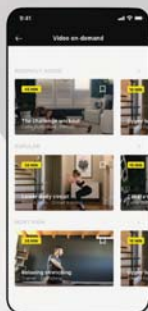
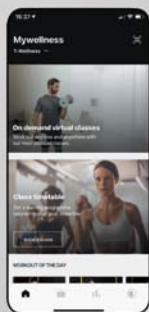


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United Fitness Brands

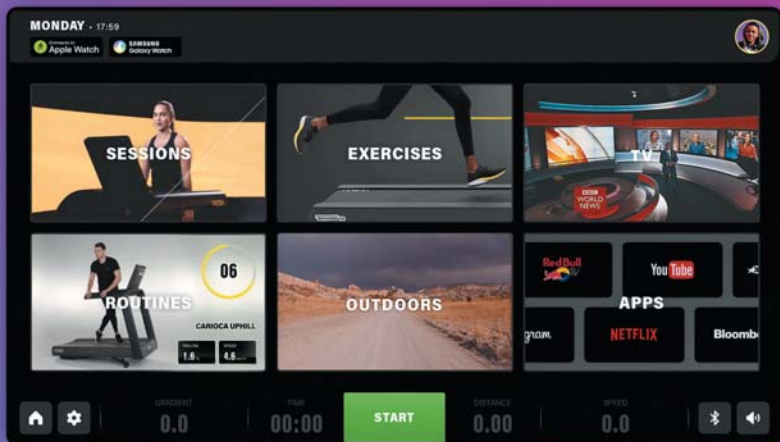
“We’re aiming to be a force in the
boutique fitness market” p50



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A matter of trust

As health clubs around the world start reopening, controlling COVID-19, while also delivering a great service to customers, must be an obsession for everyone in the sector

The fitness industry has done a magnificent job of establishing it can operate safely, with research from the UK, Europe, the US, Asia and Australia, indicating exceptionally low levels of COVID-19 association of any kind.

Now, as the industry begins to reopen, we've had the first known COVID-19 cluster and this has served both to highlight the sound COVID-secure operations being delivered elsewhere and as a warning to the sector about the importance of unity and trust to survival.

The club in question is Ursus Fitness in Hong Kong, which now has the dubious accolade of having been the first known health club in the world to be the centre of a COVID-19 cluster, with 150 people known to have contracted the virus after visiting.

In this issue (p16) we talk to Colin Grant, CEO of Pure Group and chair of the Hong Kong Alliance of Professional Fitness and Wellness Operators (HKAPFWO), about how the Hong Kong government cooperated with operators to control the Ursus cluster and avoid gym closures.

The HKAPFWO has developed a powerful relationship with its government, which immediately ordered the emergency testing of all 50,000 people working in the sector – over a two-day period – to keep facilities open.

To learn from the outbreak, the Centre for Health Protection in Hong Kong then worked with the government's electrical and mechanical services team to conclude there had been insufficient fresh air supply within the Ursus Fitness gym to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In a boost to the confidence of the fitness sector in Hong Kong, a subsequent single positive test at the GO24 gym did not lead to any transmission, in spite of the fact the person in question attended a group exercise class with 20 other people, reconfirming that safe operating procedures are effective in controlling COVID-19.

It's a harsh truth, but this experience shows it only takes one rogue operator to place stress on any industry and it's never been more important for everyone in our sector to commit to delivering on our bond of trust in maintaining safe standards to ensure consumer confidence.



SHUTTERSTOCK/RY PRODUCTION

Maintaining the reputation of the industry is paramount

It's never been more important for everyone in our sector to commit to maintaining COVID-secure operating standards

It's also essential we don't allow anything to happen to lead governments to question their support for our work, meaning every operator, no matter its size or facility type, must reliably deliver services in a COVID-secure way.

If anything is seen to be slipping, we must alert the operator involved in order to safeguard the reputation of the wider sector and if that doesn't lead to an immediate response, inform local Environmental Health Officers.

For the sake of industry unity, let's hope this won't ever be necessary and that all operators will commit to a level of professionalism that will enable us to trust each other, to stay open and to thrive together.

Liz Terry, editor
lizterry@leisuremedia.com

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Uniting the world of fitness

ISSUE 3 2021 No 288



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PHOTO: GIAN ROSSI PHOTOGRAPHY

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CONFIDENCE INSIDE



Write to reply

Fuel the debate about issues and opportunities across the industry.

We'd love to hear from you –
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Focus on big bold ideas to really boost healthy lifestyles

Create and innovate

Andy King, Link4Life

In the spirit of collaboration and working from the premise that very few ideas are new, I used LinkedIn to sound out the industry about ways we can strengthen both our commercial and social offering as we move towards re-opening.

I was so pleased with the reaction I'm hoping others will join the discussion. The areas for consideration were as follows:

1. Incentivise vaccine refusers

Can we target those who are nervous or reluctant about vaccination by incentivising them using leisure and cultural offers?

IDEAS: free membership, tickets to shows, personal training sessions, wearables.

2. Means meet needs

Given some people have reportedly been stashing cash as they can't go abroad, for example, yet might well be carrying excess weight and be in poor shape generally, is anyone designing products and/or services to help accelerate positive change?

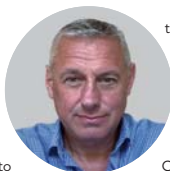
IDEAS: advanced payment membership offers, weight management courses, nutritional advice and healthy food delivery services, wearables plus advice, personal training bundles.

3. Needs without means

Can we design similar programmes

Could operators help families whose kids have been cooped up?

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/GENS HOSKINOV



to assist with the above, but targeting deprived communities and those that need help most? IDEAS: aim to be commissioned to boost their resilience.

Organise social prescribing activities with Link Workers and voluntary sector referral schemes using parks and community venues. Run community engagement events to co-create activities with the communities not just for them.

4. Family time

Can we help families be more active with a 'summer of fun'

for kids who've been cooped up for far too long?

IDEAS: kickstart a new era in family activity in centres and parks. Create programmes in the streets. Organise huge open weekends that offer a range of family activities. Run summer play schemes utilising Marcus Rashford holiday hunger funding and Sport England's £10m to open school facilities. Focus on big bold ideas to really boost healthy lifestyles.

If you'd like to hear how others have responded to the above call for ideas and would also like to share your ideas please get in touch: andy.king@link4life.org.



Members of the Nuffield health clubs teams switched roles to provide COVID support

“The programme blends together physical therapy and mental health support and is run in partnership with local NHS trusts



Stepping up to support the NHS

Dr Davina Deniszczyc, Nuffield Health

At this challenging time in our sector's history, I want to highlight the valuable contribution that many of Nuffield Health's fitness and wellbeing professionals are making to support the recovery of the nation from COVID-19.

Twenty eight of our fitness and wellbeing professions have been seconded to work with the Buckingham Healthcare NHS Trust to help the COVID-19 efforts, within family liaison, clerical, operational and administrative positions including COVID-19 swabbing.

The 28 are from Nuffield Health's Fitness & Wellbeing Centres in Aylesbury, St Albans, Hemel Hempstead, Oxfordshire,

Wokingham and Ealing and they're working at the NHS Trust's Stoke Mandeville, Amersham and Wycombe hospitals.

Their work is highly valued, as Tunde Adewopo, divisional director of specialist services at Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust explains: "Partnering with Nuffield Health locally to be able to bring some of their employees to work with us at the trust couldn't be more timely. This is supporting our medical and nursing colleagues, helping to free up their time and enabling them to focus even more on caring for our patients."

This is part of a programme across Nuffield Health in support of NHS trusts and builds on the COVID-19 Recovery Programme that is now running at 17 of our

fitness and wellbeing centres across the UK, ahead of a larger rollout to over 40 sites by May 2021.

The programme blends physical therapy and mental health support and is run in partnership with local NHS trusts.

Former NHS patients will work with a rehabilitation specialist for personalised advice and on a recovery plan, consisting of a six-week virtual programme of at-home exercises, before moving to one of our fitness and wellbeing centres.

We'll share the outcomes with the NHS and other healthcare providers.

With gyms reopening, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. I hope the sector's safety record, value and importance is recognised, so we can work to build a healthier nation. ●

HCM people



Meticulous tracing and reporting of cases show, time and time again, that fitness centres and yoga studios are some of the safest places on the planet

Colin Grant

CEO, Pure Group

Background

In early March, a small facility in Hong Kong – Ursus Fitness – became one of the only gyms in the world to be the centre of a COVID-19 cluster, with more than 150 people, including customers, staff and their close contacts, linked to the outbreak. Here we give the background to the situation and talk to Colin Grant, CEO of Pure Group and chair of the Hong Kong Alliance of Professional Fitness and Wellness Operators about how the sector responded.

Gyms in Hong Kong had only reopened weeks before – on 18 February – with some enforcing mask-wearing as a way to control COVID-19. Members were also obliged to use a 'LeaveHomeSafe' tracing app each time they entered the gym and fitness

classes in Hong Kong had various limits imposed, from numbers to mask wearing and distancing.

Timeline of the outbreak

Before the Ursus outbreak, major operators in Hong Kong reported they were remaining COVID-free by following strict protocols.

In response to the Ursus cluster, the government made mask-wearing mandatory in gyms (from Thursday 11 March) and on Friday 12 March – in a battle to keep gyms open – authorities ordered all 50,000 fitness industry workers in Hong Kong to undergo mandatory testing within two days (by 14 March 2021).

Everyone in Hong Kong's gyms must now wear a mask, except when eating, drinking and showering – a discipline already adopted in some other countries – it's also mandatory for staff to wear masks at all times.

In common with many countries, the Hong Kong government is also now mandating partitions and the spacing of equipment at 1.5m.

Some fitness centres temporarily banned members and PTs who frequent more than one gym, while others stocked up on rapid test kits to safeguard customers.

Many closed temporarily for deep cleaning and to get employees screened.

The rapid response brought the Ursus cluster under control very quickly and non-affected gyms were allowed to stay open throughout.

Establishing the cause

In a bid to establish the cause of the outbreak, a site visit was carried out at Ursus on 22 March between various departments of government, led by Hong Kong's leading microbiologist, Yuen-Kwok yung and

A photograph of Colin Grant, a middle-aged man with light brown hair, wearing a white button-down shirt and blue jeans. He is sitting on a red sofa with black cushions, with his hands clasped in his lap. The background is a textured, light-colored wall with some greenery visible on the sides.

Colin Grant is chair of
the Hong Kong Alliance
of Professional Fitness
and Wellness Operators

PHOTO: EMMANUEL

Ronald Lam, controller of The Centre for Health Protection in Hong Kong.

After consulting with engineers from the electrical and mechanical services department, Professor Yuen concluded that there had been insufficient fresh air supply within the Ursus Fitness gym to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

He said the system had no fresh air exhaust which made it impossible to dilute the viral air particles.

The outbreak has shaken but united the Hong Kong fitness sector and HCM spoke to Colin Grant, CEO of Pure Group and chair of the Hong Kong Alliance of Professional Fitness and Wellness Operators about the impact of the outbreak and what the wider health and fitness community can learn from this incident, as countries around the world prepare to come out of lockdown.

Q&A Colin Grant

How did the HK fitness industry swing into action to contain the Ursus cluster?

We contact-traced very effectively, and quickly introduced additional hygiene, safety and distancing measures. We also formed alliances to bring unity and shared learnings to an unprecedented situation, so that we could work together and protect the community and the industry.

How did the government handle the crisis?

We've been in close contact with the government all along – particularly the Home Affairs Bureau, which links with the Centre for Health Protection – to ensure we have all necessary information about COVID-19 cases and regulations, and to build trust that our locations are some of the safest places possible during the pandemic.

The government has adopted a suppress and lift strategy to manage the ebb and flow of COVID-19 numbers and has adjusted its industry prioritisation according to ongoing learnings.



UV Technology is used by Pure Group to sterilise phones for use in the gym

PHOTO: PURE GROUP

For example, while we were coupled with bars and nightclubs during the first phases of lockdown, once it became clear that there were no secondary infections in gyms and yoga studios, and contact tracing and safety measures were firmly in place, we were decoupled from them and permitted to remain open longer and re-open earlier.

You explained that the government is behind the industry – how has this come about?

Through the constant communication and proven adherence to standards mentioned above. The strategy of our alliance – the Hong Kong Alliance of Professional Fitness and Wellness Operators (HKAPFWO) – has always been to maintain an open and honest dialogue with key government officials. I believe this has paid off.

Tell us about the HKAPFWO

The HKAPFWO was started to unite a diverse range of our industry's operators under a common mission to drive safety and communicate regularly with the government.

Alliance members range from big box operators to boutiques, from large chains to single-clubs and from group fitness and personal training to physiotherapy.

This has been a very positive experience of sharing and improving together and shows the merits of unity in a crisis.

What learnings do you have to share from this experience?

Listen to others and find ways to come together and flourish – even when you're a group of competitors, you can make it work for everyone when you all listen with respect.



PHOTO: PURE GROUP



Find ways to come together and flourish. Even when you're a group of competitors, you can make it work for everyone when you all listen with respect



Measures including safeguard screens, testing of gym workers and increased cleaning have been introduced

How can the industry protect itself from rogue operators?

Our alliance has recently collaborated with two other industry alliances to initiate a first-of-its kind COVID-19 safety guideline and operator endorsement scheme for Hong Kong's fitness and wellness industry – called SafeFit100.

This initiative, with its own independent steering committee, sets out a stringent list of safety, hygiene, distancing, capacity and air-flow guidelines which all operators must adhere to in order to be endorsed.

Operators can apply for endorsement via www.SafeFit100.com, and once approved they will receive their official endorsement notice and other materials to show that they're meeting the highest standards – even going above and beyond government

regulations – and have been endorsed by SafeFit100.

This initiative is a clear representation of our intention to continually enhance and protect our industry and our community.

News of the Ursus cluster spread around the world in a matter of hours – how can the sector unite to manage these kinds of situations?

Unite is the key word. The alliances, the initiatives (like SafeFit100) and the meticulous tracing and reporting of cases that show, time and time again, that fitness centres and yoga studios are some of the safest places on the planet when stringent standards are met.

We must collectively drive awareness of these facts. Let them be our legacy and guide our future. ●



I don't think we can point to any club in America that's doing better now compared to pre-pandemic times

David Blitz

BlitzLake



David Blitz is focusing on expanding Studio Three



What's the connection between BlitzLake's real estate operation and investment in health and fitness?

BlitzLake is a vertically-integrated real estate company with interests in fitness and hospitality. One of our guiding philosophies is to develop projects that enhance our communities.

While we keep our gym brand, Studio Three, operationally separate, it's important to me and my partners that we open in A+ locations with strong demographics.

We draw inspiration from the areas in which we open, and it's important to us that our neighbours view our presence as a positive force in their community.

What are your ambitions?

To continue to improve lives in the long-term. The Studio Three concept is designed to make people healthier and happier in body, mind and spirit. Innovation is key to our success, and we'll continue to invest in the best technology and solutions.

We're passionate about recruiting talented professionals and giving them a path to success. It's one of the things that makes Studio Three special – a true investment in our team in terms of compensation, training and growth opportunity.

This gives our team confidence and drive to do their best every day and always reach for the next rung on the ladder.

Our longer-term goal for Studio Three is to scale the business while continuing to evaluate our product and adapt to the business climate. We want to scale in a way that allows us to continue offering the best product in every medium in which we work.



Studio Three's spin bikes, weights and benches were designed by Eric Villyency (the designer of the Peloton bike)

How many clubs do you plan to roll out?

As many as we can without losing our premium approach to hospitality, programming, design, talent, and technology.

Are you planning to expand internationally?

Currently, we're focused on US expansion, but we'll see.

What makes Studio Three special and different?

We strive to be a leader in all areas for our community.

First and foremost, we operate with a member-first mentality. Fitness is an extension of the hospitality industry, and it's critical every decision, programme, piece of equipment, even social media content, serves customers.

Our leadership team meets weekly to brainstorm ideas. Sessions always start with the question, "What do our members need right now?"

There's a positive, open stream of dialogue and feedback coming from our community that allows our leadership to respond quickly, smartly and with input (and buy-in) from employees.

Studio Three's supportive employee environment

also stands alone. Providing bright, open workspaces; investing in state-of-the-art technology and tools; encouraging team members to eat well, sleep enough, get fresh air and exercise daily; providing opportunities to give back to the community in partnership with local organisations – these are just a few distinct examples of how Studio Three stands alone.

And your kit?

Signature spin bikes and accompanying software, weights and benches were designed by innovator Eric Villyency [designer of the Peloton bike and the Soulcycle bike], whose expertise places Studio Three in a league of its own.

Why did you choose Gensler to design the new Chicago club?

Gensler Chicago designed the base building at 333 North Green Street where our club is located and I had a very positive experience collaborating with them on a prior project.

Their reputation is stellar, and they brought a strong vision, fueled by our vibrant Fulton Market neighbourhood. The space came out beautifully.



One of the best aspects of Studio Three is our loyal membership community. Our team has really come to know our members and where they are in their wellness journey

It's an uplifting, luxurious environment, and you can immediately sense that the interiors were crafted with intention – encouraging goal-setting, growth and a sense of family for our members.

How can you evolve with a focus on just three specific workout types?

There are several modules within each of our three disciplines – Interval, Cycle, and Yoga. For example, we have HIIT classes that focus specifically on certain parts of the body, or in yoga, there's everything from power to yin. There are endless possibilities.

Our instructors are passionate about their work and push the creative boundaries of programming. They keep updated and informed, so they can build variety into group classes.

One of the best aspects of Studio Three is our loyal membership community. Our team has really come to know our members and where they are in their wellness journey.

This also allows them to design workouts that speak to our clients, while providing a range of options to augment or decrease intensity.

How have you tackled the challenges of the pandemic?

In March 2020, we knew we had to continue to be there for our members and our team at a time when their routines were upended.

Pressing pause was never an option. The pandemic really pushed us to think creatively, and immediately implement our ideas. I'm incredibly grateful to our team, who never lost their passion, spark, and commitment.

We moved quickly to reimagine operations. First, we launched a live-stream offering, LiveWithS3, for real-time workouts with our instructors. Private virtual classes for groups were also available and emerged as a popular team engagement tool for corporations.

Next, we launched an outdoor fitness facility called The Arena in a vacant lot with 50 raised,



There are three disciplines at Studio Three: Interval, Cycle, and Yoga

JOHN R. BOEHM

Astroturf-covered platforms spaced six feet apart with programmes ranging from Yoga to Bodyweight Burn.

A covered indoor/outdoor area with heating elements – called LP Outdoors – came shortly thereafter and will remain an all-season venue, barring severe weather conditions in Chicago. We also began offering pop-up weekend classes outdoors in the parking lot directly across the street from our new club – to give our neighbours a “sneak peek” of things to come.

