

Evaluation of Mind's Sector Support Programme

2018-2021

Final Report

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Covid-19 and the Sector Support programme

Early 2020 saw the beginning of the global pandemic of COVID-19 and a series of Government legislations including 3 national lockdowns (March-May 2020; November and December 2020-April 2021) which had significant restrictions on daily life. The various and changing restrictions in place because of the pandemic have impacted and continue to impact the sport and physical activity sector and large numbers of staff unable to work and in furlough schemes, with uncertain futures. Athletes have not been able to train in the same way and sports venues have been asked to close during lockdown periods and higher-level restrictions. These restrictions have impacted on the delivery of the Sector Support programme but have also resulted in a higher demand for mental health support across all sectors. Mind have initiated incredible efforts to meet the needs of the sport and physical activity sector and support mental health more widely during a challenging year. An outline of the alterations made to the original delivery plans, and additional support provided by Mind is detailed within the evaluation report.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
Executive Summary	iv
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1 Physical activity and mental health	1
1.1.1 Benefits of physical activity for those with mental health problems.....	2
1.1.2 Barriers to physical activity for those with mental health problems	3
1.1.3 The physical activity sector and mental health support.....	3
1.1.4 Inter-sector collaboration and organisational change	3
1.2 Mind’s Sector Support programme	4
1.2.1 Get Set to Go programme summary	4
1.2.1 Overview of the Sector Support programme	5
1.2.2 Covid-19 and alterations to the delivery of the Sector Support programme	8
Chapter 2. Evaluation Methodology	10
2.1 Overview	10
2.2 Aims and objectives of the evaluation.....	10
2.3 The RE-AIM Framework	10
2.4 Evaluation objectives of the Sector Support programme	11
2.5 Data collection	12
2.5.2 Observation of the regional offer co-design workshops	13
2.5.3 Webinar series survey.....	14
2.5.4 Focus groups with the lived experience advisory group and Mind’s physical activity project management team	15
2.5.5 Focus groups with Mind’s operational and strategic partners.....	17
2.5.6 A series of interviews with employees from one strategic partner	18
2.5.7 Telephone interviews with lead and partner organisations for the regional hubs.....	19
2.5.8 Data analysis	22
Chapter 3. Engagement with sector partners and organisations (Objective 1)	24
3.1 Overview	24
3.2. Reach of the project.....	24
3.3 Evaluating the reach of the project	26
3.3.1 Mind as mental health experts	26
3.3.2 Sector ‘buy in’ for mental health	27

3.3.3 Quality of communication within partnerships.....	29
3.4 Summary of objective 1	31
Chapter 4. Implementing actions plans for sport and mental health (Objective 2)	32
4.1 Overview	32
4.2 Successful implementation of action.....	32
4.3 A sense of responsibility for driving change	35
4.4 An increased focus on mental health support.....	37
4.5 The high-performance culture within the sector	38
4.6 Summary of objective 2	40
Chapter 5. Effectiveness and sustainability of engagement with partner organisations and sector networks (Objective 3)	41
5.1 Overview	41
5.2 Organisational mental health policy and practice	41
5.3 Raising the profile of mental health in physical activity and sport	42
5.4 COVID-19 and embedding changes in action plans, practice, and policy	45
5.5 Mind’s long-term relationship with sector partners and delivery of initiatives.....	46
Chapter 6. Knowledge exchange and partnership building within the sport and physical activity sector (Objective 4)	50
6.1 Overview	50
6.2. Mental health support and knowledge exchange between Mind, organisations, and partners.....	50
6.3 Mind’s role in supporting partners to deliver mental health initiatives through knowledge exchange and partnership building	53
Chapter 7. Implications and recommendations	58
7.1 Priority Recommendations for Mind’s Physical Activity Team.....	58
7.2 Priority Recommendations for Partner Organisations	59
7.3 Suggested Recommendations for Mind’s Physical Activity Team	60
7.4 Suggested Recommendations for Partner Organisations	60
7.5 The lived experience advisory teams’ recommendations	61
Chapter 8. Summary and conclusions.....	62

Table of Tables

Table 1.1	Overview of Mind’s national strategic partner support.....	6
Table 1.2	Regional network key performance indicators.....	7
Table 2.1	Overview of the RE-AIM components and RE-AIM qualitative.....	11
Table 2.2	Summary of evaluation objectives and data sources to address each objective and RE-AIM components	13
Table 2.3	Regional attendance rates and list of attendees to co-design workshops.....	14
Table 2.4	Demographic information of lead and partner organisations for each region of the regional network.....	21
Table 2.5	Objectives, themes and key points for evaluation findings.....	23
Table 3.1	Regional offer KPIs and figures relating to KPI for April and October 2020.....	24
Table 3.2	Estimated reach of the Sector Support programme.....	25
Table 6.1	Barriers and facilitators to successful knowledge exchange between Mind and sector partner.....	55

Executive Summary

Between 2014 and 2017, Mind delivered the first phase of the Get Set to Go programme to engage people with mental health problems in sport and physical activity. The programme was funded by Sport England and the National Lottery. Mind worked with Loughborough University to evaluate the impact of the programme on participants' outcomes (including physical activity and mental health) and provide learning to inform future iterations of the programme. For the full academic report from the first phase of the programme, published in October 2017, please visit [NCSEM-EM \(ncsem-em.org.uk\)](https://ncsem-em.org.uk). Learning from the Get Set to Go programme evaluation highlighted the pivotal role of sport and exercise providers for supporting those with mental health problems to become active, which led to an expansion of the programme to develop sector support for sport, physical activity, and mental health.

The Sector Support programme

In the next phase of delivery (The Sector Support programme: 2018-2021), Mind sought to expand their work with the wider sport and physical activity sector and build on the success of the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation led by the Sport and Recreation Alliance, Professional Players Federation and Mind. Mind has strong existing connections with many partners within the sector, including Active Partnerships, local authority sport development and public health teams, healthcare providers, leisure providers and third sector partners and a two-year partnership with the English Football League. The overarching aim of the Sector Support programme was for sport and physical activity providers in the sector to become better equipped to support and engage people with mental health problems to take part in their activities and support their employees and volunteers by improving their organisational policies and practices around mental health.

The sector influencing and engagement activities included:

- **National Strategic Partner Support:** Mind supported strategic partner organisations at a national level to enable them to become sector leaders on mental health and physical activity. Partners were given support to deliver bespoke mental health initiatives, and Mind helped these organisations to role model best practice.
- **Regional Engagement and Influencing Hubs:** The delivery model and mechanisms for the regional network were developed in the first 6 months of the Sector Support programme

through 3 co-design workshops. Lead and partner organisations for the hubs were created in 8 locations: North East, North West, Yorkshire & Humber, West Midlands, East Midlands, East of England, South East and South West. In each region, Mind helped to build expertise and embed the case for change around mental health.

- ***Delivery of Mental Health Awareness in for Sport and Physical Activity + (MHASPA) training:*** Mind continued to deliver MHASPA training (first developed in 2016 to meet the demand for mental health support from the sport sector) to over 35,000 of the sectors workforce through local Mind trainers initially, and then through an eLearning resource developed by Mind in collaboration with UK Coaching, 1st4Sport and Sport England. Those who completed the course were awarded three developmental CPD points by CIMSPA between 2017 and 2020. This changed to 1.5 points in 2021 in response to CIMSPA new point system. This course was evaluated in phase 1 of the programme and continues to be evaluated internally by Mind.
- ***Universal Offer (Online resources and networking opportunities):*** The Universal Offer of supporting volunteers and workers in the sector has significantly increased in priority during the Covid-19 pandemic. Mind provided online training resources and opportunities for staff working or volunteering in sport and physical activity to network and share best practice. During the pandemic and through lockdown, Mind created and updated elements of the Universal Offer to ensure effective and timely mental health support to the sector.

Evaluation of the Sector Support programme

In 2018, Mind commissioned an academic team from Loughborough University and the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine to evaluate the Sector Support programme. This evaluation explored the impact of Mind’s engagement with the sports and physical activity sector to influence change on a national, regional, and local level. The findings of this report will be used to inform future development of Mind’s influencing work.

Evaluation Aim: To understand the effectiveness of the Sector Support programme in influencing and engaging the sector to better support those with mental health problems to engage in sport and physical activity. The evaluation aimed to address the following objectives:

- ***Objective 1:*** Evaluate the effectiveness of Mind in engaging with sector partners and organisations at a national, regional and local level.
- ***Objective 2:*** Evaluate the effectiveness of supporting national strategic partners to implement their action plans for sport and mental health.

- **Objective 3:** Evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of Mind’s engagement with partner organisations and sector networks to influence the national policy landscape.
- **Objective 4:** Understand how Mind can most effectively facilitate knowledge exchange and partnership building within the sport and physical activity sector at a national, regional and local level.

Collaborative framework

To ensure the evaluation data collected was appropriate and fit for purpose, the analysis and development of data collection procedures were conducted within a collaborative framework. The framework was led by the Loughborough University research team and involved a lived experience advisory group, alongside Mind’s physical activity project management team. The lived experience advisory group were recruited through Mind’s existing networks and invited to attend two focus groups to discuss research activities and progression of the evaluation.

Data collection methods

The research team used a variety of qualitative data collection methods to evaluate the programme. These included:

- Observation of co-design workshops with health and leisure providers within the sector
- Qualitative survey to assess the impact of the webinar series
- Focus groups with the lived experience advisory group and Mind’s physical activity project management team
- Focus groups with Mind’s appointed operational and strategic partners
- Telephone interviews with representatives of the lead and partner organisations for the regional networks
- A series of interviews with employees from one of Mind’s appointed strategic partners.

Evaluation approach

The evaluation was conducted using guidance from the RE-AIM framework¹ to answer each objective. This framework provides clarity of how and why changes to policy and practice have been made as a result of strategic partner support and knowledge exchange, and how effectively knowledge exchange activities have been delivered at a national, regional and local level. The RE-AIM framework assesses the following domains:

- **Reach** (i.e., Organisational recruitment and engagement)

¹ Glasgow, R. E., Vogt, T. M., & Boles, S. M. (1999). Evaluating the public health impact of health promotion interventions: the RE-AIM framework. *American Journal of Public Health*. 89. 1322-1327

- *Effectiveness* (i.e., Perceived impact of support and knowledge exchange between Mind, partners and organisations at a national, regional, and local level)
- *Adoption* (i.e., Use of knowledge gained and changes to policy and practice)
- *Implementation* (i.e., How and why organisations are implementing the new knowledge both within the workplace and the wider sector)
- *Maintenance* (i.e., The sustainability of partnerships, knowledge exchange and maintained mental health initiatives)

A summary of the evaluation findings is presented below separated by each of the 4 objectives.

Evaluation findings

Objective 1: Evaluate the effectiveness of Mind in engaging with sector partners and organisations at a national, regional, and local level

This objective sought to assess the Reach of the project and explored organisational recruitment and engagement. Partners and organisations were unanimously positive of their relationship with Mind, their engagement, and the support they received throughout the project. Partners suggested that Mind’s credibility within the field of mental health was a facilitator to extend the reach of the project, and recruit and engage with organisations. However, meeting the demand for support from the sector was considered a potential challenge from Mind, with organisations and partners also noting concern regarding Mind’s capacity to meaningfully sustain long-term engagement with the sector. Facilitators to sector engagement included meaningful conversations between Mind and organisations, understanding and flexibility of deadlines and/or key performance indicators (KPIs), and a willingness to communicate and address concerns in a timely manner. Barriers to engagement included organisations not having the required time and resources to prioritise work on mental health and struggling to make contact with sector partners, and progress the work, when the assigned individual to promote such initiatives was not available (or had left the organisation).

Objective 2: Evaluate the effectiveness of supporting national strategic partners to implement their action plans for sport and mental health.

Employees discussed the effectiveness of the project and the changes that had been adopted within their organisation to support mental health. Implemented examples included birthdays off work, formalised wellbeing committees with Terms of Reference, wellbeing questions to staff at the top of meeting agendas, increased signposting to services and counselling sessions offered to staff, and online wellbeing activities during lockdown/home working. An illustration

of the project effectiveness was how employees considered the mental health 'narrative' in the sector to be more open, more transparent, and discussed more regularly, with clear recognition of its importance than ever before. However, all participants acknowledged there was still more to do to overcome stigma more broadly in the sector. It was acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic had accelerated the integration of mental health awareness, due to an increased need to support employees and partners throughout the pandemic. The 'high performance' culture within the sport sector was considered a potential barrier to implementing mental health support and organisation action plans effectively. However, employees suggested they could see this culture changing positively. Despite initiating a change in culture, some employees felt a misalignment between senior management narratives and their role modelling of work behaviours (i.e., encouraging staff to take breaks but not modelling this behaviour), suggesting although the project has been effective, further efforts are required to implement change in the workplace.

Objective 3: Evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of Mind's engagement with partner organisations and sector networks to influence the national policy landscape.

Effectiveness was illustrated by a notable improvement in mental health awareness across the sector (adoption efforts included improvements in internal mental health provision, such as the creation of mental health steering groups, wellness action plans, and 'mental health leave' days). The Sector Support programme was effective in initiating conversations around promoting parity of esteem between physical and mental health within the sport and physical activity sector. Engagement with the Universal Offer of eLearning was considered successful to improve knowledge and awareness of both internal employees and external partners within the sport sector. Improvements in collaborative working between the sport sector and the mental health sector were noted and are considered crucial for changes to practice and policy adoption of knowledge exchange, implementation of two-way knowledge exchange and maintenance of long-term partnership building. The regional network model was considered positive for promoting conversation around a system level approach to mental health and led to changes in practice and facilitated discussion around policy. All national organisations and sector partners acknowledged the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted their plans to some degree. However, the lockdown restrictions facilitated an increased use of online resources and social media platforms to continue promoting the mental health agenda to the wider sector.

Objective 4: Understand how Mind can effectively facilitate knowledge exchange and partnerships within the sport and physical activity sector at a national, regional, and local level. Effectiveness of the project is illustrated by a perceived positive impact on the attitudes, knowledge, and awareness within the sector. Organisations suggested they had improved their awareness of the importance of tailored messaging when delivering mental health messages and noted that implementing collaborative working strategies between the sport and mental health sector was an important outcome of the project. The perceived increase in Mind's visibility alongside the success of the programme has extended the reach of the project further than expected, and the direction and support provided to organisations by Mind has facilitated organisations to translate a willingness to learn into tangible action. Knowledge exchange between Mind and the sector was achieved through several strategies including: Mind's Universal Offer, monthly newsletter, social media, virtual conferences and CPD opportunities, and regular communication between organisations. The regional network was considered successful to promote collaborative working and deliver mental health initiatives regionally and locally. However, there is a need to focus on targeted local delivery for long term maintenance.

Priority recommendations derived for the Sector Support programme evaluation

Recommendations below have been organised separately for Mind's Physical Activity Team and for sector partners seeking to promote mental health awareness and improve long-term delivery of mental health projects.

Priority Recommendations for Mind's Physical Activity Team:

- Continue to work with organisations to ensure progressively autonomous endeavours to deliver internal (employees) and external (partners) mental health support. Examples include for Mind to provide direction (where possible) for organisations to gain independent financial support to allocate time and resource to mental health initiatives.
- In order to embed mental health support into professional practice, continue to work with strategic partners to create a quality assurance or competence measure of mental health knowledge in the sector, and encourage its integration into coaching policy.
- To increase levels of support locally, facilitate engagement with local Minds and introduce initial contacts to regional network leads where possible. Stronger links with local Minds was suggested as a strategy to improve long-term sustainable delivery of mental health

initiatives and promote parity of esteem between physical and mental health through the bi-directional support between the sport sector and the mental health sector.

