

**sports**  
think tank

# The Road to the 2024 **Election Manifesto**

100 policy ideas for  
sport, physical activity  
and wellbeing



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**ARDEN**  
STRATEGIES

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# About the Sports Think Tank

**The STT is a Think Tank dedicated to delivering sport and physical activity research and policy solutions. With our bases in London and Loughborough we are dedicated to helping the sport and physical activity sector think clearly and strategically based on the best available evidence. And create deliverable policy solutions.**

Our purpose is to conduct and promote research and help the education of the public about the benefits of sport and physical activity and to help the sector think more clearly using the evidence about the best ways to create advocacy, impact and investment in the sector. We understand sport, policy and how government works.

Published by The Sports Think Tank January 2024

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The contents and opinions expressed in this briefing paper are those of the authors only.

# Acknowledgements



**We would like to thank Arden Strategies, led by former Cabinet Minister the Rt Hon. Jim Murphy and their support for this publication.**

Arden strategies is an internationally renowned advisory and communications firm based in London, whose team is made up of truly outstanding individuals with proven experience in business, government, strategic communication, and politics.

The founder the Rt Hon Jim Murphy is a life-long sport enthusiast and understands the role sport can play in political life in the UK. His personal commitment to the project has been instrumental in helping the team believe it will help policy development in the run up to the 2024 General Election Manifestos. Arden strategies will help provide a pivotal role to ensure the ideas and policies in this booklet

are part of the policy mix going into the parties fighting the elections in 2024 and with whoever forms the next government.

We of course would also like to thank all of our contributors to this pamphlet. The individual authors have been given the opportunity to share their thoughts and insight into finding policy changes which they believe will access to sport, physical activity, and wellbeing easier and more sustainable. The authors are responsible for their own contributions, and we have avoided editing as much as possible. Their help and resource support has made this possible. Thank You.

And finally thank you to Mark Balcar, James Reed, Tom Walker and Lucy James who have ensured this document is a contribution to policy makers in an election year.

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# Foreword

**Ever since the publication, in 2023, of my Fabian Society Report – Healthy Britain A new approach to health and wellbeing policy – I’ve been overwhelmed by the energy and enthusiasm shown by the wider sport and physical activity sector to engage with it.**

It is not hyperbole to claim that physical activity remains one of the most under-used resources we have at our disposal when tackling some of our most persistent challenges, from easing the pressures on the NHS, tackling crime and improving economic productivity to finding ways to level up. As I outlined in the Healthy Britain report, the evidence is overwhelming: health and wellbeing are not just desirable outcomes in and of themselves, but essential components of a programme for growth, productivity, national renewal, and opportunity for all.

It is to this backdrop – and the impending general election – that the Sports Think Tank has published a crucial document, The Road to the 2024 Manifesto: 100 policy ideas for sport, physical activity, and wellbeing.

Bringing together ideas, proposals and calls from 29 different contributors across the sport, physical activity, and wellbeing sector, it makes for a fascinating and inspiring read. From simple ideas that could be easily implemented to more wide-reaching changes intended to shift the dial on public discourse, there is plenty of food for thought.

Perhaps most importantly – and this is where political parties should prick up their ears – the contributors were challenged to make each policy call cost-neutral. That’s right. The ideas, suggestions and proposals contained

in this document have been designed to be delivered without any extra investment. In these economically trying times, this aspect alone should make the document you have in your hands essential reading.

Another aspect that adds value to this document is the sheer variety of the ideas within it. From activating primary school children to engaging the elderly and from community sport to elite performance, nearly every aspect of sport, wellbeing and physical activity is covered. As the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Sport, and with my professional background in fitness and wellbeing, I recognise the importance of this, as in my work I constantly witness so many areas and ways in which the sector can make a difference to lives.

This is a fantastic document and I want to congratulate the Sports Think Tank for its hard work in putting together – and I am grateful to each contributor. I have no doubt that it will help shape the policies of the next government – whoever emerges as winner from next year’s general election. I look forward to the debate and discussions that will follow from its publication. I’m sure the response to it will be just as enthusiastic and energetic as the one towards Healthy Britain was last year.



**Kim  
Leadbeater MP**

Chair, All-Party  
Parliamentary Group  
for Sport



# Introduction

**As we head into a General Election year the team at the Sports Think Tank have been working on ways to best engage with policy makers and to ensure that sport, physical activity and wellbeing are included in the policy mix.**

There is increasing recognition of the role sport, physical activity and wellbeing can play in creating a healthier nation but, in a country facing multiple, deep-seated economic and structural problems as well as increasing global situations, it can be difficult to find space to talk about the benefits that policy makers can derive from a policy agenda around getting people active.

We know there is no shortage of reports, ideas and policy asks produced by the sector. They all add to the case and are very welcome. But we felt there was still some space for organisations who don't always get heard but have something useful to add.

It also has become clear that the sector will not be able to rely on additional government spending. Indeed, the predicted department

spend at the time of writing, in the winter of 2023, is likely to fall during the current cycle. So, we asked our contributors to produce policy ideas that remain -resource-neutral for government over the budget cycle. We know that in the long run, 'savings' can be made with a healthier and more productive nation, but how this is measured and paid for in the short term remains one of the challenges for governments.

It is an interesting challenge for us all – to have to rethink our approach to policy making when resources are scarce or unavailable. What can we do better with current levels of spending? This exercise is not easy for organisations who do not often have vast revenues and we have not been fully successful at achieving this. However, it has also been useful to help partners think more deeply about their policy ideas and asks. The policy process means these ideas need to be practical and deliverable. How an idea will be implemented is just as vital as the idea itself.

We aim for the work we have done to collect these policy ideas to be the start of an iterative process involving both the contributors and policy makers. Our original target was to generate

around 100 micro policy ideas and work them through the political system. While it is easier to ask for large policy wins, with resource implications, we felt using the principle of marginal gains – so well used in sporting circles – was a fresh, much-needed approach.

We have a basic driving underpinning philosophy to our work. The nation needs to be moving more. There are, however, deep-seated inequalities in the population which create barriers for people to get physically active, exacerbating the problem. We do not feel we need to repeat the excellent work of others on the evidence for this. But we want to offer some fresh solutions.

