



EU Work Plan
for Sport

2014-
2017

Expert Group on Health-enhancing physical activity

Recommendations to encourage physical education in schools, including motor skills in early childhood, and to create valuable interactions with the sport sector, local authorities and the private sector

Acknowledgements:

Under the chairmanship of Jean-François Toussaint (FR), the Expert Group work on these recommendations was coordinated by Paulo Rocha (PT) and supported by the European Commission (EAC/Sport). Beelin Baxter (UK) and Richard Bailey (ICSSPE) kindly ensured the final language proofreading.

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1. Introduction

In the White Paper on Sport (2007), the European Commission recognised that the time spent in physical education and extra-curricular sport activities are vital to children's education and health. Both are crucial instruments to promote their physical, cognitive, social and cultural development.

The European Union (EU) Guidelines on Physical Activity (2008) highlight that the decline in physical activity and the concomitant increase of the time spent in sedentary behaviours observed among children in Europe represent an enormous threat, which is responsible for several physical, metabolic and mental comorbidities, during youth and later life^{1,23}.

The low levels of physical activity among children and adolescents in the EU are alarming and have become a matter of great concern for policy makers. The educational environment plays a particularly important role in this context. It has been estimated that about 80% of school-age children only practice physical activity and sport in school⁴. The school must, therefore, be considered unique, since it is the only institution that can help all children to achieve, whether through formal curriculum (physical education classes) or through extra-curricular sport and physical activities, the World Health Organization's recommendations on physical activity for young people. It has been recognised that special attention should be given to the education sector and its relevant role in health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) promotion during childhood and adolescence. Schools, and physical education in particular, play a key role in ensuring that every child has an opportunity to develop fully his/her cognitive, social and physical potential.

At the EU level, the first EU Work Plan for Sport (2011-2014)⁵ highlighted the need for further action to promote HEPA. The Council Recommendation of November 2013 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors⁶ invited Member States (MS) to develop cross-sectoral policies and integrated strategies involving sport, education, health, transport, environment, urban planning and other relevant

¹ Martinez-Gomez D, Tucker J, Heelan K, Welk GJ, Eisenman JC. Associations between sedentary behavior and blood pressure in young children. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 2009; 163(8): 724-730.

² Tremblay MS, LeBlanc AG, Kho ME, Saunders TJ, Larouche R, Colly RC, Goldfield G, Gorber SC. Systematic review of sedentary behaviour and health indicators in school-aged children and youth. *Inter J Behav Nutr Phys Activity*. 2011; 8: 98.

³ Katzmarzyk PT. Physical activity, sedentary behaviour and health: paradigm paralysis or paradigm shift? *Diabetes*. 2010; 59: 2717-2725.

⁴ Woods CB, Tannehill D, Quinlan A, Moyna N & Walsh J (2010). Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA). Research Report No 1. School of Health and Human Performance, Dublin City University and Irish Sports Council, Dublin, Ireland. <https://www4.dcu.ie/shhp/downloads/CSPPA.pdf>

⁵ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:42011Y0601%2801%29>

⁶ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32013H1204%2801%29>

society sectors.

Likewise, the second EU Work Plan for Sport (2014-2017)⁷ gave priority to HEPA promotion and identified additional actions for the Member States (MS) and the Commission to promote HEPA. It mandated the Expert Group on Health-enhancing physical activity (XG HEPA) to produce recommendations *to encourage physical education in schools, including motor skills in early childhood, and to create valuable interactions with the sport sector, local authorities and the private sector.*

From a legal perspective, article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty provided the basis to support and frame action in the field of sport, recognising the educational and social relevance of sport in European societies. When promoting EU sporting issues and considering the mandate of the XG HEPA, relevant aspects should be taken into account, such as the quality of the physical education programmes in all MS, the taught time allocated to physical education and to other extra-curricular activities, the physical education teachers' qualifications, and the national strategies adopted in this context. The Eurydice Report – Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe⁸ looked carefully into some of those aspects. Along with its conclusions, scientific evidence and the recently published UNESCO report “Quality physical education guidelines for policy makers”⁹ were used by the XG HEPA to support the development of the present recommendations.

MS are encouraged to take these recommendations into consideration when defining new national strategies and curricular reforms to promote quality physical education, physical activity and sport participation among young people.

