

Children's fitness testing: A feasibility study

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Objective This study aimed to determine whether it was necessary, cost effective and practical to investigate Welsh children's fitness levels in order to promote active, healthy lifestyles.

Design A multi-method study comprising a comprehensive review of literature, a questionnaire survey and interviews.

Setting This was a feasibility study commissioned by the National Assembly for Wales undertaken between October 2003 and March 2004.

Method The methodology involved a world-wide literature search carried out using metalib and in consultation with UK experts and stakeholders in Wales via a questionnaire ($n = 35$) and individual interviews ($n = 5$). The response rate for the questionnaire survey was 36.4 per cent.

Results The study indicated concern amongst experts and stakeholders about Welsh children's health, fitness and activity, but also revealed a number of misconceptions about children's fitness and fitness testing. The study highlighted that the measurement of children's fitness is fraught with difficulties, including methodological limitations, the possible negative impact on some children, and the relatively weak association between children's physical fitness and health. Additionally, utilizing children's fitness test data to inform policy and practice was considered problematic by the experts and stakeholders, and there was limited evidence from the literature that previously conducted large scale surveys on children's fitness have positively impacted on children's health, activity and fitness.

***Conclusion* It was concluded that a research project focusing solely on fitness testing Welsh children is neither necessary, cost effective nor practical. However, a 'lifestyle oriented' project including the monitoring of physical activity was recommended as increasing activity levels is achievable for all and the process will lead to health gains.**

Key Words: activity promotion • children • fitness • fitness testing • physical activity

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