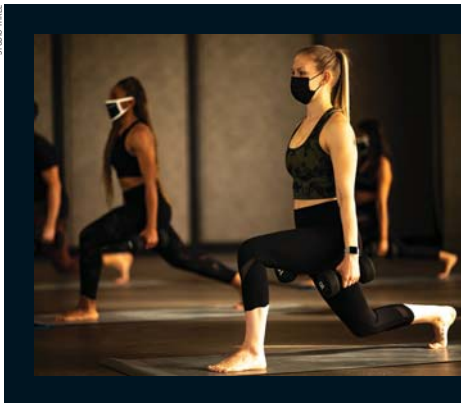
All the while, we were preparing our indoor studio spaces for reopening, consulting with medical experts, surveying members and going beyond guidelines from the World Health Organization.

What pandemic protocols did you adopt?

The Studio Three Way represents our commitment to health, safety and wellness – both inside and outside the studio, with investments in custom, full-length dividers and thermal, UV, and hospital-grade technology and supplies. The procedures, protocols and studio configurations allowed us to make necessary adjustments as we entered final construction for our new Fulton Market studio in Chicago.



STUDIO THREE



The operator has restarted group classes

We also launched S3 Reserve, a new booking platform available to existing members. Clients could reserve time in 45-minute blocks to individually access the Interval, Cycle and Yoga studios and the equipment available in each.

Members had the option to follow a 'workout of the day', take a pre-recorded, high-energy spin class broadcast in the cycle room, stream LiveWithS3 classes or do their own thing, with specially curated playlists. Now we're able to accommodate group fitness classes again, we've phased out S3 Reserve, but it provided a lifeline to our members at a time when they needed us the most.

How are your income levels when compared to pre-pandemic?

I don't think we can point to any club in America that's doing better now compared to pre-pandemic times.

Studio Three has not been immune to the business challenges brought on by COVID-19, but we're grateful to have been able to continue operations, keep our team members employed, and provide a critical wellness outlet at a time when people have needed it the most.

You started the boutique operators association – what prompted you to do this and what are your goals?

We have tremendous respect for our colleagues at gyms of all sizes. I co-founded the Chicago Boutique Fitness Alliance as a way of advocating for the smaller gyms across all of the city's 77 neighborhoods, which may not have as much access to resources.

Collectively, the alliance represents 25,000+ jobs and hundreds of thousands of clients. Together, we're a unified voice with city and state leaders in advocating for our businesses. We also share resources, best practice and ideas in the spirit of keeping our industry alive during these unprecedented times.

Does the industry have enough status with the US government?

Health literacy among the American public has never been more critical, and our leaders have made good strides with regard to awareness of physical and mental health, as well as the dangers of obesity.

There are always opportunities to do more, and I think our leaders can lean on the fitness industry for innovation, programming ideas, and roll-outs in major cities throughout the US.

What's the most valuable lesson you've learned since the start of the pandemic?

It has been a year of lessons, but perhaps one of the most evident takeaways is how important it is to take care of each other. Everyone has struggled in their own way over the past year, and small gestures and sacrifices go a long way. We've worked very hard to keep our team and clients together. This connectivity has helped all of us immeasurably.

RSG flexes brands with global John Reed and Gold's Gym openings

Rainer Schaller's RSG Group has opened a John Reed Fitness club in downtown Los Angeles – the first in North America.

Located in the city's vibrant South Park neighbourhood, the 33,000sq ft, high-end club combines functional design with a club-like atmosphere. It will offer free weights areas,

cardio and strength zones, functional training and a wide range of boutique-style classes such as indoor cycling, HIIT, pilates, barre, dance and yoga.

The location of the first John Reed club in the US suggests that RSG – led by Rainer Schaller, the founder of budget gym megabrand McFIT – is setting out on a cluster approach for its Northern American operations.

Robert Hull, club manager, John Reed Los Angeles, said: "John Reed LA offers our members training in an environment that is immersive, elevated and inclusive."

The site is the 31st John Reed-branded club globally and is part of the company's worldwide expansion plans.

As well as expanding John Reed's footprint to North America, RSG is also introducing



The 33,000sq ft, high-end club offers functional design

Gold's Gym to the German market, with the opening of a flagship studio in the capital city Berlin any day now. This will also be the first Gold's Gym club to be operated by RSG in Europe.

RSG, already a leader in the European fitness market,

became a global player last year, following its acquisition of Gold's Gym for US\$100m.

Its portfolio comprises 17 fitness brands – including McFIT, High5 and Cyberotics.

More: http://lei.sr/X83Rn_H



THOMAS KUNZ/GETTY IMAGES



John Reed LA offers our members training in an immersive environment

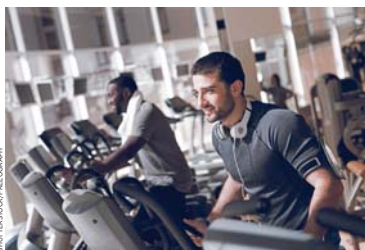
Robert Hull

German sector remains robust – has lost just 11.6 per cent of members

The German health club industry has weathered the effects of the pandemic better than many other countries, despite widespread lockdowns and disruption, according to figures just published by industry body, DSSV.

The organisation found the total number of members of health clubs in Germany declined by only 11.6 per cent during 2020, leaving the nation with 10.31 million gym members. The attrition rate means overall market penetration fell from 14 per cent in 2019 to 12.4 per cent.

While there were some permanent closures, the



SHUTTERSTOCK/FREEGRIAN

There are now 9,538 health clubs in Germany

number of health clubs fell by just 1.4 per cent during 2020 – there are now 9,538 health clubs in the country.

Other headline figures from the report, which charts

the health of the German fitness industry, show the industry generated revenues of €4.16bn during 2020 – a 24.5 per cent fall from the €5.51bn figure in 2019.



The number of health clubs fell by just 1.4 per cent during 2020 and the industry generated revenues of €4.16bn – a 24.5 per cent fall from the €5.51bn figure in 2019

DSSV report

Contracts in German gyms are typically more binding, so operators have continued to collect dues during lockdown.

More: http://lei.sr/x2j2n_H

Office for Health Promotion to tackle lifestyle diseases in UK

The UK government has launched a new Office for Health Promotion, designed to lead efforts to improve the nation's physical and mental health.

Tasked with promoting physical activity, tackling obesity and improving mental health, the office is modelled on similar schemes around the world, such as Singapore's "health promotion board".

Launched in response to the pandemic – which has exposed the severity of the UK's poor public health when it comes to preventable diseases – the office will address and tackle these public health issues across all ages.

Its remit will be to "systematically tackle

SHUTTERSTOCK/ALEXANDROS HOVALIOS



The office will be crucial in tackling the causes of poor health

Boris Johnson

the top preventable risk factors causing death and ill health in the UK", by designing, implementing and tracking delivery policy across government.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said: "COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance



SHUTTERSTOCK/ELENA NIKHOREVA

The office will design, implement and track policies

of physical health in our ability to tackle such illnesses, and we must continue to help people to lead healthy lives so that we can all better prevent and fight illnesses.

"The Office for Health Promotion will be crucial in tackling the causes, not just

the symptoms, of poor health and improving prevention of illnesses and disease."

The office will recruit an "expert lead", reporting jointly to the Health Secretary and CMO Chris Whitty.

More: http://lei.sr/D7v4C_H

Xponential acquires Rumble, grows portfolio to nine brands

Boutique franchise business Xponential Fitness has added boxing studio operator Rumble to its portfolio of brands.

Rumble delivers 45-minute, 10-round, full-body strength

and conditioning workouts crafted around specially designed water-filled, teardrop-style boxing bags.

The company opened its first site in New York in 2017 and has since expanded to Los Angeles, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Palo Alto, and San Francisco.

Anthony Geisler, CEO of Xponential Fitness, said: "With its premium boxing experience, virtual workout platform and celebrity reach, Rumble is a fantastic fit for our lineup of boutique fitness brands."

Rumble is the ninth brand in the group's portfolio.

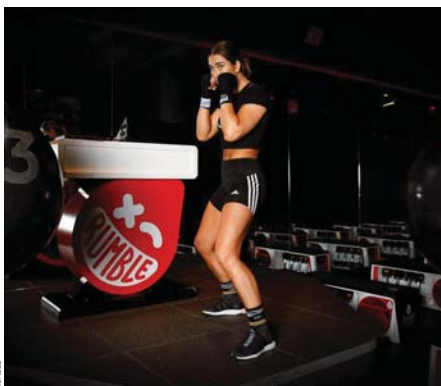
More: http://lei.sr/r5a4m_H



Xponential Fitness



Rumble is a fantastic fit for our lineup of boutique brands
Anthony Geisler



RUMBLE

Rumble opened its first site in New York City in 2017

Research: face masks have 10 per cent impact on intense exercise

A small-scale study has found wearing a face mask during intense exercise may have a modest effect on the body's ability to perform.

The study, published in the *European Respiratory Journal*, found that wearing a face mask reduced the participants' ability to

perform vigorous exercise by about 10 per cent, a level the study's authors deemed to be a "significant but modest worsening of spirometry and cardiorespiratory parameters at rest and peak exercise".

Researchers said this 'modest' reduction meant that wearing masks, even during peak exercise sessions in an indoor setting, would be 'safe'.

For the research, 12 healthy men and women underwent three cardiopulmonary exercise tests – one without a mask, one with surgical mask and another with FFP2 mask. The thicker FFP2 mask resulted in a 10 per cent reduction in peak oxygen uptake, with the surgical mask having a smaller impact.

In their conclusion researchers at the Centro Cardiologico Monzino in Milan



A thicker mask reduced peak oxygen uptake by 10 per cent

said: "The effect is driven by a ventilation reduction due to an increased airflow resistance.

"However, since exercise ventilatory limitation is far from being reached, their use is safe even during maximal exercise."

Responding to the research, ukactive said the study was "limited" and that much wider research was needed before it could inform how health clubs and fitness facilities operate.

More: http://lei.r/j9U7e_H



Since exercise ventilatory limitation is far from being reached, their use is safe even during maximal exercise, with a slight reduction in performance

Centro Cardiologico Monzino

Total Fitness enters CVA, but says 'majority of clubs' will reopen

Total Fitness in the UK is entering into a company voluntary arrangement (CVA), after being hit hard by the pandemic lockdowns.

The company, which has 17 clubs in the north of England and Wales, said it was now seeking the assistance of all partners – including landlords and suppliers – to try and secure a future for the business.

Total Fitness in Huddersfield will close permanently, but the company said the remainder of facilities would be unaffected.

A spokesperson told HCM: "The COVID-19 crisis has been hugely challenging for many industries, particularly



Total Fitness will reopen all but one of its 17 clubs

for those that have been closed for long periods of time, such as the fitness industry. Total Fitness is no exception and is now seeking the assistance of all partners

(landlords and suppliers) to support the strong, long-term future of the business by launching a CVA.

"The CVA will not have an impact on the ongoing

The CVA will not have an impact on the ongoing operations for the majority of our clubs or the 12th April 2021 reopening in England or Wales

Total Fitness

operations for the majority of our clubs or the 12th April 2021 reopening in England or Wales."

More: http://lei.r/d9j7h_H

Gym Group has created £1.8bn of social value since 2016

Budget fitness operator The Gym Group has generated £1.8bn in social value since 2016.

Pre-pandemic, the company – which operates 186 gyms around the UK – generated £490 in social value per member per year, equivalent to an average of £3m per site.

The social value generated by each site grew each year driven by increased member usage, until lockdowns reduced overall member visits in 2020.

The figure comes from a study by Sheffield Hallam University, which establishes The Gym Group as the first private-sector UK company to commission an analysis of the social value created by its business.



Creating social value is an important part of our purpose as a business

Richard Darwin

The methodology, initially commissioned by Sport England and the Government, uses a 'Social Value Calculator' developed by 4global in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University and socio-economic data provider Experian.



The social value generated by each site grew each year

Richard Darwin, chief executive of The Gym Group, said: "Sustainability is in our DNA and the creation of £1.8bn of social value in the last 5 years, is an important part of our purpose as a business. What these findings emphasise is just

how important physical activity is – not only for mental wellbeing and physical health, but also in the economic and social benefit it brings to the communities in which we operate."

More: http://lei.sr/2Z4G4_H

Nuffield Health takes over historic Barbican site from Virgin

Nuffield Health has acquired the lease for the historic Barbican health club site, previously operated by Virgin Active.

Located on Aldersgate Road, the property has been operated as a health club since the 1980s, when it first opened as The Barbican Health and Fitness Centre.

Thanks to being developed by industry entrepreneur David

Giampaolo – and its association with Diana, Princess of Wales, who opened the club – the property became one of the UK's first upmarket health and fitness venues.

Since its launch, the club has operated under a number of owners and brands – including Bally and Holmes Place.

The deal is part of Nuffield's larger strategy for its London operations.

A spokesperson for Nuffield Health said: "We can confirm that we have taken over the lease. The site will become London's leading fitness and wellbeing centre."

More: http://lei.sr/Z8JGW_H



The Barbican site will become London's leading fitness and wellbeing centre

Nuffield Health



The club is near Nuffield's new London hospital at St Barts

Les Mills uses 'hologram' tech in Masterclass videos

Les Mills has come up with an ingenious solution to get around the pandemic travel bans, which threatened a long tradition of its video Masterclasses, featuring a global line up of instructors and presenters.

COVID-19-enforced travel restrictions and border closures meant overseas

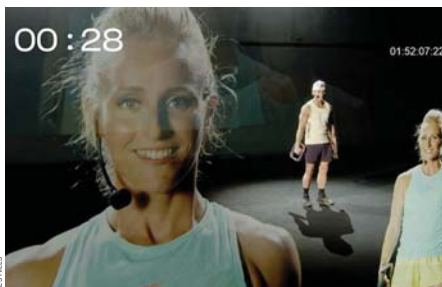
presenters couldn't make it to New Zealand for the shooting of the videos.

Those who have viewed the videos, however, would've spotted that the latest Masterclass releases still feature teams from the UK, China, Australia and France.

This was made possible by using projected image technology, creating a type of hologram effect, showing instructors from different countries as if they were in the same room.

Les Mills Producer Ross Peebles said: "Yes, 'projected images' is probably a better term than 'holograms'. We're not saying that the presenters were in the same studio."

Shoots were set up in London, Shanghai, Sydney and Paris, with Peebles directing



Les Mills used projected image technology in the videos

the shoots from Les Mills International in Auckland.

"We essentially watched the shoots on a more robust version of a Zoom call," Peebles said.

"This allowed us to both monitor and direct the

cameras, to make sure we're getting exactly what we need.

"We also had our creative director, and the programme directors with us to monitor the performance elements."

More: http://lei.sr/g8r7W_H



UNION/ROSS PEEBLES



We essentially watched the shoots on a more robust version of a Zoom call

Ross Peebles

People in the Netherlands see health clubs as an essential service

The vast majority of the population of the Netherlands expect their physical and mental health to improve, once health clubs reopen following the pandemic lockdowns.

An independent study, commissioned by industry body NL Actief, showed that nine out of ten respondents believe fitness facilities are important for public health and that they play a positive role in people's mental and physical health.

The study asked people's opinion on the importance of gyms – and their views on the differences between exercising at home and at the gym.



Most people said the home is no substitute for a health club

While at-home fitness has experienced a boom during the pandemic, it seems that it's no substitute for a gym environment, as 73 per cent said health clubs

provided them with the motivation to exercise.

Most (92.6 per cent) respondents said they expect the population to become fitter once gyms reopen.



NL ACTIEF



Sport and fitness are not recreation, but important factors for public health

Ronald Wouters

NL Actief director, Ronald Wouters, said: "Sport and fitness aren't just recreation, but are also important for public health."

More: http://lei.sr/j9c7K_H

Prince Harry named chief impact officer of BetterUp

Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex has become the first chief impact officer of US-based coaching and mental health firm BetterUp. Harry is a passionate mental health advocate and has previously launched a host of initiatives in support of mental wellbeing, including Invictus Games, Headfit for Life and Sentebale.

Founded in 2013 as a Silicon Valley startup and said to be valued at US\$1.73bn, BetterUp offers mobile-based coaching, counselling and mentorship via an all-in-one platform.

It combines behavioural science, AI technology and human interaction to optimise personal growth and professional development in

“
My goal is to lift up critical dialogues around mental health, build supportive and compassionate communities, and foster an environment for honest and vulnerable conversations

Prince Harry

support of a person's whole health, at work and in life.

Its services are used by companies such as Google, Hilton and Warner Brothers to improve and monitor staff wellbeing.

In a statement announcing his appointment, Harry



Prince Harry has a new senior role at BetterUp

explained that he “firmly believes focusing on and prioritising our mental fitness unlocks potential and opportunity we never knew we had inside us.

“During my decade in the military, I learned we don't just need to build physical resilience,

but also mental resilience,” he said. “As BetterUp's first chief impact officer, my goal is to lift up critical dialogues around mental health and foster an environment for honest conversations.”

More: http://lei.sr/A9h7q_H

Changes in consumer exercise behaviours ‘are here to stay’

A report into the pandemic's effects on consumer behaviours in fitness and sport has predicted permanent changes to the way goods and digital services are consumed.

Sporting Goods 2021 – The Next Normal for an Industry in Flux, from McKinsey & Company, says the consumer shift to digital and online has been bigger

than first thought – and will become a permanent feature in the market.

The “pivot to digital” in fitness was perhaps best illustrated by the way Peloton saw quarterly workouts more than quadruple – from 19 million in Q1 2020 to 77 million in Q4 the same year.

“COVID-19 has ushered in the next normal for the health and fitness industry, defined by factors including digital commerce, rising demand for sustainable products and increasing participation in some forms of exercise,” the report states.

More: http://lei.sr/5K4t4_H

“
COVID-19 has ushered in the next normal for the industry

Sporting Goods 2021 report



The pandemic has changed consumer behaviour

COVID vaccine less effective in people with obesity

At least one of the vaccines approved for use against COVID-19 could be less effective in obese people, according to a new study.

Research shows that healthcare workers with a body mass index (BMI) of more than 30 (the standard definition for obesity) produced only about half the amount of antibodies from the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, when compared with non-obese people.

The findings from the study, called *Obesity May*

Hamper SARS-CoV-2 vaccine immunogenicity, hasn't yet been peer-reviewed, but could mean that people with obesity might need an extra booster jab in order for them to create the needed protection against the virus.