We debated the working title at length. We know that for many sports is a passion. For others, the mere word might act as a barrier. But we wanted to suggest that sport to movement is a wide spectrum but with a joined-up approach it is necessary to recognise they all play a role in policy terms. From Play to elite, via sport, movement, and activity!

What has emerged, despite it being self-selecting, highlights a clear direction of travel that the sector needs to take. We continue to support current approaches around elite sport. However, a new, more complex approach and new direction is required to truly tackle the issues facing the country. In their respective strategies, both the Government and Sport England highlighted the need and importance for a collaborative approach – and that is reflected in this paper too. Ours is a complex system with many strategic objectives. To seriously tackle the ongoing issues, however, we need to refocus our approaches and work together to achieve them. This will be challenging given the breath outcomes that sport contributes to our society and communities, but we hope that this publication will help to contribute to help the sector more forward together in collaboration.

We have kept editing to a minimum.

The chapters are ‘owned’ by the contributors and show the rich variety of thinking and expertise that exists across the sector. It is also interesting as we move forward to help the sector understand the policy making process and there are many ideas that require the sector to respond itself and do better. This is not however, is not a strategy document. Its is an opportunity for many organisations across the wider sports sector to have a voice. The role of government in many areas is as a convenor not necessarily as a funder. This pamphlet sits alongside many others that will be produced over the next twelve months. In trying to cover policy areas from play to elite sports and soft power hopefully we have shown the breadth of the impact the sector has on government policy making. However, we have only really touched the surface of the potential. With 29 chapters, we fully understand there are many more specific areas we could address, and we are happy to talk to anybody who wants to contribute to further work!

I’d like to thank the small team that have helped throughout, Mark Balcar, Tom Walker, James Reed, and our contributors and supporters. Without them this would literally not have happened. Now we pass on the baton to policy makers inside government, and the parties. We don’t publish and then just move on at the Sports Think Tank. This pamphlet will be turned into blogs and podcasts as well as an iterative policy manifesto on our website. Join us on the journey.



**Andy Reed**  
**OBE**

SajelImpact Group



# Executive summary

**There is no doubt of the positive role which sport, physical activity and wellbeing can play in creating a better, more equal, and healthier nation. We know that sport and activity, of all kinds, matter to people and to the state. We also know that in an ever increasingly busy, stressful, and complex world, sport and activity is good for people: it improves physical and mental health, supports education and learning, improves resilience personally and professionally, and enhances and helps communities to flourish.**

It can, however, be difficult for policy makers to find the space and means to drive effective policies in this area. This difficulty often arises from the diversity of the sector itself, covering a huge range of types of organisations, activities, objectives, challenges and outcomes. Furthermore, increasingly, the difficulty arises

from the current national and global landscape, where economic challenges, structural issues and global disruption dramatically restrict the time and resources available to policy makers. As a result, there is growing recognition that the sector is highly unlikely to receive additional promises of new funding over the next few years (even as politicians consider what they might offer as we head into an election year).

Policy makers are therefore presented with an interesting challenge. We want our highly successful elite and professional sports organisations to continue to flourish; we need to continue to grow activity levels in the population; and we wish to have a healthy and productive population. But we will have to do this when resources will be unavailable or diminishing – particularly difficult for a sector which does not often have large reserves to draw upon.



Our challenge with this book was therefore to get the sector to think more deeply about their policy ideas – specifically, to look at how to make gains and improvements whilst being resource neutral. This represents a move away from the large financial and policy asks which have become common practice in the last two decades, to something more inventive and unconventional: substituting lateral and alternative thinking for standard funding or regulation asks.

This book contains the sector’s response to that challenge.

## Overview

The book contains contributions from 28 organisations working with and in the sector. It has generated over 150 policy ideas of all kinds. While our ambition was for these to be resource neutral, not all are.

One of the challenges of such a wide range of ideas is that it is almost impossible to provide a comprehensive summary of the conclusions reached by the contributors. Because if the book does one thing, it highlights the diversity of the sport and physical activity sector. At one end of the spectrum, community interventions in our most deprived communities support a range of social policy outcomes including improving physical and mental health, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and enhancing community cohesion. At the other end, elite and professional sport support local regeneration, economic growth, and international influence. As a result, the sector operates and engages at many different levels of policy, often at the same time. This adds to the complexity for policy makers, who must appreciate to what part of the sector they are referring as they prioritise policies across government.

This complexity is reflected in the ideas contained in this book. These policy suggestions range from end to end of the spectrum, and which are as diverse as the sector they are aiming to help. While summarising such diversity of thought and ideas is challenging, several common themes emerge throughout, and which we outline below:

1. **Children and young people** – a much stronger framework is needed to ensure our children and young people are meeting the Chief Medical Officers recommended activity guidelines (3 hours per day for babies and toddlers (aged 1-4) and 1 hour a day for children and young people (aged 5-18). This means that children must be able to play and be active, in school, outside school and at all stages of the education system. This is crucial in instilling in them the habit of exercise for life and making sure that they become active adults.
2. **Recognition of community groups** – over the long term, community groups act as key drivers of health prevention and wellbeing. They also play an important role in improving social outcomes such as increasing cohesion and reducing inequality. However, they are often overlooked in the sector as they are not primarily sport or activity focused.
3. **Design and the built environment** – to ensure that children and adults are active, they must be in surroundings which enable and encourage this. This can only be done with appropriate approaches to building and planning, to create environments which increase active lives in local neighbourhoods and communities.

