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December, 2009

Prof. Mike Collins' paper on *the economic costs of inactivity* prompted the enclosed recent answers from

**Ed Balls MP, the Secretary of State and
Michael Gove MP, the Shadow Secretary of State.**

We invite you to comment on their points and the overall picture. So far only a small percentage of the public is personally active to a healthy degree. We are seeking ways to prise our lethargic population away from TV and computer games.

Our board, with the collaboration of Dr Charlie Foster of Oxford, sums the state of activity up from this new perspective, which excludes no-one. This may facilitate your writing about and exploring the positive ways ahead on a truly national scale.

*** "They welcome the recent response the Government has outlined in the Be Active, be Healthy physical activity strategy (DH, 2009). This document provides a strong framework for different approaches to promote physical activity. However in the absence of (1) a national plan of implementation, and (2) resources to co-ordinate and deliver the plan at a local level, the strategy document remains in splendid and impotent isolation.**

*** This absence of a national plan and infrastructure leaves the country underserved and indeed sedentary compared to other international countries. New public health guidelines are being developed by the World Health Organisation, the European Commission as well as nations, including our own. The USA and Finland have now committed, on the launch of their new physical activity guidelines for children, adults and older people, both a national strategy, a national plan and federal and government level investment in state and regional level physical activity promotion. True change will require real investment.**

The countdown to the Olympics (now under 1000 days) will culminate in a global sporting festival and we are certain the Government (of whatever party) will be committed to ensure a safe and successful spectacle. However there remains a dangerous assumption that the mere presence of the Olympics, in conjunction with a legacy plan will deliver an active nation.

(cont.)

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* This assumption is driven by emotion and not evidence. Indeed no evaluation of the effect of the Olympics (Winter or Summer) has ever resulted in any detectable impact on the hosts nation's population (see Murphy and Bauman, 2007). Both responses focus on the assumption that sport is the best means to activate the nation.

Again this flies in the face of all data on activity levels of adults and children. The contribution of sport to the profile of an active adult is most important at younger ages and then diminishes as you grow older. Indeed the current Active People survey benchmark of the nation's sporting levels supports this fact.

* The sports participation indicator measures the number of adults (aged 16 and over) participating in at least 30 minutes of sport at moderate intensity at least three times a week. This level of physical activity is under current and proposed levels of physical activity for the population.

* Sport is a fantastic means to be active if you are able to access a facility, be physically capable to play, have the necessary skill and equipment, and believe it will be fun, sociable and fit into your life. Sadly for the majority of adults and some groups of children sport will remain an irrelevant, unattractive and unpopular choice.

* We feel that other physical activities will offer the optimal selection of choices for currently inactive adults. These choices are lifestyle activities like *walking, cycling, dancing, swimming* and *play*. There is a wealth of evidence on supporting inactive adults and children to take up physical activity and in the UK we are lucky enough to have one of the best international agencies producing guidance in this area – the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence.

* Our physical activity legacy will depend on building environments, projects and national plans to encourage our nation to become more active. Sport is merely one choice, and for the majority the one least likely to be tried. It is of course ironic that the lure of sedentary behaviours i.e. TV watching is also promoted by the Government and the professional sport industry and will be constructing its own legacy of ill health in future years. We hope the Government can seize the initiative and re-focus on physical activity for all not just sport for some. It can make huge savings.”

Murphy NM, Bauman A. Mass sporting and physical activity events – are they “bread and circuses” or public health interventions to increase population levels of physical activity?” *J. Phys Act Health*, 2007 Apr. 4(2); 193-202