

## Written evidence submitted by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences

### BASES EVIDENCE TO THE DCMS SPORT SELECT COMMITTEE ON MAJOR CULTURAL AND SPORTING EVENTS

#### Introduction

1. The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) is the professional body for sport and exercise sciences in the UK. Our mission is to drive excellence in the sport and exercise sciences through the promotion of evidence-based practice and the development and enhancement of professional and ethical standards. Therefore, our submission focuses on Major Sporting Events (MSEs).
2. To ensure that this submission is evidence based and encapsulates a wide range of views the Association i) established an experienced multi-disciplinary authorship team ii) surveyed BASES members, and iii) read, reflected, and incorporated relevant published research.
3. Whilst, as stated, our focus is on MSEs we do want to encourage innovative collaborations between sport & culture and science & art. Readers might find this example from Liverpool helpful in this regard - [Eureka Mersey](#)

#### Q1: What does the UK public want from major cultural and sporting events, and how effectively is this being reflected in the planning and programming for events in 2022?

4. **What the public want?** Following a search, we are not aware of any published research which specifically answers this question and strongly recommend that such research is commissioned. At a time when the country has yet to recover from the Pandemic, it is important that we understand what the public wants from MSEs. The findings from such a study could be used to inform bids to host future MSEs.
5. In the absence of evidence, we speculate that what the public want is for MSEs to:
  - ✓ Improve public health and mental wellbeing by helping communities and individuals become more physically active (PA).
  - ✓ Entertain and inspire them through being able to volunteer, engage and watch world class sports performers and for their Team to win.
  - ✓ Give them the opportunity to watch competitions that are based on sporting merit and integrity.
  - ✓ Be carbon neutral and not damage the environment nor contribute to climate change.
  - ✓ Be available to the widest sections of the community and to be accessible to everyone.
  - ✓ Promote equality, diversity, and inclusion.
  - ✓ Lead to a legacy that is planned and budgeted for in terms of improved infrastructure, improved safety, and volunteering opportunities<sup>i</sup>.
  - ✓ Aid post-pandemic economic recovery.
  - ✓ Be value for money and not create 'white elephants'.
  - ✓ Have in place robust protective measures that create COVID-safe environments.
6. **Effectiveness:** As we have no direct evidence of how effective current planning is for 2022, the following is based on reflecting on previous planning cycles –

- ✓ Not enough thought has been given to how major events are going to enable more people to be more active more often and how to get those who do the least amount of activity to do a little bit more. For example, London 2012 promised to deliver a physical activity legacy but there is limited evidence of this and to the authors' knowledge no MSE has delivered a PA legacy.
- ✓ If MSEs are going to be 'justified' in part on delivering health-related outcomes the mechanism by which this is to be delivered needs to be clearly articulated and understood and built into the implementation plan of the event. Such planning needs to be conducted by interdisciplinary Teams that include experts in health as well as those from sport.
- ✓ More strategic and better planning is required to create 'engaged' rather than 'passive' spectators, and to engage spectators beyond the groups traditionally involved. Ideally engagement should include spectators being inspired to become more active. However, 'engagement' can have other beneficial dimensions which ensure that spectators move from 'consuming' sports to 'learning and creating'. The MSEs of the future need to abandon the concept of the 'armchair spectator' and use digital platforms and social media to remotely engage those not at the event. Part of that engagement should be showcasing the wonders of Sport and Exercise Science and inspiring the next generation to enter the profession. For example, in 2003 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of summiting Everest the University of Brighton ran an event to show children the nature of the challenge and the scale of the achievement – please see [here](#).

The Chicago Marathon Expo in 2018 organised an event to enable members of the public to experience what it feels like to run at the pace of a sub-2-hour marathon – please see [here](#).

- ✓ There could also be more “what goes on behind the scenes” events and broadcasting to show the breadth of involvement in MSE's; from volunteers to ground-staff, to professionals from Sports and Exercise, and competitors.