In their report, a team of researchers from the Istituti Fisioterapici Ospitalieri in Rome, Italy, wrote:

"These findings imply that females, lean and young people have an increased capacity to mount immune responses when compared with males, overweight and the older population."

"Although further studies are needed, this data may have important implications for the development of vaccination strategies for COVID-19, particularly in obese people."



Obese people produced only half the amount of antibodies

"Since obesity is a major risk factor for morbidity and mortality for patients with COVID-19, it is mandatory to plan an efficient vaccination programme in this subgroup."

"Evidence suggests that SARS-CoV-2 infections are

more severe and linger for about five days longer in people who are obese."

The findings were based on a study of 248 healthcare workers.

More: http://lei.sr/T6q9c_H



This data may have important implications for the development of vaccination strategies

Istituti Ospitalieri report

Growing evidence that a COVID-19 infection could trigger diabetes

There's growing evidence that a COVID-19 infection could trigger diabetes.

One of the studies to have made the link is a report relating to the outcomes of 47,780 COVID-19 patients within five months of hospital discharge in England. It found that 4.9 per cent of patients were diagnosed with diabetes post-discharge.

A registry, called CoviDiab, has now been launched to analyse reports which suggest COVID-19 induces diabetes.

Paul Zimmet, co-lead investigator of CoviDiab, said: "We don't know the magnitude of the new-onset diabetes in COVID-19 and if it will persist



A registry will collect data which links COVID-19 to diabetes

or resolve after the infection."

● Clinical observations also show that diabetes is associated with an increased risk of COVID-19 severity and mortality, meaning pre-existing

diabetes can determine COVID-19 outcomes.

A study led by researchers at the University of Exeter shows that people aged 40 living with Type 2 diabetes face a

"disproportionately increased risk of dying from COVID-19" – equivalent to the risk faced by a non-diabetic 20 years older.

More: http://lei.sr/q3F7Y_H



HONOLULU UNIVERSITY



We don't yet know the magnitude of the new-onset diabetes in COVID-19

Paul Zimmet



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Everyone's talking about Group exercise

In spite of having met all government-agreed, COVID-secure operating standards, group exercise has had a rough ride during the pandemic, being closed more than gyms. HCM asks why this is and what can be done about it

The re-opening of gyms in England on 12 April will be a bittersweet moment. Although it's extremely heartening that gyms are opening before pubs in 2021 and testament to the progress made in terms of lobbying and the government's understanding of the importance of exercise, it's unfortunate that group exercise classes won't be permitted until 17 May.

This delay is causing serious issues for health clubs that have group exercise at the core of their experience.

We look at the impact this is having on operators, how they're adapting and whether the term 'group exercise' needs to be overhauled so it fits better with current political thinking? We ask the experts.



While gyms' reopening date is 12 April, group exercise can't restart until 17 May



It's a decision that defies logic and as an industry we need to campaign to persuade the government to reconsider



PHOTO: DAVID LLOYD LEBERRE

Glenn Earlam

David Lloyd

Although we breathe a collective sigh of relief as our sector can finally start to reopen, the reality is that a significant part of our offering remains closed.

We all understand how difficult these roadmap decisions must be for the government, but it is hard to understand the logic behind not allowing indoor group exercise to start again.

As an industry we have been able to clearly demonstrate we can operate safely. Ample social distancing measures, rigorous cleaning processes and reduced class numbers have all led to close to zero rates of transmission, yet indoor group exercise has been singled out for extended closure.

Group exercise has always been a vital part of our offering, and we are in a more fortunate position than most operators as we have been able to offer outdoor group exercise from the end of March. But we know a chunk of our membership will be reluctant to return until we can provide an indoor offering. This will inevitably slow the recovery of multi-product facilities, not to mention the thousands of beleaguered

Glenn Earlam says a percentage of members won't come back until group exercise restarts

HIIT and holistic exercise studio businesses which will remain closed.

Almost 30 per cent of David Lloyd Clubs' membership base participate in group exercise. Seventy five per cent are female with an average age of just over 45. This more mature segment is painfully aware that age is a key factor in COVID-19 mortality and they are more conscious about their health than ever before. Yet we are unable to offer the very products which would help them to develop a new healthy lifestyle.

Many of our instructors are self-employed, so left without work or income, while their much-needed skills and experience are being wasted. A whole army of well-qualified fitness professionals, eager to play their part in the nation's recovery from a health crisis, are having to wait to the end of the pandemic before they can do so.

It's a decision that defies logic and as an industry we need to campaign to persuade the government to reconsider.



PHOTO: DAVID LLOYD LEBERRE



I've yet to hear a logical answer as to why we can't run group exercise and think there is a misunderstanding about how we operate

Ed Stanbury

BLOK

At BLOK we only do group exercise, so it's extremely frustrating that even when we're allowed to open our doors on 12 April we won't be able to give customers our usual product of instructor-led classes, because of these nonsensical rules.

I've yet to hear a logical answer as to why we can't run group exercise and think there is a misunderstanding about how we operate and how the virus behaves, because we absolutely believe we can run group exercise in a safe environment.

We know when people are arriving, when they're leaving and how many are in the club at one time. Most of our studios have external doors, so people queue up in a socially distanced way, are

checked in outside, follow a marked one way system to their mat where they have their own wipes, antibacterial cleaner and hand sanitiser to clean their mat and equipment before and after the session.

The studios are running at half capacity, so everyone has plenty of space, plus we have state-of-the-art ventilation and air conditioning systems.

Stanbury is founder and CEO of boutique fitness studio BLOK

PHOTO: BLOK

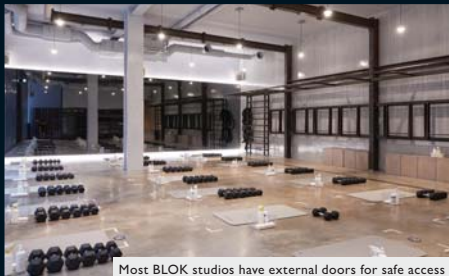


It's a high level of control and when we launch properly on 17 May we will be following all the same protocols, except members will be able to follow an instructor instead of doing their own individual workout, as they will be doing from 12 April.

The presence of an instructor has no impact on the likely spread of a virus, and it would be far better to replace this arbitrary distinction with stricter guidelines on dedicated, distanced workout areas, with equipment being cleaned before and after each use and therefore eliminating the risk of transmission either through airborne particles or surface contact.

I don't think the industry should have to rebrand group exercise to avoid governments making ill-informed policies. The onus should be on the government to understand the industries they are legislating on, and to create guidelines which effectively protect the public.

PHOTO: BLOK



Most BLOK studios have external doors for safe access

David Alstead

ukactive

While the Government's reopening roadmap for England prioritised indoor gyms, pools and leisure centres in the first available stage for indoor venues (from 12 April), we were very disappointed that indoor exercise classes featured in a later stage, being unable to reopen until 17 May at the earliest.

Many of our members have group exercise as an integral part of their service offering, with boutique studios having this at their core, which means either they cannot reopen or it is not economically viable to reopen on 12 April if they are commercially reliant on classes.

There is understandable frustration because indoor classes are led by responsible trainers in accordance with the sector's safety guidance. When ukactive



From our data we know the prolonged closure of group exercise will disproportionately affect women



There is frustration among ukactive members, says Alstead

co-developed the framework for reopening with the government, we included indoor group exercise, focusing on maintaining social distancing, wiping down equipment between uses, ensuring a maximum occupancy based on 100sq ft, as well as having a track and trace system already in place.

We must continue to highlight to the government the strict safety measures in place. Alongside this, we have also proven an extremely low prevalence of COVID-19 among people who have visited fitness and leisure facilities, with ukactive providing the government with data from more than 2,000 sites, based on 75 million visits, showing an overall rate of just 1.7 cases per 100,000 visits (from July to December 2020), with no indication that these people caught COVID-19 at the

gym or had it when they visited.

This decision could also have a detrimental impact on people served by a myriad of classes, such as older adults requiring strength classes which help prevent falls; cancer patients requiring prehab and rehab services; and those requiring weight management programmes. From our data we know the prolonged closure of group exercise will also disproportionately affect women.

In the meantime, group exercise classes are due to take place outside from 29 March. Many of our members with outdoor space are setting up equipment in the fresh air, following COVID-secure guidelines and the guidance on what is considered 'outdoors' when it comes to coverings. Our team is available to advise members on how to do this legally.



Gym-goers who attend group exercise classes go to the gym twice as often

Martin Franklin

Les Mills

The safety of our community is our number one priority, so having a phased approach to the re-opening of society is important. That said, we

know the COVID-safe protocols for group exercise are some of the most stringent and controllable from any business sector in the prevention of the virus.

There is a significant proportion of the population which relies on group exercise: statistics show more than 4.86 million people in England were taking part in group exercise classes each week pre-COVID. Our 2019 Global Consumer Fitness Survey revealed that 45 per cent of gym-goers cite group exercise as the main reason for attending their gym, and those who attend group exercise classes go to the gym twice as often.

Research from Alliance Leisure found that 96 per cent of consumers

who tried a workout from a club during lockdown would use that facility when it reopened. While a survey of 9,000 Les Mills On Demand users found that 63 per cent of non-gym members are interested in trying live Les Mills classes in a club. So it is inevitable that this delay to group exercise will impact operators, putting some at risk of insolvency.

Operators should continue to build on the successes they've had during lockdown in maintaining engagement and the innovative ways they've been able to connect with their members. This includes continuing with at-home options and a mix of live

and pre-recorded workouts.

In the meantime, the sector should use the first month after reopening as an opportunity to get ready and build excitement among members for when they can get back to that first in-person class, by re-engaging members and instructors and planning launch events.

Outdoor exercise is also a big opportunity and is already providing an exciting dimension to club timetables in markets which have re-opened. Les Mills has created a new outdoor group exercise guide and marketing campaign to support clubs in kicking things off with a bang in April.

Franklin has spoken out about the rules around group exercise



PHOTO: LES MILLS

● Download the report: www.HCMmag.com/lesmillsoutdoors



More than 60,000 individuals attend our group exercise classes each week, so not being able to run them has a financial impact on our business, and a social impact on customers

Ben Beevers

Everyone Active

The delay on the return to group exercise will have an effect on a number of Everyone Active sites, especially as last year we implemented COVID-safe measures – including social distancing and enhanced cleaning – which meant we did not have any recorded cases of the virus relating to our classes.

With more than 200 centres across the UK, group exercise plays a key role in our offering to communities. In the week before the second lockdown, we welcomed 66,828 individuals to our classes and were running at close to 80 per cent of class capacity.

More than 60,000 individuals attend our group exercise classes routinely each week, so not being able to run them has a financial impact on our business, and a social impact on customers who don't have access or equipment to exercise during lockdowns.

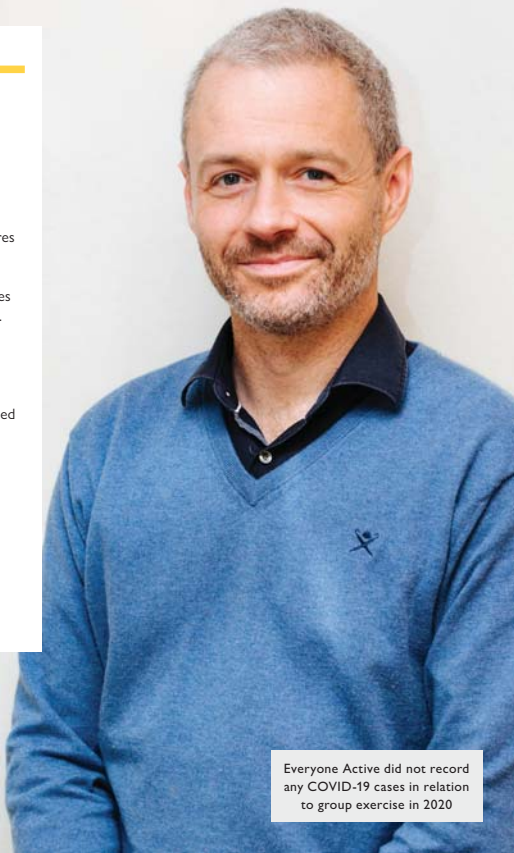


PHOTO: EVERYONE ACTIVE

Everyone Active did not record any COVID-19 cases in relation to group exercise in 2020

66

The Mahindra Group has always taken wellbeing very seriously; its Indian heritage means that mental and spiritual health and mindfulness are embedded in its philosophy



The team is part of Formula E – the only FIA World Championship for electric cars

The team manager of Mahindra Racing talks to Kate Cracknell about creating a new corporate culture in a competitive world – one that places employee wellbeing first

DAVID CLARKE

Mahindra Racing prioritises workplace wellbeing as a way to promote creativity and productivity

What is Mahindra Racing?

A motor racing team in the FIA Formula E World Championship. Part of the Mahindra Group, we are at the forefront of EV (electric vehicle) innovation.

The Mahindra Group already manufactures electronic vehicles and went into Formula E specifically to use it as a test bed: a way to develop technology that would allow it to create better electronic vehicles for normal road use. We call it our 'Race to Road' philosophy.

Tell us about Formula E

Formula E is the only FIA World Championship for electric cars, with this year being its seventh season. For those readers familiar with Formula 1, every Formula E race is like Monaco. We race on temporary tracks in city centres across most continents of the world: London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Hong Kong... the list goes on.

Twelve teams compete in a maximum of 15 races per season, with that season normally running from December to July; the start of this season was delayed to February due to COVID-19. Mahindra Racing has been involved from the very

first season, and although we're yet to win the Championship, we are a multi-race winning team.

Formula E targets a different demographic from Formula 1 – families and younger people – with events broadcast around the world, as well as live streamed on YouTube. And it has an important environmental agenda too: there's an exhibition alongside each event, The Allianz E-Village, which showcases innovations in EV, sustainability, clean energy and so on. It's about trying to achieve a greener planet.

It's the most competitive motorsport on the planet: all the teams are so close in performance that you could win one week and come last the next. That's because all cars have to use a standardised battery and the same chassis; they all look the same. The only permitted differences are in the powertrain, which is completely electric – motor, inverter and gearbox – and the software.

The whole idea behind the Championship is to spearhead the innovation of electronic vehicles, and it comes down to two key areas: efficiency, so you drain the battery less; and regeneration, whereby the motor becomes a generator to put power back into the battery, so you can go further. On the race track, these two factors combine to ensure you go as fast as you can for as long as you can, so you finish the race. In the real world, it means going as far as you can as efficiently as possible.

How many people work for Mahindra Racing?

We have three drivers – two race and one reserve – and a pool of simulator drivers. Meanwhile, behind the scenes at the factory, our team is currently 62 strong.

If you compare that to Formula 1, where they have teams of 350–700 people, it's clear our team are under a lot of pressure, working in a stressful environment where they have to make decisions in milliseconds, and where the hours stack up as we approach race days.

When we moved head office in April 2020 – moving from a 4,700sq ft site to a 47,000sq ft site – we wanted to allocate some of that additional space to our team's wellbeing. We wanted to be a company that takes its employees' physical and mental health seriously.

Tell us about your wellbeing ethos.

In a creative world like ours, where you have to come up with innovative solutions to out-think your competitors, it isn't good to be at your screen the whole time. You can't stay productive for long hours without a break. We've therefore always encouraged our team to step away from their desks now and then, taking half an hour out to read a book, go for a walk, do some exercise.

With more of our team working from home at the moment, we're trying to support them in achieving this same balance there too.



The wellbeing focus benefits Mahindra Racing by providing an extra incentive for employees to stay with the company

SPACE/STEFANIE / LOU JONKSON

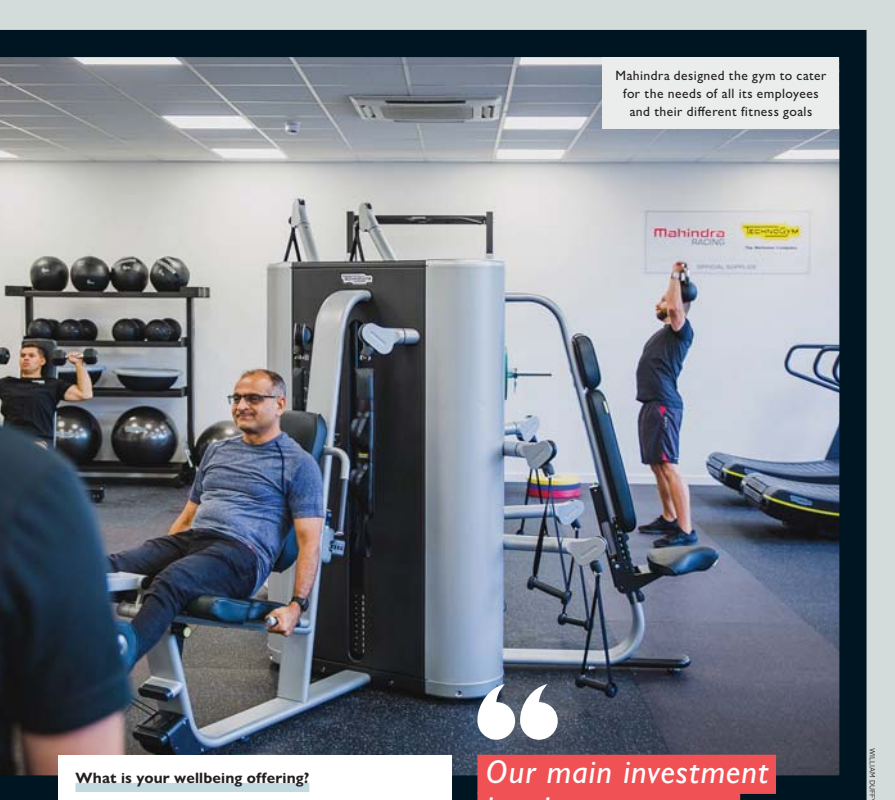
WILLIAM DUFFY



I'm a huge believer in this personally. I used to run 5km several times a week, but a few kidney operations later and I'm trying to get back into shape. I quickly realised that it was the mental benefits of my workouts that were the most instant – and arguably the most important.

Of course, this focus on wellbeing benefits Mahindra Racing as a company: if our team feels fresh, we get the best out of them. It's also the case that motorsport is very incestuous; if a team is doing well, competitors think it's because of the team and try to poach people. We hope, if we look after our employees, they will want to stay with us.

But beyond all of that, we're doing this because it's who we are. We've always been a family. Now we're a family of 62, but we still have lunches together – we stop everything at the factory and sit and talk about them, their lives, their families. That hasn't been possible during lockdown, of course, but we've called every member of the team every week just to see how they are – not to talk about work at all, but just to check in, keep an eye on their wellbeing, make sure they're OK.



