



Panel of sports experts finds enough facilities – but they’re simply not good enough

An independent panel, chaired by leading sports broadcaster John Inverdale has concluded that the UK currently has enough community sports facilities – but that they simply are not in good enough condition, and in some cases not even available for use. The panel recommends two priority actions to tackle this situation:

- 1) **Local authorities must not be afraid to rationalise facilities where they are no longer fit for purpose or located in the wrong place.**
Evidence shows that closing two poor facilities in order to create one good one can lead to increased sporting participation.
- 2) **Schools must be obliged to open the premises for out of hours sporting usage.**
Evidence shows that the availability of school sports facilities varies according to the attitude of the individual school. Yet opening up all school facilities could enable many more people to participate.

The panel's further recommendations are:

- 3) **Greater research is required to understand the current location, condition and usage of facilities.** Only then can investment be directed to where it will have the most impact.
- 4) **All new facilities, whether on school or community sites must include social space for players, spectators and others.** This contributes both to the quality of experience, and crucially may generate income to sustain the venue.
- 5) **Voluntary and community groups must be more fully involved in facility provision.** This would reduce costs and generate greater community ownership of the facility. Examples are as follows:
 - a school providing access and giving responsibility to a badminton club one evening, and a basketball club the next; the security of venue would incentivise responsible stewardship
 - A sports centre and local clubs creating formal user agreements, thus providing secure income for the centre and guaranteeing facility time for sport as opposed to other non-sporting uses;
 - A local authority transferring a pavilion or changing rooms to local sports clubs, thus reducing costs for the local authority and providing an asset for the club from which to create a firm base and identity
- 6) **Freely available outdoor space must appear more accessible.** Whilst there is now increased access to open space, people do not understand how to get there, nor where to go upon arrival. Improved transport links to natural areas, and improved information on paths and routes would encourage greater usage among non-participants.
- 7) **Access to and maintenance of waterways must be improved.** At present access to the UK's waterways is highly restricted, and maintenance is dramatically underfunded. Opening up high quality water and waterside recreation would hugely increase the facility stock.