- 4. Elite and professional sports** – it is vital to maintain support for our hugely successful elite and professional sports. This includes support for hosting major and minor sporting events across the nation. It is also crucial to use our success and influence at this level to enhance the UK's soft power and influence at global level.
- 5. Increased use of data and evaluation** – the positive impacts of physical activity – whether sport, fitness, or active recreation – are well known. The sector's lack of effective evaluation and hard data has long hampered its ability to prove its worth. Increased monitoring and evaluation, such as a sector wide framework, helping the sector use and increase the data available, could have a huge impact on its ability to be taken seriously in its ability to improve social outcomes.
- 6. Better use of technology** – some of the most popular and impactful consumer technology from the last decade has been based around sport and activity. However, the sector has been very slow in adopting its use for wider strategic aims. There are vast opportunities to use technology to help establish a more successful and stronger sector which need to be explored.
- 7. More opportunities to be heard** – a common theme was the desire of many organisations, particularly those who are less well known, to have the opportunity to contribute and be heard. This reflects wider frustration that the larger, more prominent organisations continue to dominate the public and political narrative around the sector, leading smaller organisations feeling not properly understood, recognised, or valued by policy makers. It also limits the extent to which new and alternative approaches can be considered.
- 8. Better collaboration** – the need for collaboration within and across the sector is well understood by policy makers and the sector. Sport England's Uniting the Movement calls for more collaboration, and Government's Get Active strategy sets out the vision for the future. The formation of the National Sectors Partners Group seeks to help the sector collaborate better. More recently, the cross-government National Physical Activity Taskforce has been established to drive these ambitions forward. But these are works in progress and there is a long way to go. And more collaboration must also include more cross government working. Our sector's work crosses several government departments, including health, education, leisure, justice, and foreign affairs. Joining up government policy and financial decision making across the different departments is vital to making it effective.
- 9. Increased political championing** – many organisations are calling for better political advocacy and leadership, including more all-party political groupings to help make their case, up to and including the Prime Minister.

### Contents summary

It is the policy ideas generated by the contributors that are the heart of this book. We have divided the book into broad themes and we outline below the contents of each section.

**Chapter One** concerns **Children and Young People**, and we learn about how politicians can **enhance play at a young age** from Play England and to **harness the potential of physical education, play and sport** in schools from the Youth Sport Trust. Loughborough College sets out **how to improve the skills and education** within the sports and physical activity sector.

**Chapter Two** explores policy ideas from within the Community Sport sector and **how to better tackle the inequalities** that exist within the current system, and in the second half, **addressing issues of inclusion**. The Sport for Development Coalition broadly sets out why **investing in ‘sport for development’ is an ‘Open Goal’ for public policy**. British Judo highlights how **NGB-led grassroots sport** could play a stronger role in this agenda. Sported underlines **the societal impact of community sport** and StreetGames highlights the **importance of recognising and supporting non-traditional sports clubs in the form of locally embedded, locally trusted community organisations**, that could deliver more sport and physical activity amongst key target groups with some simple policy ideas. This theme is taken up by Sportily, who set out how the Church of England and local parishes **could better enhance community through placed-based sport and physical activity**. All contributors offer important insights into how policy could be strengthened to deliver more social outcomes to key target groups across multiple departmental responsibilities.

The last three contributions from Women’s Sport, Sporting Equals, and Activity Alliance, who provide policy makers and the sector with a wide range of policy changes and approaches to **better drive inclusion and access to sport and physical activity** for women and girls, ethnical diverse communities, and disabled people.

**Chapter Three** looks at **Preventative Health: recreation and leisure**, offering a strong direction for policy makers around the increasingly important prevention agenda. Routes to Roots by Intelligent Health highlights **the strong link between physical activity and better health** and offers a wealth of policy ideas right across government. This is supported

in Place and Health by The Active Partnership Network who outlines the **important pivot needed from leisure to wellbeing and role of active design to tackle inactivity**. The theme of wellbeing is taken up by State of Life who argue that **sport and activity are the national prevention health service**, and that **WELLBY offers a new model of social and economic value for sport** in the UK.

David Morley Architects take up the theme of active design setting out **how policy makers can create spaces for movement**, while Max Associates consider two interrelated policies, to **join-up planning of swimming, sports, and leisure centres across the public sector**, specifically education and local authority sites and to ensure **innovative and needs based facilities are delivered in local communities**. SLC support this, **considering the role and cost of public leisure, which is still too often unaffordable**, therefore failing to serve those who need it most: inactive people, people with long term health conditions and people from deprived communities. Finally, a coalition of outdoor organisations, led by British Canoeing, **offer policy makers long-term suggestions to address the deep inequalities in public access and outdoor recreation** and to improve access to nature and the outdoors to improve our wellbeing.

**Chapter Four** explores several issues around **Workforce, Higher Education and Data and Evidence**, and the ways in which policy makers can help the sector to be more robust and resilient. Active IQ highlights the policy needs **to ensure workforce development so it can deliver a healthier nation** and UK Coaching sets out the policy changes required **for coaches to unlock more sporting and physical activity** especially amongst target groups. Loughborough University outlines how **world-leading academics and research**

**facilities**, and higher education institutions like Loughborough, can help inform and shape policy backed up by strong research-based evidence.

The second half of this chapter focuses on data and evidence, and contains contributions from Fitmedia, who emphasise the importance of **evidencing improvement at both project and national level through better data and evaluation** including fitness testing in schools. Similarly, Sport 80 examines **revolutionising sports governance** through data-driven strategies to achieve operational excellence and commercial success. Finally, Oaks Consultancy, offers a strategic approach to **transforming the fundraising and achieving long-term financial sustainability** of those organisations using sport to achieve social outcomes, from integrating funders and policymakers, to streamlining financial inputs, to ensuring athletes are provided robust platforms to give back.

**Chapter Five** provides a brief overview from the well-established **Elite and Professional Sport** policy perspective. Starting with the issue of concussion in grassroots sport, Farrar's Building, sets out **policy interventions needed to reduce brain-damage in a sporting context**. Sports Communications provide a **wealth of policy ideas from NGBs** to get more people active and provide the **necessary leadership** to achieve this. UK Sport set out a strong case for maintaining the current policies that ensures the **UK is leading the world in elite sport**. Finally, Henham Strategy, outlines the **untapped potential of sporting soft power** that could be realised if policy makers took a more strategic approach to building relationships with some of the people most important to the UK Government, diplomatically and commercially.

A summary of all the policy ideas generated by the contributors can be found on the **STT website**.

## Conclusion

This book is ultimately about the 150 plus policy ideas generated by 28 contributors. What also emerges however, is a broader direction of travel that the sector and policy makers need to take alongside these innovative policy ideas. While our world beating professional and elite sport system should be maintained and better used for enhancing UK PLC, a new, more complex approach and new direction is required to deliver an active and well nation. In their respective strategies, both the Government and Sport England highlighted the need for a collaborative approach, and this is reflected in this book too, alongside strong central and local leadership. This will be challenging given the breadth of outcomes that sport contributes to society and communities, but the outcomes are worth it. We hope that this publication will help contribute to moving forward together in collaboration.