Mahindra designed the gym to cater for the needs of all its employees and their different fitness goals

What is your wellbeing offering?

We've done a number of things around the new factory: we've put plants in everyone's office, for example, and have created break-out areas throughout our open-plan design.

But our main investment has been our gym, which we've designed around the wide-ranging needs within our team: race drivers, serious amateur athletes training for decathlons or mountain biking events, and those who don't belong to a gym and need some help in getting started. We wanted to make sure there was something for everyone.

It's been a big investment given we only have 62 people on-site, but as I say, we were determined to be a company that takes wellbeing seriously.

We partnered with Technogym for a range of products to provide cardio, strength and functional tools, as well as Technogym Skillmills and Technogym Bikes that allow people to take part in live streamed or on-demand classes. We also have heart rate devices our team can use.

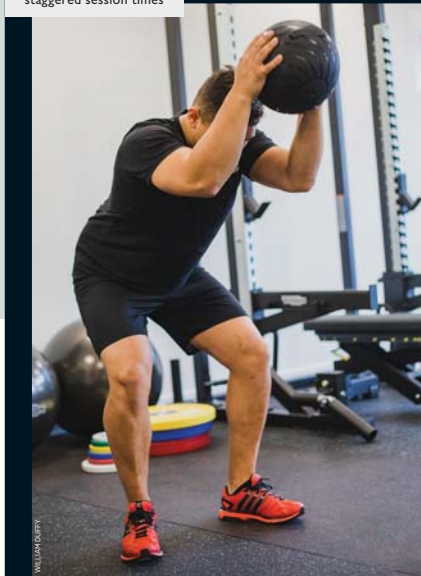
And we have two of everything, which is great. Some people like to compete side-by-

“
Our main investment has been our gym, which we've designed around the wide-ranging needs within our team: race drivers, serious amateur athletes and those who need some help getting started



The gym has stayed open during the pandemic, with staggered session times

WILLIAM DUFFY



WILLIAM DUFFY

side; others just want a workout buddy to help motivate them and make training more fun.

We also have an independent instructor who comes on-site every two weeks and who's available to everyone. They're there to offer personalised advice and workout programmes to any member of staff, helping them achieve whatever it is they want to achieve. Alongside this, the Technogym mywellness app allows our employees to track their progress.

How has COVID impacted your efforts?

Our gym has remained open even throughout COVID-19, as it's a private workplace facility. We have, however, put a range of safety measures in place – limiting access to two people at a time, for example. It's open all day, so people have been able to stagger their workouts.

We've also been supporting our employees with online workouts, because although our factory has remained open, we've had fewer people in at any one time. We reached out to some fitness influencers who, in partnership with Technogym, created some online content especially for us, including things like stretching and bodyweight classes. These are available through the app for our team, but we've put some of them on YouTube for our followers to enjoy too.

Now the race season is starting, but there are still some local restrictions meaning gyms and pools are closed in some of the cities we're visiting. For our drivers, we're therefore shipping out smaller pieces of kit so they can work out in their hotel rooms.

What impact have you seen so far?

An impressive 99 per cent of our team are using our gym; just one team member remains reluctant, as he prefers to go out and play golf. But that's OK – he's active.

As a direct result of our new gym, we have one driver who now bases himself here at head office. He has all the equipment he needs here to train his reaction time, upper body strength, core strength... everything he needs to be race-fit. He drives in early and meets his PT here.

But as I say, we've deliberately designed the gym to meet our pro-athletes' needs without leaving the rest of our staff behind. We have team members who are changing their shifts to work around the restricted access to the gym, for example. They want to do virtual classes on the bikes – these are one of ▶



Introducing the Mahindra Group

Mahindra Racing is part of the Mahindra Group, which was originally founded in India in 1945 as a steel business.

Over the decades, Mahindra has steadily grown to become a global brand that boasts a 150+ strong "federation of companies". These span 22 industries (see below), more than 100 countries and 256,000+ employees, bringing in US\$19.4bn in revenue.

But as Anand Mahindra, chair of the Mahindra Group, explains: "It's not about how big we become, but how we become big."

Mahindra's story in this respect is one of responding to the needs of society: "A need for change in agricultural practices pushed us to foray into that sector right before the agricultural revolution began in India," says its website. "We also became one of the key torch-bearers of the IT revolution in our country.

"Our focus now lies in developing alternative energy sources, because we believe energy conservation will play a huge role in ensuring a better future – not just for our country and communities, but the entire world."

www.mahindra.com

Mahindra market sectors

- Aerospace
- Agriculture
- Boats
- Construction equipment
- Defence
- Hospitality
- Insurance
- Power backup
- Retail
- Steel
- Two wheelers
- Aftermarket
- Automotive
- Clean energy
- Consulting
- Farm equipment
- Information technology
- Logistics
- Real estate
- Infrastructure
- Rural housing finance
- Trucks and buses
- Vehicle and equipment finance



Mahindra Racing is just one small part of the Mahindra Group, which is active in 22 different industries



“

In a creative world where you have to come up with innovative solutions to out-think your competitors, you can't stay productive for long hours without a break. We encourage our team to step away from their desks and do some exercise

► the most popular activities – and they're willing to change their working patterns to be able to do them.

Our next step is to hopefully draw on other partnerships – Nuffield, for example, with a view to addressing the nutritional needs of all of our team, not just our drivers.

We're also setting up an open forum to encourage our staff members to come up with ideas of what we should do next, with rewards for those who come up with the best, most impactful suggestions.

Is your ethos mirrored in the overall Mahindra Group?

The Mahindra Group has always taken wellbeing very seriously; its Indian heritage means that mental and spiritual health, mindfulness and so on are embedded in its philosophy. We're trying to embrace as much of this as possible, while at the same time appreciating we need to shape things slightly around a European mindset.

It will take time: people have come from other companies that didn't operate like this, so we need to embed a new culture of wellbeing. But this is a family and it's important to us. We will keep repeating the mantra over and over so everyone believes it. ●

● www.mahindraracing.com



Mahindra Racing is committed to building a culture of wellbeing in the company



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studio like yours.**



**There's only one
software like ours.**

Everything you need to run—and grow—your business.

To book a demo or learn more, visit uk.mindbodyonline.com

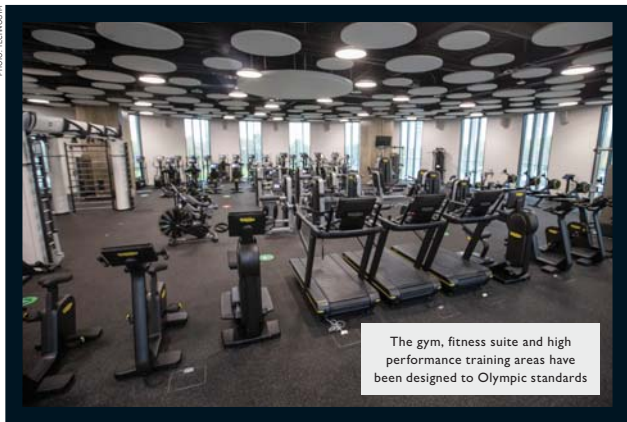
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Technogym's ambition and impact in the physical activity sector aligns perfectly with our values. We now have an amazing suite of state-of-the-art equipment with endless opportunity for innovation

Cathy Gallagher, executive director of sport, University of Stirling



WORLD CLASS



The gym, fitness suite and high performance training areas have been designed to Olympic standards

The University of Stirling has transformed its fitness offering with world-class performance sport and fitness facilities powered by Technogym

As University of Stirling's vice chancellor, Professor Sir Gerry McCormac says: "sport is part of the university's DNA". When the university invested in a £20m upgrade of its sport and fitness facilities, the vision was clear: to engage as many students, staff, and members of the community as possible in sport and physical activity at the level of their choosing.

Cathy Gallagher, executive director of sport, tells us how the new facilities are communicating the university's ambition within the 335 acre campus and beyond.

"We always want to set standards," she says. "After winning UK Sports University of the Year in 2020, we didn't rest on our laurels – our investment in new facilities shows our commitment to performance sport and physical wellbeing."

Fit for Olympians

The university's previous sports facilities didn't reflect the scale of ambition for sport at the campus.

University of Stirling is home to the National Swimming Academy and National Tennis Academy and is the only university outside North America to compete in NCAA-ranked golf events.

Its athletes and coaching staff are household names, including Duncan Scott (pre-selected for Tokyo 2021, and the most decorated Scottish athlete at any single Commonwealth Games) and head performance swim coach Steve Tigg, who is part of Team GB.

Swimming, golf, tennis, triathlon, male and female football, rugby, and curling – the list of sporting achievements at the university goes on.

"The performance programme is a key part of our culture," says Gallagher, "we needed world-class facilities to match the quality of our programmes and coaching staff and set out to create a home fit for Olympians."

Performance sport

The previous facilities were demolished and replaced with a stunning 5,000 sq m complex that includes indoor sports halls and tennis courts, a 50m pool, changing facilities, a gym and fitness suite and high-performance training areas, all overlooking Airthrey Loch.

The beautiful setting has become a go-to point on campus and for the wider local area, carrying the message of health and wellbeing to a huge audience.

"Sport is now the first thing people encounter when coming onto campus," says Gallagher. "Feedback continues to be amazing – we've been told the new facilities are iconic and transformational."

Creating healthy habits

University of Stirling's ambitious investment has created a definite statement of intent around its visions of creating a student experience that leads to long-term healthy habits and also to driving innovation, with sport and physical activity at the heart of the identity of the university.

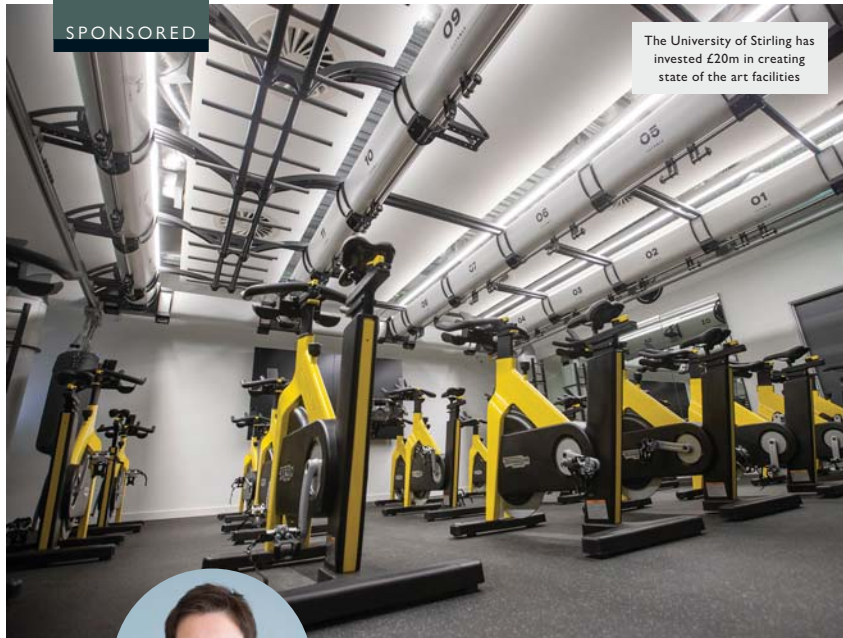


PHOTO: TECHNOGYM



Cathy Gallagher

We needed world-class facilities to match the quality of our programmes and coaching staff and set out to create a home fit for Olympians



"It's crucial we get the student experience right," explains Gallagher. "First year students need to feel part of something. Our beautiful new fitness facilities are a key touchpoint, helping young people form healthy routines. We know the investment we've made will transform the student experience. We hope it will also have a positive lasting impact on the rest of their lives."

A key part of the design brief was to connect every part of the new facilities to create a streamlined student and member experience.

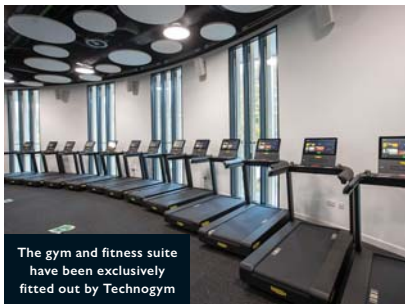
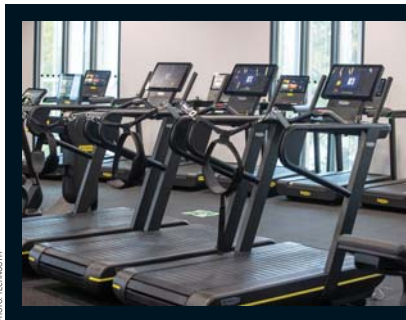
"The facilities now have one entrance and one exit, so freshers or local people can walk through the door with one of our Olympic athletes," says Gallagher. "This creates an important sense of motivation and belonging."

University of Stirling's new fitness suite features over 110 stations, with a dedicated strength and conditioning area and high-performance training area.

"Technogym's ambition and impact in the physical activity sector aligns perfectly with our values and what we want to achieve," explains Gallagher. "Thanks to Technogym, we now have an amazing suite of state-of-the-art equipment with endless opportunity for innovation."



Facilities have been designed to engage staff, students and community



The gym and fitness suite have been exclusively fitted out by Technogym

Harnessing digital

University of Stirling is one of the first higher education settings in the UK to invest in Technogym's Excite Live line.

"This amazing kit blows my mind!" says Gallagher. "It offers phenomenal technological advancements, with beautiful architecture and aesthetics and the kit is very slimline, helping us make better use of space and cater for more members."

Technogym Excite Live helps the university deliver on its ambition to engage more of its student population.

"Excite Live's level of sophistication and functionality aligns with the language we use in programme development and delivery," says Gallagher. "We knew it would help us get more students physically active."

Innovative gym floor layout

University of Stirling made the decision to add Technogym Skill Line classes to the gym floor, including Skillbike class, Skillrow class, and Skillrun class.

"We know digital will engage people, but we never want to lose the human aspect of the gym," explains Gallagher. "Skill Line classes create a buzz on the gym floor. It's a different dynamic, which

engages more people in a new way. Technogym helped us with programming and staff training, so we can offer a compelling member experience."

"Our goal is to keep people coming back and Technogym's kit is key to this engagement," says Gallagher. "People can access their own coach and programming through the equipment, get extra content, and enjoy the benefits of a community."

Living and breathing excellence

"We're Scotland's University for sport and excellence and need to exhibit excellence in everything we do – this includes our choice of partners," says Gallagher. "Technogym is a world-leading brand and clearly demonstrates its commitment to innovation and advancement."

"We work with Technogym to stay ahead of the game. As we continue on our journey of increased participation, Technogym acts as consultants, advisors, and researchers. The strength and rigour of Technogym's work helps us deliver on our strategic objectives." ●

● Find out more: [Technogym.com](https://www.technogym.com)



Joe Cohen, Robert Rowland and Hilary Rowland are the driving force behind the new company.

Hilary first talked to HCM in 2011/12 when Boom Cycle launched

Robert Rowland, Hilary Rowland, Joe Cohen

United Fitness Brands

Boom Cycle and Kobox have both been bought by new company, United Fitness Brands Ltd



We're aiming to be a force in the boutique fitness market

As gyms reopen in the UK a new brand is launching that plans to take the boutique market by storm

Robert and Hilary Rowland, founders of Boom Cycle, have teamed up with Joe Cohen, owner of 'fight club meets nightclub' boxing studio, Kobox to form a new business called United Fitness Brands.

Ownership of the two founder businesses has been transferred to United Fitness Brands Ltd, which will be chaired by industry veteran, David Lloyd, who's been a non-exec of Boom Cycle since 2018. The individual brands will continue to operate independently.

The new company has received backing from venture capital trust Pembroke VCT, Nectar Capital and a number of high net worth individuals who've already invested in Kobox and Boom Cycle.

United Fitness Brands will use its financial backing to take on synergistic businesses in

complementary verticals to create a new 'super group' of boutique brands that will pool resources and use their collective strengths to grow their individual businesses.

A clear strategy

Speaking to *HCM* the trio said the new group has a clear strategy for growth: "Future plans are to merge with other operators, such as barre and yoga to create a portfolio," says Robert. "We're in talks with other operators and aiming to be a force in the boutique fitness market."

"The idea is to help the operators under the United Fitness Brands umbrella to spread costs and share their expertise," says Hilary.

"It will also result in brands being in a stronger position when it comes to finding

investment and new sites, as there'll be an opportunity to identify larger sites in which more than one brand can have a presence."

"We want each brand to keep doing what they're doing," she says. "We're looking for brands that have become successful because they've developed their own identity and created a loyal community of users and we don't want them to change that."

"What we want to do is to make sure each brand has a better opportunity to grow and develop by sharing resources and operating in a more efficient way."

Adding Kobox to the mix

Joe said: "Kobox was the first to bring boxing-based classes to the masses in a major market."

"Now, more than five years since our launch, we're embarking on another UK first – creating an industry-defining supergroup, which I'm sure will go from strength to strength and allow more people across the country to enjoy these incredible brand offerings."

"We met up with Joe in the middle of last year," says Robert "The whole industry was having a hard time, but as a result of the way

Boom Cycle and Kobox are located, we have a lot of shared clients and thought it would strengthen our position and make a successful merger if the two businesses joined forces."

"We're both offering high-intensity workouts and believe we're best in class, so there's a great fit between the two businesses."

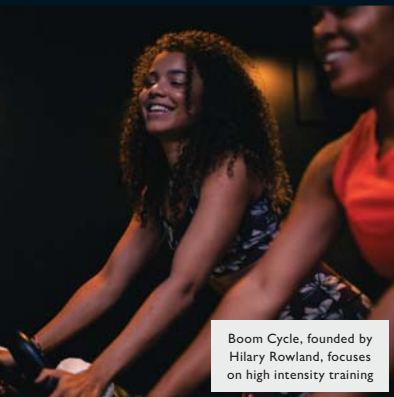
"It took until March 2021 to close the deal," says Joe "It shows how long these things take to get done."

"Although it's new to the UK market, this business model has been tried and tested in other sectors and other markets and proven to work," says Robert. "It allows all companies to run more leanly and pool resources and expertise and scale more quickly than they would be able to do apart."

