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Ref: G:\Heads of Serv PA – Sport\Lts\Kick Boxing

9th May 2008

Dear Colleague

Re: Children involved in Thai (Kick) Boxing

Following the screening of the Channel 4 documentary “Strictly Baby Fight Club” on Thursday 24th April the NSPCC has received a significant number of enquiries and concerns from a wide range of individuals including LSCBs, the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, and members of the public. All of the enquiries have raised questions about the appropriateness of young children’s involvement in this activity, the serious risks they were exposed to, and the need for intervention to protect their safety and welfare.

In contacting you we are seeking to share the extent of the concerns and also highlight aspects of current legislation and guidance that could be considered in response to any concerns that may be raised in your area arising from this programme.

Thai (Kick) boxing is not recognised as a sport by any of the UK Sports Councils or the Department for Culture Media and Sport. It has no single governing body that the Sports Councils can intervene with, or that the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) can engage in dialogue with to raise the serious issues highlighted by this programme.

There are a number of sports and recreation activities that children and young people are involved in that fall outside of the regulated Governing Body structure. This can often mean that standards fall short of those we would expect to see in place, and may encourage practice that can compromise the welfare and safety of young people. In the absence of regulation by a Governing Body we believe local interventions are the only means of raising the standards of operation of these activities. All Sport England County Sports Partnerships and many Governing Bodies of sport operate club accreditation programmes that promote and recognise best practice in providing sport for children and young people. Information on this can be found at www.clubmark.org.uk and on the CPSU’s website at www.thecpsu.org.uk.



The Channel 4 programme highlighted a number of serious concerns in relation to safeguarding. There are issues where we feel there may be opportunity for local interventions by Local Safeguarding Children Boards and individual constituent organisations over and above the considerations set out in the 'Working Together' 2006 guidance.

Local Education Welfare Services have a responsibility under the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and 1963, and the Children (Performances) Regulations 1968 to investigate and monitor employment undertaken by young people of compulsory school age. The purpose of this legislation is to ensure that such employment is safe and legal, and that it does not damage or interrupt the young peoples' education. There were clear examples highlighted in the programme where the children took part in a "professional" fight (i.e. spectators paid to watch) to which this legislation could apply.

The Licensing Act 2003 requires Local Licensing Committees to grant licences for the provision of regulated entertainment or facilities and this would include an indoor sporting event or boxing or wrestling entertainment. Before a licence is granted the applicant is required to demonstrate how they are promoting the four objectives of the Act, which include the protection of children from harm. There were examples in the Channel 4 programme where it could be evidenced that children were exposed to unnecessary risk of harm. This could be justification for a review of the licence if one had already been granted. If a licence had not been granted that would place the organisers in breach of the licensing regulations.

Local letting policies have been established in a small number of local authority leisure services to promote best practice in the provision of sporting activities for children and young people. Within the safeguarding policies of these leisure services department's provision can be made for clubs and associations seeking to use facilities to demonstrate minimum standards in relation to safeguarding. Where non-affiliated or unregulated sports clubs seek to hire facilities this approach to letting can be an effective means of introducing minimum operating standards, raising standards of practice, and addressing some of the worst aspects of youth sport highlighted in the television programme.

I hope that this information is helpful in considering local responses both to specific issues raised by this programme, and to the wider issue of raising the quality of children and young people's experience of sport and recreation. I would appreciate it if you would raise this matter with your Board and would welcome any comments or views from members. We would also find it helpful in our discussions with the relevant Government Departments if we are able to share local reactions to the programme that you may have received.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Boocock'.

Steve Boocock
Child Protection in Sport Unit Director