Chapter One:  
Children and Young People

# Play England



Written by:

**Eugene Minogue**



## The importance of play

### Context

#### The importance of play

**Play is the foundation of all human movement, physical literacy, physical activity, PE, and sport (and much more!)**...

Play is vital for all children and young people. It's the main way they enjoy their daily lives, make friends and learn about the world around them. Through play children develop social, physical and cognitive skills, creativity, cultural awareness and resilience. They learn to manage risks, make decisions and develop their identities. Children play whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Play is different from adult-led or sport-based activities. When they play, children follow their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way. Play is essential for happy, healthy, capable and resilient children.

Through play, people develop capabilities that help them to solve problems creatively and to develop resilience. A playful mindset can also encourage learning new content and skills. Playful people are open to new experiences and are able to create and reimagine spaces and places for play and recreation. Playful adults are also often more active and better at coping with stressful situations. In fact, playful adults live approximately 10 years longer, on average, than less playful people!

Play and recreation brings diverse people together and improves the social and natural environment. Spaces and places for play and recreation enable safe and stimulating interactions between friends, families, communities, strangers and with the built and natural environment. For both children and adults, the social aspects of play and recreation are fundamental for relationship building with people and the environment.

Nature-based play helps to create a greater sense of empathy and respect for nature and can contribute to climate resilience. Investments to ‘de-greying’ public spaces. (paving, streets, roads, concrete etc.) can create climate resilient environments and open new spaces and places for diverse play and recreation opportunities.

Child and play-friendly spaces and places can also boost the economic value and long-term viability of the built environment. Public spaces where children, young people and families choose to visit signal better than any marketing material that an area is clean, safe, and fun. Retail, leisure, and businesses increasingly recognise that play and recreation is good for business!

### The role of government

The 1980 **United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**<sup>1</sup> declared that the right to play was a critical human right. The UNCRC requires governments to respect, protect and fulfil the right to play of all children through legislation, planning and budgets.

Specifically, **Article 31 (leisure, play and culture)**<sup>2</sup> states; **“Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.”**



However, children are experiencing many barriers to play including traffic, crime, time spent on screens, social segregation, and the busy, structured lives of children and parents. As children’s opportunities to play have reduced, there has been a growth in childhood obesity, physical and mental health problems.

Leadership is desperately needed. The future UK government, local authorities and civil society can together make sure that children and wider-society benefit from better play and recreation opportunities. As an example, the Scottish Parliament recently approved a **bill to incorporate the rights and obligations set out in UNCRC into law**.<sup>3</sup>

### The ask

Simply, for the future government to introduce **‘Play Sufficiency’** legislation in England.

**Play Sufficiency legislation for England** would establish a statutory guidance that Local Authorities must follow, in order to comply with a duty to assess for and secure sufficient play and recreation opportunities and to conduct regular play sufficiency reports.

Legislation should cover (but **not be** limited to) the following three key areas;

1. **Spaces and places** (spaces and places for play and recreation).
2. **Workforce** (qualifications, registration and regulation).
3. **Provision** (high-quality, inclusive play services).

## Why

An **equivalent duty has been in place in Wales for over a decade**,<sup>4</sup> and in May 2023 a ‘play sufficiency duty’ was introduced in Scotland, leaving England lagging behind.

Save the Children UK published a report in Sept 2023 - **‘What about the children? - How the UK’s decision-makers considered children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic’**.<sup>5</sup>

The report outlines **how Government failed to consider children and young people’s needs during the pandemic, including their need for outdoor play, physical activity and social contact**.

The report recommendations include (amongst others) a call for;

- ◆ A national play strategy,
- ◆ A clear ministerial lead, and;
- ◆ A **play sufficiency** duty on local authorities.

All of which Play England currently have in development.

## Play Sufficiency legislation for England

The current planning system in England is very weak with regards to children, specifically play and recreation opportunities. For example, the 2021 NPPF makes only one single mention of children (in connection with assessing housing needs). No other **Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)**<sup>6</sup> guidance addresses children explicitly. By contrast, newts and bats are amongst the species covered by national planning guidance! Additionally, there has also been a ‘missed opportunity’ with the **Levelling up bill**<sup>7</sup> which could have potentially addressed this.

Due to the current weakness in England’s planning system, children’s physical and mental health is suffering as a result, and Play England are calling for radical change from the current lack of protection for children and play provision in England’s planning system.

In Spring 2023, along with other wider-sector partners, Play England submitted a briefing to DLHUC Select Committee setting out the need for a parliamentary inquiry into children, young people and the built environment. This subject has never before been the focus of a select committee and has never been more needed. Therefore, it was a hugely significant step forward for children when **the Inquiry was announced in November**.<sup>8</sup>

A Recommendation from the Select Committee inquiry to introduce ‘Play Sufficiency’ legislation would provide a powerful and a high-profile catalyst for much needed meaningful change in England.

A Select Committee inquiry would give a powerful signal of official interest in children and planning, and be a high-profile catalyst for change.

Whilst every local authority in England is required to have a local plan, and key organisations must be consulted on this plan (e.g. **Sport England**<sup>9</sup>), spaces and place for play (playgrounds, adventure playgrounds, MUGA’s, skate parks, parkour parks, outdoor fitness etc.) ‘fall through the cracks’, as there is no ‘body’ to speak for them... Play England would like to change that!

Therefore, we are asking for the future government to introduce **‘Play Sufficiency’** legislation in England, to bring children’s right to ‘play and recreation’ into meaningful practice.





## How

### Play Sufficiency legislation for England

would establish statutory guidance that Local Authorities must follow, in order to comply with a duty to assess for, and secure sufficient play and recreation opportunities and to conduct regular play sufficiency reports.