Centralised wellness locations

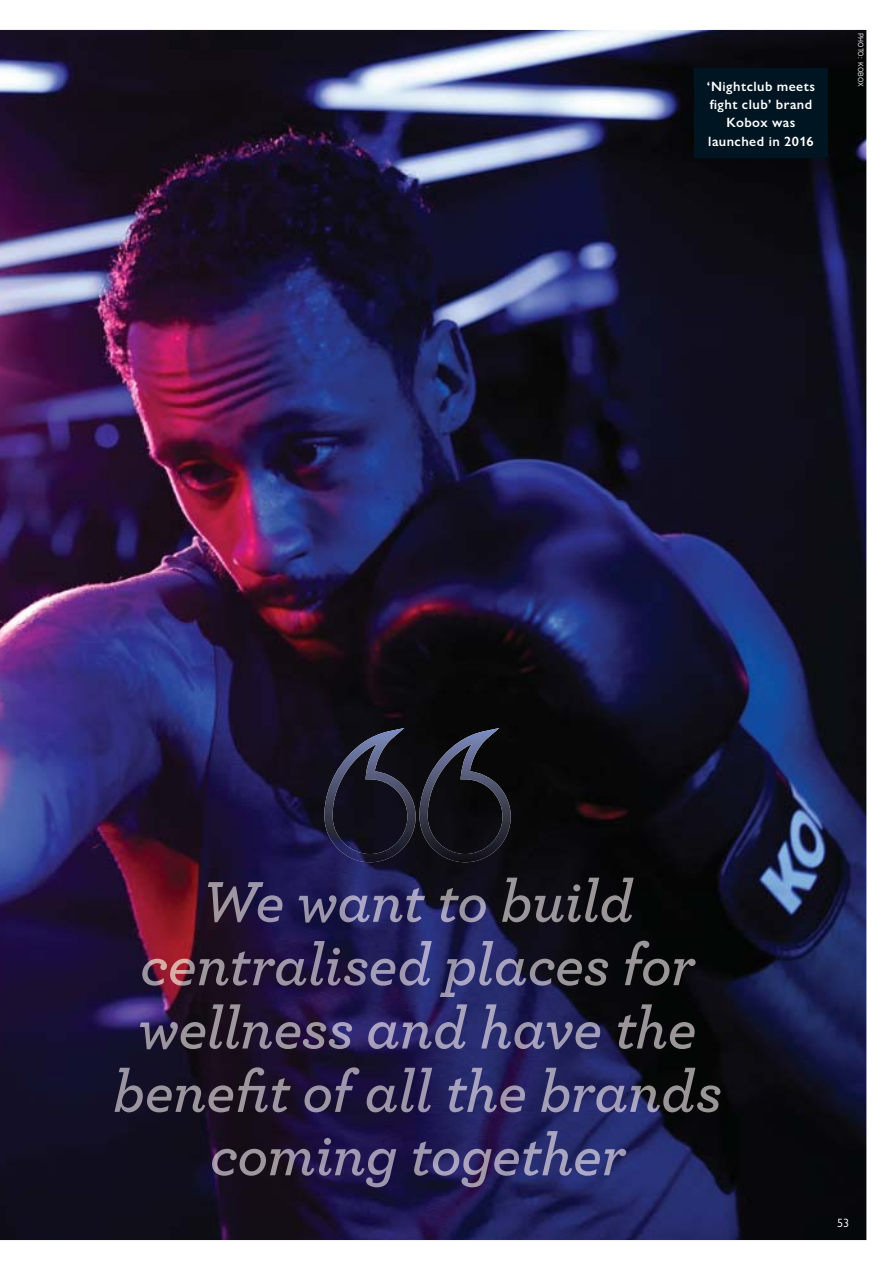
Hilary continues: "Our plan is also to build new United Fitness Brands facilities around the UK, where consumers can come and do a yoga or barre class, have a cryopod treatment and enjoy the juice bar. We want to build centralised places for wellness and have the benefit of all the brands coming together, while allowing each to maintain its brand and customer loyalty and use shared facilities, such as changing rooms."

The three say the core team will manage centralised services, such as F&B, in-house, rather



Boom Cycle, founded by Hilary Rowland, focuses on high intensity training

PHOTO BOOM CYCLE

A man with short dark hair and a beard is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark tank top and black boxing gloves. He is looking down and to his left with a focused expression. The background is dark with bright, out-of-focus neon lights in shades of blue and purple, creating a moody, club-like atmosphere. The lighting casts strong shadows on his face and body.

'Nightclub meets
fight club' brand
Kobox was
launched in 2016

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*We want to build
centralised places for
wellness and have the
benefit of all the brands
coming together*



The company, with David Lloyd as chair, is being backed by private and VC funds

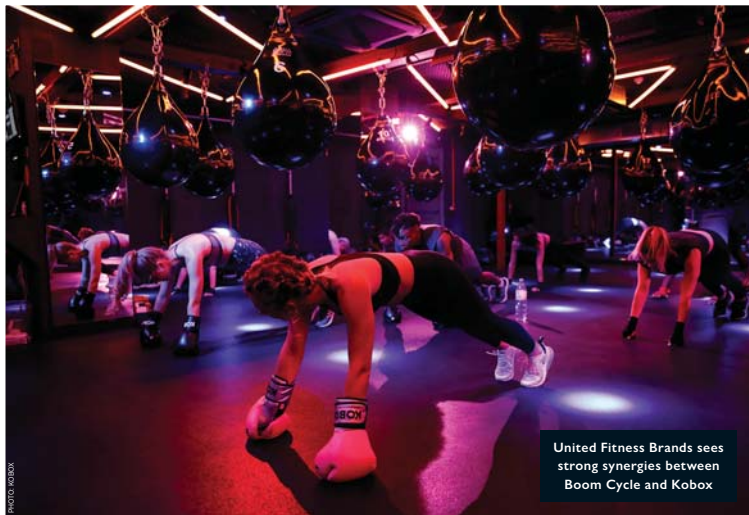


PHOTO: KOBOK

than sub-contracting these out, so economies of scale can reduce prices or increase margins. "As a management team, we have strong skills that can build this business and take it forward – finance and growing the business will be Joe's responsibility, operations will be Robert's and marketing will be mine," she says. "The team will be answerable to a board and have to perform and 'deliver on the numbers.'"

"It's a beautiful vision", says Hilary, but there's a lot of hard work ahead."

Business contracts

Partners that join the United Fitness Brands portfolio will have contracts in place to define their involvement, with these outlining upsides and downsides, including the terms on which severances would take place if things don't work out. Partners will have equity in the wider company and each company will come under the ownership of United Fitness Brands Ltd.

"We'll do due diligence and make sure we fit together as a group," says Robert. "We'll need to know we have the power to elevate that brand before we take it on."

"Doing this will enable us to pivot more quickly and grow a stronger team – tackling external

*It's a beautiful vision
but there's a lot of
hard work ahead*

market forces is less of a trial in a strong group than by yourself – there's safety in numbers."

Decisions on capital investment will be made based on margins. "One business might need capital, another may need sprucing up," says Joe. "The plan is to keep the brands under one roof as much as possible, to amplify the capital expenditure via shared changing rooms and so forth."

Next steps

The next milestone for United Fitness Brands will be the opening of more studios in 2021, including a Kobox studio, which will launch as a 'club in club' space at Boom Cycle's existing Waterloo site. Kobox Kings Road in London will then get a Boom Cycle, taking the count to six sites for Boom Cycle and four for Kobox.



Robert Rowland, Hilary Roland and Joe Cohen will focus on operations, marketing and investment respectively



"The dream scenario is location, location, location – accessible to residential and to offices," says Robert, "and able to support a seven day a week operation from 6.15am in the morning to 9.00pm at night.

"The second thing is the space itself – we need 12,000sq ft of good open space in this sort of location to build what we want to build. We want to keep the site comfortable and nice to be in, but not high-end or super luxe. We're all very aligned on not overspending on sites," he says. "It's all about those margins," interjects Hilary.

The plan is to remain as tenants rather than investing in real estate and the hunt will take the team outside the capital, as Robert explains: "In addition to London, we'll be looking at the major cities such as Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow.

Team development

"At Boom Cycle, we've been talking about this for two years at board level, so there's been a huge amount of excitement at the news," says Robert.

"Our teams are excited too – it's sending such a positive message, in spite of COVID," says Hilary, "Our staff are saying it proves they're on the right team."

Boom Cycle and Kobox will have 10 sites between them by the early part of 2021



"People love to work in this industry," says Robert, "But smaller operators have career ceilings much sooner, so this move will open up more opportunities for our teams."

The UK market is the immediate priority for development, but the United Fitness Brands board is keen to fine-tune the concept and then to explore franchising, so overseas markets may beckon at that point: "We want to get it absolutely right before we hit the franchise market," says Hilary.

Fighting back from lockdown

It's been a tough time for businesses that rely on group exercise and Robert says the lockdown easing roadmap has been hard to accept: "It's been pretty brutal – group exercise is having to wait another five weeks after a year of disruption and that really feels like a kick in the teeth," he says.

"The future's looking bright for us with the new deal, but collectively boutique operators are still struggling to understand the lack of cashflow support from government outside of grants," says Robert. "When you see companies such as McDonald's getting a five per cent VAT rate and the health and fitness

industry being overlooked in a health crisis, it's a confusing point of view to understand."

"Research shows that every £1 spent by the government on health and fitness gives £4 value," says Hilary, "So it's incomprehensible that they would leave us without any sector-specific support."

"We just want to get open," says Robert "The silver lining is that we know from the first lockdowns that our customers are genuinely happy to come back and excited for the return. We're comfortable that people are going to stay engaged."

"We want to give brands all the support we always wanted when we were starting out," says Joe. "We're happy to help with the slightly boring stuff, so they can focus on doing what they love doing and build their business."

"You can get into a position when you're growing a boutique business that you need advice, but anyone you could ask is a competitor and they're not going to give it up," says Hilary, "This way, all that advice is freely available and the company becomes a 'hot pot' of fitness."

"Having lost a year to the pandemic, we're keen to press on," says Robert. "Instead of waiting for things to happen we're making things happen and creating a new opportunity to grow and build the business." ●

Workforce development has never been so important and apprenticeships have a key role to play in the rebuilding of our sector



Train & retain

Tad Chapman from Active IQ argues that operators should take a fresh look at apprenticeships and their power to drive recovery



Apprenticeships have a long-standing reputation as a reliable training tool, usually associated with young learners entering a profession.

While this is indeed one role for apprenticeships in workforce development, their potential is far greater than simply recruiting youngsters wishing to 'earn and learn'.

The Department for Education described apprenticeship training as "the key to unlocking productivity" while last month's National Apprenticeship Week ran under the theme "Build the Future". Both these bold statements are true. Today's apprenticeships have the potential to train older and more experienced colleagues right up to senior management level. They can attract strong candidates looking for a clear career pathway to the top and – importantly – have the power to retain top talent within an organisation.

When it comes to developing people's skills and knowledge, future-proofing your workforce and retaining the best in the business, apprenticeships are hard to beat. And as we emerge from three successive COVID-19 lockdowns ready to rebuild our sector and workforce, their potential to help is hard to ignore.

"Workforce development has never been so important and apprenticeships have a key role to play in the rebuilding of our sector," says Tad Chapman, head of end-point assessment at Active IQ. "Apprenticeships not only provide an excellent route into our industry



Tad Chapman

but also a fantastic career pathway that will future-proof workforce development by retaining – as well as training – the best talent in an organisation."

Challenging perception

Hampering this, however, are many myths and misperceptions which need to be challenged before the leisure industry can fully realise the potential of apprenticeships.

"Despite the best efforts of Government, industry, leading training providers and awarding organisations like ourselves, common misperceptions remain.

Also, apprenticeships are sometimes considered an afterthought or a quick route to free training," says Tad.

"In fact, there are diverse and varied apprenticeships on offer from entry level right up to degree and management level," he explains. "The idea you can start out as a lifeguard or gym instructor and train your way up to general manager or CEO isn't far-fetched: the career pathway is clear and accessible."

Releasing untapped potential

"Employers need to recognise the newest apprenticeship standards run from Level 2 – such as a community activator coach or leisure team member – right up to level 6 and 7, including chartered manager and senior leader," says Tad. "The potential for apprentices to extend way beyond entry level recruitment and reach management and degree level is a valuable retention tool for operators and employers who can hold onto their brightest talent."

Apprenticeships have the potential to train older and more experienced colleagues

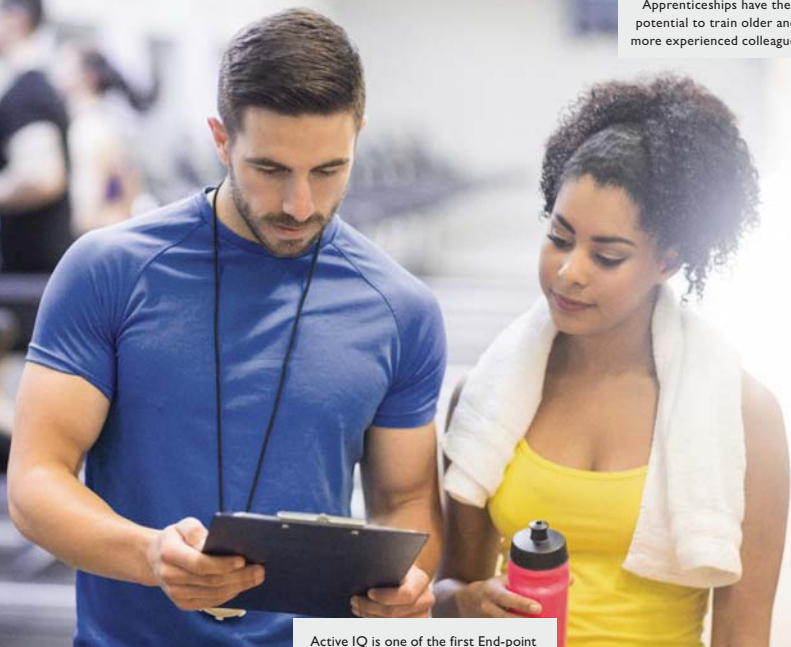


PHOTO: MARK BRIDGMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Growth area

Apprenticeships are an important growth area for the physical activity workforce with skills-based, on-the-job learning of immense value in these public-facing roles. In addition, Tad is seeing rising demand for sector-specific but non-physical-activity-based roles, such as customer service, digital skills, finance, warehousing and facilities management. "The whole sector needs to expand its view and recognise that apprenticeships can support all aspects of a leisure facility's business," he says. "At Active IQ we carry out end-point assessment for a broad range of sectors from transport to facilities management and there's plenty to be learned from these industries and applied to the leisure trade."

Active IQ is one of the first End-point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) within the physical activity sector to be approved on the Register of End-point Assessment Organisations.

With unmatched expertise it offers 15 End-point Assessments (EPAs) for the new apprenticeship standards including these most pertinent to the leisure sector:

- Business administrator
- Community activator coach
- Community sport and health officer
- Customer service practitioner
- Facilities management supervisor
- Leisure duty manager
- Leisure team member
- Personal trainer
- Team leader/supervisor

Back on track post-lockdown

Lockdown had a devastating impact on the leisure sector with facilities forced to close and a high percentage of staff put on furlough. On-the-job training suffered greatly as face-to-face interaction ground to a halt. Post-lockdown, restoring confidence in colleagues and members, reviving training programmes and renewing optimism will be key. Apprenticeships can help by offering a cost-effective, clearly mapped route to put people's careers back on track. And after such uncertain and turbulent times, there's a

lot to be said for the structure and security offered by apprenticeships and the end-point assessment process. ●

Find out more: www.activeiq.co.uk

Get tough

Policing the rules, even if it means losing members, will be crucial to building trust as health clubs reopen, Paul Roberts tells Kath Hudson

Pacing the gym floor like a headteacher and chastising anyone who has forgotten about social distancing is anathema to how the majority of operators would want to treat their members, but according to

Paul Roberts, CEO of sentiment analysts, MyCustomerLens, this is going to be absolutely crucial from day one of gyms opening. He warns that unless fitness staff are empowered to go beyond their comfort zones, to make sure COVID-safe rules are adhered to, health clubs risk losing members, trust and credibility.

"Our analysis shows that one of the value drivers around current consumer behaviour is trust," Roberts explains. "As they go back to their clubs, members will be expecting the gym to have COVID-safe measures put in place and in order to build and retain their trust it's crucial these rules are policed. Staff need to step in if members aren't acting as they should be. If you let it ride once, then that will be it - you'll have lost the credibility and won't get it back."

Roberts stresses this headline approach will be paramount. Operators will need to risk losing the membership of the rule breaker

in order to save multiple memberships of those quiet, possibly anxious, people who observe it happening and vote with their feet when they decide the gym isn't upholding the rules put in place to make them safe.

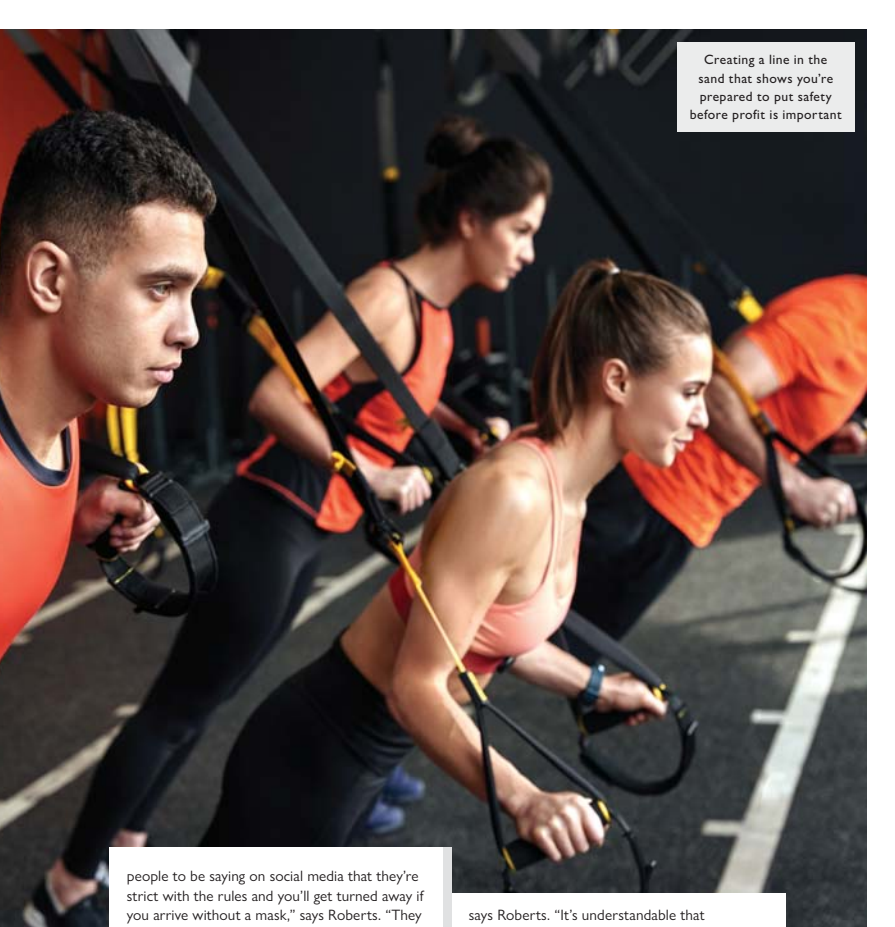
Avoiding a scene

"A PT might not want to get involved with an altercation because they want to have a friendly relationship with everyone and not create a scene, but clubs absolutely need to take a zero-tolerance approach to those who don't follow the rules and be prepared to lose members," says Roberts. "Creating that line in the sand which shows you are willing to put safety over profits is important."