- Continue to work with sector partners to update the Universal Offer online resources (such as the eLearning provision and mental health resources) in response to new information and feedback from organisations, and advertise upcoming Webinar, CPD and networking events, to provide tangible guidance and support for the sector to facilitate long-term change.
- Understand specific barriers and facilitators for knowledge exchange with sector partners. Consider disseminating these key barriers and facilitators to partners to provide them with the knowledge to create and sustain effective working relationships. Attempt to incorporate such knowledge when fostering new partnerships or maintaining existing partnerships (e.g., outlining roles and responsibilities of each partner early on).
- Consider delivery of (virtual or in person when Covid-19 restrictions permit) conferences, training days, or workshops where representatives from the sector, alongside representatives from other sectors (i.e., mental health, education etc) are invited to network. Particularly encourage multi-sector collaborations.
- Work towards optimal use of social media platforms. Encourage organisations to share stories and best practice with the wider sector via multiple media channels to promote sharing of information between organisations. Mind should consider creating a social media channel specifically for the programme or incorporate physical activity initiatives on Mind's main social media channels to improve visibility.

Priority Recommendations for Partner Organisations:

- Encourage identification of individual(s) to act as the contact point within organisations and consider including the work around mental health as part of specific job descriptions going forward. Employers noted that having multiple people working on promoting a mental health initiative was important for long-term delivery. This strategy will also help to eliminate the single point of failure if an individual were to leave the organisation.
- Encourage senior management to role model behaviours supportive of a work life balance, including normalising conversations around mental health so such behaviours are viewed as acceptable. This will ensure consistency and multi-level buy in, necessary for effective change.

- Sector partners to focus on their employee mental health alongside supporting externally facing mental health support. Employers noted there was heightened focus on externally facing work which could reduce time and resources left to promote employee mental health. Covid-19 has accelerated positive change regarding normalising conversation around mental health in workplaces within the sport and physical activity sector and this momentum, with the support from the programme should be optimised.
- Organisations should identify areas in which they need direction and encourage bi-directional knowledge exchange and collaborative working between sporting and mental health organisations to promote parity of esteem between physical and mental health. This wider collaboration may be achieved by inviting both physical activity and mental health representatives to upcoming events.
- When initiating new relationships, organisations should identify common and mutual priorities early in the relationship, with timelines and an action plan on how objectives will be reached. Systems and sectors working together was highlighted as a strategy to promote networking at a strategic level and promote collaborative working in practice.

Summary and conclusion

Despite the significant impact of Covid-19, the Sector Support programme was effective at reaching, and connecting a wide range of organisations and partners within the sport and physical activity sector. Partners and organisations were unanimously positive of their relationship with Mind, their engagement, and the support they received throughout the programme. They believed that the partnership had increased internal awareness of employee mental health, improved implementation and delivery of external mental health initiatives. Delivery of mental health objectives, and maintenance of long-term partnerships is challenged by a variety of barriers and facilitators. The future success of the Sector Support programme relies on the willingness of the sector (at all levels) to continue to engage with mental health learning, to promote and deliver initiatives to improve mental health, and to continue to learn how complex barriers to partnership building and knowledge exchange can be mitigated.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Physical activity and mental health

Mental health and mental illness are two inter-related but separate concepts². The absence of mental illness does not imply the presence of mental health, or vice versa³. The complete mental health model combines mental health (flourishing, languishing, moderate mental health) with the presence or absence of mental illness. Complete mental health means both flourishing and free of mental illness. Within this report, ‘mental health problems’ will be used as an overarching term to include those experiencing poor mental health, including those with and without mental illness.

Mental health problems are considered the UK’s most worrying public health issue⁴. It is projected that by 2030, mental health problems will be the leading cause of global mortality and morbidity⁵. It is estimated that one in four people will experience a common mental health problem within their lifetime, with the rate of common mental disorders (including anxiety and depression) increasing with nearly 8% of the population meeting the criteria for diagnosis⁶. Individuals with mental health problems have up to 20 years shorter life expectancy compared to the general population⁷. This gap is largely due to physical health inequalities and associated non-communicable diseases. For example, individuals with mental health problems have an increased risk of developing comorbid physical illness, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease⁸. Many of these risk factors could be reduced by individuals making lifestyle changes such as improving diet and engaging in more physical activity. However, people with mental health problems have increased incidences of adverse health behaviours, including tobacco smoking and substance misuse. These behaviours, alongside low levels of activity and high levels of sedentary behaviour⁸, poor diet and medication for mental illness, further contribute to the high rates of chronic medical conditions⁵.

² Keyes, C.M. (2002). The Mental Health Continuum: From languishing to flourishing in life. *Journal of Health and Social Research*, 43, 207-222

³ Keyes, C.L.M. (2007). Promoting and protecting mental health as flourishing. A complementary strategy for improving national mental health. *American Psychologist*, 62(6), 95-108

⁴ Department of Health and Social Care. (2019). UK Chief Medical Officers’ Physical Activity Guidelines. 1-65

⁵ World Health Organization. (2010). *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health*. Geneva: World Health Organization

⁶ McManus S, Meltzer H, Brugha T, Bebbington P, Jenkins R (eds), 2009. *Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England 2007: results of a household survey*. NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care

⁷ Walker, E. R., McGee, R. E., & Druss, B. G. (2015). Mortality in Mental Disorders and Global Disease Burden Implications. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 72(4), 334–341

⁸ Ribe, A.R., Laursen, T.M., Sandbaek, A., Charles, M., Nordentoft, M., & Vestergaard, M. (2014). Long-term mortality of persons with severe mental illness and diabetes: a population-based cohort study in Denmark. *Psychological Medicine*, 44, 3097-3107

1.1.1 Benefits of physical activity for those with mental health problems

In recent years there has been a substantive increase in evidence endorsing physical activity for both physical and mental health. Recently, the European Psychiatric Association released a position statement advocating the integration of physical activity for the management and treatment of mild to moderate mental illness⁹. The benefits to those with mental health problems when engaging in physical activity are extensive, with studies indicating improvements in a range of areas^{10,11}. These include:

- Reductions in depressive symptoms (including low mood and energy)
- Decreases in psychotic symptoms in schizophrenia and affective disorders
- Improvements in physical health measures (eg, BMI, waist circumference)
- Improvements in social cognition, functional capacity, and quality of life
- Increased social interactions, perceived social support, and reduced loneliness.

Physical activity is associated with a range of psycho-social benefits for individuals of all ages, as activity often engenders social interaction and a sense of belonging through shared experiences, which lead to increases in self-esteem¹². Various modes of exercise can be effective for improving outcomes of mental illness¹³, including aerobic, anaerobic, resistance exercises, individually based and group exercise activities. The benefits of exercise are, however, not maintained if the individual is not *regularly* physically active. Despite the considerable psycho-social benefits of physical activity for most people, it is important to note that physical activity is not the panacea for all mental health problems and other strategies and support systems are crucial for prevention and recovery. In a small number of cases, physical activity needs to be approached with care and can be problematic for individuals at risk of over exercising (including development of exercise addiction and eating disorders¹⁴). To explore such issues, Mind have created a multi-disciplinary working group including academics and sport workforce and recently delivered a webinar titled ‘Exploring when physical activity “becomes a problem”’.

⁹ Stubbs, B., Vancampfort, D., Hallgren, M., Firth, J., Veronese, N., Solmi, M., ... Kahl, K.G. (2018). EPA guidance on physical activity as a treatment for severe mental illness: a meta-review of the evidence and Position Statement from the European Psychiatric Association (EPA), supported by the International Organization of Physical Therapists in Mental Health (IOPTMH). *European Psychiatry*, 54, 124-144

¹⁰ Shvedko, A.V., Thompson, J.L., Greig, C.A., & Whittaker, A.C. (2018). Physical Activity Intervention for Loneliness (PAIL) in community-dwelling older adults: protocol for a feasibility study. *Polit & Feasibility Studies*, 4(187), 1-21

¹¹ Vancampfort, D., Firth, J., Schuch, F.B., Rosenbaum, S., Mugisha, J., Hallgren, M., ... Stubbs, B. (2017). Sedentary behavior and physical activity levels in people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depressive disorder: a global systematic review and meta-analysis. *World Psychiatry*, 16(3), 308-315

¹² Gaz, D.V., & Smith, A.M. (2012). Psychosocial Benefits and Implications of Exercise. *PM&R*, 4(11), 812-817

¹³ Firth, J., Rosenbaum, S., Stubbs, B., Gorczynski, P., Yung, A. R., & Vancampfort, D. (2016). Motivating factors and barriers towards exercise in severe mental illness: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological Medicine*, (2016), 1–13

¹⁴ Plateau, C. R., Bone, S., Lanning, E., & Meyer, C. (2018). Monitoring eating and activity: links with disordered eating, compulsive exercise, and general wellbeing among young adults. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 51(11)

1.1.2 Barriers to physical activity for those with mental health problems

There are considerable barriers to physical activity for those with mental health problems¹⁵. These barriers include: a limited experience of physical activity engagement, the impact of the illness (negative symptoms) and effects of medication, effects of anxiety, lack of finances and the influences of support networks¹⁶. Most notably, one study noted over 50% of participants stated a lack of social support and inclusive access to appropriate facilities as a barrier to activity¹⁶. Using a peer support model, Mind's Get Set to Go project aimed to improve social support networks to help those with mental health problems to become more active. Learning from the Get Set to Go programme evaluation highlighted the crucial role of sport and physical activity providers for supporting people with mental health problems to become active¹⁷.

1.1.3 The physical activity sector and mental health support

The sport and physical activity sector in England include a workforce of around 400,000 employees and volunteers¹⁸, and 3 million coaches¹⁹. Providers in the sector include Active Partnerships, National Governing Bodies, leisure providers, local authority public health teams, community clubs and sports teams. Given the increased commitment to addressing mental health concerns in the general public it is important to recognise mental health within the sport sector²⁰. Alongside engaging those with mental health problems, there is a need to better support the mental health of community coaches, and those working within sport organisations via mental health awareness training and support¹⁴.

1.1.4 Inter-sector collaboration and organisational change

A potential strategy to improve mental health awareness and inclusivity in the physical activity and sport sector, is for sports organisations to partner with mental health providers to facilitate access to appropriate resources and support around mental health provision. Inter-sector

¹⁵ Soundy, A., Stubbs, B., Probst, M., Hemmings, L., & Vancampfort, D. (2014). Barriers to and facilitators of physical activity among persons with schizophrenia: a survey of physical therapists. *Psychiatric Services*, 65(5), 693–6

¹⁶ Johnstone, R., Nicol, K., Donaghy, M., & Lawrie, S. (2009). Barriers to uptake of physical activity in community-based patients with schizophrenia. *Journal of Mental Health*, 18(6), 523–532.

¹⁷ Kinnafick, F.E., Smith, N., Appleton, P., Tweed, L., Bayes, N., Tiler, C. (2017) Get Set to Go Evaluation Summary (2014-2017), National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK

¹⁸ Sport England (2018). Working in an active nation: The professional Workforce Strategy for England. https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/working-in-an-active-nation-11-e-version.pdf?wB_AMyY14zK_uQ_FRgk7iyuZVuCd5BPW

¹⁹ Sport England (2018) Coaching in an Active Nation. The professional workforce strategy for England https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/coaching-in-an-active-nation_the-coaching-plan-for-england.pdf?rpexaSlivuYWJL6DaenRiR6981vYAAj

²⁰ Smith, A, Haycock, D., Jones, J., Greenough, K., Wilcock, R., & Braid, I. (2020). Exploring mental health and illness in the UK sports coaching workforce. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, 1-4

collaboration (people and organisations from multiple sectors working together for a common purpose) has become an increasingly popular health promotion strategy²¹. Traditionally, factors relating to both sectors have hindered the integration of mental health and physical activity services. For example, while health professionals consider lack of time and formal education, competing priorities and perceptions of patients lacking motivation as barriers to prescribing physical activity²², the physical activity sector reported feeling uncertain of how to engage those with mental illness in activity, due to a lack of knowledge on mental health²³.

Sporting organisations and mental health providers working collaboratively to address core issues such as knowledge and awareness of mental health can facilitate the sport and physical activity sector to become more inclusive. Sport and physical activity organisations play an important role in instigating culture change within the sector, by influencing providers' and users' attitudes on mental health and activity. Strategies such as collaborative resource development and sector training are useful to upskill sport and physical activity staff, initiate change in how mental health is viewed and give staff knowledge and confidence to deliver activities to those with mental health issues. To address the low numbers of individuals with mental health problems participating in physical activity, the sector should become better equipped to support and engage people with mental health problems to engage in activities, and for organisations to support their employees and volunteers by improving policies and practices as an employer. Mind's Sector Support programme aimed to address these issues.

1.2 Mind's Sector Support programme

1.2.1 Get Set to Go programme summary

Between 2014 and 2017, Mind developed a physical activity programme, 'Get Set to Go', which was shown to be successful in engaging individuals with mental health problems in sport and physical activity. The programme was co-produced by people with lived experience of mental health problems, and focused on three key strands of delivery:

1. Local Delivery: Eight local Minds provided group-based activities to introduce people to sport and physical activity within a peer-support setting. Peer Navigators (people with lived

²¹ Roussos ST, Fawcett SB. A review of collaborative partnerships as a strategy for improving community health. *Annu Rev Public Health*. 2000

²² Huijg JM, Gebhardt WA, Verheijden MW, et al. Factors influencing primary health care professionals' physical activity promotion behaviors: a systematic review. *Int J Behav Med*. 2015;22:32–50

²³ Leenaars, K.E.F., Smit, E., Wagemakers, A., Molleman, G.R.M., & Koelen, M.A. (2015). Facilitators and barriers in the collaboration between the primary care and the sport sector in order to promote physical activity: A systematic literature review. *Preventive Medicine*, 81, 460-478

experience of mental health problems) helped to facilitate group-based and one-to-one support. Sports co-ordinators from each local Mind worked with mainstream sport and physical activity providers, to ensure the projects were accessible for those participating.

2. Digital Delivery: Mind's online peer support community, Elefriends (since replaced by [Side by Side](#) in 2020), included new information about getting active, and a 'BeingActive' hashtag for users to share their experiences and support each other to become more physically active.

3. National Campaigns: Mind ran several national campaigns to raise awareness of how being active can support people's mental health, and to encourage people to become more active.

Mind, in collaboration with UK Coaching and Sport England developed and delivered a three-hour 'Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity' (MHASPA) training course. This training was targeted at sport and physical activity providers, coaches, sports administrators, and volunteers. The course was co-designed by people with lived experience of mental health problems along with sports coaches and providers.