⁷ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42014Y0614%2803%29>

⁸ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/physical-education-and-sport/quality-physical-education/policy-project/>

2. Recommendations to encourage physical education as from early childhood

The early life period, from birth, assumes a fundamental role to acquire and improve motor skills^{10,11}, neuromotor capacities and healthy behaviours¹². During this period, the lack of appropriate physical and cognitive stimulation may lead to irrecoverable deficiencies or delays that will affect personal development and achievements throughout life. Participation in physical activity should, therefore, be promoted as from very early childhood with the aim of developing neuromotor skills, physical, psychological and social skills.

The academic and social relevance of physical education is acknowledged in Europe, being included in the formal curriculum in both primary and secondary education. This fact demonstrates the political commitment to physical education and sport across MS. According to the Eurydice report¹³, despite the fact that only half of the MS established national strategies to develop physical education, about two-thirds refer to the existence of large-scale national initiatives involving this sector.

Physical education and extra-curricular activities provide special environments to develop physical, technical and tactical skills, to ensure the enjoyment of playing different activities, games and sports, and to promote lifelong fitness and good health through the recognition of the numerous values associated with the activities performed.

After graduating from secondary level schools, young people should still be targeted and helped to maintain their healthy lifestyles through participation in regular exercise programmes or sport at the tertiary level (international standard classification of education levels 5 to 8). Universities, in particular, are considered important contexts for the promotion of HEPA.

¹⁰ Fischer KW. A theory of cognitive development: The control and construction of hierarchies of skills. *Psychological Review*, Vol 87(6), Nov 1980, 477-531.

¹¹ Myer GD et al. Training the developing brain, part I: cognitive developmental considerations for training youth. *Curr Sports Med Rep*. 2013 Sep-Oct; 12(5):304-10.

¹² Halfon N & Hochstein M. Life course health development: an integrated framework for developing health, policy, and research. *Milbank Q*. 2002; 80(3):433-79, iii.

¹³ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Recommendation 1 – Physical activity should be promoted from birth and throughout the life course, at all educational levels: early childhood, primary, secondary education, and tertiary level. The pre-school and school environments play a key role in the development of physical education and promotion of physical activity and sport.

2.1 Physical literacy and fundamental motor skills to be promoted before any school setting

From birth, motor skills are potentially part of each child. They must be stimulated to blossom out through situations, contexts and opportunities where children can explore their body and their environment, try out and consolidate their own motor potential. Regarding the importance of building up healthy attitudes and habits from the beginning, it is necessary not to miss opportunities to encourage motor stimulation and promotion in earliest childhood. Fundamental motor skills and physical literacy should be encouraged by all persons and institutions dealing with very young children before compulsory school.

The first very important persons to create such opportunities and to let very young children discover their own world are parents and grandparents. Advice and help, including local community based programmes should be offered to parents to ensure that they can create favourable home environments. They should be aware of the importance of this topic and encourage children's motor development.

In our society, young children, even before attending preschool settings, spend a lot of time in day-care institutions. These organisations can offer precious opportunities to give children more time to move and play, both in natural active play and organized activities. Physical activity and motor promotion must also be part of the responsibilities of these day-care institutions. If those are under public control or co-funded by public budgets, physical activity programmes should be mandatory. For private day-care institutions physical activity programmes should be highly recommended. An EU label could help to raise awareness for the topic of physical activity and motor skill promotion.

Preschool settings, parallel or following on from day-care institutions, despite not always having a formal physical activity or motor skill curriculum, should offer daily physical activity and moving opportunities. Physical activity and motor promotion must be a mandatory part of preschool institutions on a daily basis. Again, an EU label

could help to raise awareness for the topic of physical activity and motor skill promotion.

To encourage and facilitate the development of motor skills in early childhood physical activity friendly environments, age adapted programmes and activities, teachers and educators in preschool and day-care institutions with training in physical activity organization and teaching are necessary to fulfil motor promotion in these settings.

Recommendation 2 – All those in charge of children from birth and through early childhood should be aware of the important role they have in starting an educational process for motor development and physical activity. Parents, educators in day-care settings, and teachers in pre-schools should be assisted to develop their knowledge and knowhow for this topic, especially for sensorimotor learning and active play. Community-based programmes should be developed and offered to parents, educators and teachers.

