

<b>Institution:</b> Cardiff Metropolitan University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UOA17: Business and Management Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> National evaluation of sport funded programmes and its transformative impact on organisation policy and practice		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2002 - 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Dr Nicola Bolton	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Head of Dept and Principal Lecturer in Marketing & Strategy	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>  2001 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Bolton's research in public sector management and strategic planning significantly impacted sport policy in Wales and, by <b>stimulating and informing policy debate</b>, changed Welsh Government policy. Specifically, evaluation of the Free Swimming Initiative and Active Young People Programmes - which together involved <b>45%</b> of the <b>Welsh population</b> - resulted in a revised Free Swimming Scheme, the diversion of funds to the <b>£5.4m</b> Healthy and Active Fund, and concomitant developments associated with the launch of the <i>Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales</i> National Strategy. Meanwhile, evaluation of the Calls for Action programme, which involved <b>c35,000</b> participants and <b>c4,000</b> activity leaders, was undertaken using Theory of Change, the first time such a technique had been utilised in relation to the evaluation and design of national sport funded programmes. This subsequently influenced how other such programmes, including the <b>£1.3M</b> 60+ Active Leisure Scheme and the <b>£8M</b> 2020 Sport Resilience Fund, were developed, and how their effectiveness was measured.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Bolton has conducted research in the area of policy and strategic planning in the public sector since 2002 [e.g. R1] and has developed a large portfolio of evaluation research focussed on the policies of the Welsh Government (WG) and the WG sponsored body, Sport Wales. Sport Wales is the national organisation responsible for developing and promoting sport and physical activity in Wales. It is the main adviser to WG on sport and supports the delivery of national strategic priorities in this area.</p> <p>Between 2004 and 2008, Bolton was commissioned to undertake evaluation research on two national pilot schemes, <i>Active Young People</i> (AYP) [R2] and the <i>Free Swimming Initiative</i> (FSI) which together involved 45% of the Welsh population. The evaluation of these schemes, valued at over £200k, was central to <i>Climbing Higher</i>, WG's 2005 national strategy to increase participation in sport and physical activity. <i>Inter alia</i>, research undertaken highlighted the challenges faced in standalone policy interventions and concluded that achieving ambitious targets for population-wide physical activity levels would require strategies that encompass a wider range of opportunities to exercise [R3]. The research also highlighted that monitoring and evaluation methods for Free Swimming did not facilitate accountability against objectives for either Sport Wales or the participating organisations and suggested improved frameworks and measures to address this. Their adoption led to significant improvements in data collection [R3].</p>		

In the Minister for Culture and Sport's 2014-15 Remit Letter, WG requested that Sport Wales conduct a review into initiatives including the FSI and AYP (which have a combined worth of c£110m), to refine and align them with evolving Welsh priorities. This led, in 2016, to a second tranche of funded research totalling £90k, into FSI and AYP with Bolton as the sport management specialist [R4]. The research concluded that the projects were "...not yet explicitly linked to the achievement of the seven national wellbeing goals or to the priorities set out in the Welsh Government's 'Prosperity for All' agenda..." and recommended that future policy should make these the key reference points for any change. Further, it recommended that a range of modes of physical activity and recreation be integrated and linked to broader policy and wellbeing objectives, in line with the WG's Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (WBFGA). Introduced by WG in 2015, the WBFGA is a pivotal piece of legislation that requires Welsh public bodies to work together towards improving the wellbeing of Wales through the principle of sustainable development.

The Remit Letter also requested Sport Wales to consider programmes that would *narrow the participation gap*. This led to the launch of the £3m Phase 2 of the Calls for Action programme (C4A) with the specific aim of targeting inequalities. In a notable shift in direction from Phase 1, and in order to meet WG requirements, Sport Wales established four separate and much more explicit objectives for Phase 2 projects. These included working with women and girls, those living in poverty, those living with a disability and BAME communities. Taken together, the Phase 2 C4A projects attracted c35,000 participants and some 4,000 activity leaders.