Research partners from Loughborough University evaluated the impact of the programme on participants' outcomes and provided learning to inform future iterations of the programme. For the academic report, published October 2017, please access [NCSEM-EM \(ncsem-em.org.uk\)](https://www.ncsem-em.org.uk)

1.2.1 Overview of the Sector Support programme

Learning from the Get Set to Go programme evaluation highlighted the crucial role of sport and physical activity providers for supporting people with mental health problems to become active. Funding was obtained by Sport England and the Lottery Fund to conduct a second phase of work to expand Mind's existing efforts with the wider sport and physical activity sector. During this next phase of delivery (2018-2021), the aim for Mind was for sport and physical activity providers in the sector (e.g., Active Partnerships, local authority public health and physical activity teams) to become better equipped to support and engage people with mental health problems to take part in physical activities and support their employees and volunteers by improving their policies and practices as an employer. In brief, the Sector Support programme included the following components:

National Partnership Support: Mind have supported 4 national strategic partner organisations (Sport and Recreation Alliance, Activity Alliance, UK Coaching, and CIMSPA [the Chartered

Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity]) to become sector leaders on mental health and physical activity and deliver their own bespoke mental health initiatives. Mind also appointed 5 operational partners (England Athletics, The Football Association, Swim England, UKActive and AoC Sport) to embed mental health within working practice and aid delivery of mental health initiatives. Aligned with Mind’s expectation, the strategic partners engaged with their broader networks to influence the direction of policy on sport and mental health. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Mind have worked more closely with some strategic partners. Although staff changes have slowed developments with some, progress is being made around influencing the sector and embedding mental health into organisational practices. Strategic partners and information on each partnership is detailed in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Overview of Mind’s national strategic partner support

Strategic partner	Details of partnership
Activity Alliance	Working closely to improve the sectors’ approach to inclusion and accessibility. This includes working together on ‘Duty to Care’ and CIMSPA’s professional standards. Mind have also supported Activity Alliance to improve their workplace wellbeing. They have now introduced Wellness Action plans, an Employee Assistance Programme and provided staff support during the pandemic.
CIMSPA	Mind provided a support package for their Stronger Together campaign including mental health content, signposting to support and free access codes to the eLearning training. Working closely with CIMSPA to embed mental health across the standards and the sector remains a key priority.
Sport and Recreation Alliance	Mind continue to work with the Alliance on the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation. The Alliance provides a great platform to promote support services to the sector. Their promotion of Mind’s webinar series has contributed to the high number of bookings they have received.
UK Coaching	Mind continue to work with UK Coaching on the eLearning training. Mind also supported the mental health knowledge check for their Duty to Care Toolkit and delivered a Time 2 Learn session for over 100 coaches focusing on how they can look after their mental health and wellbeing. Mind also provided content for their mindfulness blog and infographic as part of Mindful Monday.

Regional Offer: Mind aimed to engage 600 regional organisations through regional networks (hubs) appointed at the start of the project. The aim was to embed the case for change locally, and indirectly reach 120,000 people by bridging the gap between national influencing, and

policy and practice at a regional level. The delivery model and mechanisms were co-designed in the first 6 months of the programme. The latest KPIs for the regional network are in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2. Regional network key performance indicators (October 2020)

KPI	April 2020	October 2020	April 2021
600 organisations engaged	272	708	801
120,000 individuals indirectly reached	54,400	141,600	160,200
1440 individuals upskilled via MHASPA.	242	927*	937*
36 face to face events hosted	9	11	11
18 virtual events hosted	6	15	44

** This is based on the number of eLearning codes provided to the Regional Networks prior to the course going free of charge in May 2020. The Regional Networks have continued to promote the eLearning during the free period and contributed to the high number of completions.*

Local Delivery: Mind continued to deliver MHASPA training to over 35,000 members of the sport and physical activity sector workforce. To date, almost 2,000 people have completed the face-to-face training (1253 during phase two) through local Mind trainers. In 2019, Mind, UK Coaching, 1st4Sport and Sport England launched the MHASPA eLearning course, making it available at scale. During the first lockdown the partners were able to make the course free of charge to support the COVID-19 response as a result of revenue from previous sales and partner investment. This enabled coaches to lead change and embed learning gained from the course within their organisations at a local level. Those who complete the course were awarded three developmental CPD points by CIMSPA between 2017 and 2020, and as part of their updated points system those that complete the course are now awarded 1.5 points. This part of the Sector Support programme was evaluated by Mind’s research and evaluation team.

Universal Offer: Mind aimed to facilitate provision of online training, resources and networking/best practice opportunities for staff working or volunteering in sport and physical activity organisations. Via this Universal Offer and being a co-creator of the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation, Mind aimed to reach 30,000 people and 300 organisations. Since March 2020 and the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, the following outcomes have been achieved:

- Introduction of a weekly (now extended to monthly) emails to 70 key sector contacts containing mental health guidance, messaging and resources and could be shared within organisations.
- Increased frequency of the newsletter to provide the sector with up-to-date mental health information and guidance.
- Supporting Mind’s Communications team on the creation of the ‘Coronavirus and your mental health toolkit’. The toolkit includes elements of how physical activity can support mental well-being during lockdown.
- Continuation of the provision the Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity eLearning (MHASPA). 21628 learners have completed the course. Version two of the eLearning is now live. eLearning outcomes for the course have not altered, however the learning experience has been improved by enhancing the format of the course, and accessibility features have been added to ensure the provision is inclusive.
- Continuation of hosting bi-annual webinars for five core organisations (Sport England, England Institute of Sport (EIS), ukactive, Activity Alliance, and Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) to promote workplace wellbeing and mental health at work.

1.2.2 Covid-19 and alterations to the delivery of the Sector Support programme

In early 2020 a global pandemic (COVID-19) resulted in the UK going into periods of national lockdowns (March-May 2020; November 2020 and December-April 2021) to reduce the number of cases and deaths from the disease. During lockdowns, exercise was restricted to a once per day with only those living in your household and as such prevented individuals playing sport or attending sport sessions. The Physical Activity Team at Mind supported briefings to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Minister for Sport and Civil Society on the benefits of physical activity outdoors for mental health. Subsequently Government legislations relaxed slightly to include the rule of six for outdoor activity outside of lockdown periods. The changing restrictions in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted and continue to impact the sport and physical activity sector with large numbers of staff unable to work and in furlough schemes. Athletes have not been able to undertake training in the same way and sports venues have been asked to close during lockdown periods and higher-level restrictions. These restrictions have impacted on the delivery of the Sector Support programme but also resulted in much higher demand for mental health support across all sectors. Mind have initiated incredible efforts to meet the needs of the sport and physical activity sector and support mental health more widely during a challenging year. An outline of the alterations made to the original delivery plans, and additional support that has been

implemented is provided below. Some programme activities have not been possible (e.g., Mental Health in Sport and Physical Activity Conference) due to COVID-19. The Universal Offer has taken priority to provide the much-needed mental health support to the sector.

Implications on the Universal Offer has included:

- **The production of a 'Return to Play' guide.** Launched in June 2020 with nearly 400 downloads in its first four weeks, the guide aims to equip the sector with the tools required to support the mental health of staff, coaches, volunteers, and participants as they 'return to play'.
- **The creation of Believe Perform Infographics.** Mind teamed up with Believe Perform (performance psychology, well-being and mental health organisation) to develop free infographics to support people to return to physical activity post lockdown, and to provide details of mental health helplines and support services for the sport community.
- **Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity eLearning.** This was made freely available between May and September 2020 with approximately 20,000 people completing it during that time.
- **A Mental Health Champions Toolkit.** Launched at the end of July 2020 to provide guidance for organisations, clubs and groups in the sport and physical activity sector on establishing a mental health champions scheme. It has been accessed over 500 times.
- **Mind have updated their Sport and Mental Health toolkit.** This update is based on the learning and knowledge gained over the past 2.5 years of the Sector Support and Community Delivery programmes. Mind conducted a survey during the summer of 2020 to gather their feedback on the current toolkit and understand what was required in the update.
- **Continued promotion of the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation.** The Charter's LinkedIn page provides a platform to promote Mind's work and that of the sector via social media. 316 professionals currently follow the page and this continues to grow.
- **Mind have hosted six webinars** taking 1135 bookings from individuals. An additional webinar was hosted at the end of March 2021 (titled 'exploring when physical activity "becomes a problem"'). This was not included within the evaluation period. Webinar topics are below:
 - Mental health at work in sport and physical activity.
 - Mental health and safeguarding in sport and physical activity.
 - Using physical activity to support mental health.
 - Volunteering: Get Set to Go and mental health champions guide
 - Mental health training for the Sport and Physical Activity Sector
 - Mental health support for the Sport and Physical Activity Sector

Mind commissioned an academic partner, Loughborough University and the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine (East Midlands) to evaluate the impact of the work they were doing in engaging and supporting the sport and physical activity sector.

Chapter 2. Evaluation Methodology

2.1 Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the evaluation including aims and objectives, data collection measures and data analysis.

2.2 Aims and objectives of the evaluation.

Evaluation aim: To understand the effectiveness of the Sector Support programme in influencing and engaging the sector to better support those with mental health problems to engage in sport and physical activity.

Our evaluation used a qualitative methodology guided by the RE-AIM framework (evaluative components: Reach, Effectiveness, Adoption, Implementation, Maintenance)²⁴ to evaluate the project process and impact on partners and organisations in the sector.

2.3 The RE-AIM Framework

The RE-AIM framework is appropriate to use in multi-sector partnerships²⁵ and has been adopted with success to evaluate physical activity promotion strategies within such partnerships²⁶. Following published guidance²⁵, this evaluation took a ‘hybrid’ approach to using the RE-AIM framework²⁰. The hybrid approach was employed as some of the evaluation objectives warranted targeted evaluation (i.e., reach to explore recruitment), while more thorough exploration was needed for aspects of the framework that incorporate multiple objectives (i.e., effectiveness, when exploring impact, experiences, policy and practice). While most studies rely on quantitative methods when employing the RE-AIM framework, a recent paper providing guidance for RE-AIM also advocates qualitative methods when using RE-AIM for evaluation purposes²⁷. An overview of each RE-AIM component, and corresponding qualitative questions are shown in the table below.

²⁴ Glasgow, R. E., Vogt, T. M., & Boles, S. M. (1999). Evaluating the public health impact of health promotion interventions: the RE-AIM framework. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89, 1322-1327.

²⁵ Finch, C.F., Gabbe, B.J., Lloyd, D.G., Cook, J., Young, W., Nicholson, M., Seward, H., Donaldson, A., & Doyle, T.L.A. (2011). Towards a national sports safety strategy: addressing facilitators and barriers towards safety guideline uptake. *Injury Prevention*, 17, 1-10

²⁶ Sweet, S.N., Martin Ginis, K.A., Estabrooks, P.A., & Latimer-Cheung, A.E. (2014). Operationalizing the RE-AIM framework to evaluate the impact of multi-sector partnerships. *Implementation Science*, 9(74), 1- 10

²⁷ Holtrop, J.S., Rabin, B.A., & Glasgow, R.E. (2018). Qualitative approaches to use of the RE-AIM framework: rationale and methods. *BMC Health Services Research*, 18(177), 1-10

Table 2.1. Overview of RE-AIM components and RE-AIM qualitative questions.

Re-AIM	Component overview	Qualitative question
Reach	Who is intended to benefit and who participates in the programme?	What factors contribute to participation? What might have been done to get more of the target audience to participate?
Effectiveness	What are the most important benefits you are trying to achieve, and what is the likelihood of negative outcomes?	Did the programme work to initiate the intended outcomes? What other factors contributed to the findings? Are the findings meaningful?
Adoption	Where is the programme applied and who is it applied to?	What factors contributed to partners and organisations taking up the programme? What barriers interacted with the programme? Was there partial or incomplete adoption? Why did some individuals take part and others did not?
Implementation	How consistently was the programme delivered, how was it adapted, and why did the findings occur?	How was the programme implemented, by whom and when? What influenced implementation? How and why was the programme adapted over time?
Maintenance	When did the initiative become active, and how will it be sustained at an individual and operational level?	Is the programme being continued after completion of the initial implementation? Is it sustained, or modified?

2.4 Evaluation objectives of the Sector Support programme

The evaluation sought to address the following objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Evaluate the effectiveness of Mind in engaging with sector partners and organisations at a national, regional, and local level.
- **Objective 2:** Evaluate the effectiveness of supporting national strategic partners to implement their action plans for sport and mental health.
- **Objective 3:** Evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of Mind’s engagement with partner organisations and sector networks to influence the national policy landscape.
- **Objective 4:** Understand how Mind can most effectively facilitate knowledge exchange and partnership building within the sport and physical activity sector at a national, regional and local level.

Our objectives were achieved by addressing each of the following RE-AIM components:

Reach (addressing objective 1):

- Exploration of Mind’s recruitment of strategic partners and organisations including barriers and facilitators to engagement.

Effectiveness (addressing objective 1-4):

- Exploration of changes made to policy and practice by strategic partners and organisations following engagement with Mind.

- Exploration of the perceived impact (including unexpected outcomes) of support and knowledge exchange between Mind, partners, and organisations.

Adoption (addressing objective 2):

- Exploration of the uptake of support from Mind by sector partners and organisations (i.e., who, when, and why) including barriers and facilitators to uptake.
- Identification of how strategic partners and organisations embed knowledge gained into action plans, policy and practice.

Implementation (addressing objectives 2-4):

- Evaluation of the processes undertaken in the co-design of the delivery model including barriers and facilitators.
- Identification of what was implemented, how and by whom, and the key facilitators and barriers for implementation of mental health action plans.
- Evaluation of the role of Mind in supporting partners to deliver mental health initiatives through knowledge exchange and partnership building.
- Exploration of how partners and organisations share knowledge and identify key facilitators and barriers between Mind, partners and organisations.

Maintenance (addressing objective 3):

- Exploration of the factors influencing Mind's long-term relationships with sector partners and organisations
- Exploration of the factors influencing long term delivery of mental health initiatives by sector partners and organisations.

2.5 Data collection

To understand the process and impact of the Sector Support programme, we collected primary data using qualitative approaches. Qualitative methods provide rich, in-depth data of the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of those involved, aiding our understanding of what, how and why things happen²⁸ and offer explanation²⁸ of outcomes, including unintended outcomes, in a real-world context²⁹. This approach engages participants in a collaborative manner, which enhances understanding and lessons learned, and improves dissemination of evidence-based approaches to learning.

We collected data using the following approaches:

- Observation of the regional offer co-design workshops
- 3-month follow-up qualitative online survey to evaluate the webinar series
- Focus groups with lived experience advisory group and Mind's project team

²⁸ King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research* (pp. 257–270). London, UK: Sage

²⁹ Moore, G., Audrey, S., Barker, M., Bond, L., Bonell, C., ... & Baird, J. (2014). *Process evaluation in complex public health intervention studies: the need for guidance*.

- Focus groups with Mind’s operational and strategic partners
- A series of interviews with employees from one strategic partner
- Telephone interviews with lead and partner organisations for the regional networks

Details of individual methods are presented in the sub-sections below. Findings (reported in Chapter 3) from these methods were integrated to address the four evaluation objectives, alongside reference to the RE-AIM components. A summary of which data collection method addressed each objective and component of RE-AIM are presented in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2. Summary of evaluation objectives and data sources to address each objective and RE-AIM component

To evaluate (aim):	Data Sources	R	E	A	I	M
1. The effectiveness of Mind in engaging with sector partners and organisations at a national, regional, and local level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups with the Mind Project Management team. • Telephone interviews with partners and organisations. • Focus groups with strategic partners. • Online survey of Webinar series. 	X				
2. The effectiveness of supporting national strategic partners to implement action plans for sport and mental health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups with strategic partners. • Strategic partner interview series. 		X	X	X	
3. The effectiveness and sustainability of Mind’s engagement with partner organisations and sector networks to influence the national policy landscape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone interviews with the regional network. • Focus group with strategic and operational partners. • Focus groups with lived experience advisory group. 		X		X	X
4. How Mind can most effectively facilitate knowledge exchange and partnership building within the sport and physical activity sector at a national, regional and local level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up focus groups and telephone interviews with partners and organisations. • Follow-up focus groups with Mind PM team and the lived experience group. • Online survey of Webinar series. 		X		X	X

2.5.2 Observation of the regional offer co-design workshops

The regional offer aimed to ensure organisations at a regional and local level are equipped with the skills to support and engage those with mental health problems in being active. In February 2019, three co-design workshops were conducted in London, Birmingham, and Leeds. These workshops brought together organisations from the sport, physical activity and mental health

sectors to co-design the regional offer and ensure it met the needs of those it aimed to support. The workshop location, attendance number, and a list of attendees are detailed below.