2.2 Physical education curricular content

In early childhood education, physical activity should include daily natural active play, enjoyable games, participation in physical activity and sports which could be supported by music or storytelling. Along with the learning dimension, fun should be also prioritised in both physical activity and physical education context. Being physically active should be enjoyable and a natural part of any child's day. Willingness and desire to learn and participate will always increase if the activity is enjoyable to children.

During primary and secondary education, physical education should include a broad variety of different games, physical activities, and sports to maximise children's experiences and opportunities to develop personal motor skills, abilities or individual's interests.

Recommendation 3 – From birth and during early childhood, physical education should include daily active play, enjoyable games, and sports aiming to develop core neuromotor skills, physical, psychological, and social attributes. In primary and secondary education, physical education should include a broad variety of different games, dance, sports, and physical exercises. Physical activity at school and physical education should be fun and enjoyable to maximise children's willingness and desire to learn and participate.

While some MS present mandatory activities that are addressed by physical education, in several others, schools have the autonomy to choose major physical education curriculum activities. Very few MS present a mixed model where mandatory activities coexist with school autonomy, although it may better adjust national goals to local community realities.

Children and young people are able to develop their physical abilities such as speed, endurance, balance, strength, suppleness, coordination and agility through different types of activities adapted to their capacities. The different gender-typical maturation status, especially until middle adolescence ages, implies that several mandatory physical activities should be precisely introduced according to the age in order to develop each of the neuromotor abilities and skills when they can be best developed¹⁴.

Recommendation 4 – The physical education curriculum content should include physical activities according to maturity phases taking into account the favourable periods that allow the full development of neuromotor abilities and skills.

It has been recognised that school physical education and physical activity can play an important roles in the prevention of several epidemic comorbidities such as overweight and obesity, diabetes mellitus, and cardiovascular diseases^{15,16,17}. More recently, research suggests that low levels of sport and outdoor activity increase the odds of becoming myopic, a phenomenon reaching epidemic proportions among

¹⁴ Balyi I, Way R, Higgs C. Long-Term Athlete Development. Human Kinetics Edts. 2013.

¹⁵ Candeias V et al. Diet and physical activity in schools: perspectives from the implementation of the WHO global strategy on diet, physical activity and health. Can J Public Health. 2010; 101, Suppl 2:S28-30.

¹⁶ World Health Organization. Global status report on noncommunicable diseases 2014. January 2015. <http://www.who.int/nmh/publications/ncd-status-report-2014/en/>

¹⁷ Matheson GO et al. Prevention and management of non-communicable disease: the IOC consensus statement, Lausanne 2013. Br J Sports Med 2013;47:1003-1011 doi:10.1136/bjsports-2013-093034

youth in several world regions¹⁸. It is estimated that children need to spend around three hours per day under natural light to be protected against myopia. Physical education classes can contribute to this need to spend sufficient time outside. Moreover the objective of physical education for children and young people should also be to instil lasting habits of moving regularly in outdoor settings, such as natural parks.

Recommendation 5 – Outdoor physical activities and sports should be promoted at all education levels. Along with extra-curricular activities, the physical education curriculum should instil lasting habits of moving regularly in outdoor settings.

Physical education transcends physiological, recreational and competitive dimensions, being also responsible for the transmission of several important ethical principles and concepts such as fair play, perseverance, cooperation, equity, social cohesion, peace, respect of other's capabilities, and both body and social awareness. These values are important pillars to guide the interpersonal interaction and teamwork and, contribute to enhancing personal development and social skills. Extra-curricular physical activities can also play a role in developing these skills and promoting the values transmitted by physical education. By doing so, extra-curricular physical activities can help to prepare future societies that are based on the values of peace, human rights, inclusion, co-operation, solidarity and justice.

Recommendation 6 – Physical education and extra-curricular activities should foster an ethical education by teaching values such as fair play, cooperation, equity, equality, integrity, peace, human rights, and respect of others' capabilities. Through sport participation, they should also develop relevant skills such as teamwork, social inclusion and leadership, avoiding sport stereotypes.