Legislation should cover (but **not be** limited to) the following three key areas:

#### 1. Spaces and places

- ◆ Bring England in-line with Wales and Scotland, but enhance to achieve a wider impact beyond play and recreation, to include the breadth of physical literacy, PE and school sport, physical activity, leisure and sport. Additionally learn from and implement from other international examples e.g.; **The Neighbourhood Play System - Sport New Zealand**.<sup>10</sup>
- ◆ Work with Sport England (in their role of statutory consultee on planning applications via the NPPF) to ensure that play sufficiency, facilities, places and spaces are covered within the **P12 Planning for sport principles**,<sup>11</sup> which is split into four categories: overarching, protect, enhance and provide, as well as more broadly across their current sector guidance documents.
- ◆ The same approach should be taken with Active Travel England, in the newly established role of statutory consultee on planning applications via the NPPF.
- ◆ This work with Active Travel England (and more broadly the DfT) should include clarification and formal definition of Play Streets, Street Play and School Streets (an example is **Westminster City Council's Active Streets policy**<sup>12</sup>).

The introduction of Play Sufficiency legislation in England would ensure that all children, young people and families have access to enough time, space, opportunity and permission to play and recreation throughout all aspects of their daily lives. It would protect, provide and enhance opportunities for play and recreation at home, at school, and throughout the public realm (e.g., parks, streets, hospitals, prisons etc.) through an on-going process of research, action, repair, maintenance and enhancement. Success will depend on bringing together and involving a diverse range of governmental departments (DLUHC, DfE, DCMS, DfT etc.), national agencies and various sectors, as well as valued stakeholders and partners, continuously developing and deepening the appreciation of play and recreation, and how best to support it.

- Similarly, with Fields in Trust’s **Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play - Beyond the Six-Acre Standard**<sup>13</sup> to ensure a single framework for England, underpinned by the NPPF.
- Ensure appropriate training and continued professional development of relevant professionals (landscape architects, urban planners, local government officers etc.) in planning, the assessment of planning applications and the procurement of spaces and places.
- ‘Bring back the good old plays’ on and in our streets, neighbourhoods, communities, parks, schools, hospitals - as well as indoor play, and adventure playgrounds, through child-centred and co-created design guidance, based on the principle of benefit-risk assessment (**ISO 4980:2023 Benefit-risk assessment**<sup>14</sup>) - a balanced, proportionate approach to ‘safety’ in children’s play, sport, physical activity, recreation and many other related sectors.
- Ensuring inequalities are addressed within spaces and places for play and recreation (e.g.; **Make Spaces for Girls**,<sup>15</sup> **Let’s Play Fair - Scope UK**<sup>16</sup>)
- Ensure spaces and places for play and recreation are appropriately and robustly inspected and maintained, and that this is on a regulated statutory footing.
- Ensure that ‘children’s’ voice is heard within the NPPF, based on **Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) of the UNCRC**<sup>17</sup> e.g.; **The Lundy model of child participation**.<sup>18</sup>
- Ensure spaces and places for play and recreation are integral to and has visibility within a strategic framework for the future of facilities - as set out in Govt.’s ‘Get Active’ strategy, through the development of a National Vision for Facilities before the end of 2023.



- Establish an official ‘brown tourist sign’ for spaces and places for play and recreation with DfT/Highways England (on the same basis as existing brown signs for sport/leisure centres, football/rugby/cricket grounds etc.)
- Work with DLUHC to ensure that **model byelaws**<sup>19</sup> for Parks and Open Spaces create a more permissive, supportive, active and healthier environment for play and recreation by removing restrictions such as ‘No Ball Games’ and ‘No Cycling’ (a ‘Know Ball Games’ law as part of wider Play Sufficiency legislation) and making all spaces and places for play and recreation ‘smoke-free’ in law.

## 2. Workforce

- Align with the government ‘Get Active’ strategy, workforce aspirations by having a committed and energised workforce for delivering the right conditions for children, young people and families to engage with play and recreation.
- Develop and re-establish a competent, dedicated and highly skilled workforce through education, training, and qualifications which are underpinned by professional standards to cover all aspects of the play workforce.
- Robustly regulate the workforce and provider organisations national workforce registration scheme.
- Support the governance and development of Local Skills Improvement Plans with full national coverage to ensure these include play and recreation.
- Increase meaningful, impactful volunteering opportunities that contribute to the overall objective of increasing play and recreation opportunities, tackling inactivity, disparities and health inequalities.

- ‘Recognition’ with Sport England (and other national bodies) to better facilitate and enable the ‘play’ sector to access and secure funding.

## 3. Provision

- Ensure play in schools and community settings is protected to provide sufficient time, and space for play should take place across the day e.g., before, during and/or after the school and placed on a similar footing as the **School sport and activity action plan**<sup>20</sup> which supports teachers and schools to deliver 2 hours of high-quality PE and provide competitive and extra-curricular opportunities to both girls and boys.
- School staff, teachers, lunchtime supervisors should receive regular adequate training focused on play and recreation, which is an important foundation for physical literacy, physical activity, sport, PE, and more broadly social, physical, and mental wellbeing.
- Schools should provide play and recreation as ‘homework’ (social prescription) to get and keep children, young people, and families active, engaged and playing together.
- Play should be the main focus of after school clubs (particularly, primary schools) and in community settings such holiday programmes (e.g. **Holiday Activity and Food programme**<sup>21</sup>) and hospitals (play therapy).
- Cross-Departmental preparation for any future public health emergency ensures that the UNCRC ‘right to play’ is placed at the very heart of all policy-making for children, young people and families.
- Ensure an increased understanding of the importance of play and recreation through high-quality, inclusive play provision by working with devolved, national and local government; and the voluntary, public and private sectors.

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Chapter One:  
Children and Young People

# Youth Sport Trust



Written by:  
**Ali Oliver**



## Harnessing the potential of PE, play and sport in schools

**Children and young people’s physical, mental, social, emotional and cognitive health and development are at crisis point. Nearly every day brings a new story or statistic that highlights just how much young people are struggling at present. They are crying out for change and a better future, and we have an obligation to explore how to utilise the levers available to us to drive improvement and wellbeing.**

Key to this improvement is increasing physical activity levels, ensuring physical development through PE, and providing accessible and inclusive opportunities for play. At present, only 47% of children are meeting the UK’s Chief Medical Officers’ recommendation that they should be active for at least 60 minutes each

and every day. Whether it’s PE, play or sport, we know that being physically active not only facilitates positive physical and mental health, but also provides access to skills such as teamwork, communication and leadership, helps foster a sense of wellbeing, and drives educational attainment. Importantly, it also plays a crucial role in building a positive physical identity and body image.

