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Investment in sport can cut crime, claims new research

Rick Broadbent

New research shows that the Government could cut crime and save millions of pounds by investing in sport. As the fight for an Olympic legacy gathers pace, a ground-breaking report claims that sport is a cost-effective way of cleaning up communities.

Titled *The Costs and Benefits of Sport for Crime Reduction*, the research reveals that the Sport and Thought project in Brent, northwest London, returns £6.58 on every £1 spent. The Fight for Peace boxing and martial arts academy in Newham, East London, returns £4.42 on every £1.

Axel Schulz, the retired German heavyweight boxer, said: "It's no good just going out and shouting, 'Sport is great.' You need to have research like this which proves beyond doubt that sport can really make a significant economic difference. This gives us the ammunition to take to governments and say, 'Here is the proof, now give sport a chance to help.'"

The research was co-funded by the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation and the Ecorys Research Programme, with support from universities in London, Milan and Cologne. The authors claim that this shows, once and for all, that investing in sport has huge economic, as well as physical, benefits, ranging from less money spent on police to less support for those no longer in prison and less healthcare because of better lifestyles. The Fight for Peace project uses boxing to help to give direction to young people.

Schulz says the report offers proof of sport's impact

While the anecdotal benefits are well known, the new research measures the impact. It states that across 800 participants in the project last year, Fight for Peace was responsible for 165 crimes being prevented, saving society more than £1 million.

With budgets being cut and the issue of legacy the hottest of potatoes, the research is being touted as proof that the Government should invest heavily in community sports projects. The study also included projects in Milan and Berlin.

The greatest cash saving came from the Sport and Thought project, which offers weekly after-school football and psychotherapeutic sessions to combat school exclusion.

● UK Athletics (UKA) has appointed its own psychiatrist. Dr Steve Peters — renowned for his work with Sir Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton, the cyclists, Craig Bellamy, the footballer, and Ronnie O'Sullivan, the snooker player — has joined UKA's performance team. He will lead a hand-picked team of sports psychologists and attempt to create a "winning culture", as well as focusing on specific athletes.

Peters will continue to work as a consultant for British Cycling, where he is credited as being a key player in Great Britain's success in recent years. He explained much of his theory in his bestselling book, *The Chimp Paradox*.

It is the first appointment made by Neil Black, the performance director of UKA. The next is likely to be a new head coach to succeed Charles van Commenee, who resigned last month.