During childhood and adolescence, school and family are the cornerstones of the teaching-learning process, supporting multi-dimensional personal and social developments. Physical education guidance documents should emphasize the promotion of children's physical, social and personal development, and their awareness for healthy lifestyles.

In some MS health education is a mandatory stand-alone school subject included in the compulsory curriculum. In almost all MS, health education concepts such as

¹⁸ Dolgin E. The myopia boom. Nature. 2015; 519: 276-278.

personal and social well-being, health and illness prevention, hygiene, food and nutrition have been developed in the context of other subjects like biology and social sciences. In certain MS, some of these topics are also included within the physical education curriculum.

The physical education curriculum should cover the topic of healthy lifestyle from a broad perspective, beyond the practice of physical activities, in close cooperation with other school disciplinary groups. Physical education classes should usefully instil and promote healthy habits and behaviours, like using stairs instead of elevators, walking and cycling, as well as discouraging excessive television and computer gaming and, instead, promoting "active" games for times when children cannot play outside.

Recommendation 7 – The physical education curriculum should include health education concepts like personal and social well-being, health promotion, and healthy lifestyles from a broader perspective beyond the practice of physical activity and sport. Physical education teachers should also cooperate closely with other disciplines in school to fully develop these concepts among the education community.

2.3 Inclusive approach

Physical activity is important for all children regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or social background. Everyone should be able to participate in the activities proposed, including less active and less skilled children, in order to prevent negative experiences resulting from inadequate practice environments and approaches.

In addition, children with disabilities or special educational needs should not be set aside. Physical education teachers should adjust the activities, following the advice from professionals with experience in physical activity and disability.

Recommendation 8 – Everyone should be able to participate in physical education and extra-curricular activities through inclusive, differentiated and adapted methodologies and activities, including less active and less skilled children. Children with a disability or special educational needs should be offered adapted activities and not be excluded.

2.4 Injury prevention

Physical activities and sport are essential parts of a healthy lifestyle. But, of course, participation in some of these activities also holds a risk. Although the relative health gains resulting from regular physical activity exceed the risk of injury, the burden of injuries related to sport and physical activities is substantial. About one in five injuries treated at emergency departments in hospitals is related to sport activities¹⁹.

Fortunately, there are many possibilities to prevent these injuries, for instance by making sport infrastructures and equipment safer, prescribing the use of protective equipment, adapting rules of the game, programming systematically warm-up sessions and by making injury prevention a core component in physical education, and educating physical education teachers and coaches accordingly. Safety promotion objectives should, therefore, be integral part of physical education.

Recommendation 9 – Planned and well-designed physical education classes should integrate safety strategies and prevention measures in order to reduce the odds of injury and improve risk management.

2.5 Physical education taught time

More recently, scientific literature has also shown that physical activity and sport participation is closely associated with school results, evidencing a positive impact in cognitive development²⁰, behaviour, and psychosocial outcomes²¹. In fact, several studies have demonstrated that higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness and motor skills development are associated with better academic performance, cognitive functioning and memory²⁰⁻²². Another important review²³ has also identified that achieving an adequate quantity and quality of physical activity is necessary to

¹⁹ EuroSafe, Policy Briefing "Promoting Safety in Sport: how to put actions in place".

²⁰ Haapala EA. Cardiorespiratory fitness and motor skills in relation to cognition and academic performance in children – a review. *J Hum Kinet.* 2013; 36: 55-68. doi: 10.2478/hukin-2013-0006.

²¹ Lees C, Hopkins J. Effect of aerobic exercise on cognition, academic achievement, and psychosocial function in children: a systematic review of randomized control trials. *Prev Chronic Dis.* 2013; 10: E174. doi: 10.5888/pcd10.130010.

²² Chaddock-Heyman L et al. III. The importance of physical activity and aerobic fitness for cognitive control and memory in children. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development.* 2014; 79(4): 25.

²³ Khan NA, Hillman CH. The relation of childhood physical activity and aerobic fitness to brain function and cognition: a review. *Pediatr Exerc Sci.* 2014; 26(2): 138-46. doi: 10.1123/pes.2013-0125. Epub 2014 Apr 10.

maintain aerobic fitness during childhood and should be defined as a critical guideline to ensure physiological and psychological health.