Research shows the important role that exercise plays in healthy brain development and cognitive performance. We know that unhappy, unhealthy children don’t learn. We need to provide all children and young people with chances to be active so that they can achieve their potential, both in school and in life.

But don't just take our word for it. We work closely with school leaders, academic researchers and many inspirational young people whose insights and experiences inform our work. We are proud to be a youth led charity, powered by young leaders and ambassadors who are determined to build futures where they and future generations are more active on a daily basis. At our recent Youth Summit, youth leaders were keen to stress that policy development should be underpinned by two priorities:

- Diversity - making a commitment to delivering inclusive approaches.
- Choice - understanding the importance of giving young people a voice and acting on it.

Focusing on daily physical activity, Physical Education and a longer school day embracing a co-curricular programme of sport, can deliver against outcomes and generate savings across a number of government priorities. However, at present the lack of a joined up, cross-government approach with separate investment and patchy engagement from some key departments means this potential is not being realised.

While we have recently seen the introduction of a national target for children's activity levels, this is only achievable through strategic investment and a clear and thorough national delivery plan which can be interpreted and implemented against local needs and priorities. We know from the progress made between 1997 and 2010 that a well-constructed, national strategy implemented through a locally embedded infrastructure of Specialist Sports Colleges and School Sport Partnerships can transform both provision, outcomes and impact within a relatively short period of time, significantly increasing opportunities for children and young people to be physically active. In addition, School Games Organisers have engaged

more than 20,000 schools and delivered 2.5m competitive opportunities a year to children and young people – change is possible.

The progress we need requires clear national direction and leadership to unite and mobilise partners from across a range of sectors to co-ordinate efforts. Recent years have seen significant waste alongside duplication of effort which has impacted on the pace of progress and failed to maximise the return on investment of public funds. There are many brilliant organisations and providers working in support of school sport and activity, but without effective coordination it can quickly become confusing and overwhelming for schools.

At the Youth Sport Trust, we believe there is a need to capitalise on the unique position of schools to support all children and young people to be active for 60 minutes a day, as recommended by the UK's Chief Medical Officers. Our belief is that every child has a right to play sport, and that PE and school sport is the most effective way to deliver a universal entitlement. Sport provides a powerful and safe environment that supports the development of a young person's essential skills for life and work. For many children school offers their first – and often only – experience and so is fundamental in developing a positive relationship with movement that can instil positive habits throughout life.





**The Youth Sport Trust’s overarching aspiration is for a government to make a ‘sporting promise’ so that every young person has:**

- 1. A Sporting Start in Life** - through a commitment to delivering 60 active minutes a day for every child, including two hours of PE a week within school at every age and stage of education.
- 2. A Sporting Chance in Life** - for those children facing inequality and disadvantage, through a national teacher training programme focussing on tackling inequalities, and building physical, social, emotional wellbeing through PE and sport.
- 3. An opportunity to be their Sporting Best** - through a daily, free to access, after school sport programme which is part of an integrated co-curricular programme within an extended school day – here, every child can find a sport or activity they love, develop civic responsibility through leadership and volunteering, and be connected into a pathway into community participation.

To support this, we are putting forward proposals for how the next government can make sure that every child is able to access a comprehensive PE and school sport offer:

**Measuring wellbeing levels including physical activity**

We believe that increasing access to PE, school sport and physical activity will help to improve wellbeing, but making progress requires measurement. Introducing a new measurement for wellbeing would be welcomed by parents, with research carried out for the Youth Sport Trust showing that 65% of parents said it was the most important factor they considered when deciding on a school for their child. Our hope is that a future holistic review of the way we deliver education and develop young people is used as an opportunity to instil wellbeing principles. In our pre-election manifesto, we will have more to say about what the next government should do to prioritise children and young people’s wellbeing at every level. In the meantime, we are calling for:

- The introduction of a national wellbeing measure for children and young people, including physical activity benchmarks and measurements to track progress.
- An ambition to improve levels of wellbeing through both prevention and intervention.

**Elevating the status of PE within schools and across the curriculum**

It is crucial that we reimagine the role, purpose and value of daily physical activity, by:

- Rebalancing the curriculum and introducing school accountability measures to reflect the needs of children today and the country in the future. Associated activity should include extending the core of the curriculum to include PE, reflecting the impact it can have on attendance, behaviour, engagement,



wellbeing and learning, and introducing physical development benchmarks to support assessment, teaching and learning in PE.

- Implementing a national PE and school sport training programme which begins with initial teacher training and extends to class teachers, PE practitioners, school sport programme co-ordinators, Heads of PE, Directors of Sport and strategic leaders of school sport partnerships.
- Commissioning research to understand the most effective ways to harness the power of physical activity, PE, play and sport to deliver education outcomes.

### **Provide a nationally led, locally embedded network to increase access and school sport**

We need to build a world leading school sport delivery system that tackles the current postcode lottery which sees support networks existing in some areas of the country but not in others, primarily where former School Sport Partnerships have closed. This should be informed by previous successes to increase activity levels, and should include:

- Rebuilding a network of school sport partnerships reflecting today's school landscape. In addition to Heads of PE, this should be anchored at a local level by school based, full-time strategic leaders, who are in turn supported by a new Director of School Sport in every Multi Academy Trust or family of schools. The strategic leads should be based in hub 'well schools' which lead innovation, research and the cascade of training across the partnership.

- Ensuring every primary, secondary, special school and alternative provision setting has a programme co-ordinator, ideally a School Sport Apprentice. This would help to empower youth voice and introduce lived experience alongside a powerful peer leadership role model. These young apprentices in turn would recruit, train and mobilise an army of young sports leaders and volunteers from across their partnership, fostering civic responsibility and personal development for tens of thousands of young people every year.

### **Deliver on an ambition for children and young people to access opportunities to be physically active for five hours each week through schools**

The ambition should be prioritised so that all children are physically active for 60 minutes each day, using the profile and reach of schools to deliver the Chief Medical Officers' guidance. We believe schools provide the perfect opportunity, environment and setting for young people to be active before, during and after the school day.

We are calling for:

- A guarantee that all children will be provided with opportunities to take part in sport or physical activity for three hours a week, in addition to two hours of PE within the curriculum.