Table 2.3. Regional attendance rates and list of attendees to co-design workshops.

Workshop	Attendance	Attendees
South	13	Brighton & Hove Mind, Sported, Rethink, London Sport, Active Surrey, Active Sussex, LEAP, Active Essex, Herts Sports & Physical Activity Partnership, Get Berkshire Active, and London Borough of Bexley
Midlands	11	Birmingham Mind, Sport Birmingham, Northamptonshire Sport, Active Black Country, CSW Sport, West Midlands Combined Authority, Newman University, Everyone Active, Activity Alliance, and Badminton England
North	11	Sheffield Mind, Leeds Mind, York Mind, Hull and East Yorkshire Mind, Yorkshire Sport Foundation, North Yorkshire Sport, Greater Sport, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Rotherham United Community Sports Trust, and Activity Alliance

The workshops were facilitated by Mind and an independent coordinator. Participating organisations discussed a variety of topics including perceptions of current mental health support; perceptions of support required; and what the regional offer should entail. After the co-design process, it was decided that Mind’s regional offer would be to support 600+ organisations through regional networks in each of the nine government regions in England. Lead and partner organisations for the regional hubs were created in eight locations: North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humber, West Midlands, East Midlands, East of England South East and South West. A regional network was not created in London. Due to a lack of relevant applications and competing priorities for the Active Partnership, Mind adapted the approach in London to work with London Sport on their Physical Activity for Health Network. In each region, Mind helped to build expertise and embed the case for change surrounding mental health.

2.5.3 Webinar series survey

Overview

Mind hosted a webinar series as an additional mode of support during COVID-19 restrictions. Six webinars were delivered between April 2020- October 2020 with an additional webinar held in March 2021. The list of webinars is documented in section 1.2.2.

Methods

Three months after the webinar was delivered, individuals who had registered to any one of the webinars were emailed a link to an online Qualtrics survey set up by the research team. This survey assessed satisfaction of the session, how the information has helped to change practice, how organisations (and employers) have supported a change to practice, and challenges that have been faced. Participants were also asked to provide positives of the sessions and how sessions could be improved.

Demographic information of participants who completed the survey



Attendees from:
England, Wales, Scotland, N Ireland



68% female and 32% male participants
97% White British, 1% mixed British, 2% prefer not to say



108 attempts or partial completions of the survey
37 full survey completions

2.5.4 Focus groups with the lived experience advisory group and Mind's physical activity project management team

Overview

Understanding the project structure and organisation from the perspective of those who commission and will benefit from the project is a vital component of any process evaluation.

Methods

Focus groups were conducted at two time points, the first at the start of the project in December 2018 (baseline), and again at the end of the project in December 2020 (follow-up). The first focus group with the Mind physical activity management team, and the first focus group with the lived experience advisory group were conducted face to face. Due to the restrictions of Covid-19 regarding social distancing measures, both follow-up focus groups were conducted using Zoom as the online platform. The focus groups followed a semi-structured interview guide, which facilitated direction in the conversation while allowing participants the flexibility to answer the question, reflect on each other's thoughts and opinions, and discuss topics as a group.

Overview of focus groups



Focus Group 1:
8 members of Mind's PA team



Focus group 2:
10 individuals in the lived experience advisory group



Focus group 1 and 2:
5.5 hours of data collected

Baseline focus groups aimed to explore:

- Mind's plans to engage and support partners and undertake the co-design process.
- The meaning of best practice when delivering initiatives to support and engaging people with mental health problems.
- What Mind, and people with mental health problems, anticipated the impact of the partnership to be, and what they perceived an effective partnership would look like.

Follow-up focus groups aimed to explore:

- Barriers and facilitators of engagement strategies.
- Implementation of partner and organisation support.
- Perceived impact of support and knowledge exchange between Mind, their partners, and organisations in the sport sector.
- Perspectives of those with lived experience of mental health problems participating in physical activity initiatives.
- Context of the physical activity sector from those with lived experience of mental health.

Demographics of focus group attendees:

Lived experience group



Age range 25-63



7 female and 3 male participants



6 White British, 1 black British, 1 Bangladeshi and 1 Pakistani participant(s)



Duration of mental health problem ranging from 6 months – 32 years.

Mind's physical activity management team



Age range 27-40



5 female and 3 male participants



Roles included: Media relations manager, community delivery lead, head of physical activity, sector support lead, senior communications officer, senior researcher, senior evaluation officer, regional support physical activity officer.



Length of time in job role ranging from 2 months to 6 and half years.

2.5.5 Focus groups with Mind's operational and strategic partners

Overview

During the Sector Support programme, Mind appointed 4 strategic partners and 5 operational partners. A baseline focus group was conducted with Mind's strategic partners in April 2019, and a follow-up in December 2020. One focus group with Mind's operational partners was conducted at the end of the project (December 2020).

Broadly, these focus groups aimed to:

- Explore the perception of support and engagement from Mind
- Identify how partners have used the support to implement and embed their action plans for sport and mental health
- Understand barriers and facilitators for implementation
- Identify changes made to policy and practice.

Methods

Focus group participants were invited to attend the focus groups by Mind's physical activity team. All strategic partners were invited and 4 organisational partners from those invited were able to attend. All focus groups were conducted online using Zoom.



4 strategic partners



4 organisational partners



4 hours of data

Demographic information for strategic partner



Age range 27-45.



2 female and 2 male representatives for Sport and Recreation Alliance, Activity Alliance, UK Coaching, and CIMSPA.



Roles included: Policy Advisor, National Partnership Advisor, Development Lead officer, and Head of Policy and Impact.



Length of time in job role ranging from 18 months to 12 years.

Demographic information for operational partner



Age range 36-47.



4 female and 2 male representatives for ukactive, The FA, England Athletics, Swimming England, and AoC Sport.



Roles included: Head of Workplace Wellbeing, Inclusion Manager, Wellbeing Specialists and Policy and Project.

2.5.6 A series of interviews with employees from one strategic partner

Overview

This series of interviews explored the perceived impact of the support provided by Mind by employees of one strategic partner. The interviews aimed to longitudinally identify: 1) how partners embed knowledge gained into policy and practice, 2) what was implemented, how and by whom, 3) the key facilitators and barriers for implementation of mental health action plans, and 4) best practice for mental health within the organisation and wider sport sector.

Methods

The strategic partner was selected for the series of interviews due to their existing partnership with Mind. Three phases of telephone interviews were conducted with the same participants (May 2019, July 2020 and December 2020). A longitudinal approach to this method allowed the research team to understand how mental health action plans were implemented and accepted by the employees and how these initiatives impacted practice within the organisation and with external partners. Only 6 of the original 8 participants were interviewed in the last stage as 2 had left the organisation due to re-structuring. Several employees also changed roles during the data

collection for the same reasons. Participants were from different teams within the organisation and had different levels of responsibilities. The interview guide asked questions around the role of the organisation in supporting mental health, organisational culture, perceptions of mental health support within the sport and physical activity sector and the relationship between Mind and their organisation.

Strategic partner employee demographics



Age range 35-49.



8 individuals (4 female, 4 male participants)



22 interviews = 18.5 hours of data



Mix of home and office workers



Length of time in role 18 months and 7 years at 1st interview

2.5.7 Telephone interviews with lead and partner organisations for the regional hubs

Overview

Due to the large geographical coverage of the regional networks and the travel restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic telephone interviews offered a convenient and accessible method to explore the creation and implementation of the regional networks. The interviews provided rich insight into how the regional network was created and implemented, with insight into geographical and organisational differences.

Methods

Telephone interviews were conducted with representatives from the lead and partner organisations from each of the eight regional areas at two-time points: at baseline (at the start of the regional network model February 2020) and at follow-up (November-December 2020).

Initial telephone interviews aimed to explore:

- Expectations of the network and why they have decided to engage with the network.
- Anticipated barriers and facilitators to developing and delivering mental health plans.

Follow-up telephone interviews aimed to explore:

- Information regarding changes to policy and practice.
- Barriers and facilitators of knowledge sharing.
- How knowledge has been embedded in action plans and delivery.
- The perceived impact and success of the regional network model.

Overview of telephone interviews with lead and partner organisations



8 geographical regions (North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, South East, East of England and South West)



8 Lead and 11 Partner Organisations



36 interviews (30-60 minutes in duration)

Due to organisational restructuring and increased workload during the Covid-19 pandemic, two of the nine partner organisations were unable to participate in the follow-up telephone interview. Initial and follow-up telephone interview demographics for both lead and partner organisations are presented in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4. Demographic information of lead and partner organisations for each region of the regional network

Region	Name of organisation	Role	Length of time in role	Pre	Post
North East	RISE (previously Tyne and Wear Sport)	Network Lead	1 year	X	X
	Tees Valley Sport	Assistant Director	14 years	X	X
	County Durham Sport	Assistant Director	2 years	X	
North West	Merseyside Sport Foundation	Sport and Physical Activity Officer	4 years	x	x
Yorkshire & Humber	Yorkshire Sport Foundation	Development Manager	7 years	x	x
	North Yorkshire Sport	Head of Development	8 years	x	x
	Department for Work and Pensions	Disability Employment Advisor	30 years	X	
	Active Humber	CEO	12 years	x	x
East Midlands	Activity Alliance	Network Lead	1 year	x	x
	Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust	Mental Health Team Leader	2 years	x	x
West Midlands	Sport Birmingham	Senior partnerships manager	10 years	x	x
East of England	Herts Sport Partnership	Project Officer	1 year	x	x
	Northamptonshire Sport	Physical Activity Development Officer	12 years	x	x
South East	Active Oxfordshire	Physical Activity Manager	15 years	X	X
	Get Berkshire Active	Head of Sport England Programmes	6 years	X	X
	Active Essex	Assistant Relationship Manager	12 months	X	X
	Oxfordshire Mind	Physical Activity & Well-being Co-ordinator	4 years	X	X
South West	Active Dorset	CEO	10 years*	X	X

* Within the South West region there was a change in staffing midway through the project. The first interview was conducted with the original CEO who had held the position for 10 years. The follow-up interview was conducted with the new CEO appointed mid-2020.

* Lead organisations for the network are presented in dark yellow, while partner organisations are listed below each corresponding lead in light yellow.

2.5.8 Data analysis

Telephone interviews and focus groups were recorded following consent from all participants and were transcribed verbatim for analysis. This data, along with the data from the online survey was synthesised and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (TA)³⁰. The analytical process is outlined below.



The first stage of analysis involved the evaluation team becoming familiar with the dataset by thoroughly reading all transcripts.



The second stage of the process involved producing initial codes from the data. Coding allows the researchers to reduce and simplify the data by focusing on specific characteristics and important sections of the data.



When all data had been coded and collated, the evaluation team organised relevant data into themes. This process involves searching the data for commonalities, differences, and notable topic areas and synthesising the data descriptively and analytically.



The final phase involved reviewing and presenting the themes in a coherent pattern that accurately reflects the 'story' told within the data. Themes were refined (themes were condensed where there was overlap between topics) and presented within the report. Themes developed from the data are presented in Chapter 3.

The findings from each data collection method are presented to address the four overarching evaluation objectives separately. Within the distinct sections, findings guided by the RE-AIM framework are discussed within the themes developed for each objective. A summary of the themes identified for the separate objectives is presented in Table 2.5.

³⁰ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597.

Table 2.5: Objective	Themes	Key points
1. Evaluate the effectiveness of Mind in engaging with sector partners and organisations at a national, regional, and local level	Mind as mental health experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased appetite for mental health support Potential for reliance on Mind as experts
	Sector 'buy-in' for mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectiveness dependant on 'buy in' from senior managers and employees
	Quality of communication within partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular, meaningful communication where partners feel heard. Importance of communication with the wider sector (i.e., social media)
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of supporting national strategic partners to implement their action plans for sport and mental health	Successful implementation of action plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception of success and feeling more equipped to promote mental health Successful relationship with Mind
	A sense of responsibility for driving change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceptions of the organisation's role in the mental health agenda Partnership with Mind considered a 'driving force' for change
	Increased focus on mental health support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covid-19, organisational restructures, and the Sector Support programme Attribution of the appetite for change
	The 'high performance' culture within the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of role modelling work-life balance from senior management Informal practices help to change staff culture
3. Evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of Mind's engagement with partner organisations and sector networks to influence the national policy landscape	Organisational mental health policy and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee focused changes Senior management supporting and role modelling mental health
	Raising the profile of mental health in physical activity and sport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parity of esteem: Change has been made, and there is more to be done Promoting collaborative and multi-sector partnerships The importance of identifying mutual priorities
	Covid-19 and embedding change in policy and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A silver lining: increased effectiveness through increased reach Focus on 'laying foundations' for sustainable mental health support
	Maintaining relationships with sector partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of partner relationships for sustainability Partners working autonomously The role of local Minds
4. How Mind can effectively facilitate knowledge exchange and partnership building within the sector at a national, regional, and local level	Support and knowledge exchange between Mind, organisations, and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector appetite for information on mental health support Covid-19 restrictions shift focus to increase visibility
	Mind's role in knowledge exchange and partnership building now, and in the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From willingness to tangible outcomes Dissemination of best practice Key barriers and facilitators of effective knowledge exchange

Chapter 3. Engagement with sector partners and organisations (Objective 1)

3.1 Overview

This section addresses objective one: to evaluate the effectiveness of Mind in engaging with sector partners and organisations at a national, regional, and local level. This section incorporates the **Reach** component of the RE-AIM framework. The evaluation of reach can be presented quantitatively through the absolute number of organisations and partners reached, and the estimated indirect reach to individuals through partnerships. Mind’s monitoring data has been included to provide additional context for the level of programme engagement. Our findings focus on processes, experiences, successes, and challenges of engaging with partners and organisations.

3.2. Reach of the project

Mind’s Universal Offer to support everyone in the sector remained a priority, and during the COVID-19 pandemic several elements of the Universal Offer have been updated. Through the updates to mental health support and resources, the following have been achieved:

- 1285 individuals signed up to the monthly newsletter (as of the 31/01/2021)
- 21,628 individuals have completed the MHASPA eLearning
- Over 316 professionals follow the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation.

Figures relating the KPI’s of the regional offer (monitored by Mind) are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Regional offer KPIs and figures relating to KPI for April and October 2020

KPI	April 2020	October 2020	April 2021
600 organisations engaged	272	708	801
120,000* indirectly reached	54,400	141,600	160,200
1440 individuals upskilled via MHASPA	242	927*	937*
36 face to face events hosted	9	11	11
18 virtual events hosted	6	15	44

*This is based on the number of eLearning codes provided to the regional networks prior to the course being made available free of charge in May 2020.