In this context, the Physical Activity Guidelines published by the World Health Organization²⁴ clearly stress that every child and young person (5-17 years) should engage in at least one hour of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day to ensure physiological and psychological health benefits. This activity should be mostly aerobic, and include muscle and bone strengthening activities, at least, 3 times per week.

Schools have a vital role to play in providing the opportunities to be active and to achieve the recommended guidelines. However, the Eurydice report has identified huge differences between MS regarding the minimum taught time in physical education. During compulsory education, the taught time seems to be low and present little variations, corresponding to 50-80 hours a year (i.e., ~ 1.5-2.5 hours per week).

The physical education taught time in primary and secondary education has been stable during the last 5 years, representing a very small percentage (about 10%) of the total taught time and about 50% of the time devoted to mathematics. In order to overcome this lack of physical education taught time, some MS (e.g. Hungary) have recently adopted new strategies to implement at all education levels a compulsory physical education taught time of about 5 lessons per week (i.e. close to the time allocated to mathematics or native language), thereby reinforcing the opportunities to be active and closing the gap to the levels recommended by the WHO. Denmark adapted a similar solution of 5 lessons per week of 45 minutes each, including physical education taught time and physical activity developed in other school disciplines.

All MS should be encouraged to follow these examples and increase physical education taught time to at least 5 lessons per week during compulsory education period. An increase in minimum physical education taught time may require adjustments in the curriculum structure and goals and would aim at realistic activities allowing teachers to address student needs at an appropriate pace.

²⁴ http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/factsheet_young_people/en/

Recommendation 10 - The minimum physical education taught time recommended during compulsory education period should be increased to at least 5 lessons per week (~ 5 hours). The physical education curricular structure and goals should be adjusted accordingly, defining tangible and flexible outcomes for each developmental stage, and suggesting the inclusion of realistic activities.

2.6 Exemptions from physical education

Exemptions from physical education present another important issue that concerns all of those involved in the school community. The reasons to justify temporary or permanent exemption from the proposed activities are usually health-related. MS differ regarding exemption procedures; while some MS require a medical certificate attesting the inability to participate, other MS accept written requests from parents or other teachers. Whatever model is adopted, schools and physical education teachers should analyse the exemption requests, in order to understand the underlying reasons, and involve parents as appropriate. Creative ways of accommodating the concerns should be explored so as to create the conditions to increase children participation in the activities.

Recommendation 11 – Physical education is a necessary part of school curriculum, and exemptions should only be granted in extraordinary circumstances. In most cases, participation should be ensured with the use of inclusive, differentiated and adapted activities.

2.7 Assessment in physical education

Personal progress, results and achievements are assessed in physical education classes in most of MS, both through summative and formative assessment methods. During primary education, this assessment mostly relies on qualitative approaches. However, summative methods are commonly used, similarly to other compulsory school disciplines.

There is a need to make students aware of expectations regarding learning and learning outcomes. The latter should be tangible and adjusted for each developmental stage. Students should be able to understand how particular skills acquired in physical education classes enhance their capacities to learn and are applicable in

their lives outside sport and recreation.

Effective and regular feedback is considered a very powerful tool to help improve student outcomes²⁵. Tracking learning during the teaching process should be among the daily responsibilities of physical education teachers.

Several MS have tried new successful approaches by using progress and achievements scales rather than quantitative physical results, which should be considered by MS authorities.

Recommendation 12 – Physical education should consider the possibility of including evaluation based on personal progress and achievements to complement both formative and summative methods. physical education teachers should provide effective and regular feedback, within defined learning outcomes.

2.8 Physical education teachers

Physical education teachers are key agents for putting physical and sport policies into practice. In the European Union, both generalist and specialist (with a Bachelors or Masters Degrees) teachers are giving physical education classes. In pre-school and primary education level, schools usually pursue a single-teacher model, where non-specialist teachers are allowed to teach physical education. In such cases, it is considered beneficial, as a minimum that qualified physical education teachers' mentor and support general teachers. In secondary education, a Masters degree is usually required from specialist physical education teachers. Physical education teachers should be role models and should be physically active as well.

Recommendation 13 – Qualified and specialised PE teachers should be preferred at all educational levels. When not possible, as a minimum, qualified PE teachers or certified coaches should counsel and support general teachers.