**Q2: What needs to happen for major events to successfully bring people from all four nations of the UK together?**

7. To bring people together the organisers of MSEs need to consider:
  - ✓ How the events or wider initiatives such as public engagement can be hosted by communities around the UK rather than at just one venue or just one city. There is evidence to suggest that legacy effects were seen in Shanghai five years after the Beijing Olympics<sup>ii</sup>. In addition, technology can be used to create virtual events at local hubs. Location based alliances such as the [Liverpool Sport Board](#) are one mechanism by which local communities can become engaged with MSEs.
  - ✓ How to ensure that 'all boats rise on the same incoming tide'? For example, how will communities in Scotland benefit from a major sporting event based in London? One answer is to ensure that major sporting events address common concerns and shared values that are relevant to all four nations. For instance, an MSE in Cardiff which addressed obesity would be relevant to all four nations.
  - ✓ How spectators from across the UK have an equal opportunity to buy tickets.
  - ✓ How people who face barriers to participation and engagement can be incentivised to engage with the MSEs. For example, bringing neighbours together socially to watch games on an outdoor screen near them, capitalising on the increased community spirit observed during the Pandemic.
  - ✓ How those spectators from across the UK who wish to travel to venues can do so without damaging the environment. However, in the 'digital age', we should not necessarily be

encouraging physical attendance in all cases. As mentioned earlier, there could be local hubs that put-on events within the community.

### **Q3: How should the success of major cultural and sporting events be measured and what should their legacies be?**

8. **Measurement:** The procedure for evaluating MSEs should be the scientific method and should be conducted by an interdisciplinary team that is independent of the Delivery Team and Funding Bodies to avoid biases. In measuring the success, or failure, of MSEs particular attention should be given to:
- ✓ Ensuring that any evaluation takes into account the 'opportunity cost' of investing taxpayers' money into a MSE rather than community sport or physical activity. For example, how many school sports halls could be built for the cost of a new sports stadium? Similarly, if it is found that a MSE has increased the level of physical activity, the question must be asked if the money had been invested in other ways (e.g., improving the infrastructure for active commuting) if a bigger impact could have been achieved? The evaluation should be planned to take place before, during and at least five years after the MSE.
  - ✓ Learning from how the impact of public engagement initiatives in other sectors is measured. For example, in Higher Education the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement has developed an evidence based 'watermark scheme' the principles of which might be applied to MSEs - <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>
  - ✓ The role Science Conferences and Centres may play in furthering the public and academic understanding of science and technology in sport during MSEs. An example being the international conference held in Glasgow in 2012 to coincide with the London Olympics – please see [here](#).
  - ✓ Taking great care when measuring the impact (or lack of it) on the PA levels of the general population<sup>iiiiiv</sup>. The assumption should be that MSEs do not increase activity levels and only after scientifically collected data has been peer reviewed should it be concluded that a sustained increase in PA has been achieved. Results of such research should be made available to the public in an accessible format to ensure taxpayers know the return they have received by investing in MSEs and also to further the cause of Open Science.
  - ✓ The fact that there are many academic and commercial organisations that can deliver a rigorous and robust evaluation, but it needs to be appropriately resourced with a sufficient lead in time. Ideally any evaluation should be costed and planned during the planning of the event *per se*. The forthcoming Commonwealth Games is a good example of this. This, like many other MSEs, promises a legacy but there is little mention of an evaluation, the size of funding or an appointed partner in the [legacy plan](#).

**Legacy:** Given the cost of MSEs it is essential that there is a return on that investment in the form of a legacy that seeks to create lasting change in health enhancing behaviours. Nonetheless, there is also a value in the immediate and transient 'feel good factor' that may occur in the run-up and whilst the event is taking place. One group of researchers concluded that "...at least as far as soccer tournaments are concerned...our evidence suggests that it is not the performance at the event but hosting the event that matters for happiness." MSEs have the potential to increase 'Gross Domestic Happiness' and the importance of this in a post-pandemic world should not be underestimated.

9. With regard to legacy, it may be prudent to 'under promise and over deliver'. Ideally the legacy of a MSE should be:
- ✓ A more active population to address the health and mental wellbeing agenda.
  - ✓ A healthier environment and infrastructure.

- ✓ Increased support for equality, diversity and inclusion in sport and in population health outcomes.
- ✓ Sustained educational opportunities in sport, exercise, science and health that encourage young people to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).
- ✓ Taking scientific and technological breakthroughs from elite sport and applying them in other settings to benefit the public good. For example, Dr Ibrahim Akubat at Newman University, Birmingham is working with a consultant surgeon to apply approaches from sports biomechanics to knee surgery.