The social media debates about the gym rules and how they're enforced will also have more impact than announcements broadcast by gyms about their new protocols, he says "Clubs need



SHUTTERSTOCK/VICTORIA VANTUK

A group of people, including a man and two women, are shown in profile, using TRX suspension training equipment in a gym. They are wearing orange and black athletic wear. The background is dark and out of focus, showing other gym equipment.

Creating a line in the sand that shows you're prepared to put safety before profit is important

people to be saying on social media that they're strict with the rules and you'll get turned away if you arrive without a mask," says Roberts. "They don't want people to be saying they went to the gym and people weren't social distancing."

Loss of trust in people

It's undoubtedly an awkward intervention to make. Over the past year, we've probably all had the experience of seeing a COVID denier getting argumentative when politely confronted by a member of staff for not wearing a mask or not standing on the correct dot while queueing.

"People who break the rules know they're doing it, that they don't have an excuse and therefore can be defensive or even aggressive,"

says Roberts. "It's understandable that gym floor staff are going to shy away from making a scene, nonetheless they will have to do this in order to reinforce the fact the health club is a trusted and safe space."

During lockdowns, although we may have missed human contact, we've also become fearful of being put at risk by others. MyCustomerLens research for Sport England showed that although people were eager to get back to their sports clubs, citing seeing their friends as one of the things they were most looking forward to, one of the barriers was about people not sticking to the rules.



Members' social media feeds will amplify messages about staff who enforce COVID-secure standards

SHUTTERSTOCK/MILANARNOVICH

"On the one hand people were saying they were excited about seeing their friends, but on the other, they were fearful that these people, who they class as friends, wouldn't follow the rules," says Roberts. "As gyms tend to be much more transactional than sports clubs and people are less familiar with each other, we can expect that mistrust of others to be even more marked in gyms when compared to sports clubs."

Expectation versus reality

Community is another theme coming up in the MyCustomerLens analysis, with many gym members excited about getting back into a social environment to exercise alongside others after so long flying solo. However, Roberts cautions there may need to be some expectation management and operators may have to steel themselves for some negativity.

"For some people, it might be a kids' Christmas experience," says Roberts. "Where

people build their hopes up so high about going back to the gym that the reality doesn't live up to expectations, particularly when people realise the experience is not what it used to be because of social distancing and reduced capacity. Once people start paying their memberships again expectations will rise and some may even experience buyers' remorse."

Avoiding frustrations

The restricted capacity will likely lead to some frustration if members experience trouble booking into classes. Roberts suggests monitoring waiting lists and if someone keeps missing out on getting into a class to manually book them in before they complain, or worse, leave.

"We're constantly seeing on leavers' surveys that people leave because they were frustrated about not being able to book into a class," he says. "When memberships are unfrozen,



Gym staff must enforce COVID-secure operating procedures at all times

Too often, booking systems are designed by IT people for IT people, rather than for members. There needs to be empathy in the messaging

operators will need to make sure they are adding value and offering convenience, otherwise people might revert to their lockdown habits."

Empathetic messaging

He also calls for booking systems to show empathy in the messaging instead of being purely functional. "All too often booking systems are designed by IT people for IT people, rather by members for members," he says. "So although they work, it can be demoralising to receive a blunt message saying you've missed out on booking into a class. There needs to be some empathy in the messaging."

He goes on to say there is frequently a disconnect between how some operators think

they communicate and how members perceive the communication. "It frequently came up in our research for community leisure trusts that they considered their communications to be good because they had factually broadcast what was happening. But members viewed it differently when they couldn't get hold of anyone to get their questions answered."

After a long winter of lockdown, the prospect of society opening up again is exciting to most but will be intimidating to some, especially those who've been shielding, so we can expect a few bumps in the road as we come blinking into the daylight and get used to functioning as a community again, under the new normal rules.

Turn the page for guidance from ReActivate

Educate members so they understand they have an important role to play

Make it clear we're dealing with a global health emergency and reinforce the importance of complying, so their actions do not harm others

Having that awkward conversation

Telling members to socially distance from another person was not something which fitness instructors and PTs signed up for when they joined the industry.

It can be a painful conversation to have and it would appear that many businesses outside of the sector have shied away from empowering their staff to enforce the COVID safety measures they put in place.

Health club operators need to find the sweet spot between making sure everyone obeys the rules and feels safe, while still making the gym a relaxed environment.

There is a lot of uncertainty around reopening, but building confidence is key. Make the COVID adaptations a positive experience, which members will share with friends by following these guidance notes from ReActivate.

Footnote: The Sport England-funded ReActivate programme, collated by Future Active Workforce, has a range of training resources available free of charge to operators

According to ReActivate these are the protocols operators should follow:

- Firstly, ensure the rules are clearly displayed
- Talk to customers and help them understand the new restrictions and how they can help keep the gym safe
- Explain the new guidance and ask them to comply
- Make it clear we are dealing with a global health emergency and they must obey the guidance
- Reinforce the importance of complying, so their actions and behaviours do not harm others
- Remind them that the measures are here to protect our NHS, our country and in particular the vulnerable
- If the member still refuses to follow the rules and protocols, calmly contact a manager for support
- Remember to think about delivery when it comes to voice tone and body language: experts advise that 55 per cent of communication comes from body language, 38 per cent from the tone of voice and only 7 per cent from the words used, so be mindful of this



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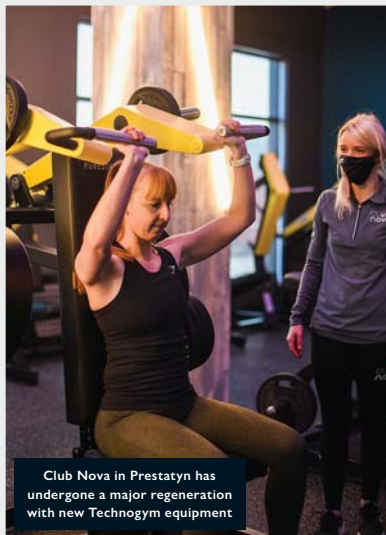


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Strengthening the future

Denbighshire Leisure is creating a range of new and unforgettable member experiences. MD, Jamie Groves, explains how a partnership with Technogym and Alliance Leisure has led to the creation of a raft of new offerings



Club Nova in Prestatyn has undergone a major regeneration with new Technogym equipment

Following Wales' lockdown, Denbighshire Leisure will reopen Club Nova, its beachfront leisure location, with an impressive new gym set up, including the new Technogym Excite Live cardio range. Nova, located in Prestatyn, has undergone a major regeneration and now offers local residents and visitors a new leisure complex with a pool, dance studio, function suite, restaurants, Costa coffee shop, and "Club Nova" gym. Denbighshire Leisure has always been innovative in its approach. As Wales headed into a long lockdown, the team considered how they could create a unique offer for members to come back to.

Creating a high-end refurb

"We knew people would want something different after being in lockdown for so long," said Jamie Groves, MD of Denbighshire Leisure, "Club Nova has an exclusive club atmosphere and our choice of fitness equipment had to underpin this premium customer experience".

"Prestatyn is a varied locality, and Club Nova is a big space," explains Groves. "Our membership runs from juniors to those aged 90+. The Excite Live range helps us give everyone a memorable experience with so much added value, whatever their training background or goal."



A mix of Technogym equipment has been installed to suit members at all levels



Technogym understands our business and matches us on values, innovation, and philosophy. They're a partner, not just an equipment supplier

Jamie Groves, MD, Denbighshire Leisure



Strong Partnerships

Denbighshire Leisure has always been innovative in its approach, with an established relationship with Technogym. The partnership has developed leisure sites together for over 15 years, and when Denbighshire Leisure appointed Alliance Leisure in 2017 to manage the UK Leisure Framework, Technogym was named on its procurement portal as a recommended supplier.

"Technogym understands our business and matches us on values, innovation, and philosophy," says Groves. "They're a partner, not just an equipment supplier."

At Club Nova, Technogym was involved from the start, helping us develop our offer, create the design, and decide on a range of products that would service our market and increase returns."

Cutting-edge equipment

Every stage of the customer experience is crucial at Club Nova, from equipment and class programming, to fitness professional training, and the ability to upsell the offer.

"Equipment connects our customer journey, and we have Technogym equipment in all seven of our leisure centres," says Groves, "For Club Nova, we were sure the Technogym portfolio would deliver".

With the remit of creating a premium fitness experience, Groves and his team chose a full range of equipment, including Excite Live, Selection 900, Skill Line, and the Mywellness app.

"Excite Live is truly cutting-edge," he explains.

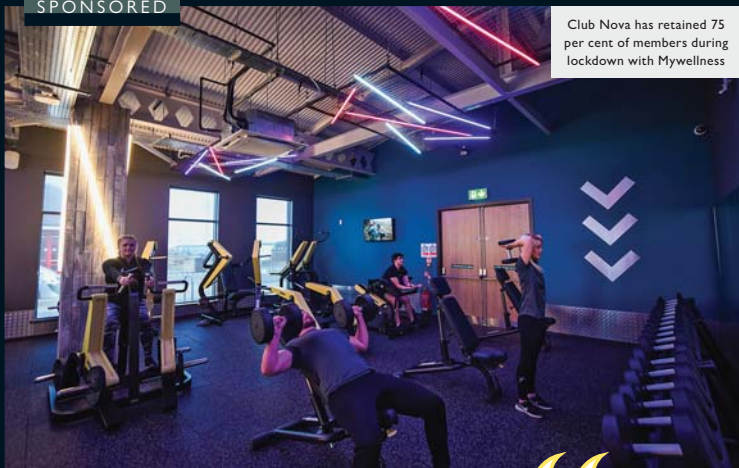
"We've always been early adopters, and the product allows us to fully utilise Technogym's astounding functionality and software, adding immense value to our customer experience."

"Technogym produces advanced equipment with a reduced footprint, which helps us make better use of space in the gym."

Keeping customers connected

Whilst members have been unable to access the sites, Groves and his team have made use of Mywellness digital platform to keep people engaged and active.

Club Nova has retained 75 per cent of members during lockdown with Mywellness



Denbighshire Leisure now uses Mywellness as a single point of contact for member events, news, training plans, online workouts, and extra content. Mywellness is integrated with front-of-house to track member trends and helps manage touchpoints to see where interventions are needed.

Denbighshire Leisure has continued to invest in facilities and digital solutions during the Pandemic as they believe in their offering and want to grow in the future, seeing digital being woven into the long-term strategy.

"Mywellness has definitely helped with retention during lockdown," says Groves. "We're ahead of the curve, retaining 75 per cent of members. It's been beneficial to have a hybrid offer and members will have more confidence in the digital side of things when they come back to the gym."

Immersive virtual group cycle

The theme of raising the bar continues at two of Denbighshire's other sites, Rhyl and X20 St Asaph, where the new Technogym Group Cycle format has been installed.

"This area is a cycling centre of excellence, so it made sense to focus on this," explains Groves. "Plenty of places offer indoor cycling but we wanted to do more: Technogym Group Cycle is a fully-connected experience with a virtual option to maximise the cycling experience."

Denbighshire Leisure has also created two dedicated group cycle spaces at Rhyl and X20

Technogym's support is invaluable in helping us shape a quality experience with a strong sense of connection and added value for every member

St Asaph Leisure Centres, with an immersive experience created by lighting, sound and AV as part of the group cycle experience.

"Adding the two new group cycle studios offers a boutique membership which has helped us increase our class programme during lockdown," says Groves.

"Group cycle is a fantastic option for groups, cycling clubs, or families, as it allows us to provide virtual classes and exclusive sessions without an instructor."

Strengthening the future

Groves is confident about the future, saying: "Our customers will come back to a quality offer and we decided to invest in equipment, environment, staff training and the entire customer experience, because we believe there will be a big uptake in fitness after lockdown."

"Technogym is invaluable in helping us shape a quality experience, with a strong sense of connection and added value. When customers come back, they'll want to enjoy fitness. We're confident we have what's needed to offer that to every member."

More: www.technogym.com

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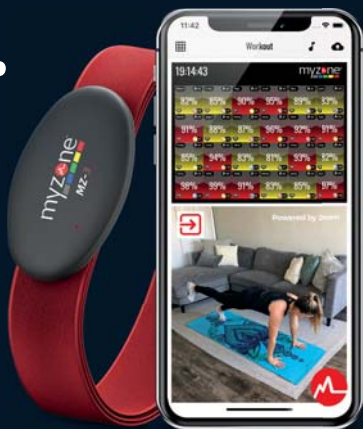




PHOTO: KRISTIAN PIERRES

How will digital, gyms and live fitness mesh to create a new customer offering in health clubs?
Phillip Mills, executive director of Les Mills, shares his views

POWERING BACK

Amid media scare stories that the COVID-inspired home fitness boom would spell the end of fitness facilities, it's encouraging that the vast majority of members want to get back to live workouts in their gym.

An October 2020 IHRSA report found that 95 per cent of members miss at least one aspect of their club and more than half are dissatisfied with their lockdown fitness routines, while operators in China, Japan, and the UAE reported rapid recoveries when they came out of lockdown.

"Since reopening our sites in June and July, we've seen a massive rush from members eager to get back into the club and we're pretty much back to pre-COVID attendance levels," says Ant Martland, co-founder and marketing director of fast-growing UAE chain, GymNation.

"Group fitness and the power of our club

communities have really shone through and we think this will be a key component in the wider industry's recovery. Having been locked up and isolated for so long, people can't wait to get back to the thrill of a buzzing live class and we've got members in [socially distanced] queues at the studio door early to secure their space. People are desperate to get back to working out in groups and the past few months have been the best new sales period we've ever had."

Gyms on the rise

Many have predicted that this rise of at-home digital fitness will cannibalise health club memberships, but the numbers don't bear this out.

Before COVID-19, around 85 per cent of gym members were already doing workouts at home (Qualtrix, 2019), illustrating the importance of delivering all types of fitness experiences if a club is to inspire loyalty. ▶

PHOTO: DAN BROT PHOTOGRAPHY

“

An October 2020 IHRSA report found 95% of members miss at least one aspect of their club and more than half are dissatisfied with their lockdown fitness routines



The social and motivational benefits will encourage people to return, says Mills

As the digital fitness revolution has gathered pace in recent years, gym memberships and penetration rates have still continued to increase. Europe – a market that's been an early adopter of digital fitness – witnessed club member growth of 66 per cent from 2009-2019.

Indeed, with an estimated 375,000 fitness apps in existence, and 77,000 launching in 2020 alone (Source: App Annie), the evidence suggests digital fitness is bringing more people into the world of workouts.

Gym operators also tackled the challenge of COVID-19 with impressive agility, implementing digital workout solutions in a matter of weeks.

With ClubIntel reporting that 72 per cent of global operators now offer on-demand and livestream workouts for members (up from just 25 per cent in 2019), clubs have clearly made substantial progress in a short space of time.

In many ways, the pandemic hastened changes that we, as operators, needed to make anyway.

By taking the club experience into people's homes, operators have the chance to reach huge swathes of the population who wouldn't typically visit a club and help them start their fitness journey. Standalone digital solutions such as livestream and on-demand can be a great way for clubs to win new fans online, build brand affinity, and eventually convert them to becoming full members of the club.

According to 2020 research from Alliance Leisure, 96 per cent of consumers who tried a workout from a club during lockdown said they would use that facility when it reopened.



Instructors hold the hearts of members more than anyone else in the club and this is needed now more than ever

Carrie Kepple, chair of IHRSA

Meanwhile, a November 2020 survey of 9,000 Les Mills On Demand (LMOD) users found 63 per cent of non-gym members are interested in trying live Les Mills classes in a club.

Clubs drive motivation

Gym members are on average 14 times more active than non-members. This is partly due to practicality – most people don't have the space, money or equipment for a replicable home workout – but the most compelling reason is that clubs don't just serve up fitness, they provide motivation.

Motivation remains essential for regular exercise adherence, and two of the most powerful motivators are the accountability and sense of connection we get from working out with others. It's why our people remain

PHOTO: DAN ROOT PHOTOGRAPHY



High quality digital offerings will reap rewards long-term



Clubs must provide world-class fitness offerings to compete with online content

our clubs' biggest assets, and why social fitness experiences hold the key to a rapid recovery.

The aim is to get back to full memberships – and beyond – as quickly as possible, but there's no going back in terms of how we operate. Digital is now a key pillar of success and it's the combination of this with live workouts that will give clubs the edge over digital-only offerings.

The emergence of high-powered digital fitness offerings from the likes of Apple and Google certainly won't make life any easier for operators, but with every challenge to the club model comes fresh opportunity. Clubs may not have the financial might or brand power of major tech firms, but they have assets that Big Tech can't yet match: highly-engaged communities centered around authentic, human connection.

On the digital side, the crucial part for clubs is serving up high-quality on-demand fitness content and livestream classes that are motivating, fun, and results-driven. YouTube is chock-full of free, average fitness content, so our clubs' offerings need to be world-class to keep the audience coming back and paying. ▶

Being fit = better vaccine outcomes

Maintaining a steady flow of stories on the safety of gyms will be key to addressing concerns and influencing policy around COVID-19 restrictions, but we should also highlight our impact on the vaccination effort.

Several studies have suggested that exercise can help boost the efficacy of vaccinations. A University of Birmingham (UK) study showed people who exercised their arms for a few hours before a flu jab developed a stronger immune response, while a study from Germany's Saarland University found that elite athletes showed a more pronounced immune response to flu jabs, suggesting the fitter you are, the more effective your vaccine will be.

Good communication will be key to encouraging members back to live workouts

► Clubs which can provide high-class digital solutions to members will also reap rewards in terms of retention. The November 2020 LMOD survey found that 92 per cent of members who subscribe to the platform via their club feel extremely positive (70 per cent) or moderately positive (22 per cent) about their facility for providing this solution.

Funnelling back to live

Emphasising the essential role of clubs in the post-COVID recovery will be key to bringing members back, while harnessing digital solutions to engage members and boomerang them back to live workouts is the blueprint for recovery.

Every club has a hardcore following, but not everyone will be back right away, so it's important to be proactive across communication channels, emphasising how good it feels for people to be back in the gym.