Bolton was the sport management lead for the core team that was awarded £140k funding to undertake a three-year programme of evaluation research into C4A between 2016 and 2019. In a departure from previous sport management evaluation research, Bolton and the team recognised that the use of a Theory of Change approach would allow them to draw meaningful links between C4A interventions and process, and the achievement of outcomes and broader objectives. This ensured that ongoing feedback and organisational learning were built into the evaluation. The co-development of a Theory of Change approach with policymakers and practitioners enabled them to clarify what they were seeking to achieve, to promote a better understanding among partner organisations (which have different priorities for and perspectives on an intervention) and, where necessary, advocate changes in real time. [R5][R6]

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The selection of underpinning research includes four international peer-reviewed journal articles. One is in a research outlet with a practitioner focus [R2], two are in an outlet concerned explicitly with sport and public policy [R3, R5] and one is in a leading journal for the study of local politics and public administration [R1]. Output [R5] is included in the Cardiff Met submission to UOA17 in REF2021. Of the two evaluation reports cited, one builds on an earlier report of the evaluation of the FSI returned by Bolton in RAE2008 [R4].

- [R1] Bolton, N. & Leach, S. (2002) Strategic planning in Local Government: A study of organisational impact and effectiveness. *Local Government Studies*, 28 (4), 1-21. DOI: 10.1080/714004169
- [R2] Bolton, N., Fleming, S. & Galdes, M. (2007) Physical activity programmes for secondary schools in Wales: Implications from a pilot scheme. *Managing Leisure*, 12:1, 74-88. DOI: 10.1080/13606710601071579
- [R3] Bolton, N. & Martin, S. (2013) The policy and politics of free swimming. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 5 (3), 445-463. DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2012.656689
- [R4] Grace, C., Bolton, N., Harris, S., Martin, S., Church, S., Eurig, A., Mattingley, B., McInch, A. & Whittington, L. (2018) Free swimming in Wales: A Review  
DOI: 10.25401/cardiffmet.13056311

[R5] Bolton, N., Martin, S., Grace, C. & Harris, S. (2018) Implementing a theory of change approach to research sport participation programmes targeting “hard to reach” groups. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 10 (4), 761-777.  
DOI: 10/1080/19406940.2018.1476397

[R6] Bolton, N., Church, S., Dixon, R., Frost, M., Grace, C., Harris, S., Martin, S. & Whittington, L. (2019) Achievement, Change and Learning: The evaluation of Sport Wales’ Calls 4 Action programme DOI: 10.25401/cardiffmet.13056320

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Two distinct areas of impact related to Bolton’s evaluation research are evident in the period: **Impact on public policy** - policy debate has been stimulated and informed by Bolton’s research, leading to a change in policy direction.

**Impacts on practitioners** - the way projects are delivered and measured has improved due to the introduction by Bolton and her team of a Theory of Change methodology to Sport Wales funded programmes.

##### Impact on Public Policy

Bolton’s research **created a shift in sport policy and its delivery** by helping Sport Wales and its partners align their management approaches with the delivery of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the recommendations of the 2017 Independent Review of Sport Wales commissioned by WG.

The 2017 Independent Review [E1] had noted that Sport Wales was viewed as “*an organisation at a crossroads in its strategic direction and the role it plays in the delivery of wellbeing goals and government policy...However, the increasing focus on sport’s contribution to the wider policy priorities, in a climate of reduced public expenditure budgets, requires Sport Wales to lead the sector through transformational change.*” The review recommended the preparation of a new strategy that would lead the sector and reflect a wider agenda to include new ways of working.

Drawing on the C4A evaluation undertaken by Bolton and her team, the Independent Review noted that C4A was a “refreshing departure” from the norm. The C4A evaluation had from the outset established a focus on organisational learning, that formed a key tenet of the “real time” evaluation process which featured significantly in the first report to the Sport Wales Board in January 2016. In November 2018, Sports Wales’ Director of Community Engagement presented to the Board on key learning from the evaluation of C4A and its influence on the emerging Sport Wales national strategy [E2]. The report specifically referred to Governance and Partnerships, the thematic area led by Bolton and noted that “*learning to date has been used to inform the approach adopted by the Healthy & Active Fund (HAF)*”, a £5.4m WG investment fund delivered jointly by Sport Wales and Public Health Wales. Minutes from the meeting confirm that “*learning from C4A would be embedded within the new strategy*” [E3].