## **In conclusion**

We are confident in the power of PE, play and sport to change lives. Put together, our vision would embed physical activity in and around schools, using the power of active lives to improve children and young people's life chances. Importantly, we believe that this can be achieved in a way that is cost neutral. We can re-profile existing funding streams such as the Primary PE and Sport Premium, School Games, Inclusion 2024 and Opening School Facilities to support our proposals, using existing spending to generate better impact and outcomes for children and young people.

From driving educational attainment to delivering improved wellbeing, developing networks and fostering a sense of belonging, there is so much potential to unlock. Now more than ever, political leaders must grasp the opportunity our sector offers as a way to empower children and young people to lead happier, healthier lives.

**Ali Oliver MBE**  
Chief Executive

## **The Youth Sport Trust**

The Youth Sport Trust is the UK's leading youth sport charity for improving wellbeing through sport and Physical Education (PE). We empower young people and equip educators to transform lives through sport and play and together, we create opportunities for everyone to belong and achieve. We have 27 years' experience building national and international networks of schools, movements of sports leaders and delivering targeted interventions which build health, inclusion and character. We are driven by a desire to build happier, healthier futures for children and young people through insight, innovation and implementation.

The logo for Loughborough College is centered within a large white circle. It features the word "Loughborough" in a bold, pink, sans-serif font. Below it, the word "COLLEGE" is written in a smaller, pink, all-caps, sans-serif font, followed by "est. 1909" in an even smaller font size.

**Loughborough**  
COLLEGE est. 1909

Chapter One: Children and Young People

# Loughborough College



Written by:

**Jo Maher**



## Skills and education within sports and physical activity

### **1. Create a funding system that provides FE with three to four-year budgets**

One of the key challenges faced by the education and skills sector is having 12-month budgets and funding cycles. This causes a challenge because, ideally, we need three or four year budget stability to enable us to plan with certainty around our core funding. Therefore, adjusting budget timelines would be a move we'd welcome.

### **2. Simplify the funding streams for FE**

We also need a simplified funding system for further education - in particular when it comes to skills. There are too many siloes and lines

which currently make up our funding streams. We recently had an exercise to count all of them up – and the final figure was 42.

The complex funding systems place a number of pressures on the sector. One of these is the need to constantly tender and compete for funding. As a result, FE institutions face a significant cost of acquisition. There is also some waste within that.

A simplified funding system would give colleges more stability and capacity, not least through the avoidance of duplication and removal of bureaucratic processes, needless red tape and multiple tenders. Being able to work on the basis of trusted provider status with accountability would make a huge difference.

### **3. Bring in physical activity and sport as mandatory items for FE – the same way that safeguarding and Prevent currently are**

In addition to a stable funding environment, we also need sport and physical activity to be at the heart of the skills sector – and to ensure our students are active and healthy.

At the moment a department has to plan their courses around having 580 funded hours. If there was a requirement to include opportunities for sport and physical activity for all students this would support the Chief Medical Officer’s (CMO) recommendations of at least 150 minutes moderate intensity activity, 75 minutes’ vigorous activity, or a mixture of both.

The problem is, however, that it’s very prescribed and those hours alone aren’t anywhere near to the Chief Medical Officer’s (CMO) recommendations of at least 150 minutes moderate intensity activity, 75 minutes’ vigorous activity, or a mixture of both.

So if there was flexibility within how FE institutions could allocate those hours, in addition to stability in the core funding, there would be more space for colleges and universities to prioritise sport and physical activity the same way we prioritise things like safeguarding and the Prevent Strategy.

### **4. Ring-fence existing funding from the DoH to fund applied interventions that use social prescribing and/or physical activity**

We would like to see ring-fenced, “intervention funding” within current health budgets that would support physical activity initiatives. This cross-departmental funding would support interventions through social prescribing in the workplace and through physical activity.

For example, at Loughborough College we run a programme called Step Into Health, which focuses on a person’s lifestyle, fitness and diet. Tutors work with participants to help them start forming healthier habits. Step to Health offers everything from exercise prescriptions to nutritional information and guidance, supporting people over a period of time to make active lifestyle and physical activity changes.

Having dedicated DoH funding support colleges to run programmes like Step Into Health would help achieve many of the government’s aims around creating a preventative health system. It is a perfect programme which should be covered by DoH. In fact, Loughborough College has trained a number of GPs on the programme, but have done so using funding from the Department of Education.



## 5. Redistribute existing funding to DISE and adult education

The Diploma in Sporting Excellence (DISE), which supports the elite end of sport and the NGBs, doesn't receive the same funding as some of the core further education. We need to level up the funding for the diploma as a proportion of the overall study programme funding. So if a study programme gets a 5% uplift, DISE needs 5% too.

We also have to address adult funding. We all recognise the issues around the number of adults deemed physically inactive and/or obese. Adults are also finding it hard to access FE due to 10+ years of funding cuts. The cuts in adult education funding has made it very difficult for colleges to give adults the skills and to get them into a college environment so they can get those added benefits.



## 6. Rethink devolution's impact on delivering skills programmes

Devolution has led to a situation where we are now in a postcode lottery when delivering programmes like Step Into Health – which could benefit a huge number of people. We were delivering Step Into Health as a national course, but can now only deliver it in non-devolved areas.

Colleges should be able to deliver programmes and initiatives that are of strategic national importance everywhere – in both devolved and non-devolved areas.

## 7. Add a skills section in the next (cross-departmental) sports strategy

We need a skills section in the next sports strategy, with education placed at the heart of it. The strategy itself should also be a cross-departmental one, involving not just the DCMS but DfE, DfH, Department for Business and Department for Energy Security & Net Zero.

It needs to be a core task force within the funding space. There is already money across government for the decarbonisation agenda – some of which we've been able to ringfence to support the physical activity industry by investing in more sustainable swimming pools. We need apply the same principle to assist skills and education.



Chapter Two: Community Sport  
and Inclusion in Sport

# Sport for Development Coalition



Written by:

**Simon Lansley**

# Why investing in sport for development is an ‘Open Goal’ for public policy

## Where we are

In these times of national and global need – and as the cost-of-living crisis is causing pressures on finances at all levels – we need new ways to find new solutions to old problems. How to keep people healthy and to save on healthcare costs? What can we do to improve social cohesion? How can we better level up? How can we drive economic growth?