In markets that were quick to recover, such as China, operators such as Pure Fitness set out rebound plans designed to reactivate members, bring back those who cancelled and attract new faces. Campaigns incentivised members to bring their spouse or family members to the gym, while early bird discounts for people to join within the first four to six weeks have also been common. Obviously, appropriate offers need to vary by local market conditions and capacity.

Industry unity

One of the brighter spots of the past year has been the renewed sense of importance that governments – and society in general – have attached to health and fitness.

We may compete with each other in business, but when it comes to COVID-19, we all need to work together as one industry team to ensure people feel safe when exercising.

Strong lobbying efforts from industry bodies and HCM magazine – working closely with clubs and instructors – have resulted in policy wins for the sector and a raft of positive headlines. Several countries in Europe have exempted gyms and leisure facilities from lockdown measures in recognition of their role in keeping people fighting fit, as well as the very low COVID-19 transmission rate in fitness settings.

Data from uactive, published in February, showed that for every 100,000 visits to UK gyms and leisure centres during 2020, only 1.7 people tested positive for COVID-19, while there is no evidence that transmission took place in gyms, or that people had the virus while they were in the gym.

The strides operators have made to enhance digital offerings will help future-proof our clubs, but another powerful way to get clubs back to capacity will be to refocus on delivering live classes – both indoors and outdoors – as soon as permitted.

While so much has changed, some things remain the same. It's our people who inspired members to join and it's our people who will be key to bringing them back. As well as the operational impact your team can make, consider the emotional contribution they can make in helping members feel safe again.

"Instructors hold the hearts of members more than anyone else in the club and this is needed now more than ever," says Carrie Kepple, chair of IHRSA and MD of Styles Studios Fitness in Illinois.

"These instructors are often the types who will jump right back in and do whatever it takes to get members feeling good again. They're likely to have lots of existing relationships with members and it's also important to ensure they make a real effort to connect and engage with members they don't know." ●

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Mental Wealth

Katie Lewis and Lindsey Simpson co-founded Workplace Mental Wealth to drive workforce change in the health and fitness industry. Liz Terry talks to Lewis about their first research study – the Fitness and Active Leisure Workforce State of Mind Survey – and the launch of The Good Work Pledge

What are the positives and negatives established by your study?

The global pandemic has disrupted lives on a scale unknown to most of us until now, so it is probably not a surprise that when we asked whether people had experienced a mental health issue in the last 12 months, 53 per cent answered 'yes'. However, it's also worth noting that, overall, 69 per cent said they have experienced a mental health issue at some point. This suggests that the prevalence of mental ill health is not just a pandemic issue for the sector.


Of course this is a wider issue, not just one for our sector. According to the NHS England Mental Health Taskforce 2016, the UK economy loses approximately £105 billion each year to mental health related issues. If our sector is to thrive, we need to look after the wellbeing of our workforce.

This means creating a culture that places as much importance on mental health as physical health.

We all have mental health and it can change over time just like physical health. Our research suggests that, as a sector, we need to work harder to de-stigmatise mental health, making it as easy and as accepted to talk about as physical health. The impact of stigma can be seen in the 42 per cent of those questioned who stated that they would not be honest with their employer if they needed time off work due to a mental health issue.

When questioned further as to the reasons behind this, 29 per cent said because they would worry that to do so might negatively impact their career, 18 per cent said they would worry about being negatively thought of by others and 24 per cent said they would find it difficult to talk about a personal mental health issue.

It's encouraging to learn that of those questioned



Lewis and Simpson hope to reduce the stigma attached to discussing mental health issues and make it easier to access help

The Good Work Pledge enables health and active leisure employers to show their commitment to supporting employee mental health



Katie Lewis and Lindsey Simpson

who report to a manager, 78 per cent felt that their manager cared about their mental wellbeing. 79 per cent of respondents also felt that if a colleague approached them about a mental health issue, they felt equipped to support them and to signpost them effectively to help.

Is the industry workforce in good shape?

In terms of current health, collectively, our respondents rated their physical health as 73/100, their social health as 65/100 and their mental health as 63/100.

Behind that data are over 1,000 individual stories, but our analysis showed that those over 45, men and senior leaders reported the highest combined health scores. This was the first survey of its kind which has set a benchmark, so we don't yet have historical data to draw comparisons against. That will come as we repeat our research.

What our survey does tell us is that there has been no universal experience of the pandemic.

The range is vast, from people who have experienced severe distress over the last 12 months and continue to do so, to others that have thrived during the pandemic. Lack of awareness and understanding

can be an issue at both an organisational and personal level and there is the added layer of stigma associated with mental health problems.

Stigma means many workers don't feel able or safe to talk to their employers when they are in distress. This is problematic, because it hinders open and honest conversations that identify risks and mitigations, issues, opportunities and actions. If these conversations happen when they need to, it usually means better outcomes for everyone.

Tell us about the Good Work Pledge

It is our hope that the survey has shone a light on workforce mental health and offered valuable insights that will help employers and individuals understand the current state of play and to take action that will address some of the issues identified.

We're all in this together. Every person and every employer has a role to play.

As part of the Workforce State of Mind Survey 2021, we make four broad recommendations focused around improving awareness through education, reducing stigma, sector leadership and supporting a return to work.



Workforce State of Mind Survey findings

53%

have experienced a mental issue in the last 12 months

69%

have experienced a mental health issue at some point

58%

of women have experienced a mental health issue in the last 12 months compared to 43% of men

78%

believe their line manager cares about their mental health

79%

feel equipped to help a colleague with mental health issues

19%

said someone regularly checks in on their mental health at work

56%

of those working independently felt it is better for their mental health

40%

of employers said they have a wellbeing strategy they communicate to all employees

Employers have a huge role to play. Whilst not all mental health issues result from work or the place of work, the fact that we all spend so much of our time working means that the culture and environment created by employers can have a huge influence on our ability to cope with everyday stress and anxiety. Employers have a duty of care to their employees.

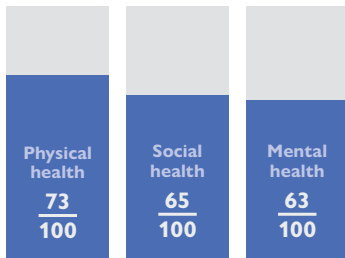
We feel it's important we all pull together under a single ambition to shine a light on issues surrounding mental health and make a commitment to action that will drive positive change. The action that is appropriate for each organisation will be different – there's no one size fits all fix, but every organisation has a part to play and simple actions can make a big difference.

The Good Work Pledge is a way to unite the sector to drive progress. It enables employers to show their commitment to employee mental health and work towards meeting the Thriving at Work Six Mental Health Core Standards – the government-backed framework for employers.

We called it The Good Work Pledge because characteristics of 'good work' can help prevent new mental health problems developing and support those with mental health conditions to do well at work. CIMSPA is backing The Pledge and we encourage all employers serving the fitness and active leisure sector to get involved. There is more information about the pledge on our website workplacementalwealth.com/pledge.

By far, the single biggest impact on respondent's wellbeing was if they felt their work had purpose and if they felt valued.

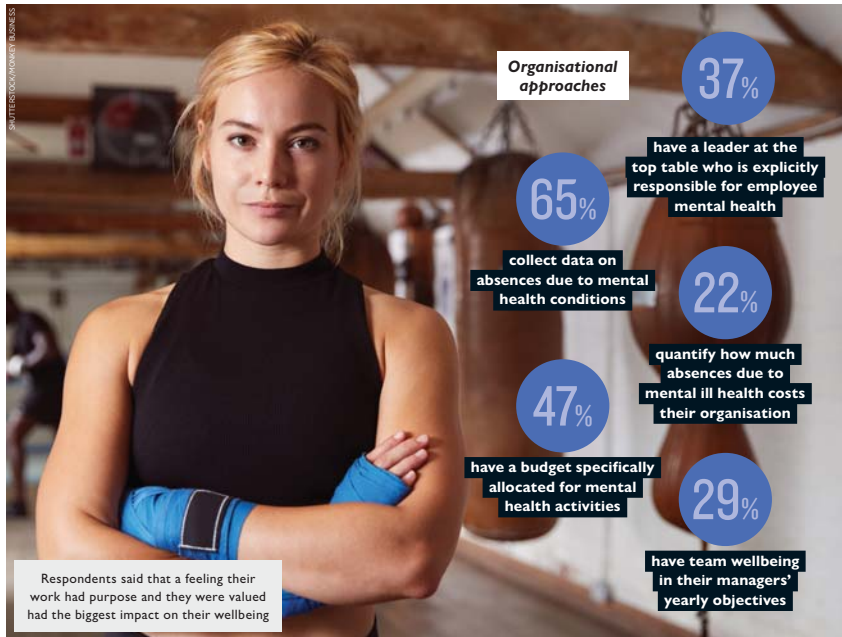
Workforce scores out of 100



Why did you undertake this study?

Quite simply, because it needed doing. We are passionate about driving forward the mental health agenda for our sector and because we had the skills to do it. Our focus is on working with employers and industry bodies, providing the tools and insights needed, to enable them to deliver effective employee wellbeing strategies that take a whole-person approach, placing mental health on a par with physical health.

A great deal of what the sector can do to create mentally healthy workplaces is well within its gift because it's about providing good work, not clinical mental health interventions.



CIMSPA welcomes the findings of this insightful report, which is the first significant move to shed light on the mental health of professionals working in fitness and active leisure. Tara Dillon, CEO, CIMSPA



Tell us about your partnership

We've known each other professionally for more than 20 years, although we had never worked together before. While most will know me for my industry communications specialism, Lindsey is well known both inside and outside of the leisure sector for her cultural change work.

Over the summer of 2020, whilst in the grip of a pandemic, we both became Mental Health First Aiders and established a mutual interest in looking at and better understanding the mental health of the sector's workforce. It was at this time we discovered there had been no sector-wide exploration of the sector's state of mind. We decided our skill sets would marry well and would enable us to plug this much needed gap. We consulted with Tara Dillon, CEO at CIMSPA very early on and were really pleased when CIMSPA agreed to back the survey and The Good Work Pledge.

Do operators in the activity market value their staff highly enough?

Every organisation is different so that's an impossible question to answer, certainly without much more exploration. What we do know is, there has been incredible support for our work, suggesting there's a collective ambition to better understand the state of mind of the workforce and work together to drive systemic change that will positively impact at every level of the sector.

Our aim is to conduct this survey annually to keep workforce mental health in the spotlight, to chart positive progress and share insights. The Good Work Pledge and other projects we have planned will also help support the sector to meet the challenges ahead for the benefit of our people, our organisations and the customers we serve.

More: www.workplacementalwealth.com/pledge ●

Get Tracking

A new tracking tool, called Moving Communities, will assess the impact of the UK's £100m National Leisure Recovery Fund, as well as evaluating the contribution public sector facilities make to their local communities, as HCM reports

The Moving Communities monitoring and evaluation tool has been launched by Sport England, to enable decision-makers to understand the impact of the government's £100m National Leisure Recovery Fund in helping public sector sports, fitness and recreation facilities

recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

Moving Communities will also create an evidence base for local and national decision-making.

Who's running Moving Communities?

A group of partners – including Leisure-net Solutions, the Sport Industry Research Group at Sheffield Hallam University, 4global, Max Associates and Quest – have repurposed the National Benchmarking Survey (NBS), which provides critical data on the performance of leisure facilities, to measure the impact of the National Leisure Recovery Fund.

Known as Moving Communities, the new monitoring and evaluation tool will analyse participation at public leisure facilities and provide insight into the sector's performance, sustainability and social value.

The data will help local authorities, leisure providers and policymakers support the recovery of public gyms and leisure centres and will be used to inform future investment and policy decisions, with the aim of strengthening communities and improving the nation's health and wellbeing.



Moving Communities will help the sector to demonstrate how it contributes to local communities

Who'll take part?

All local authorities benefiting from the funding will be required to take part in the monitoring, which will benchmark income, expenditure, participation, social value and the customer experience. A small number will also go through Quest Prime.

Customer experience will also be measured through a national online survey, which will be the largest experience survey of its kind undertaken in the sector, with more than 1,000 leisure facilities taking part, engaging with a potential sample of 50,000 – 100,000 consumers.

In addition to providing data about the people using publicly-owned sport, fitness and recreation facilities, how they're using them and how often, Moving Communities will evidence the social value of the sector.



Will the findings be shared?

Participating local authorities will have access to Moving Communities dashboards, which can be used to inform and evidence local decisions, while a quarterly overview will be published to provide insights for providers.

"Moving Communities will demonstrate the value and impact of the sector as it emerges from the pandemic, at the time when it's needed most," says Dave Monkhouse, director of customer insight firm, leisure-net, which is leading the delivery of the service on behalf of Sport England.

"The data will show who's performing well, how and why. This will be shared with other local authorities, to help the sector recover from the crisis."



The new monitoring and evaluation tool will analyse participation at public leisure facilities and provide insight into the sector's performance, sustainability and social value

Q&A **Mike Hill**

HCM drills into the detail of Sport England's Moving Communities initiative with leisure-net's Mike Hill

What does this mean for the sector?

Moving Communities is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the industry to gather data, insight and intelligence on a sector-wide scale, helping to inform key decisions that will shape the way we operate in the challenging years to come.

This opportunity has come about off the back of evaluation and monitoring for the National Leisure Recovery Fund, but can develop into something important and valuable for the sector.

For the first time this will give us a clear picture, across most local authorities in England, of how leisure centres are performing in terms of finance, participation, the customer experience and the social value they bring to their communities.

Operators will be able to compare their performance against national averages and wider data sets. It's going to be a step change in terms of the breadth and depth of understanding we have about the active leisure sector.

Will the results impact funding going forward?

The insight that Moving Communities will give us will be a valuable part of "making the case" for future local leisure provision, not only from a national government point of view, but also



Sport England's and individual local authorities'.

It's not only about how fast customers return and in what numbers, but also who comes back. The last 12 months have exaggerated many existing inequalities in the country and we need to ensure that hard to reach groups – who were often relatively inactive prior to COVID-19 – are not left behind even more, increasing the activity and health gap even further.

Will you compare the types of offering against the results and if so, how will this work?

The Moving Communities initiative will help to provide insight into the sector's recovery from COVID-19. For example, it will investigate whether certain demographics are coming back to their local centres more than others and establish what best practice looks like and how we can share it.

We know from previous research, carried out by Leisure-net, that people in older age groups and women are generally more concerned about returning, and have more of a focus on cleanliness and other safety protocols, so it's essential that operators and local authorities find out very quickly, whether their re-opening systems and processes are up to standard and giving returning customers the confidence they need.

As part of this, certain sites will also be undertaking Quest Prime – the new version of Quest – which is offering operators a tool to measure their readiness and standards against national performance levels.

It's also important to share best practice, so all the findings will be made available nationally on a quarterly basis, through a series of reports and webinars.



Participation will be monitored across all age groups

KALINOPES/SHUTTERSTOCK



The monitoring will create an evidence base to help demonstrate the value of the leisure sector

Will the data be anonymised, or will it be possible to see the performance of individual facilities?

Local authorities and their operators will be able to see their data and KPIs for their own sites, and compare them against national benchmarks using a series of filters. All data will be anonymised and amalgamated centrally in order to produce these valuable benchmarks and the overall national picture.

How has your research been designed to ensure operators can effect change based on the results?

The Moving Communities Customer Experience Survey will be the largest of its kind ever carried out in the sector. Each local authority and operator will be able to see their results on a site by site basis and compare them with the rest of the sector.

The survey has key questions in it, such as Net Promoter Score, the new Customer Confidence Indicator and Overall Satisfaction, as well as new sets of questions looking at the value that customers feel their local centres deliver in terms of their activity levels and wellbeing, and their future plans for activity.

With the change of activity patterns over the last 12 months, insight into customers' attitudes and perceptions will be more critical than ever to service providers.

What role will the partners play?

Leisure-net is the lead partner in the consortium, we'll manage the overall programme, including communications and education/feedback to the sector.

4global is leading on the data collection and reporting elements and building the new Moving Communities platform, while Sheffield Hallam University's Sports Industry Research Centre is bringing academic rigour to the process and will also be producing the quarterly sector reports.

Management consultancy, Max Associates, is focusing on keeping the initiative aligned with what's happening on the ground with local authorities and public sector provision. Finally, Right Directions is leading on Quest Prime, the operational/quality check within the process – a key element of the study. ●

More: www.movingcommunities.org

TAXING MATTERS

New tax laws will hit the UK fitness sector in early April, changing the way freelance PTs are legally classified for income tax and national insurance, as Abi Harris reports

IR35 - four simple characters with a big impact for operators in the health and fitness industry. As the Chancellor left all mention of this impending tax change out of his March budget, this means private sector IR35 tax reforms officially hit our sector in April.

What is IR35?

IR35 is new tax legislation that means private sector employers will be responsible for assessing whether or not contractors need to pay income tax and national insurance contributions.

It will also compel operators to seek out 'disguised employees', or contractors with a permanent position at a company, who don't pay the same income tax or national insurance contributions (NIC) as standard employees.

The purpose of IR35 is to collect the same amount of tax and National Insurance Contributions as would have been paid if an individual was employed directly.

It's widely believed that IR35 changes could be disastrous for the self-employed, who are likely to be hit with additional costs, while companies

— already grappling with the ongoing fallout from COVID-19 — will need to assess the likely impact of the new legislation on their businesses and move to accommodate the change.

What it means for our sector


IR35 will apply where personal trainers or instructors provide services to an organisation through an intermediary company, such as Joe Bloggs PT Services Ltd, or are supplied via an employment agency/business. The question to ask is "if it wasn't for that company in the middle, would the individual be regarded as an employee/worker for tax and NIC purposes?"

Health club and leisure centre operators engaging 'off-payroll' PTs and instructors via an intermediary will be responsible for determining their employment status and paying Income Tax and NICs for those deemed employees.

Aaron McCulloch is MD of Your Personal Training (YPT), which supports PTs and gym operators to deliver personal training services. He says: "Many PTs work in clubs as 'off-payroll' gym or class instructors via their own



New tax laws will impact the way operators transact with fitness professionals



The financial impact can be significant, amounting to thousands of pounds in additional income tax and NICs for every contractor HMRC would deem to be an employee – Padma Tadi, Irwin Mitchell

limited company in lieu of paying floor rent to operate their business; it's been standard practice in our sector for many years.

"They're often required to carry out inductions, group exercise classes or even cleaning, and would typically have to ask for time off and work their PT business around a shift rota set by the club.

"If a PT or instructor is obliged to deliver a set number of regular working hours and are told when, where and how they must do this, it's likely HMRC would deem them an employee."