Planned activities with official partnerships have been delayed or postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, an overview of the anticipated reach of both strategic and operational partners is shown below in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Estimated reach of the Sector Support programme

Partner or organisation	Demographic information	Estimated reach and associated work with Mind
Strategic Partners	Activity Alliance (National)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating with CIMSPA regarding inclusion and support for the sector – 8 members and 35 associate members • All workforce (25 staff members) supported with wellness action plans • Regional networks work closely with local organisations
	Sport and Recreation Alliance (London)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 320 members • 150,000 sports clubs affiliated to members • 455 signatories of the Mental Health Charter (March 2021)
	UK Coaching (Leeds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200 organisations, 150,000 coaches reached through training, 8,000 coaches learning in community, 50+ million people indirectly reached through campaigns • Time 2 Learn session delivered to 100+ coaches on mental health and wellbeing
	CIMPSA (Loughborough)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 520 free access codes to members for eLearning
Operational Partners	ukactive (London)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4,000 member organisations • 10,000+ individuals reached through Mindful Monday • 200+ leisure workforce upskilled via Every Mind Matters.
	England Athletics (Birmingham)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,800 affiliated clubs/organisational members, 187,000 registered athletes, 30,000 licenced coaches, 5,450 licensed officials • 16,000+ people engaged via #RunandTalk (including 1,100+ Mental Health Champions) and #RunAndRevise
	Swim England (Loughborough)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,500 members • 1,300+ of the workforce upskilled. • 700+ mental health fact sheets provided to swimmers or those who support swimmers
	The FA (Burton)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millions of individuals reached through partnership. • Mental health guide to grassroots football sent out to 120,000 coaches. • Mental health guide for football officials sent to 28,000 officials. • Supported creation of an internal mental health guide sent out to 900 FA staff • Launch of the Heads up campaign by the FA, the Rpyal Foundation, CALM, Mind and Sporting Chance
	AoC Sport (London)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 190 college members. 1,000+ student volunteers, 15,000 student participants in programmes, 150 students recruited as Mental Health Ambassadors, 79 colleges signed up to pilot ‘Maintaining an active lifestyle to keep physically and mentally healthy: tutorial resources for colleges’

3.3 Evaluating the reach of the project

Within the qualitative work, the research team identified three themes to understand the reach of Mind's engagement with partners and organisations within the sector:



Theme 1: Mind as mental health experts



Theme 2: Sector 'buy-in' for mental health



Theme 3: Quality of communication within partnerships

3.3.1 Mind as mental health experts

Partners and organisations were unanimously positive of their relationship with Mind, their engagement, and the support they received throughout the programme. Sector partners were enthusiastic about their partnership with Mind, due to their knowledge and influence in the mental health sector and suggested a sense of being 'stronger together' by establishing such partnerships. Mind's credibility within the field of mental health was considered a facilitator for the regional network to connect with organisation and reiterated when engaging with partner organisations,

"I'm excited, we're partnering with a big hitter which gives real credibility to our work and what we are doing. They know we have expertise [in the sport sector], but by us partnering it gives us greater credibility, which means we can have greater influence and greater reach ... we are stronger together, Mind and all the partners".

Strategic Partner 1

Following the success of phase one of GStG, Mind's physical activity project management (PM) team highlighted an increased interest in mental health provision within the sector. Mind acknowledged the increased appetite for mental health support from organisations was their overarching aim. However, meeting the demand of organisations requiring support was identified as one of Mind's perceived challenges in the early stages of the Sector Support programme,

“I think managing the demand is going to be a challenge, even though we’ve got more of a structure, but whenever we talk about mental health, whenever we release some research or we have an event, it leads to more questions, more support [needed]”.

Mind (PM) team 2

In the follow-up focus group, the large demand from the sector was noted, indicating the programme had been successful in its reach to engage sector partners. The PM team reported that the appetite for involvement was even larger than expected in the initial stages of the project, and how this demand has consequently increased the pressure on their capacity to sustain this level of engagement long-term,

“We always knew there was going to be high demand. It’s something that we still haven’t got a solution to how we manage it; we’re working on it ... Because the programme is funded by Sport England, a lot of departments have a vested interest in it which means they think we can help with their outcomes, which we can, but we also have quite a contained programme to deliver.”

Mind PM Team 4

Sector partners and organisations also raised questions on the capacity of Mind to maintain the support currently being offered to the sector long term. Partners indicated they did not feel in a position to continue promoting mental health without the support of Mind.

3.3.2 Sector ‘buy in’ for mental health

In addition to the surge in positive interest in the Sector Support programme, Mind’s PM team highlighted that gaining sufficient buy-in from big sector partners (specifically those that they had not worked with before) could be a challenge as this type of project had not been done before in the sector. An important part of achieving sector buy-in is identifying collaborative priorities between partners, which was initially perceived to be a potential challenge due to the range of organisations Mind support,

“I think the struggle will be knowing what the partners want from this. I think we have clarity about what we want this to deliver, and what we think this sector needs, but I don’t think they’re quite sure, and I think that’s some of the challenge.”

Mind PM team 4

Organisations and partners aimed to increase their provision and the numbers of resources they had to offer following an increased interest in mental health eLearning. However, despite a significant amount of work aimed at promoting mental health and buy-in from singular members and clubs, organisations noted a lack of engagement from national governing bodies (NGBs). Due to the potential reach of NGBs, organisations believed this lack of engagement from NGBs reduced the speed of mental health awareness being embedded in policy and practice,

“The eLearning was a good tool, people really engaged with it. I guess NGBs are the hardest, a bit of a blind spot, they didn’t really engage [with the network] as we’d have liked, it would be great to share the eLearning with them - that would be a great outcome, but it hasn’t happened. NGB’s don’t always have the best relationship with their clubs. It’s been a bit of a hard sell, like you’re going in a bit blind and cold calling in a respect”.

Regional network lead, 4

One of the main barriers to engagement which could go some way to explaining the anticipated challenge of gaining sector buy-in regarding the point above was having the additional time and resources to prioritise the mental health initiative work. Many organisations noted challenges in promoting the mental health agenda alongside their current job role. Resistance to change and reluctance to implement mental health action plans was observed in some cases where employees felt such plans were a burden to complete on top of already busy schedules.

“if you want to do something and you want to do it well it needs to be part of somebody’s job opposed to an add on, so some dedicated time and resource is fundamental”.

Regional Network Lead 2

It was suggested that whilst having a designated individual assigned to promote mental health was helpful, they struggled to engage with the programme when that person was not available. Partners noted willingness to undertake action plans improved over time, especially in response to the endorsement of such plans and mental health awareness by senior management. For mental health to be embedded in practice and policy there is a need for consistent ‘buy-in’ from senior management, to have a collateral impact on the engagement of employees.

3.3.3 Quality of communication within partnerships

All organisations and partners highlighted that regular, meaningful conversation between themselves and Mind was crucial for the success of the project. Communication was viewed as a contributor to successful implementation/adoption by all strategic partners (see also objective 2). It was consistently stated that frequent dialogue between Mind and organisations was important to provide direction, identify priorities and make sure all partners are moving 'in tandem'. Organisations noted that a willingness to help and the frequency of support received from Mind facilitated engagement,

"They've [Mind] been brilliant, everything we've asked for they have answered. Even throughout COVID-19 they never went missing, they've always been around to speak to. That has been massively important. When partners have disappeared or not answered its quite difficult to know where you stand, but Mind as a funder have just stood constant".

Regional Network Lead 3

At the start of the project, partners hoped that the relationship would facilitate conversations and develop insight into mental health, work with a strong collaborative effort to upskill the workforce both formally and informally, reach a wider audience and therefore extend their influencing capacity, be influential at a senior and governmental level and identify and demonstrate best practice. From an operational level it was hoped that the partnership would provide key messaging to enhance awareness of mental health research and signposting to information and resources; providing expertise and technical understanding to help develop resources and coordinate conversations with other organisations. Although there was a slower start than anticipated where there were changes to staff due to re-structures, the relationship was strong and respected by all employees interviewed. Operationally, strategic partners emphasised how progressive their work around mental health had been. However, there was an appetite for more help in terms of strategic direction and a need to connect more on a policy level,

"Our main account manager speaks to [Mind PM team] on pretty much a daily basis at the moment as the new version of the Mind eLearning is about to go live ... the same thing I said probably back in the summer that I think operationally in terms of getting things out there, you know, brilliant relationship. I think the bit that we need to do more of is probably connecting it more on a policy level and stakeholder engagement. At the minute we've been

very focussed on a lot of the operational details, because we've got new products coming down the shoot. In the new year it will be more stakeholder policy [traditional] stuff."

Strategic partner employee 8

Partners commented on how Mind made each organisation feel 'heard' within the project responding promptly and supportively to any queries or concerns that they had. This notion of supporting organisations aligns with how Mind wanted to be perceived in the sector, indicating a successful collaboration between Mind and sector partners. Although direct communication between Mind and organisations was considered successful, sector partners noted some challenges when disseminating communication to the wider sector. It was suggested that wider communication channels were needed to further the visibility of partnerships. Social media was suggested as an important component to optimise project reach,

"I feel like they don't have enough communication strategies, they [National Mind Physical Activity Team] don't have their own Twitter. If they had their own communication channels that would help with our promotion and increase the amount of people that see our work... we want to shout about our partnership with Mind".

Regional Network Lead 3

Regular and meaningful communication allowed for flexibility within the project and engagement strategies when things did not go to plan. The flexibility of project outcomes helped maintain 'momentum' and engagement in the project. The Covid-19 pandemic provided significant challenges for organisations with them unable to deliver intended meetings, networking events and proposed projects (particularly relevant to operational partners). Although organisations admitted that the reach of their project had been affected by less face-to-face contact, they were positive about the social media response they had received. Organisations appreciated the support and flexibility afforded by Mind during the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically regarding intended project outcomes,

"Mind have been great and are a relaxed organisation in terms of funded projects, sometimes monitoring and evaluation can be quite challenging, but Mind have been really supportive and realised the importance that each region is different and just let us get on with it. In particular with the challenges and changes [due to Covid-19], they've been good at

checking in with how we are doing, with the whole situation and changes with our original [project] aims. So that reassurance has been really, really good”.

Regional Network Lead

3.4 Summary of objective 1

Partners and organisations were unanimously positive of their relationship with Mind, their engagement, and the support they received throughout the project, and suggested that Mind’s credibility within the field of mental health was considered a facilitator to extend the reach of the project, and recruit and engage with organisations. However, meeting the demand for support from the sector was considered a potential challenge to Mind, with organisations and partners also noting concern regarding Mind’s capacity to meaningfully sustain long-term engagement with the sector. Barriers to sector engagement included organisations not having the additional time and resources to prioritise the mental health initiative work and struggling to make contacts with sector partners when the assigned individual to promote such initiatives was not available (or had left the organisation). Facilitators to engagement included meaningful conversation between Mind and organisations, understanding and flexibility of deadlines and key performance indicators (KPIs), and a willingness to communicate and address concerns in a timely manner.

Chapter 4. Implementing actions plans for sport and mental health (Objective 2)

4.1 Overview

This section aims to address objective two: to evaluate the effectiveness of supporting national strategic partners to implement their action plans for sport and mental health. During the Sector Support programme, Mind appointed four strategic partners. These included Sport and Recreation Alliance, Activity Alliance, UK Coaching and the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA). This section focuses on the **Effectiveness, Adoption, and Implementation** components of the RE-AIM framework. Four themes were developed from the data collected through the focus group with strategic partners and the interview series with the strategic partner. They were:



Theme 1: Successful implementation of action plans



Theme 2: A sense of responsibility for driving change



Theme 3: Increased focus on mental health support



Theme 4: The 'high performance' culture within the sector

4.2 Successful implementation of action

The majority of employees interviewed discussed various changes that had been implemented to support mental health, policies that were already in place and elements of the organisation's action plan (e.g., mental health and wellbeing being a pillar of the Duty to Care Toolkit). However, not all employees were aware of the term 'action plan' or details of their organisation's action plans for sport and mental health,

"I think also with these things sometimes it's the name of them. You're like "No, I don't know," but actually there's some things that filter through that you are aware of but don't realise it's linked."

Strategic Partner Employee 6

It was evident that progress was being made in the implementation of the action plan in how mental health support was perceived, promoted in practice and approached by employees and partners. The example below emphasises the point made in objective 1 of why the buy in of both employees and senior managers are important to bring about true change,

“We’ve always had things in place and what’s happened is they’re now connected. The connections are now thickening to such a point that they’re merged in each other and it’s immersed. So, often you have support and care for your colleagues in a bottom up approach where people just care about individuals and that gets so far and it’s either forced underground or it’s just not accepted by the organisation because it interferes with business, if you like, performance. Then you’ve got a top down approach which is that bit that can often be seen as “Do they really mean it? Is it a tick box? What award are we trying to win?” What we’ve got is that the bottom up has gone all the way into the senior stuff and the structural stuff has come all the way down to staff. So, we’ve got this really thick ingrained process where staff can talk about, you know, their situation. The organisation and colleagues just... it’s no different to if you like from being... breaking your arm or having an injury, it’s just accepted that somebody is having some time out and there’s no pressure on them. It’s all encompassing now.

Strategic Partner Employee 2

The focus on employee wellbeing also made notable progress within the organisation taking part in the interview series. Early on, employees were not all aware of the aims of the Sector Support programme. However, by the third phase of the interview series, it was evident that practice had changed as employees were able to list what initiatives had been implemented. These included but were not limited to: birthdays off work (not annual leave), formalised wellbeing committees with Terms of Reference; wellbeing questions to staff at the top of meeting agendas; increased signposting to services; online games during lockdown/home working; counselling sessions offered to staff extended,

“We have a number of things that are already embedded, but more recently in terms of our staff benefits package... We were always able to access counselling, but that’s been

extended to some more sessions if people actually needed it during the last six months. We do a number of social events we have at work. We're building a wellbeing calendar where people can dip in and dip out to different things if they want to join, whether that's again going for a walk at lunch time or having a physical activity buddy. We are as an organisation more mindful at the moment of how everybody's feeling."

Strategic Partner focus group, 3

Staff within the strategic partnerships generally felt more equipped, and more comfortable engaging in the topic of mental health. Employees considered the mental health 'narrative' in the sector to be more open, more transparent, and discussed more regularly, with clear recognition of its importance than ever before. However, it was commonly thought that more work was needed to embed mental health support across the whole sector. The following example details how more depth was needed in the implementation of action plans to understand the 'how' to achieve objectives to accompany the 'what can be done', *"it's a lot of people happy to be in meetings with great subject headings and a really robust agenda, but actually getting to the end of that meeting and assigning roles, tasks, task forces, projects to people. Even though we are weighed down I think just willingness to engage in something where you are able to receive something at the end of it, like a project, and say "I'm going to run with this because I see the benefit of it and I can see I can support it." There's a couple of different things that I've sat in on, a task force I've been part of that just don't move fast enough."*

Strategic Partner Employee 8

The relationship between strategic partners and Mind, highlighted in Chapter 4, was unanimously seen as effective for improving knowledge and aiding successful implementation of the action plans within the organisation (internally facing) and with partners (externally facing). The success of the partnership was attributed to good communication with a willingness to listen and provide support, transparency, and honest conversations. One partner attributed all changes they had made to the relationship they had developed with Mind, indicating successful implementation of the support received from Mind into internal practice,

“All of the work that we have done has been in the timescales of working with Mind. I do know that if it hadn’t been for the partnership and for setting up this, the stuff that we’ve done and we’ve changed wouldn’t have taken place ... I used the thriving at work toolkit as a basis to set up an action plan to ensure that staff were able to have that support from a staff handbook support. Ensuring that we developed a wellbeing policy, which we didn’t have beforehand. We’ve set up and made changes to the policies around employees and either when you’re going through employment and you’re letting people know they haven’t been successful or when they come new into the organisation. We’ve set up an employer assistance scheme which we didn’t have before. We’ve set up a wellbeing action group which has been running about two years and that was one of the first things that we did.”

