITY.LIST@education.gov.uk

Pro-Bono Economics response – “Review of GCSE, AS and A level physical education activity list”

[Pro-Bono Economics](#) (PBE) welcomes the arrival of this consultation; we see it as a significant part of a broader debate surrounding how best to increase physical participation in children and young people. It is widely accepted that such endeavours – if successful – can support levels of general wellbeing (mental as well as physical) within the population, a necessary if not sufficient factor in addressing some of society’s most challenging policy challenges. These include stubbornly low workforce productivity and managing demands on the National Health Service.

We are responding in this fashion via a short letter – rather than through the online survey – as our observations and feedback are relatively high-level and hence would not comply with the submission requirements. Nevertheless, we hope that these comments prove helpful at any rate.

First and by way of background PBE’s core brief is to help charities understand their impact using economics. We achieve this by facilitating volunteering opportunities for professional economists keen to give their time on a pro-bono basis to such charitable projects active in any one of the following four fields: i) education; ii) employment; iii) mental health; and iv) poverty. This work typically culminates with research reports often showcasing the monetary value of initiatives whose purpose may otherwise have appeared largely altruistic¹.

Wherever possible we seek to share the insights from our work regarding impact in the four areas highlighted above with Government - through Departmental Consultations - or Parliamentary Select Committee inquiries. We see many commonalities between the ends the third sector and legislators are looking to achieve; as we continually strive to uncover and highlight the impact of charitable initiatives it is only natural therefore that some of our findings may be of relevance to policymakers. It is our hope that by circulating the applicable insights contained within our research reports, those in a position to shape policy in the UK can do so in possession of as much rigorously sourced and relevant information as feasibly possible.

Our observations here follow-on from a proprietary initiative of PBE, rather than one in which we partnered with a charitable organisation. Time and resource permitting we do seek to put our expertise in the field of impact assessment to work on a project solely of our own choosing from time to time. This is often in response to identifying fascinating insights during the ordinary course of our activities but whose further exploration does not necessarily fit within the remit of a given project (yet still warrant further examination).

“Upside Down Sport: building mental well-being and resilience in Britain’s next generation” was one such exercise. In November 2017 PBE hosted a policy roundtable in which we welcomed representatives of charities, Non-Governmental Bodies, and the public sector to discuss whether the UK’s policy priorities were

¹ Monetary benefits typically derive from cost savings to the public purse – for example via less reliance on the NHS services – and/or heightened earning potential on the part of groups/individuals in receipt of support (for example, via increased productivity or less need for extended periods of absence from employment due to physical/mental ill-health).

correct here. This examined how investing in grass roots physical activity programmes with demonstrable impact can ensure the wellbeing and productivity of future generations. This followed on from our hosting of a public lecture and panel discussion on the same theme in February 2017 with Baroness Tanni Grey Thompson, Mark Gregory (Chief Economist at EY) and Will Watt (Director of Product at Jump) together with Simon Kuper of the Financial Times².

Below we have presented a short list of some of the most pertinent – yet anecdotal – takeaways from our fact-finding exercises, which can largely be taken to support the work the Department for Education is conducting here. As a charity focussed on enhancing understanding surrounding impact, these do not represent the views or campaigning goals of PBE, but we hope may still be of use in contextualising the work of the Department in reviewing the physical activity lists for GCSE, AS and A level:

- **Current statutory guidance³ seemingly lacks the vision and prescription necessary to ensure consistency and value for money in the provision of physical education in our schools** – Participants to our roundtable suggested that it fails to deliver a robust physical education curriculum equipped to deal with childhood inactivity, much less generate the enthusiasm in children necessary to put them on the right path to a lifelong relationship with sport. It serves as guidance and is not prescriptive, leaving schools to their own devices with little direction.
- **Physical education as administered by the Department for Education under the auspices of the Healthy Pupils Unit should reflect the broad definition used by Sport England and the variety of different interests and talents of children** – It was also suggested that a more ambitious, diverse physical education curriculum in schools would help the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) deliver on the laudable objectives contained within its Sporting Futures Strategy of 2015⁴.
- **A well-structured sporting framework – underpinned by robust impact assessments – is fundamental to our children’s resilience and our nation’s future productivity, which extends to both in-school and extracurricular physical activity** – It was recommended that a new working group to consolidate data in this area and scope out and establish an independent delivery authority should be an immediate priority of Government, to ensure any proposed changes can be evaluated on an ongoing basis in a rigorous and impartial manner⁵.

Given education and mental health represent two of PBE’s core areas of focus we have large amounts of impactful information that may be of interest to the Department, either in this or other fields of your activity. We would be delighted to share these with you or provide additional colour to the brief high-level points introduced above if of interest. Please do not hesitate to reach out if so.

Yours sincerely,



Julia Grant

CEO, PBE

² A webcast of the event can be found [here](#).

³ Department for Education (September 2013) - National Curriculum in England: PE Programmes of Study - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study>

⁴ DCMS (December 2015) Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622/Sporting_Future_ACCESSIBLE.pdf

⁵ This is a point that was elaborated on in greater detail within our response to the work of the DCMS Select Committee regarding “the social impact of participation in sport and culture inquiry” – see [here](#).