

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

UKACTIVE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD

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"High-quality research and robust evidence are the cornerstones of effective policy, and while we know that physical activity is one of the most powerful medicines available to society, and we've proven that adding just small amounts of activity improves the health and wellbeing of almost everyone – all the resources and time spent investigating activity amounts to very little unless we know how to support more people, to be more active, more often.

The ukactive Blueprint highlights necessary steps to support the academic community and physical activity providers to put research at the heart of practice."



LOOKING AT THE FACTS

Fig 6.

Research councils and academic journals should reward and promote high-quality research into the health benefits of physical activity and effective behavioural interventions.



THE NIHR SHOULD COMMISSION A FULL-SCALE REVIEW WITH AN INDEPENDENT CHAIR, INTO THE HISTORICAL EFFECTIVENESS OF EXERCISE ON PRESCRIPTION.

INTRODUCTION

The findings of many academics and scientists, from the UK and abroad, have built a foundation of evidence against inactivity. A robust, comprehensive evidence base is vital for demonstrating the urgent need to encourage everyone to adopt an active lifestyle. It also helps us understand the most effective programmes, initiatives and interventions to support them.

The research community must continue to share insight and data that can support the decision-making of government. And we must now translate repeated lab-based research findings into real world services, with a clear two-way link between academia and frontline practice: one without the other is completely pointless. We need a constant process of refining the evidence to support practical interventions, which can be realistically implemented and scaled-up if shown to be effective.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

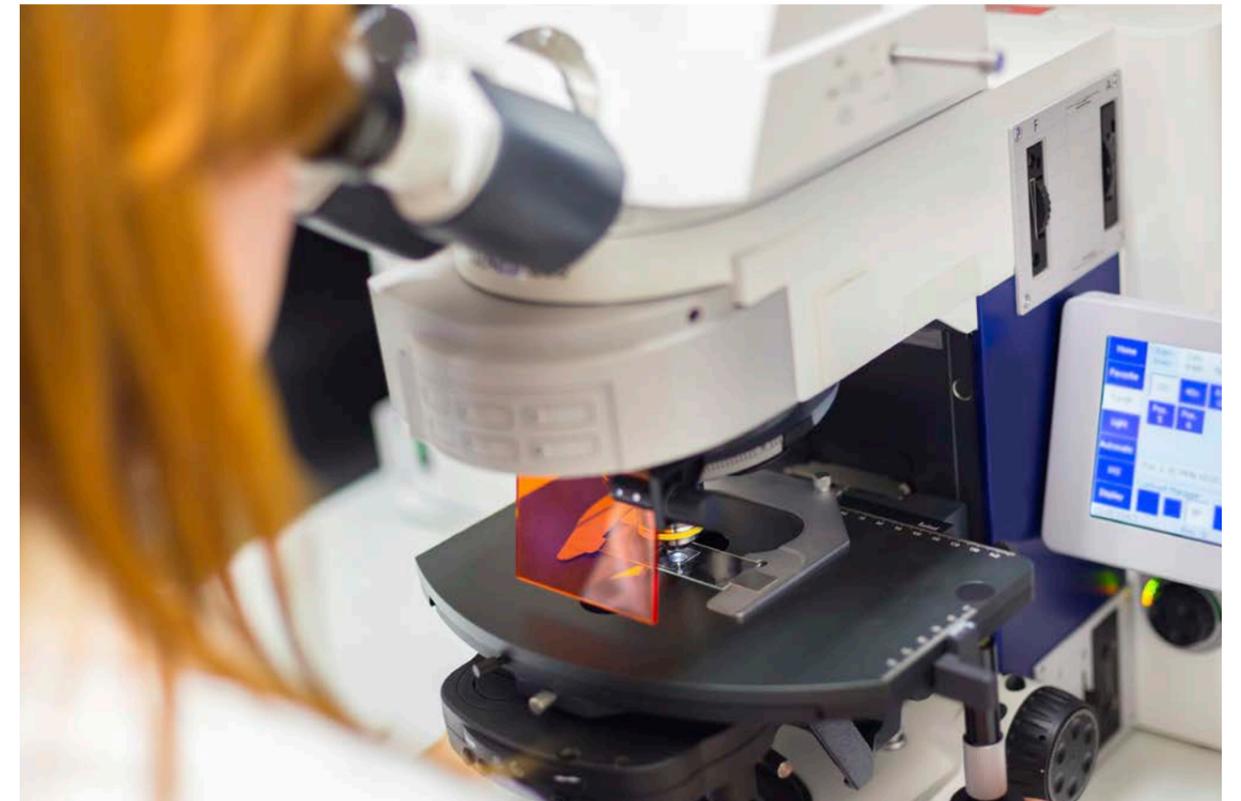
1 Powerful, robust research and high-quality evidence is the cornerstone of activity promotion. The first step of any behavioural intervention strategy must be obtaining a clear understanding of whether it will achieve its goal and whether it is the most effective way of doing so.

- >> To reward and promote more high-quality research into the health benefits of physical activity and effective behavioural interventions, research councils and academic journals should show a greater willingness to fund this research more regularly through dedicated funding programmes, placing an emphasis on research conducted in a real world as opposed to lab-based settings.
- >> All funded activity initiatives should include in their budget adequate funds for thorough, independent evaluation, in order to fully understand outcomes, efficacy and cost-effectiveness when compared with other programmes. Results should be published openly.
- >> The academic community should have to demonstrate the applicability to frontline practice of every piece of funded research conducted as part of any fundraising process.

2 Government is in a unique position to collate and analyse data collected across the entire UK, and should do so to gain a broader understanding of various trends and effective interventions.

- >> An independent research body or network should be established to collate, synthesise and disseminate data submitted from research studies across the nation. This independent body can also share noteworthy data with government and senior stakeholders.

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3 Like medical treatments, effective public health policy requires an evidence-based approach to understand what works and make constant improvements as new information becomes available. The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and other research funding bodies should collaborate to invest in real-world, practical research with a feedback mechanism that makes sure it informs frontline practice.

- >> The NIHR should commission a full review into all existing literature on the effectiveness of physical activity interventions, as well as all current spending on physical activity research and commit to increasing the scope of research in this area through dedicated funding programmes.
- >> Under the guidance of the Chief Medical Officer, The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, in partnership with the NIHR, should commission a full-scale review with an independent Chair, into the historical effectiveness of exercise on prescription. The review should highlight areas that need more research and funding; developments that can be made in practice; and clear recommendations as to how the 'miracle cure' of physical activity can be effectively delivered for the prevention, treatment and management of long-term conditions.
- >> It should be recognised that existing attempts to evaluate real-world physical activity services have relied on underqualified and poorly supported frontline staff, who lack dedicated expertise in research and evaluation processes. The importance of accurate data collection has suffered as a result of this lack of support, competency and resource. Any future strategy must address the need to invest in support for frontline teams to increase their ability to play fundamental roles in research studies, as well as their understanding of why such data collection processes are fundamental to the future improvement of services.