**Q4: What are the challenges facing the delivery of major cultural and sporting events in 2022, and the bid to host the World Cup 2030?**

10. Embedded within the 'challenges' listed below is an opportunity to establish a unique selling proposition (USP) for MSEs held in the UK.
  - ✓ Recognising, redefining, and reimagining what a MSE means for the new and next generation. This may (will) mean embracing and increasing opportunities for E-sport, less traditional activities, and sport in space<sup>vi</sup>. An interesting example of a less traditional sport is the Source Park in Hastings – the world's largest underground skatepark. Please see [here](#).
  - ✓ Reimagining what food and drink is on offer at MSEs venues. There should be enough healthy food options to be enjoyed by the audience including children. Watching sport should not mean a day of foods high in fat, sugar, and salt. We can build a generation of sports fans that can make healthy food choices because they are available at events.
  - ✓ Ensuring that venues are safe, that venue safety requirements are regularly reviewed and that all risks associated with large numbers are mitigated as far as possible.
  - ✓ Ensuring that events are COVID secure and being cognisant of changes in public attitudes regarding the cost of such events in a post-pandemic economy.
  - ✓ Taking the event's duty of care for the health and wellbeing of the Athlete seriously – see for example <https://www.whytoreview.org/>
  - ✓ Integrating major technological developments including artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) into the bidding for, planning of, delivery and evaluation of MSEs. AR presents the potential for immersive and meaningful personal experiences for the remote viewer and can draw on data from AI and machine learning to optimise that experience further. This may lead to spectators across the world being able to feel like they are in the crowd, watching the game 'live' at the event. If such a proposition could be part of our bid to host the 2030 World Cup it could give our bid a distinctive dimension that would increase its chances of success.
  - ✓ Finding a way to ensure that MSEs improve public health and mental wellbeing.
  - ✓ Delivering events that enhance the environment rather than damage it.
  - ✓ Ensuring MSEs promote equality, diversity, and inclusion to increase reach and engagement. This includes women and girls<sup>vii</sup>, diverse ethnic communities, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities and migrants<sup>viiiix</sup>
  - ✓ Establishing the UK as a place that is open, fair and a trusted international partner.
  - ✓ Connecting with older people<sup>x</sup>. 89% of those who died from COVID-19 were aged 65 or over. If MSEs are to develop the UK's resilience to future Pandemics, then they need to help break the perception that sport, exercise, and physical activity is for the young and able. Care should be taken to connect with people from ethnically diverse communities who were also disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

- ✓ Sports performers, coaches and technical teams should more actively be pulled into role modelling. A woman physiotherapist, a strength and conditioning coach with a disability, a migrant coach, etc can inspire others to achieve.
11. There is then an opportunity to create a USP for MSEs in the UK which could be characterised as being i) futureproof, ii) healthy for the participants, public & planet iii) inclusive & diverse and iv) AI enabled.

## **Conclusion**

12. A silver lining in the very dark cloud of the COVID-19 Pandemic is the opportunity to reimagine all areas of our society including MSEs. We hope that the Select Committee will be bold and innovative and help recreate MSEs such that when the eyes of the world are on the UK this is what they see:

- ✓ Inspiring world class drug-free sport performed by healthy athletes who love what they do and who model positive values and behaviours.
- ✓ People from all our wonderfully diverse communities coming together as engaged spectators to share those special moments that only sport can deliver.
- ✓ MSEs that have built into their core purpose education and promoting health enhancing physical activity.
- ✓ Environmentally enhancing venues and delivery mechanisms.
- ✓ AI enabled MSEs that use the UK's world leading science and technology to deliver success and evaluate its impact.
- ✓ MSEs that embrace and celebrate E-sport and other emerging types of sport such as Space Sport.
- ✓ A show case for world leading British Sport and Exercise Science. As part of the Association's response to this call for evidence we will explore what more we can do to engage the public in our own major events for example our annual conference. By 'practicing what we preach' we hope to both set an example others can follow and reach out to form partnerships with organisers of MSEs.

13. In short MSEs should leave the world a better place than they found it.

***Written on behalf of the Association by Andy Smith, Ibrahim Akubat, David Broom, Mark Faghy, Adam Gledhill, Zoe Knowles, Neil Maxwell, Rita de Oliveira and Mark Ross.***

***Thanks to Ian Wilson and the BASES Board.***

## **References**

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