



Ein cyf/Our ref HL/00434/16  
Professors Anderson & Pollock

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Dear Professors Anderson & Pollock

Thank you for your letter of 1 March about preventing injuries in children playing school rugby. I am responding as Minister for Education and Skills, and on behalf of the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism.

Welsh Government wants all young people to have a wide range of opportunities to participate in sport. Sport has so many benefits beyond sport and healthy lifestyles, for example in developing personal, team and leadership skills. And with Wales a country which has rugby at the core of its culture, we would not want to discourage young people from playing the sport they enjoy as concussion, or other injury, can happen in any sport or recreational activity – though clearly some sports carry higher risks than others.

We take very seriously the issue of safety in sport. I have gone on record previously urging schools and sports teams to make sure that sport is safe and there is vigilance on the signs of concussion and brain injury. We all have a responsibility, individually and collectively, to ensure that our children and young people are able to participate safely as well as have fun in sport and that every precaution is taken to mitigate injury.

That is why, in September 2014 the Welsh Government published guidance on concussion and brain injury to support schools and youth sport providers to minimise the possibility of injury. A 'Graduated Return to Play' protocol is included in the guidance as we know it is essential that an injured player does not return to training or full sport too early. The guidance has been circulated widely to help ensure its key messages are conveyed to all education, sports and health professionals, as well as to parents and to children and young people themselves.

The guidance was created in cooperation with a range of partners, from those within the health professions and the NHS, to sports bodies such as the Welsh Rugby Union and Football Association of Wales and was co-signed by myself, the Deputy Minister for Culture, the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Nursing Officer in Wales.

So I expect all schools to put safety first in rugby and all sports, and to ensure that anyone brought into a school to play, referee, or deliver sporting activities, are aware of the signs of concussion the associated risks and know what action to take.

You mention in your letter that many secondary schools deliver contact rugby as a compulsory part of the curriculum from age 11. This may be the case, but I should highlight that the programme of study for Physical Education (PE) does not prescribe the particular competitive activities which are offered to pupils, or how they are delivered, which is a matter for individual schools in the context of the resources they have available and in ensuring that the needs of their pupils are met.

The PE programme of study provides opportunities for young people to learn the importance of following relevant rules and safety procedures when exercising and to develop an understanding of risk and, being mindful of their own and others safety.

Looking ahead, on 30 June 2015, I announced my support for the development of a new curriculum by accepting, in full, the recommendations of the *Successful Futures* report by Professor Graham Donaldson.

In his report, Professor Donaldson identifies 4 key purposes of the curriculum. One of these is to support all our children and young people to become 'healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society', and who '*know how to find the information and support to keep them safe and well*', '*take part in physical activity*', and '*take measured decisions about lifestyle and manage risk*'.

This work is still at a relatively early stage, but the Pioneer Schools Network will be at the forefront of designing the new curriculum and assessment arrangements with expert advice and support.

I hope setting out the position in Wales on the provision of rugby in schools and actions we have taken to mitigate injury is helpful in allaying your concerns.



**Huw Lewis AC / AM**

Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau  
Minister for Education and Skills