Continuous professional development is normally available to physical education teachers, thereby facilitating interaction with other disciplines. High quality training opportunities should always be ensured to allow physical education teachers to

²⁵ Hattie J, Visible Learning For Teachers – maximising impact on learning, 2012

expand their knowledge in relevant themes, such as new motor skills and sports, and health-enhancing physical activity, in order to improve the quality of their provision. Initial physical education teacher education should be constantly adapted to include such relevant topics, and also results from recent research and new learning approaches.

Recommendation 14 – National education coordinating bodies should promote quality changes in the training curricula of physical education teachers, both in initial formation and continuous education, in order to improve and expand those teachers' knowledge and competences in a variety of relevant subjects.

2.9 Monitoring of physical education

Monitoring the assessment or evaluation of physical education is legally required in most MS. However, it may be carried out irregularly or infrequently and there may be either no administrative system in place or there is a shortage of appropriately qualified/experienced personnel to facilitate the process²⁶. Monitoring inspections is usually undertaken by teachers, local or regional or national inspectors or, most commonly, by a combination of these groups. Where monitoring occurs, its rationale is generally quality assurance and advice/guidance. It is considered important that MS develop the necessary conditions to ensure physical education classes' quality and curriculum compliance.

Recommendation 15 – National education coordinating bodies and schools should support the development and implementation of methods to ensure the compliance with and the high quality of the physical education curriculum.

2.10 Extra-curricular activities and activities outside physical education curriculum

In most MS, extra-curricular activities, focusing on participation in sport competitions, physical activities, games and events complement the physical education curriculum. Offering a broad variety of extra-curricular activities is useful to increase choice for children and adolescents. In many MS there are good examples

²⁶ UNESCO, World-wide Survey of School Physical Education – Final Report 2013

to illustrate how such activities can be included into the daily school routine like active breaks or activities on the way to school (such as active transport). Schools, alone or accompanied by other relevant organisations, should be responsible for the coordination of these activities.

In general, it is considered that more can be done. The extra-curricular activities offer should be increased to encompass a variety of activities ranging from the recreational context (e.g., healthy breaks, physical activities and games) to the competitive context (e.g., different contexts such as recreational physical activities and games, competitive sports). Schools and tertiary level institutions, such as universities, could be encouraged to participate in inter-scholar and inter-universities sport competitions, to organise sport/physical activity afternoons or holidays sport camps. Students in secondary school and tertiary institutions should be encouraged to take part in these after-school physical activity opportunities.

Recommendation 16 – Schools, alone or accompanied by other relevant organisations should promote and increase the availability of physical activities outside physical education curriculum (e.g. physical activity and sport, active breaks) including the implementation of the active school concept.

3. Valuable interactions between schools and the sport sector

As explained previously, physical education and extra-curricular activities play a pivotal role in increasing physical activity participation and in promoting the adoption of healthy lifestyles among children and adolescents. Extra-curricular activities usually pursue similar goals as those specified in the physical education curriculum, but their main purpose is to broaden and complement the opportunities for young people to be more physically active. They should be included in the school remit, and must take into consideration the individual needs and interests of young people at school, reflecting cultural, geographical, financial, and several other conditions involving schools.

Sport organisations also play a vital role to address these challenges, as partners to complement the activities of schools, reinforcing the relevance of cooperation and complementarity as strategic values. The beneficial relationship between these partners should be promoted and publicly highlighted to strengthen valuable interactions. Sustainable collaboration programmes should be created, both in curricular and extra-curricular contexts, which may increase participation in sport

and physical activity. There is a wide variety of valuable models and successful programmes across Europe that address how this cooperation can be organised, which could be considered as best practices.

Recommendation 17 – Schools should seek to establish a cooperative framework with sport organisations and other local sport offers in order to promote both curricular and extra-curricular activities.

3.1 Sharing infrastructures and facilities

The availability and quality of physical education infrastructure and facilities, and of equipment in schools, impact on the nature, scope and quality of physical education programmes. Schools should have access to adequate physical education infrastructures, facilities and equipment that meet the standards of safety and hygiene, and that are maintained accordingly. It is obvious that the planning of physical education classes should take into account the available infrastructures and local environments.