Strategic partner focus group, 1

4.3 A sense of responsibility for driving change

The strategic partner who took part in the interview series was considered, by their employees who felt a mutual responsibility for driving change, to be shifting the landscape regarding how members and external partners provide mental health support to their athletes and organisations. Mental health is considered high priority due to the development of external facing projects such as Duty to Care. Development of the Duty to Care Toolkit and enabling free access to the eLearning resource for 4 months during the Covid-19 period facilitated wider sector engagement and feedback was considered very positive, evidencing a huge appetite for information around mental health support. Although employees saw themselves as drivers for the mental health agenda, they emphasised the importance of ‘sector buy in’. For example, employees pointed out there is currently no coaching standard for mental health support, as there is for other areas such as safeguarding in children and young people. Employees suggested that creating a quality assurance measure, or measures of competence regarding mental health knowledge may provide a tangible indicator of mental health knowledge in the sport sector and encourage its integration into coaching requirements and policy,

So CIMSPA is our Trafford Institute or professional standards and they could approach CIMSPA potentially and see if they can get some of their learning endorsed by CIMSPA. In order for them to remain current the idea is that they are going to need to meet a coaching standard and have X amount of points per year, i.e. ten or 12 CPD points per year, to remain

current at that high standard for coaching, a little bit like the mental health webinar. That's got CIMSPA points.

Strategic Partner employee 8

CPD opportunities are included the MHASPA course. Those who complete the course were awarded three developmental CPD points between 2017 and 2020. This changed to 1.5 points in 2021 to align with CIMSPA new point system.

The Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation is perceived to be successful in raising awareness for mental health. The strategic partners expressed a sense of responsibility to get the promotion of mental health, and continue the momentum of change, to the rest of the sector 'right'. For example, strategic partners questioned whether organisations continue to champion the Charter and get more signatures or whether it had fulfilled its aim in gaining commitment from organisations. It was perceived that most signatories sign the charter and want to know 'what can we do now'. Other organisations were thought to sign the Charter but not engage in the implementation of initiatives or action plans, and sometimes there is a lag. This example highlights how the strategic partners were looking to take the next step for implementing mental health support into practice, helping their partner organisations to implement action plans, and continue to push for change. The strategic partners took pride in the responsibility of what they perceived to be leading the way for change in the sector. Rather than an extra burden, staff saw the partnership with Mind as an opportunity to be the driving force of change,

I think one of the things that came out, like anything whenever you move to follow an action plan, there's always that side that somebody says there's a load of work to be done here. But I think one of the things that was interesting with the Mind one was when they looked at the action plan was how much it was an opportunity – and I remember somebody flagging it in an email. So I'd say it was quite a positive thing of we're in a really strong position. So in some areas we probably did things better than others, and so therefore there was a bit of getting together and making sure that that was possible across everybody.

Strategic Partner focus group 1

4.4 An increased focus on mental health support

Whereas employees were more aware of the work their organisation had implemented to support mental health of employees and partners, naturally, there were significant discussions on the influence of COVID-19 related government legislations and the influence they had on accelerating the focus on mental health support among the population (and more specifically within the sport and physical activity sector). The increased workload during Covid-19 and an organisational restructure were considered ‘triggers’ for employee mental health problems. During the third phase of interviews, the participating staff who were not directly involved in the Mind programme were markedly more positive about staff support during a recent merger (a second re-organising of staff) suggesting that mental health support had improved during the programme,

So where I would seek support I would get it, from a number of different angles. People would be willing to reach out or a healthcare package would have some counselling provided, or we could signpost as we know with different companies, or even our HR team would be in touch. So there’s staff who send out the mindfulness calendar, the action for happiness calendar, at the start of the month. We have buddy systems.

Strategic Partner employee 3

Staff concluded that it was difficult to disentangle the impact of COVID-19, the relationship with Mind and organisational restructures in the increased focus on supporting employee mental health. However, many acknowledged that the same advancements would not have been made if they were not partnering with Mind on the Sector Support programme. It was agreed that organisations had more focus on mental health because of an increased need to support employees and partners through the COVID-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, it was highlighted that government-imposed restrictions during the pandemic impacted the adoption and implementation of the action plans, and employees questioned if the action plan was embedded within the organisation enough to support individuals through an unprecedented time,

“Through the restructure that we had last time and through Covid – there has been a loss of people. Some of the people that had a lot of knowledge and passion and drive for the area have been lost to the organisation through the restructure and furlough. So that’s been a barrier that’s slowed things down.”

4.5 The high-performance culture within the sector

The culture within the sport and physical activity sector, and particularly within the strategic partner organisations was viewed by some, as ‘high-performance’ where employees are working at a high level and fast pace and where slowing down, or taking time to care for individual mental health, is not considered a priority, has associated stigma and/or can be perceived as a weakness. Although awareness of mental health has increased and opportunities for staff to access support had also increased, regular open discussions of mental health/problems are not the norm for *everyone*. The stigma that still exists in places within the sector resulted in some individuals being reticent to embrace mental health discussions. This point was reiterated in the wider sector when attendees of the webinar series also noted that conversations around mental health were not always easy,

“Not knowing whether you dare speak about it or not”

Webinar series evaluation survey

The perception of a high-performance culture was viewed as a potential barrier to implementing mental health support and action plans effectively. However, Strategic partners reported they could see the start of the perceptions of a ‘high performance’ culture changing,

“Whilst we’ve still got high performance embedded as a big part of our culture and we do want to perceive ourselves as high performing, I think there’s been a real change for that to be far more appreciative of not just being high performing in a job but being in a very good place mentally. I’ve noticed in meetings, whether it’s manager meetings and at a leadership level, the team’s wellbeing is almost the first thing on the agenda. That’s a really good part of the culture that filters down. It gives people the confidence to know that it’s okay not to be okay. That feels like a real switch.”

Strategic Partner Focus Group 4

A facilitator of the effective implementation of action plans was discussed as formal or informal practices of mental health support. As indicated in the quote above, it was the informal practices that appeared to make the difference to how employees perceived their organisation to be promoting a culture of mental health support. For example, normalising

conversations around mental health by asking how everyone is at the beginning of a meeting was more effective to employees than knowing they could access counselling support whenever they liked.

However, some employees also suggested a misalignment between senior management narratives regarding mental health and their role modelling of work behaviours. Participants from the interview series and the strategic partner focus group were keen that organisations did not ignore fundamental issues of workload and the culture of high performance. Although the messages from senior teams promoted work-life balance, and this was progressively noted throughout the series of interviews, controlling workload was not always feasible. For some, this was exacerbated during busy times brought on by COVID-19. Notably, many partners have continued to encourage 'normalising' conversations around mental health and discussed their endeavours to integrate such conversations into meeting agendas. However, although promoted by CEO's, employees indicated that strategies suggested by employers such as taking breaks, and 'switching off' in the evening were not consistently role modelled by senior leadership, which promotes a dissonance in the message delivered,

"Our senior leadership and exec are really good about creating that culture and delivering the message about mental health being important, but some of them are experiencing problems themselves because they're taking on too much or not taking breaks. You know, they are not taking time off. And while they're telling us to look after ourselves, if you don't see it in the people that are leading you it's hard to not follow that behaviour".

Operational partner 3

When senior managers themselves showed a balanced approach to their work, sent personal emails to the workforce, and actively engaged in mental health care, their employees felt they were able to do the same. Whereas employees emphasised their respect for the commitment of their senior managers to their work, they also highlighted that this ethos could promote pressure within the workforce. It was important to employees that senior managers were driving change for effective implementation of action plans. Further suggestions from the strategic partners were to promote case studies of 'real' people to normalise the conversation of mental health and not just from celebrities,

individual stories which people can connect to, and building a network of ambassadors that are 'on the ground' in the sector.

4.6 Summary of objective 2

Employees discussed the effectiveness of the project and the changes that had been adopted within their organisation to support mental health. Implemented examples included birthdays off work, formalised wellbeing committees with Terms of Reference, wellbeing questions to staff at the top of meeting agendas, increased signposting to services and counselling sessions offered to staff, and online wellbeing activities during lockdown/home working. An illustration of the project effectiveness was how employees considered the mental health 'narrative' in the sector to be more open, more transparent, and discussed more regularly, with clear recognition of its importance greater than ever before. However, all participants acknowledged there was still work to do to overcome stigma more broadly in the sector, with the selected strategic partner who took part in the series of interviews considered, by employees, to hold a responsibility for driving change. It was acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic had accelerated the integration of mental health awareness into the organisation, due to an increased need to support employees and partners throughout the pandemic. The 'high performance' culture within the sport sector was considered a potential barrier to implementing mental health support and organisation action plans effectively, however employees suggested they could see the influence of the culture changing. Despite initiating a change in culture, some employees felt a misalignment between senior management narratives and their role modelling of work behaviours (i.e., encouraging staff to take breaks but not modelling this behaviour), suggesting that although the project has been effective, further efforts are required to implement knowledge in the workplace.

Chapter 5. Effectiveness and sustainability of engagement with partner organisations and sector networks (Objective 3)

5.1 Overview

This chapter aims to address objective three: to evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of Mind’s engagement with partner organisations and sector networks to influence the national policy landscape. Focusing on Mind’s partners at national, regional, and local level, this section explores Mind’s engagement more broadly with the Sport and Physical Activity sector. Regarding the domains of the RE-AIM framework, this section incorporates

Effectiveness, Implementation and Maintenance. Themes developed include:



Theme 1: Organisational mental health policy and practice



Theme 2: Raising the profile of mental health in physical activity and sport



Theme 3: COVID-19 and embedding changes in action plans, practice, and policy



Theme 4: Mind’s long-term relationships with sector partners, and delivery of mental health initiatives

5.2 Organisational mental health policy and practice

A notable change in mental health awareness across the sector was observed internally by organisations and strategic partners (see objective 2). There was evidence of improvements in organisational policy that reflect change in how organisations consider the mental health of their employees both nationally and regionally,

“We have three mental health days a year in addition to annual leave, you don’t have to provide an explanation. It’s an encouragement for us to take three days off whenever we need to look after ourselves. I think it’s really powerful, a powerful message to us all.”

Operational partner 4

However, employers suggested that their ‘heightened focus’ on externally facing work had, at times, meant time and resources were less focused on the employee:

“I think we acknowledge how tough things were for our members before acknowledging our own staff and how they were doing.”

Operational partner 2

Organisations and partners also observed an improvement in the signposting of mental health resources and support structures, and to the language used when delivering well-being related messages,

“I can understand why they prioritise that [external work]. Internally it’s hard trying to understand how to get the tone right and recognise how to lead people, acknowledge our own challenges internally and better equip ourselves. we’ve had a real lightbulb moment with it [mental health] and how it is acknowledged in our internal meetings now. It’s embedded in the way that we think rather than something we keep telling each other to do.”

Operational partner 1

Alongside increased signposting, organisations have created various internal mental health and well-being support groups and initiatives to provide employees with the opportunity to prioritise their own well-being and discuss mental health concerns with their colleagues:

“We’ve really evolved the support that we had for our staff since working with Mind, because of our relationship with Mind and it was part of our operational objectives as well. In the last 18 months we have introduced a mental health steering committee, and is now an internal part of our organisation. We also have a physical activity committee and a social committee who together form a wellbeing action plan for the organisation.”

Operational partner 2

5.3 Raising the profile of mental health in physical activity and sport

It was communicated throughout the evaluation that organisations aimed to promote mental health with equal importance to physical health to their external partners and members. Efforts to raise the profile of mental health in physical activity was discussed in terms of promoting parity of esteem, improving strategies to increase knowledge, identifying mutual priorities, and promoting collaborative and multi-sector partnerships. Notably, organisations and partners suggested that collaborative working to facilitate change in practice was considered two-way and was needed to promote parity of esteem for physical and mental health within both sectors. Where the sport sector felt they needed

support from mental health services, mental health services needed support from the sport sector to establish meaningful changes in routine practice and embed policy,

“Rather than concentrating on just upskilling the physical activity workforce, it’s as much about upskilling the mental healthcare workforce. People who work in physical activity organisations know the benefits of it on mental health, it’s the other way around. I don’t think mental health organisations completely understand why being physically active can help a person mentally as well as physically”

Regional Network Lead 1

As part of their Universal Offer, Mind provided access to online training and resources for staff working or volunteering in the sector. Participants interviewed highlighted they were not always confident with their own understanding of mental health and recognised a need to improve awareness and knowledge of mental health within the sport and physical activity sector. Changes to practice in response to this need included organisations increasing mental health provision and promoting the training both internally and externally to partners and members. However, despite improvements towards supporting mental health in response to the eLearning, it was acknowledged that progress is still needed to promote parity of esteem and embed mental health learning into long-term practice and policy,

“I think some coaches still struggle with their role in mental health improvement, they’re asking why they’re doing the job of mental health professionals, it’s a really difficult conversation to have when they just view themselves as a sports coach, like that’s their expertise, that’s what they do, they don’t see it as improving people’s mental health.”

Operational partner 3

An important outcome of the Sector Support programme has been the recognition of the importance of physical activity for mental health, and the role the sector plays in disseminating this information:

“We are starting to see an emerging role for connecting health professionals who help people with mental illness with other interventions. How do we ensure that medical professionals are able to prescribe physical activity, to offer people this package of support and not just straight towards pharmaceuticals? We’re not there yet, but we are seeing activities being pushed because they’re good for mental health. We’re seeing a much

stronger role for prescribing activity, so I think we now have a role to publicly advocate how important it is to move every day, because it's good for your mind."

Regional Network Lead 7

A notable change in practice and in efforts to implement knowledge into action plans, practice and policy was the increase in collaborative working between sector partners and organisations (see objective 4 for collaborative working during Covid-19). Throughout the Sector Support programme, organisations worked with a variety of partners in the sport sector, the police force, local councils, mental health services, academic institutions, and various charities. By organisations collaborating, information was made more accessible to the wider sector. The regional network model was considered positive for promoting conversation around a system level approach to mental health, leading to changes in practice and facilitating discussion around policy,

"There was something about making sure that the people in the group [network] were all relevant, it's about reaching all those different corners and having some sort of outcome, a real clear plan of what it would achieve ... It was about a connecting network. I found this valuable, you get to talk to someone and then you're like "Oh we're trying to do this" and then you've sort of got each other, and you can move from there".

Regional Network Partner 9

In addition to improving mental health awareness in practice, organisations suggested that collaborative working between sectors could help facilitate greater change in mental health resource for the sport sector, and influence change in policy:

"I think for us an important part of this project is to try and work more proactively with mental health clinicians and organisations and connect up physical activity partners and practitioners with the mental health. Because it's quite fragmented, not everybody sees the value of physical activity for mental health and maintaining good mental health ... with people working collaboratively, those important changes can be made to how that link [between mental health and activity] is viewed".

Regional Network Lead 6

Communication was considered a facilitator for maintaining collaborative relationships between sector partners and organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond (see

objective 1, 2 for communication). Regular updates on project delivery and regular discussions around organisational and regional priority was considered a facilitator to effective partnerships, by improving connectivity between organisations. Systems and sectors working together was highlighted as a strategy to promote networking at a strategic level and promote collaborative working in practice. One strategy employed to promote collaborative working was organisations identifying common priorities between partners nationally, regionally, and locally. This strategy was considered to facilitate the implementation of mental health knowledge into practice, and increased the potential of reaching a common goal:

“The first exercise we went thorough was to identify two or three common priorities and that would be the main focus of the network going forward ... then we formed an action plan for us to go and work on individually but also collectively, you know, pool our resources, our knowledge, our understanding”.