Bolton’s team also undertook two other significant research evaluations. Firstly, the Free Swimming (FSI) review (June 2018) [R4] concluded “*evidence suggests that the current approach to free swimming is not the most cost-effective way to use the £3 million pa allocated to it...it is no longer fit for purpose.*”. This led to dialogue between Sport Wales, WG and key stakeholders resulting in a revised scheme for Free Swimming and the diversion of some funds to the Healthy & Active Fund. Secondly, the recommendations of the 2019 Young People Programmes Review (YPPR) [E4] were publicly endorsed in the Sport Wales 2018-19 Annual Report [E5]. Concomitant developments associated with the launch of the *Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales* national strategy and an agreed new fund of £1.3 million to support an over 60s Active Leisure Scheme, emerged directly from Bolton’s evaluation research findings [E6].

**Impact on Practitioners**

The use of a Theory of Change approach in the evaluation of C4A was the **first time such a technique was utilised in relation to the evaluation and design of national sport funded programmes**. Importantly, it was highly successful in assessing the extent to which the original policy drivers had been met. Furthermore, it had a positive impact on the organisations sponsored through C4A, allowing them to learn from each other and by facilitating cross-fertilisation of an enhanced experience for both the organisations themselves and, indirectly, their diverse end users [E7]. Its use had been driven by the team's initial evaluation of the FSI [R3] which had highlighted that the existence of multiple objectives posed a significant challenge when evaluating the initiative. When developing a system of evaluation for C4A the team identified the use of Theory of Change as a way to provide a common approach which shifted the focus to outcomes rather than inputs and outputs, hitherto commonplace in Sport Wales performance management.

The use of Theory of Change techniques has subsequently become an expected norm for Sport Wales and its principal partners and has become a core tool used in the development and evaluation of its programmes. This has included the **2020 Free Swimming Independent Progress Monitoring Exercise (£60k)**, the invitation to tender for which states an expectation of the use of a Theory of Change approach to "*help us to understand what sort of data we need...to help us learn.*"; the 2019 evaluation of the **Healthy & Active Fund (£5.4m)** which required the use of Theory of Change at both programme and project level; the **2019 Review of National Lottery Community Grant Scheme**, which adopted a Theory of Change approach in order to focus on outcomes; and, the development of both the **2020 60+ Active Leisure Scheme (£1.3M)** and the **2020 Sport Resilience Fund (£8M)** which also used a Theory of Change approach. [E8]

Collectively, Bolton's research has had significant impact across a number of Sport Wales and Welsh Government policy initiatives with its ongoing impact evidenced through the funding secured for two KESS2 projects (totalling £118k). The first is examining barriers to participation for young disadvantaged females. The second is examining the cross-sectional working, required by the WBFGA, of Sport Wales, Public Health Wales and Natural Resources Wales to achieve sustainable gains in the areas of health and physical activity.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [E1] Sport Wales Review: An Independent Report describing outcomes of the Welsh Government commissioned independent review of Sport Wales and evaluating the C4A programme undertaken by Bolton and her team. June 2017.
- [E2] Sport Wales Board Paper "Calls4Action Learning" presented by SW Director of Community Engagement, describing key learning from the evaluation of C4A and its influence on the emerging Sport Wales national strategy. November 2018
- [E3] Minutes of the Sport Wales Board 27<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Minute 5.6: 'Calls for Action Learning' confirms that learning from C4A will be embedded in the new strategy.
- [E4] Sport Wales' Young People Programmes Review Report, February 2019 includes the recommendations which resulted from the evaluation research.
- [E5] Sport Wales 2018-19 Annual Report endorsing the Young People Programmes Review.
- [E6] Testimonial from Sport Wales Chief Executive confirming the cumulative impact of Bolton's evaluation research on the work of Sport Wales.

**Impact case study (REF3)**

- [E7] Testimonial from Group Manager for Prevention and Wellbeing Services at Bridgend County Council, one of the C4A partner organisations, confirming the impact of the introduction of Theory of Change techniques on the organisation.
- [E8] Documents related to the 5 programmes mentioned in the text to illustrate the use of Theory of Change techniques:
- a) 2020 Free Swimming Independent Progress Monitoring Exercise (see page 7)
  - b) 2019 Evaluation of the Healthy & Active Fund (see page 2)
  - c) 2019 Review of National Lottery Community Grant Scheme
  - d) 2020 60+ Active Leisure Scheme
  - e) 2020 Sport Resilience Fund