Schools and local sport organisations need appropriate sport facilities to develop their activities in safe and healthy environments. There is a common interest to share facilities and, therefore, optimize the use of existing infrastructure to prevent building parallel facilities or leave existing ones underused. Such partnerships would be beneficial for regular physical education classes, but would also provide for new or expanded opportunities for after-school physical activity programmes. Institutional collaboration frameworks are needed to ensure that school and sport infrastructures are correctly planned and efficiently managed.

Recommendation 18 – Partnerships should be created between schools and sport sector organisations to ensure quality and availability of safe infrastructures and equipment for physical education, extra-curricular or after-school activities, and communities. These partnerships should ensure the efficient management of infrastructures and prevent duplicate or underused facilities.

After-school physical activity can be considerably promoted by making sport facilities of schools available after school hours. When schools have on-site sport facilities, they should be encouraged to engage in partnerships with groups from the local community and from the sport movement, to facilitate the access and use of these

facilities after school hours.

Recommendation 19 – School administration should be encouraged to open their sport facilities after schools hours to make them more accessible to local communities and sport organisations.

3.2 Label for schools promoting physical activity and sport

At European level, some documents or meetings have discussed the idea of introducing an EU label for sport-minded schools as a means to reinforce the synergistic cooperation between the education and sport sectors.

Luxembourg, during its EU Presidency in 2004, proposed to launch an EU-wide 'sports-minded schools' label that could be awarded to schools respecting key criteria, such as the school management, sports facilities and equipment, compulsory physical education, extra-curricular school activities and institutional links with sports clubs²⁷. In the 2007 White Paper on Sport, the Commission proposed *“to introduce the award of a European label to schools actively involved in supporting and promoting physical activities in a school environment [...] with a view to raise public awareness of the needs and specificities of the sector, [...] make schools more attractive and improve attendance, [...] and support health promotion and awareness-raising campaigns through sport”*²⁸.

Recommendation 20 – A label should be created at European Union level to be awarded to schools respecting a set of criteria demonstrating active involvement in supporting and promoting physical activities and sport.

3.3 Talent development

Special attention should be given to young highly proficient athletes aspiring to a career in sport. MS have been developing specific programmes and focused measures to particularly target these groups.

²⁷ <http://www.euractiv.com/sports/sports-minded-schools-idea-makin-news-214108>

²⁸ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0391>

At national level, most MS have been providing supportive frameworks to these exceptional young athletes attend special sports schools²⁹.

At local level, it is important that schools adjust their curriculum, class schedules, and develop several other favourable conditions to promote the integration of these students. Cooperation with sport sector organizations is also crucial to ensure more opportunities in this domain.

Recommendation 21 – School administration should create and strengthen the conditions to support and facilitate talent development of young athletes aspiring to a career in elite sports, by promoting the adoption of several specific measures such as flexible curricula and weekly schedules (allowing for sufficient time to train and compete), school enrolment, school transfer, remedial classes, flexible exams dates and tutor teachers.

3.4 Contribution of certified sport coaches

Certified sport coaches can also contribute to the success of the cooperative programmes developed between schools and sport sector organisations. Their experience, skills and commitment can support the development of new projects in schools both regarding physical education and in extra-curricular activities, to increase physical activity offers.

In order for their impact on a school to be sustainable in the long-term, these certified sport coaches should work alongside and up-skill physical education class teachers, rather than replacing them. MS authorities should, therefore, create supportive frameworks aimed at promoting participation of certified coaches, in a sustainable way. However, they should not replace compulsory physical education classes or compensate for a possible lack of physical education teachers.

²⁹ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Recommendation 22 –Frameworks should be developed at the national level to promote participation of certified coaches in cooperation between schools, sport organisations and local authorities with the objective of creating a sustainable impact on schools and complementing the sport skills of teachers. This participation should not replace compulsory physical education classes or compensate for a possible lack of physical education teachers.

4. Valuable interactions between schools and local authorities

School is not the only institution responsible for young people's physical, mental, social and cultural development. Several other stakeholders such as family, the wider educational community, the sport sector, social organizations, and local authorities share the responsibility to complete the educational task, working in close partnership with schools.

In fact, local authorities, in partnership with schools, share the responsibility for physical, mental, social and cultural development of young people. Active lifestyles are often discouraged by the modern built and social environments. Governments can facilitate population level behavioural change by creating supporting and enabling environments.