Regional Network Partner 4

Identifying mutual priorities in collaborative working were suggested to contribute to sustaining partnerships and facilitating long term mental health project delivery (this point is expanded on in objective 4 regarding sustainability of Mind’s engagement).

5.4 COVID-19 and embedding changes in action plans, practice, and policy

National organisations and sector partners acknowledged the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted their plans to some degree (i.e., reduced the number of events and activities planned, and stopped face to face training and provision). The impact of Covid-19 on embedding changes to action plans, practice, and policy was discussed at times as a ‘silver lining’. Organisations discussed how changes to online information had increased effectiveness through improved reach, with a focus on ‘laying foundations’ for sustainable mental health support. Participants suggested that the restrictions of the pandemic facilitated an increased use of online resources and social media platforms to continue promoting the mental health agenda to the wider sector. Many organisations considered engagement with online resources to be effective, and uptake of Minds Universal Offer of the eLearning was considered successful. Changes from face-to-face dissemination of training encouraged the innovation of creative strategies to engage individuals:

“I think what Covid-19 has done is it has got people to think outside the box ...that’s where beautiful things came out like the lunch and learn sessions, creating videos of how to exercise in your living room with these videos, ... also the tool kits, I think without Covid I don’t know if certain things would have happened.”

Lived experience participant.

Despite a reduction in the number of delivered projects to promote mental health, many organisations suggested that the restrictions during the pandemic had accelerated a change in attitudes towards mental health (see also objective 2 and objective 4). These changes were attributed to an increased number of individuals experiencing mental health problems in part due to isolation. It was acknowledged that organisations increased mental health support because of an increased need to support employees and partners,

“I think pre-Covid there was a lot of buy-in [from the sector], but there’s always people that are perhaps are a bit dismissive of it [mental health], and I think Covid might have accelerated some of that change. You know, people actually maybe understanding it a bit more and it really is resonating with them a lot more”.

Operational Partner, 1

Despite positive changes in attitudes towards mental health and endeavours to be more inclusive, it was acknowledged that true culture change takes time. The lived experience group highlighted, in line with employees’ beliefs previously mentioned, there is more to be done in turning the ‘best interests’ of organisations into tangible initiatives and adequately supporting the audience they are trying to reach,

- *“When people organise things, they do them with good intentions, but they don’t speak to the audience they are trying to reach and it leads the target audience to become very frustrated, but the organisations are just ticking boxes”.*

Lived experience participant 3

5.5 Mind’s long-term relationship with sector partners and delivery of initiatives

Several factors were thought to influence Mind’s long-term relationships with sector partners and the delivery of mental health initiatives. Such factors were reflected through conversations around the quality of relationships between partners for sustainability, partners working autonomously, and the role of local Minds. Quality communication was

suggested by sector partners and organisations as being important for maintaining long term relationships and successfully sustaining delivery of mental health initiatives,

“We have a catch up meeting every month or so which is good to hear about the other regions. That’s useful. I speak to [Mind] once a month as well so I still have that dialogue and communication and it’s been maintained throughout the project; it helps us enormously”.

Regional Network Lead 3

Organisations agreed Mind’s credibility and regarded them as experts within the sector (see objective 1). However, despite the positive recognition of their involvement and wanting to continue with their role in supporting the sector, Mind were keen to emphasise the importance of organisations beginning to work independently and feel accomplished, competent, and autonomous in the promotion of mental health initiatives,

“We definitely want to be that expert partner who is supportive and facilitates this community of people to understand and better support mental health. What we don’t want to be is the solution to everyone’s problem, so that Mind are going to do that for us. We don’t want to create a reliance on us, we want people to be empowered”.

Mind PM team

Organisations were unanimous in their view that the support and engagement they had received from Mind has increased awareness of employee mental health and has enabled them to, to some degree, independently deliver mental health provision both internally and externally. However, there was a concern about the resource capacity of Mind to support the sector long term, with organisations not yet feeling confident enough to continue alone,

“We know what to access and when. My concern is around the resource capacity within Mind to support the whole sector, in a meaningful way, that’s just a real challenge for them.

With such a small team to be able to do anything other than basic signposting will be difficult. Working together in more depth has hopefully set us up and enabled us to be more self-sufficient, but ultimately, they’re the experts in mental health, and however we upskill [our workforce], we will always be a physical activity organisation.”

Operational partner 2

Despite being keen to continue working with Mind, organisations recognised that the sole responsibility of driving initiatives did not lie with Mind, and delegation of responsibility was

needed among sector partners. The notion of ownership was raised as a central component to ensuring long term delivery of mental health initiatives. A crucial element of ownership for long term sustainable delivery is organisational independence, where partners continue delivering projects and offering mental health support without continual direction:

“everyone gets that mental health is important, they need to look after everyone’s mental health, we’re at a space where most organisation have provision in place, there’s positive training, resources, support and signposting. It’s now about them taking ownership and that to become embedded. We need people to reflect on what they’ve done over the last few years, what they’ve learnt and how they move forward.”

Mind PM Team

To ensure independent delivery of mental health initiatives, funding is necessary for appropriate allocation of time and resource. Partners acknowledged that gaining funding was not Mind’s responsibility, and resource allocation needed to be directed from senior leadership within independent organisations. However, it was recognised that allocation of time and resource was preceded by the acknowledgement that the journey to embed mental health awareness within the sector was not finished, and a willingness to continue learning was necessary. Regardless of a willingness to continue to support partners, Mind’s project management team noted that maintaining the current level of involvement long term is not sustainable, and aim to have a more facilitative role in the future,

We want people to be able to support each other and feel more confident about that, I see our role becoming more facilitative in the future ... For example, in our elite sports meetings, we say “this is not our job to fix this, we’ll help you, we’ll be your cheerleaders, we can give you guidance, but you need to do this”. I think that is the change we need going forwards”.

Mind PM team

To address expectations of the level of required support, and to encourage the change from active involvement to facilitating guidance in the future, Mind aimed to update their universal provision to increase the sustainable support available to organisations. The involvement of local Minds in project delivery was considered important in the maintenance of long-term mental health initiatives. In most cases within the regional network, involvement and engagement with local Minds was less than anticipated,

“It’s a bit hit and miss when it comes to capacity and priorities of local Minds as to how physical activity is viewed ... Its difficult because individual Minds aren’t part of national Mind ... they [national Mind] tried to contact them but if their connections were stronger it would have made it easier for us because they know the priorities for the area”.

Regional Network Lead 1

In addition to funding 27 local Minds to deliver Get Set to Go across both phases, the Mind physical activity team aimed to further improve their relationships with local Minds and funded twenty local Minds to deliver the Mindful Monday project (as part of the Great British Week of Sport). Both lead and partner organisations from a range of geographical regions within the regional network suggested that engagement with local Minds would improve the reach of the project and help refine project priorities to the requirements in their geographical area (see also a discussion in objective 4 on local delivery).

5.6 Summary of objective 3

Effectiveness was illustrated by a notable improvement in mental health awareness across the sector (adoption efforts included improvements in internal mental health provision, such as the creation of mental health steering groups, wellness action plans, and ‘mental health leave’ days). The Sector Support programme was effective in initiating conversations around promoting parity of esteem between physical and mental health within the sport and physical activity sector. Engagement with the Universal Offer of eLearning was considered successful to improve knowledge and awareness of employees and external partners within the sport sector. Improvements in collaborative working between the sport and mental health sector were noted and are considered crucial for adoption of knowledge, changes to practice and policy, implementation of two-way knowledge exchange and maintenance of long-term partnership building. The regional network was considered positive for promoting conversation around a system level approach to mental health and led to changes in practice and facilitated discussion around policy. All national organisations and sector partners acknowledged that Covid-19 had impacted their delivery plans. However, lockdown restrictions facilitated an increased use of online resources and social media platforms to continue promoting the mental health agenda to the wider sector.

Chapter 6. Knowledge exchange and partnership building within the sport and physical activity sector (Objective 4)

6.1 Overview

This chapter addresses objective four: to understand how Mind can most effectively facilitate knowledge exchange and partnership building within the sport and physical activity sector at a national, regional, and local level and will focus on **Effectiveness**, **Implementation** and **Maintenance** from the RE-AIM framework. This section also highlights the successes of knowledge exchange and partnership building alongside who is involved to facilitate this and document the challenges of knowledge exchange. This chapter draws on all the research methods employed during the evaluation. Themes identified were:



Theme 1: Mental health support and knowledge exchange between Mind, organisations, and partners



Theme 2: Mind's role in knowledge exchange and partnership building now and in the future.

6.2. Mental health support and knowledge exchange between Mind, organisations, and partners

This section will focus on the impact of the Sector Support programme, including expected and unexpected outcomes and the experiences of those delivering and participating in mental health initiatives. Discussions focused on sector appetite for information on mental health support and working within Covid-19 restrictions to increase visibility.

Overall, the Sector Support programme has been perceived to have a positive impact on attitudes, knowledge and awareness of mental health in the sport and physical activity sector. There have been notable increases in the number of participants for CPD, eLearning and webinar opportunities, alongside an increase in the number of signups to Mind's newsletter. Feedback from the webinar series indicated that 97% of respondents rated the course as 'very good' or 'good' and 92% of respondents found the webinars useful. Examples of how the information was put into practice include managing personal wellbeing, tips and advice on providing guidance, and changes to policy and practice. E.g.,

By using the information given, I put together a Mental Health at work pack and communication for our team. Staff have fed back and have found the information useful for them whilst working at home.

Webinar Series evaluation

Respondents to the webinar evaluation survey were particularly positive about the format of the webinars and resources highlighted within the sessions. Practical advice was especially welcomed,

the single best slide was the Finishing Work checklist as it was a lovely practical thing. I've kept it saved and shared it round others (who have all said it's great). The whole webinar was very well delivered with excellent content.

Webinar Series evaluation

Sector representatives suggested an awareness of the importance of appropriate messaging and recognised that the knowledge they had gained throughout the project had prompted conversations around appropriate signposting of physical activity for mental health.

Collaborative working and conversations between the physical activity and mental health sector was an important facilitator of a better understanding evidenced by the next quote, *“When you start talking about mental health people move towards the complex end of what is going on and they're either frightened off or don't know much about it, there's recognition that the targeted stuff that needs more serious intervention. For lots of people its this middle ground with reducing common depression and anxiety and improving general mental health and being active every day can starve off some of those pressures and help you when you've got it [mental health problems], but that message needs to be clearer.”*

Regional Network Partner 3

Alongside intended outcomes of the programme, unintended or unexpected outcomes were also identified through the evaluation. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the initial programme aims have been documented earlier in the report, however, it was suggested that despite challenges, a 'silver lining' to Covid-19 has been observed,

“What has been interesting to observe is the response to Covid, it seems like organisations have started to accelerate their journey and involvement with the sector, support, and sector

influence ... because of those additional pressures, and having to support staff who are struggling or working from home.”

Mind PM Team

Representatives from Mind also suggested that during the Sector Support programme and the Covid-19 pandemic, the visibility of the organisation has increased, and this heightened interest and consequently increased the number of users of their online provision (eg., eLearning and The Mindful Monday project (funded by ukactive and European Commission),

“Mind’s brand recognition has definitely increased during this time. That was not a programme outcome we were working on ... thinking about the eLearning, we had a target of 10,000 people, and over 35,000 have accessed the course. It’s still growing.”

Mind PM Team

The perceived increased visibility Mind received, alongside the success of the Sector Support programme, had extended the reach of the project further than expected and resulted in an increased interest in CPD opportunities. The success of the programme has resulted in partner organisations aiming to collaborate with organisations outside of the sector,

We hosted the workshop and we had three guest speakers ... a colleague who had a clinical role within mental health of children and young people, somebody that worked with a youth charity who were very community based and a volunteer coach who had experience on mental health. We then got more people signing up to the network ... panel members were happy for their email contacts to be shared, so those people that wanted to follow-up and be connected after the webinar, I was able to connect those up so people could then make contact to their own circumstances or their local providers and maybe signposting.”

Regional Network Partner 6

In addition to initiating relationships with organisations outside of the sport sector, the success of the Sector Support programme has also been influential in fostering new relationships with other key organisations within the sport sector,

“We were able to partner with Forestry England, who we haven’t done a lot of work with before. We put together a video that is now accessible to everyone. And further to that we had a lot of partners get involved and say they want to promote Mindful Monday and be

involved. This Girl Can, Sport England, all the big players got behind it. It's been a great little project that's just grown so much from both sides, community delivery and sector support."

Mind PM Team

The perceived impact of creating new relationships both within and beyond the support sector has extended the reach of the project. Importantly, and in many cases, the impact of this increased awareness and brokering of partnerships has facilitated an increase in funding for sporting organisations promoting mental health initiatives,

There's a charity [applied for funding with] that have delivered some really great stuff that we promoted really quite widely, and we've then linked them up with different partners. So, it's a charity who've managed to secure funding to deliver various activities in parks and green spaces ...that's been a hugely popular facility Again, we've had boxing clubs in particular that they've noticed issues with some of their younger members suffering from mental health problems, not being able to train regularly, particularly during lockdown. So, they were quite quick out of the blocks and looking into that"

Regional Network Partner 1

6.3 Mind's role in supporting partners to deliver mental health initiatives through knowledge exchange and partnership building

Mind's role in supporting partners was reflected in three areas relating to the progression from willingness to tangible outcomes, dissemination of best practice, and key barriers and facilitators of knowledge exchange. It was agreed that Mind were considered mental health experts and were pivotal to creating and disseminating appropriate knowledge within the sector. It was suggested that Mind's role was to assist organisations in the translation from thought and willingness to tangible action by providing direction, knowledge, and support.

"We had this investment from Mind, we were all really passionate about it, but it was like what can we do? Now we have message and communication that makes a difference, mental health champions who make a difference. We've progressed from a group of people that just meet and chat into a group now that are doing something quite tangible."