Law firm, Irwin Mitchell, has been supporting companies dealing with IR35 across a number

of sectors and senior associate, Padma Tadi, says: "The financial impact can be significant; amounting to thousands of pounds in additional income tax and NICs for every contractor HMRC would deem to be an employee.

"Operators will be responsible for deducting and passing on these charges, as well managing the increased costs and responsibilities attached to employment rights to which the individual may be entitled.

"The legislation applies to all invoices and payments made after 6 April 2021," she says, "even if the work is carried out before that date and when passed on to

PTs or instructors, this could reduce their net income by up to 25 per cent."

The good news is these changes only apply to freelancers providing services via an intermediary company and they won't apply to small organisations which don't meet at least two of the following criteria:

- Annual turnover of more than £10.2 million
- Balance sheet total of more than £5.1 million
- More than 50 (F/T equivalent) employees

However, Tadi advises: "Beware when looking at size. If you're part of a corporate group, the overall group turnover must be considered, or you may still fall within the scope."

"Preparation is key, because assessing each team member and introducing and actioning appropriate policies and procedures can be extremely time consuming", warns McCulloch. ●

Each team member could need to be assessed

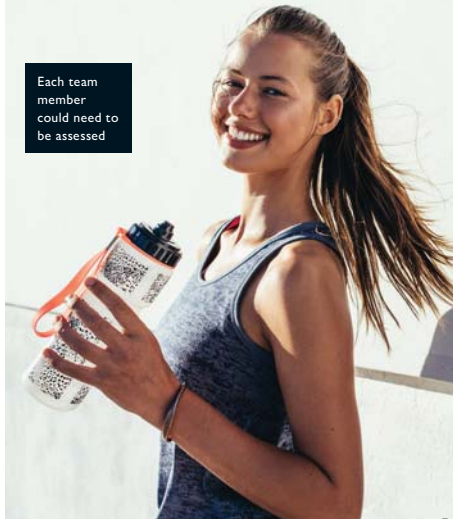


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ALAN LUND



If a PT or instructor is obliged to deliver a set number of regular working hours and are told when, where and how they must do this, it's likely HMRC would deem them an employee – Aaron McCulloch, Your Personal Training

8 steps to compliance – Aaron McCulloch, Your Personal Training

1. Establish whether you fall within the definition of 'small'. If so, you won't ever need to make changes, provided you remain small.
2. Identify freelancers who operate via an intermediary and provide a status determination for each. Consider how often they work for you, whether they provide their own kit and if they work for other gyms.
3. Decide who in the team will be responsible for determining the status of freelancers. If they need training to understand how to make a proper assessment, HMRC has an online tool (known as CEST) to assist, but it has been subject to criticism for giving some inaccurate outcomes, so we advise also seeking professional advice.
4. Freelance PTs and instructors may challenge the status you allocate. Decide how

you'll deal with those appeals and how you'll comply with the time limits (you have 45 days to respond to any appeal with your findings).

5. Will tax and NICs which are due be an additional cost for you, or can you renegotiate so this is factored into the PTs' rates?

6. Review how the payment processes will work. The PTs' invoices will need to be split between fee and VAT, with PAYE and NIC calculated on the fee and with a net payment made to the PTs and PAYE/NIC to HMRC.

7. Establish whether you need to set up a separate PAYE scheme to handle payments – they must be processed under the real-time information (RTI) arrangements.

8. Advise instructors you're reviewing your processes. You may want to ask them to become employees if they are critical to your operation.



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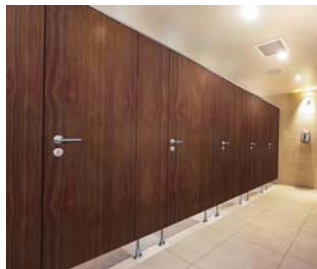
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MARATHON



Changing rooms have been largely closed during the pandemic, but as clubs open up, how will ongoing pandemic restrictions impact changing room design? We ask the experts for their observations and reflections

It's important for all facilities to have a layout that's flexible, says Safe Space's Gregg Rumble

Personal Space

Gregg Rumble

Safe Space Lockers

The challenge for any gym is how best to maximise space, and so the trade-off with increasing the size of changing facilities might be reducing the available space for F&B, which may then impact secondary spend or even reduce space on the gym floor, so maximising the existing changing space will be important.

Ultimately, changing room trends will be led by the whole gym experience; we'll see a smarter use of space and more consideration given to layout that encourages social distancing and a shift away from tightly packed changing facilities, to ensure members feel safe and comfortable.

We've seen some operators adapt their space to restrict access to certain lockers, vanity units, benches, toilet cubicles, etc, to help manage social distancing, however this is more difficult to implement in smaller changing rooms.



36
We'll see a smarter use of space and more consideration given to layouts that encourage social distancing

Cubicles enforce social distancing, however they're confined spaces with more surface area, so require thorough cleaning.

Ideally each cubicle would be sanitised after use and before another member occupies it, however this can be difficult for staff to manage and puts more responsibility on members.

We're seeing more use of tech – using contactless via a mobile app to secure lockers is one example, and a way of reducing contact with surfaces.

We're yet to experience a significant shift in how operators are designing their changing rooms. I think a key reason for this is the unknown in terms of how the pandemic will progress.

It's important for any new facility to have a gym design and layout that's flexible and can be adapted – we've seen this with existing spaces – gyms are putting in temporary measures to help manage social distancing and keep members safe, while still providing a quality of service and experience that encourages them to return. New changing facilities should be no different. ▶



Spencer Grimwood

Crown Sports Lockers

Our belief is that once the vaccination rollout is completed by summer, operators will return to 'business as usual' regarding changing room provision. To the best of our knowledge, our key clients in the health club sector are not planning longer-term redesigns of their changing room layouts.

We introduced one or two adjustments to our changing room designs to aid social distancing when the first lockdown was announced, such as reducing the number of hairdryer points at a vanity station and increasing the distance between the freestanding benches and lockers to improve people flow and minimise pinch points.

Operators will want to welcome guests and members in numbers that will help redress their bottom lines as quickly as possible

Given the strictures and business impact of lockdown, operators will want to welcome guests and members in numbers that will help redress their bottom lines as quickly as possible, in accordance with government guidelines.

As lockdown lifts, these factors may prevail over current social distancing measures, especially if vaccine passports are introduced and users gain greater confidence about proximity to others.

Looking ahead I think locking systems will be one of the main focus points. Rather like attitudes to coinage, are customers going to want to touch a key that has been handled by lots of others to secure their locker?

Several of our clients are looking to change to RFID locks, which can be operated by the customer's membership card, wrist band or mobile device. These types of locks are also easier to keep clean for the operator.

Operators will return to 'business as usual' once the vaccine rollout is completed, predicts Spencer Grimwood



PHOTO: LLOYD BUSINESS/SHUTTERSTOCK

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Hussle brings gyms additional revenue by engaging with people who don't currently buy traditional gym memberships, such as: 'try-before-you-buy' customers, occasional users and customers requiring multi-venue workout options that no single operator can provide

In the last 18 months, Hussle has:

- 📌 Brought 66,000 disengaged ex-members back
- 📌 Encouraged 14,000 brand new customers into gyms
- 📌 Secured gym partner locations in 96 per cent of UK postcodes
- 📌 Turned more than 30,000 try-before-you-buy customers into direct club members

On average, 26% of customers go on to become members of gyms they visit via Hussle



www.hussle.com/list-my-gym



The Charing Cross Sports Club has grown its membership numbers with Huddle



PHOTOS: CHARING CROSS SPORTS CLUB

Come out of lockdown fighting fit

Huddle's new Membership Conversion Service proactively turns Huddle customers into direct club members, encouraging them to join clubs they attend regularly

The biggest challenge facing UK operators is getting members back after lockdown.

While some predict a reopening surge, others are more cautious, questioning whether new at-home habits will keep people away.

Operators will be working with tighter budgets and so marketing spend – often the first to be cut – is likely to be hit especially hard.

With this in mind, have you considered all the available options? Now more than ever is the time to give something new a try.

Partnership working

Tom Canning, GM at Charing Cross Sports Club, says: "We're a small independent club surrounded by heavy hitters with big budgets. While we compete on price and facilities, we couldn't get near them in terms of marketing exposure without our partnership with Huddle."

"Huddle offers us a free digital marketing channel with powerful UK-wide reach, opening up new member options at no extra cost."

"We've worked with Huddle for 10 years now. The partnership gives us invaluable exposure we can't get anywhere else and gets us in front of customers we wouldn't otherwise be seen by."

"I can clearly identify the value our partnership brings. In fact, since the relationship started, it's done nothing but get better – pre COVID-19 we were getting £1,200 a month via Huddle," he explains.

Huddle targets customers that don't engage with traditional gym memberships and so offers up

members operators would never normally attract – either direct, through partnerships with the likes of Vodafone, or via employers offering fitness-as-a-benefit to staff, such as Facebook and the NHS. It's ideal for occasional gym goers, 'try-before-they-buy' customers and those wanting multi-venue workouts.

New for 2021

The new Membership Conversion Service (MCS) turns Huddle customers who regularly use one facility into direct club members, to boost member sales.

"For me the joy of Huddle is that consumers can use clubs wherever they find themselves. But it's reassuring to know if someone uses us frequently, Huddle will promote joining us direct," says Canning.

"I believe this element of our partnership will come into its own after lockdown. The pandemic has changed the way we live and work. People won't be in offices five days a week, they'll divide their time between work and home. Huddle is a wonderful platform for that; it would be a benefit for any independent club."

More: www.huddle.com/list-my-gym



PHOTO: CHARING CROSS SPORTS CLUB

Huddle offers us a free digital marketing channel with powerful UK-wide reach. Working alongside them opens up new member options, all at no extra cost

**Tom Canning, GM,
Charing Cross Sports Club**

Product innovation



Steph Eaves rounds up the latest launches in health and fitness

Function's corporate fitness app will empower your workforce, says Ernst De Neef

Digital fitness supplier FunXtion has introduced its new white labeled corporate fitness app to support healthier and more productive workplaces.

Designed to provide a healthy wellbeing hub

for employees, the app includes: connectivity to wearable devices, inclusive training plans to suit every ability and an extensive library of on-demand workouts and online coaching options. Together,

this gives employees access to a host of training options, wellness solutions and a means of connecting to colleagues anytime, anywhere.

Ernst De Neef, FunXtion CEO, commented: "It has been a turbulent time for all of us, with many adapting to working from home and tackling a more sedentary lifestyle.

"With audio workouts for lunchtime walks, seven-minute break workouts, 'no sweat' workouts, communication with real-life coaches and duo workouts that colleagues can tackle



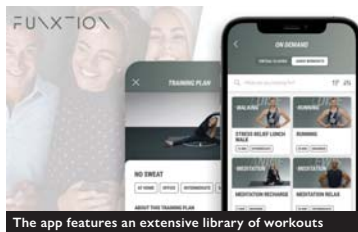
We've launched this app to help businesses thrive by prioritising health

Ernst De Neef

together, the app has an exercise to meet any goal.

"We've launched this app to prioritise employee health and, in turn, help businesses thrive."

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
FUNCTION



The app features an extensive library of workouts

Nautilus Leverage Deadlift Shrug helps members learn proper technique, says Jon Thiel

Nautilus has launched the Leverage Deadlift Shrug, which is billed as an ideal solution for those seeking the benefits of

the deadlift movement on an assisted machine. This new product from the Leverage line is aimed at facilities hoping to expand their free weight, functional, or plate loaded areas.

"The Deadlift Shrug is easy to use, safe for the user and effective," said Jon Thiel, Nautilus' director of products.

"The defined path of motion helps new strength training members to feel comfortable beginning their journey. Gym staff



The Deadlift Shrug has been designed for safety

don't have to worry about potential client injury. It is not uncommon to scrape the barbell on the front of the shins, especially when first learning the deadlift exercise. With the Deadlift Shrug's pivoting

handle design, the risk to the user is eliminated."

The Leverage line ensures low load points for safe and simple use.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Nautilus



The defined path of motion helps those new to strength training

Jon Thiel

Goji's virus-killing air purification system is the future of air purification for gyms, says **Greg Whyte**

As health clubs prepare to reopen, Goji's coronavirus-killing air purification system could give members the extra confidence they need to come back.

Goji has introduced a cost-effective, world-class, hospital-grade air purification system to the UK health and fitness market, which traps and kills 99.9 per cent of viruses and bacteria, including COVID-19.

The cleaner and greener system uses revolutionary Nano-Confined Catalytic Oxidation (NCCO) technology, to purify the air, without generating any harmful bi-products. Two million units have already been sold in Asia and the US.

The environmentally-friendly and affordable system can work independently or alongside existing health club ventilation systems, removing toxins from the air, including pollen, dust mites, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), tiny particulate matter (down to PM2.5), odours and other airborne pollutants.



Air purification is reinventing the health industry. Our customers will truly feel the difference of our purified air

**Jon Williams, CEO,
The Marlow Club**



Goji air purification systems at The Marlow Club

Goji is already installed at the prestigious Marlow Club, where CEO, Jon Williams, says: "Air purification is reinventing the health club industry. Our customers will truly feel the difference of our purified air and be reassured we're doing absolutely everything we can to keep them safe when they return to our club – now and into the future."

"In the long-term we're delivering a green legacy – a pollutant-free space. A safe hub where our members can breathe deeply and freely, reducing pollution-triggering conditions such as airborne viral and bacterial infections, asthma and hay fever. Our members will value our clean air for their long-term health and wellbeing."

Goji air purifiers:

- Have no toxic filters to return to landfill
- Are not reliant on bringing air in from the outside, so avoid the cost of heating or cooling outside air
- Are highly efficient at eliminating pollution, pollen, dust mites, particulate matter, viruses, bacteria, VOCs and odours
- Are available in a range of sizes, including floor, wall and ceiling units, as well as duct-mounted units that can be



Greg Whyte

attached to and work in combination with existing ventilation systems

- Purify and clean out particulate matter down to 2.5 microns, PM2.5 (the average cross-section of a human hair is 50 microns)
- Run on as little energy as required for a lightbulb
- Can be used throughout a club or be targeted to high density areas.

Professor Greg Whyte, director of science at Goji says: "This is the future of air quality. Air pollution is one of the UK's biggest public health challenges, and society is right to question what clean and green really means. Goji delivers on both."

Find out more:

www.gojigroup.co.uk
email: info@gojigroup.co.uk
Tel: +44 (0)330 133 4127



Gym goers can now wake up and strengthen those inactive muscles

Tracy Morrell



The new Booty Builder V8 is easier and safer to use

Booty Builder launches V8 model for a better glute workout, says Tracy Morrell

Booty Builder has launched its new V8 model to the UK market, with hopes it will inspire the nation's desk workers to get moving again.

Built on the experience of Booty Builder's seven previous models and retaining the patented raised feet design that

puts the user in the optimal position to isolate the glutes, the V8 has otherwise been totally redesigned. The new model is billed as easier, safer and faster to set up and use. It also has a much reduced footprint.

Tracy Morrell, director of React Fitness, the exclusive

UK distributor for Booty Builder, commented:

"People are now realising the importance of glute activation for physical function, strength and performance.

"With the V8, gym-goers can now wake up and strengthen those inactive muscles. And the great

thing about its design is that it allows operators to achieve more with their space, which is a good fit in today's landscape given the reduced gym capacities and social distancing measures."

fitness-kit.net **KEYWORD**
React Fitness

The patent pending Myzone Switch will transform workouts, says Dave Wright

Myzone CEO, Dave Wright, has announced the launch of MZ-Switch, a mobile heart rate monitor which can now sit on the wrist or forearm.

The new product joins the existing Myzone belt which sits on the sternum.

The interchangeable, waterproof heart rate monitor enables users to continue monitoring their performance when exercising outside and also in the pool.

Myzone's system sees people collecting MEPs – exercise points – and working on their MEP rankings for motivation. This also helps build communities.

Data from MZ Switch is collected in real-time and used to understand work output and recovery, enabling training to develop progression and live results.

The new tech is built off the back of the existing Myzone infrastructure,



The new tech is patent pending

Dave Wright



MEPs can now be gained everywhere

enabling the company to extend its reach into the wider activity, consumer and wellness markets.

Although Myzone already has an MZ watch, this only displays data from the chest-mounted heart rate monitor, it doesn't collect it as MZ Switch does.

The Myzone Switch is patent-pending as the first interchangeable heart rate monitor of its type.

Heart rate is determined by PPG sensors that scan the microvascular system.

fitness-kit.net **KEYWORD**
Myzone



art_{of}
cryo



PREMIUM ART OF CRYO SOLUTIONS

Unique art of cryo chamber solutions - Vaultz

- Reliable, Durable & Real
- Purely electricity driven
- Secure
- More than cold! 30 years of experience

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Fit kids have more brainpower

Children with better cardiorespiratory health than their peers also do better on cognitive tests and other measures of brain function, according to new research

Researchers at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) found the link between cardiorespiratory fitness and cognitive health is evident even earlier in life than previously appreciated.

Most studies of the link between fitness and brain health focus on adults or pre adolescent or adolescent children. Research has also consistently found positive correlations between people's aerobic exercise capacity and their academic achievement and cognitive abilities.

UIUC's Shelby Key, who led the research, said: "Studies have found that higher cardiorespiratory fitness in older children and adults corresponds to the relative size and connectivity of brain structures that are important to cognitive control. "But it isn't yet known at what point in the developmental trajectory of childhood this relationship emerges."

To better understand the relationship between

Preschool children with higher cardiorespiratory fitness had higher scores on academic ability tasks related to general intellectual abilities

cardiorespiratory fitness and brain health in 59 preschool-aged children, the researchers subjected them to several tests.

The children walked as far as they could in six minutes, a test that allowed researchers to estimate their cardiorespiratory fitness.

An early cognitive and academic development test gave the team a measure of each child's intellectual abilities, and a computerised "flanker" task measured how well they were able to focus on the important part of an image while ignoring distracting information.

Participants also took part in a computerised task that required them to alter their responses depending on whether flowers or hearts appeared on the screen – a measure of mental flexibility.

Statistical analyses revealed a relationship between the children's physical fitness and their cognitive abilities and brain function, the researchers said.

"Preschool children with higher estimated cardiorespiratory fitness had higher scores on academic ability tasks related to general intellectual abilities as well as their use of expressive language," Key said.

"They had better performance on computerised tasks requiring attention and multitasking skills, and they showed the potential for faster processing speeds and greater resource allocation in the brain when completing these computerised tasks."

● The study was published in the *Journal of Clinical Medicine*. To read the full article at www.HCMmag.com/preschoolers



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