Local authorities have a responsibility to implement and coordinate cross-sectoral programmes to enhance physical activity and sport participation as well as to promote active transport in the community. They are also in charge of urban and regional planning, security promotion and environment protection, physical activity and sport infrastructure planning, management and funding, and implementation of light physical activity monitoring systems to assure quality information to adjust local policies and strategies.

As highlighted by the UNESCO Worldwide Survey of School Physical Education (2013), only about a quarter of countries have formally arranged school-community partnership 'pathways'.

4.1 Active transport

Recommendation 23 – Local authorities should promote the necessary conditions to develop active transport to and from school, especially reducing car traffic and speed near schools, developing safe routes for cycling or walking groups (“pedibus”) or active skating, providing bicycle racks and promoting active transport among all members of school communities.

4.2 Sport infrastructures

Recommendation 24 – Local authorities should develop efficient models to plan, manage and fund high quality and safe physical activity and sport infrastructures making them accessible for schools, sport organisations, local communities and citizens.

4.3 Awareness campaigns

Recommendation 25 – In cooperation with schools, sport organisations and other stakeholders, local authorities should develop and implement local campaigns to promote regular physical activity and sport as part of a healthier lifestyle.

5. Valuable interactions between schools and the private sector

The private sector companies provide sports facilities and services (e.g., fitness centres, private sport clubs or swimming pools, , golf, and sport events such as running races) for which a membership or an entrance fee is usually required.

The private sector can also play a role, alongside schools, in the promotion of physical education and extra-curricular activities. A close cooperation with schools and local authorities may increase the number and variety of programmes and activities availability, in particular in areas where physical activity opportunities are limited. In this sense, private businesses should be encouraged to develop with schools programmes such as sporting events, sport camps, regular sport programmes, novel extra-curricular activities and public awareness-raising events. They should not replace mandatory physical education classes.

The available offer could be accessible easily through modern technologies or internet websites. Moreover schools and private sector should seek to cooperate in order to make the available offer accessible for free or at low cost for schools pupils.

Some MS already have a legacy in this area and some best practices implemented by private sector organisations (including non-profit cultural or social organisations), can be highlighted such as the development of sustainable, collaborative school programmes (supported by specific funds), and the promotion of continuous professional development for teachers in technical and pedagogical areas.

Recommendation 26 – Private sector organisations should be encouraged to cooperate with schools or other educational institutions to develop a physical activity and sport offer for young people such as sport camps, regular sport programmes, extra-curricular activities, and public awareness-raising events, in particular in areas where opportunities are limited, and to make it accessible for pupils and school community. These activities must be framed by pedagogical principles, respect equity and ethical values but they should not replace compulsory physical education classes.

6. Monitoring

In its 2013 Recommendation on HEPA³⁰, the Council recognised that the availability of more information and better data on physical activity levels and HEPA promotion policies is an essential element to underpin better evidence-based policy. Therefore, monitoring provisions form part of the Recommendation. They were designed as minimal reporting requirements on general aspects of HEPA promotion that can be addressed by all MS.

MS were invited to appoint national Physical Activity Focal Points to support that monitoring framework. The Commission was invited to promote the establishment and functioning of this framework, in close synergy and cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), thereby avoiding duplication of data collection.

The Expert Group on HEPA considered that the evidence base could be further improved, by collecting data related to physical activity, fitness markers and sport participation especially for young people, including at local level. These data should include information collected by indirect methods, such as standardized questionnaires, combined with objectively measured data resulting from equipment like accelerometers and pedometers, and fitness test batteries.

It recommends considering the possibility to include it in the monitoring framework when evaluating the Council Recommendation.

Recommendation 27 – Effort should be encouraged to improve data collection on HEPA with objective measurements at the school level.

Recommendation 28 – The European Commission should report on the progress regarding the implementation of these recommendations.

³⁰ (2013/C 354/01)

7. Dissemination

The present recommendations will be presented to the Council Working Party on Sport under the Luxembourgish Presidency of the Council of the EU.

The Commission will explore the possibility of disseminating the results through relevant education-related channels at EU level.

Member States representatives in the XG HEPA will liaise with their national education ministries and other relevant ministries to disseminate the information at national level.