Regional Network partner 7

Sector partners viewed Mind to hold a crucial role in communicating and sharing knowledge, highlighting success stories, enhancing connectivity between community clubs

and organisations, and signposting to appropriate resources. Organisations also indicated that Mind had a pivotal role in recommending ‘best practice’ and developing materials for organisations to disseminate to their employees and partners within the sector. Materials included CPD and training content such as the webinars, which was suggested to be influential in improving mental health awareness within the sector,

“The CPD training was identified as our number one priority. We felt there was still a big gap in education lacking for the physical activity workforce across the board ... so that enabled us with [the help of] Mind ... they had the [MHASPA] training available that [we delivered] as a live course for at least the last year ... we’ve tried to make it as accessible as possible. We’ve all come together to promote that through our own networks and our workforce”

Regional Network Partner 4

Key examples of how knowledge and best practice were shared between Mind and the sector are presented below:

- The monthly newsletter circulated to members (including organisations in the sport sector) by Mind was suggested to be an appropriate and useful strategy to disseminate relevant information on mental health support, guidance and signposting of resources to the wider sector
- Organisations and sector partners social media platforms (Twitter was considered the most influential) were key to promoting initiatives and sharing knowledge on projects, highlighting success stories, and promoting shared information between organisations
- Internal employee surveys were considered an effective strategy to encourage bi-directional knowledge exchange between organisations and employees, and to receive feedback on internal mental health support
- Regular and meaningful communication in a variety of formats facilitated knowledge exchange between Mind and the sector. Examples include regular meetings and phone calls, and regionally via the regional network
- Virtual conferences, training days and online Webinar / eLearning. It was noted that online events using smaller breakout rooms to network and facilitate discussion was effective in encouraging organisations to share best practice

Key barriers, and facilitators to knowledge exchange between Mind and sector partners and organisations were discussed throughout the evaluation. These are presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1. Barriers and facilitators to successful knowledge exchange between Mind and sector partners

Barriers to successful knowledge exchange	Facilitators of successful knowledge exchange
Inadequate or infrequent communication	Regular and meaningful conversation
COVID-19 related staff changes during project delivery – e.g., redundancies, reduce working hours, and furlough.	Regular signposting of appropriate and updated information
Staff turnover – e.g., regular point of contact or ‘driver’ of the project changes	Holding more than one point of contact within an organisation
Lack of clarity in the roles or expectations of each other	Setting expectations and boundaries early on in new partnerships, and creating regular and updated project timelines
Unreachable contacts at organisations	Designated individual(s) to facilitate conversation and disseminate information
COVID-19 reducing face to face training provision and networking	Multiple communication platforms e.g., social media, newsletter
Creating opportunities for initial ‘brokering’ conversations with new partners, or inter-sector partnerships	Senior leadership ‘buy-in’ at organisations
Lack of prioritisation of mental health agendas (either due to additional working demands, or reduced number of employees during Covid-19)	Investment of time, resource (including individual’s time), and funding

Several strategies to facilitate long term knowledge exchange and partnership building were suggested. Representatives across the country identified the regional network as a catalyst for successful collaborations between the sport sector and long-term delivery of mental health initiatives and instigating relationships with organisations in other sectors (e.g., health and social care). An important outcome of the network for long term delivery was highlighting opportunities for tangible change. Organisations discussed that the regional network was effective for bringing together key organisations to facilitate system change around mental health and activity. Regional representatives noted that networks engaging appropriate organisations within a geographical region facilitated communication around identifying mutual priorities. A regional approach to networking was considered an effective strategy to engage a broad range of organisations who could benefit from collaborative working,

“It’s [the network] an opportunity to come together and it’s probable that a lot of the partners don’t work in isolation in particular counties. Having a wide network has been

successful, you need that number of partners for people to dip into bits that are relevant to them. If the geographical area wasn't as broad you wouldn't have enough partners"

Regional Network Partner 2

In some cases, it was noted that the breadth of network was helpful to engage a broad range of partners to maximise opportunities for partners to network (i.e., Midlands, and South East of England). However, other regions suggested that the wide range of geographical regions reduced the impact of delivering long term mental health initiatives, as priorities and provisions differed drastically across the regions (i.e., North East and South West of England). Consequently, there is a need to adapt the regional network to facilitate regional connections, whilst prioritising appropriate local delivery,

"it has been successful [the network], but trying to spread it over such a large area almost dilutes the focus rather than improves it. For example, Cornwall and Bristol have very different priorities and provision in terms of access to green space. Sometimes they find it hard to see the relevance to them when I'm co-ordinating it from Dorset, and we have different needs here too, it's quite a hard ask for the whole of the South West."

Regional Network Lead 2

Consistent and effective communication was considered the most crucial and effective strategy to promote successful working partnerships and facilitate long-term delivery of mental health initiatives within the sector (also see discussions on communication in objective 1, 2 and 3). Successful strategies for communication were presented both within organisations, and for external partnerships. Internally, employers and employees noted the value of embedding mental health conversations in regular communication (i.e., as a meeting agenda, or in catch-up conversations between colleagues and/or line managers and signposting to support from HR). Improving internal mental health support was suggested to increase awareness of mental health within the sector, which has in turn increased endeavours to continue sharing best practice externally. Organisations noted that the regularity of conversation surrounding mental health had increased during Covid-19, and there was a collective endeavour to continue such conversations beyond the pandemic.

Regular communication between Mind and sector partners, and between organisations within the sport sector, was also considered pivotal in ensuring sustainable sharing of

knowledge and best practice. This was particularly relevant during the Covid-19 pandemic as spontaneous networking opportunities are reduced due to social distancing measures, and lockdown legislation. Organisations who acknowledged the importance of physical activity for mental health noted an obligation to share this information on social media, to consistently communicate knowledge and share success stories with their partners,

“I know our marketing team and comms team using our social media channels were always hot on making sure that mental health and wellbeing is publicised ... it’s making sure from a comms perspective we are consistent with that [messaging], and pre-Covid we weren’t great at it ... I think what Covid has presented us is that mental health and wellbeing of everyone involved in what arguably is the nation’s favourite sport needs to be front and centre.”

Operational Partner 2

6.4 Summary of objective 4

Effectiveness of the project is illustrated by a perceived positive impact on the attitudes, knowledge, and awareness of the sector. Organisations suggested they had improved their awareness of the importance of tailored messaging when delivering mental health messages and noted that implementing collaborative working strategies between the sport and mental health sector was an important outcome of the project. The perceived increase in Mind’s visibility alongside the success of the programme has extended the reach of the project further than expected, and the direction and support provided to organisations by Mind has facilitated organisations to translate a willingness to learn into tangible action. Knowledge exchange between Mind and the sector was achieved and implemented through several strategies including: Mind’s Universal Offer and monthly newsletter, social media, virtual conferences and CPD opportunities, and regular communication between organisations. The regional network was considered successful to promote collaborative working and deliver mental health initiatives regionally and locally. However, there is a need to focus on targeted local delivery to ensure long term maintenance.

Chapter 7. Implications and recommendations

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the key implications and suggested recommendations are included below. Recommendations have been organised into priority and suggested recommendations separately for Mind's physical activity team and for sector partners who are seeking to promote mental health awareness and improve long-term delivery of mental health projects.

7.1 Priority Recommendations for Mind's Physical Activity Team

1. Continue to work with organisations to ensure progressively autonomous endeavours to deliver internal (employees) and external (partners) mental health support. Examples includes, for Mind to provide direction (where possible) for organisations to gain independent financial support to allocate time and resource to mental health initiatives.
2. In order to embed mental health support into professional practice, continue to work with strategic partners to create a quality assurance or competence measure of mental health knowledge in the sector, and encourage its integration into coaching policy. UK Coaching were considered by their employees to be changing the landscape of how coaches and external partners could provide mental health support to their athletes and organisations.
3. To increase levels of support locally, facilitate engagement with local Minds and introduce initial contacts to regional network leads where possible. Stronger links with local Mind's was suggested as a strategy to improve long-term sustainable delivery of mental health initiatives and promote parity of esteem between physical and mental health through the bi-directional support between the sport sector and the mental health sector.
4. Continue to working with sector partners to update the Universal online resources (such as the eLearning provision and mental health resources) in response to new information and feedback from organisations, and advertise upcoming Webinar, CPD and networking events, to provide tangible guidance and support for the sector to facilitate long-term change.
5. Understand the specific barriers and facilitators for knowledge exchange with sector partners and organisations. Consider disseminating these key barriers and facilitators to partnerships and sector organisations to provide them with the knowledge to create and sustain effective working relationships. Attempt to incorporate such knowledge when

fostering new partnerships or maintaining existing partnerships (e.g., outlining roles and responsibilities of each partner early on).

6. Consider delivery of (virtual or in person when Covid-19 restrictions permit) conferences, training days, or workshops where representatives from the sector, alongside representatives from other sectors (i.e., mental health, education etc) are invited to network. Particularly encourage multi-sector collaborations.
7. Work towards optimal use of social media platforms. Encourage organisations to share stories and best practice with the wider sector via multiple media channels to promote sharing of information between organisations. The social media platforms of the organisations within the partnerships were considered key to promoting initiatives and sharing best practice. Mind should consider creating a social media channel specifically for the programme or incorporate physical activity initiatives on Mind's main social media channels to improve visibility of partnerships to the wider sector.

7.2 Priority Recommendations for Partner Organisations

8. Encourage identification of individual(s) to act as the contact point within organisations and consider including the work around mental health as part of specific job descriptions going forward. Employers noted that having multiple people working on promoting a mental health initiative was important for long-term delivery. It can be overwhelming to lead when the 'sole driver' of the network. This strategy will also help to eliminate the single point of failure if an individual were to leave the organisation.
9. Encourage senior management to role model behaviours supportive of a work life balance, including normalising conversations around mental health so such behaviours are viewed as acceptable. This will ensure consistency and multi-level buy in, necessary for effective change. An example could be for senior management to complete the same action plan as all employees as some employees were resistant to change when they perceived mental wellness action plans to be a burden on top of their workload.
10. Sector partners to focus on their employee mental health alongside supporting externally facing mental health support. Employers noted there was heightened focus on externally facing work which could reduce time and resources left to promote employee mental health. Covid-19 has also accelerated positive change regarding normalising conversation

around mental health in workplaces within the sport and physical activity sector and this momentum, with the support from the programme should be optimised.

11. Organisations should identify areas in which they need direction and encourage bi-directional knowledge exchange and collaborative working between sporting and mental health organisations to promote parity of esteem between physical and mental health. This wider collaboration may be achieved by inviting both physical activity and mental health representatives to upcoming events.
12. When initiating new relationships, organisations should identify common and mutual priorities early in the relationship, with timelines and an action plan on how objectives will be reached. Systems and sectors working together was highlighted as a strategy to promote networking at a strategic level and promote collaborative working in practice.

7.3 Suggested Recommendations for Mind's Physical Activity Team

13. Attempt to directly engage with NGB's to understand their needs and create a united and concerted effort to continue to promote mental health within the sport sector. Despite a significant amount of work aimed at promoting mental health and increased interest from singular members and clubs, organisations noted a lack of engagement from NGB's.
14. Continue signposting organisations to mental health resources and support structures to better support their employees. The programme was effective for improving how mental health is discussed within sector organisations and has started to become embedded in internal conversations (both formally and informally). Signposting organisations to appropriate materials early in the relationship, and continued disseminating of knowledge, and best practice via established media formats will maintain visibility.
15. Continue monitoring the regional network and provide guidance for regions seeking to identify additional representatives for more collaborators within each region; it may help to emphasise the importance of reaching mutual priorities within geographical areas to maximise the potential for success of mental health initiatives and projects.

7.4 Suggested Recommendations for Partner Organisations

16. Encourage organisations to design innovative and creative strategies to deliver messaging and disseminate information that can be shared more sustainably (e.g., via social media or online platforms). Partners and organisations should use these strategies to promote their

mental health initiatives and disseminate relevant mental health guidance to their members. An important outcome of the programme was the sector recognising their responsibility to disseminate mental health guidance effectively to their partners.

17. Recognise the target audience and deliver messaging appropriate to the needs of the audience (e.g., the sport and physical activity sector, or those without social support networks).
18. Organisations may consider creating employee feedback surveys or opportunities for internal staff to offer suggestions around internal mental health policy and practice. Bi-directional knowledge exchange between employer and employee was considered important to sustaining embedded mental health support in long-term practice.

7.5 The lived experience advisory teams' recommendations

The lived experience advisory team worked with Mind to provide knowledge to physical activity providers. Group representatives offered some reflections and recommendations for practice. This further insight aligns with the recommendations for the sector, and provide more specific/direct detail and context to embed change into practice:

1. Consider suggesting organisations create a lived experience advisory board to work with them to provide recommendations on how organisations can become more inclusive to those with mental health problems.
2. The promotion of physical activity as a strategy to improve mental health has improved, but further 'visibility' of promotion efforts is needed, e.g., hearing success stories, positive initiatives and sharing good practice from around the country
3. Organisations should under-go sufficient training to evidence they support those with mental health problems; consider the creation of an audit checklist for leisure centres to evidence their support and inclusion of those with mental health problems within the sector, and to highlight areas for development to become more inclusive.
4. Adoption of 'inclusion' methods (e.g., a buddy system, or allocation of quieter hours in facilities to facilitate engagement in those with mental illness).
5. Creation of 'inclusion officers' within the sector who liaise with those with mental health problems to hold initial conversations about activity, and aid engagement.
6. Improve regional reach by acknowledging that different areas hold different priorities, problems, and provision; targeted geographical initiatives may enhance engagement.

Chapter 8. Summary and conclusions

The overarching aim of the Sector Support programme was for sport and physical activity providers in the sector to become better equipped to support and engage people with mental health problems to take part in their activities, and support their employees and volunteers by improving their organisational policies and practices around mental health.

The programme was effective at reaching a wide range of organisations and partners within the sector. Partners and organisations were unanimously positive of their relationship with Mind, their engagement, and the support received throughout the programme. They believed that the support received had increased internal awareness of employee mental health, and improved external delivery of targeted initiatives. Quality communication and flexibility of outcomes were considered to facilitate effective partnerships. Communication was suggested by sector partners and organisations as being crucial for maintaining long term relationships and successfully delivering initiatives. Suggestions to sustain partnerships and facilitate long-term delivery of mental health initiatives included: clear and established agreements between organisations when working collaboratively; and regular and meaningful communication between partners.

The programme was effective in initiating and normalising conversations around mental health within the sector. Organisations noted an improvement in mental health knowledge, awareness, and attitudes, with a large proportion of participants highlighting the important contribution Mind's, UK Coaching and 1st4Sport online eLearning platform has made to these improvements. Despite such important and positive changes, employees, those attending the webinar series, and individuals with lived experience of mental health problems, acknowledged that more is needed to embed learning around mental health support into long-term practice and policy. Suggestions for improvement included increasing collaborative working between the sport sector and the mental health sector to facilitate two-way knowledge exchange, increasing regional delivery to address local priority, and the creation of a mental health audit (akin to the GP Pride to Practice scheme) for sporting organisations to become more inclusive to those with mental health problems.

Delivery of mental health objectives, and maintenance of long-term partnerships is challenged by a variety of barriers and facilitators. Central to these is the investment into organisational budgets to allocate time and resource to driving mental health initiatives, senior leadership buy-in from organisations, and the use of multiple communication platforms to increase the visibility of projects and share best practice with the wider sector. The regional network was considered successful for improving connectivity between organisations and promoting knowledge exchange and partnership. However, despite partners considering the breadth of the network was helpful to engage a broad range of partners, some suggested the broad geographical coverage of the regional network reduced the impact of long-term delivery. It was wholly agreed that targeted regional and local delivery was crucial for initiating and maintaining successful working partnerships.

Maintaining sector support and encouraging the sustainability of mental health provision within the sector is a long-term objective of the programme. A suggestion central to this objective is to continue to encourage and promote collaborative working between the sport and physical activity, and the mental health sectors, whilst raising the profile of mental health in the sector and promoting parity of esteem between physical and mental health. Promotion of physical activity as a strategy to improve mental health has improved, but further 'visibility' of promotion efforts is needed. For example, hearing success stories, sharing good practice, and hearing positive initiatives from around the country is suggested to improve visibility. The creation of appropriate channels to improve this is necessary.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the programme significantly. The health policy implications of this pandemic caused face-to-face mental health initiatives and network events to be cancelled. Throughout the pandemic, there was a considerable effort to continue the promotion of mental health support within the sector via online strategies. Despite a reduction in the number of in-person initiatives during the pandemic, many organisations suggested that awareness and attitudes around mental health had improved, and indeed accelerated, including normalising conversations, increasing internal employee support systems, and encouraging organisations to design creative initiatives to continue the delivery of mental health initiatives in line with government social distancing guidance. Participants were not able to disentangle the reasons behind the acceleration of the

advances made in mental health support within the sector between the effects of Covid-19, structural changes in many organisations and the Sector Support programme. However, it was agreed that there would not have been the same level of advancement without the Sector Support programme and the support from Mind. The future success of the Sector Support programme relies on the willingness of the sector (at all levels) to engage with mental health learning, to promote and deliver initiatives to improve mental health, and to continue to learn how complex barriers to partnership building and knowledge exchange can be mitigated.