As the search for new solutions is now on, there has never been a better time to look at what sport can do for society. Because those who do look, will quickly find that there is a huge number of ways in which sport and physical activity can be harnessed to improve the health and wellbeing of the nation – as well as boost the economy.

## What is ‘sport for development’ – and what can it achieve?

Sport for development (also known as sport for good, or sport for change) is the increasingly popular practice of using targeted sport and physical activity-based interventions to intentionally achieve a series of positive health and societal outcomes. From reducing crime, tackling unemployment and improving physical and mental health to increasing educational attainment and community cohesion, sport can be used to drive change in every area of society.

It is far from a new concept in the UK. From Victorian philanthropism to the playing fields set aside for factory workers in pre- and post-

war Britain, we have a rich history in sport for development. It gained global traction in 2000 too, when Nelson Mandela famously declared at the Laureus Awards that **“Sport has the power to change the world”**.<sup>22</sup>

## A coalition for good

In 2016, the United Nations recognised that sport is **“an important enabler of sustainable development”**.<sup>23</sup> This was followed, in the UK, by Sport England, Comic Relief and Laureus Sport for Good coming together to support a new “Sport for Development Coalition” (SFDC).

The momentum behind the coalition has grown ever since and has gathered pace in the past two years. Since 2021, the SFDC has doubled in size and currently comprises around 400 charities, civil society organisations, leagues, clubs and networks. It covers thousands of projects and programmes across the UK, each one demonstrating how ‘the power of sport’ is being used every day across our communities to address inequalities.

Collectively, the coalition members are committed to focusing on impact (demonstrating the value of sport for development), advocacy (making the case for sport for development) and investment (strengthening and building the sport for development sector). In short, they are playing their part in building a healthier, more equitable and sustainable future.



Research shows that interventions across the coalition network predominantly take place where they are needed most. In 2021, **analysis of almost 35,000 beneficiaries**<sup>24</sup> across leading interventions from the network showed that 64% of participants were from the 30% most deprived areas of the country.

As detailed in the **Unlocking The Potential report (2022)**,<sup>25</sup> produced by the National Sector Partners Group – of which SFDC is a member – helping to level up communities by tackling inequalities and getting the best social return on investment requires a proportionately stronger focus on those in lower socio-economic groups and more deprived communities. Research commissioned by the coalition and conducted by State of Life in 2022 – which used HM Treasury guidance on wellbeing valuation – showed how a young person being part of a sport for development programme is worth at least £2,500 per annum.

To join the coalition and movement, organisations **sign a Charter**<sup>26</sup> which outlines how they are dedicated to tackling health and societal inequalities, including around environmental sustainability. Access to green space for recreation, active travel and clean air, for example, support multiple outcomes across the framework.

## Policy calls for 2024 GE

Each sport for development programme can simultaneously deliver multiple returns on investment across policy areas. Therefore, sport for development projects and programmes are a huge untapped solution – an ‘open goal’ – for policymakers who are serious about finding innovative and cost-neutral solutions in a cost-of-living crisis.

This is why, ahead of the 2024 General Election, the SFDC is calling for:

- ◆ Funds already committed for jobs, health and tackling crime to factor in proven sport for development interventions, as demonstrated by the £5million committed by the Ministry of Justice to a **Youth Justice Sport Fund**<sup>27</sup> by Coalition partners StreetGames and the Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice in early 2023.
- ◆ A drive to raise awareness, build advocacy, and win more support and investment for the sector. In early 2022, SFDC members built on this thinking by co-designing and launching the #OpenGoal Shared Advocacy Framework in direct response to the **Government’s Levelling Up agenda**.<sup>28</sup>

#OpenGoal also relates to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a UK context. As the UK approaches a General Election in 2024, the #OpenGoal campaign will see a series of outputs produced by the coalition to underline how its growing membership is supporting these public policy priorities.

## What can be achieved

By answering these simple policy calls, the government that takes the reins in 2024 has at its disposal an entire toolbox of powerful, yet cost-neutral solutions for tackling some of the most persistent challenges faced by the UK.

Some examples of how sport for development can drive change include:

### ◆ Improved health & wellbeing

The **Richmond Group of Charities**<sup>29</sup> features 12 national charities dealing with chronic conditions such as stroke, diabetes, cancer, mental health problems, asthma, arthritis and Alzheimer’s. Through sport and physical activity, its **‘We Are Undefeatable’**<sup>30</sup> campaign seeks to support the 15million people who live with one or more long-term health condition in England. Elsewhere working through the Coalition,

the national mental health charity Mind partnered with two Universities to oversee publication of the Coalition’s **‘Moving for Mental Health’**<sup>31</sup> research report and policy brief in January 2022. It features learning and evidence from more than 70 Coalition supporter organisations. Other members such as **Red January**,<sup>32</sup> **Sport In Mind**,<sup>33</sup> **Intelligent Health**<sup>34</sup> and **Sporting Memories Network**<sup>35</sup> target different health and wellbeing issues through their innovative programmes.

### 📍 **Closing the gap in education and development**

Coalition members support young people disengaged with education and work to increase attainment through charities like **Football Beyond Borders**,<sup>36</sup> **School of Hard Knocks**<sup>37</sup> and **Dallaglio Rugby Works**.<sup>38</sup> National partners like **Youth Sport Trust**<sup>39</sup> and **Chance to Shine**<sup>40</sup> support educators and schools through programmes aimed at ensuring all children can access the life-changing benefits of play and sport, and other Coalition supporters like **Boxing Futures**,<sup>41</sup> **Golf Foundation**,<sup>42</sup> **Greenhouse Sports**<sup>43</sup> and **Empire Fighting Chance**<sup>44</sup> deliver tailored programmes in schools and communities to build resilience and aid development. The **Dame Kelly Holmes Trust**<sup>45</sup> trains a national network of former Olympic and Paralympic athletes to mentor young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, while charities such as **Activity Alliance**<sup>46</sup> and **Access Sport**<sup>47</sup> aim to increase inclusion and accessibility in sport and physical activity, for example for disabled people.

### 📍 **Increased employability and skills**

**Street League**<sup>48</sup> and **Sport 4 Life**<sup>49</sup> deliver tailored programmes aimed at supporting young people not in employment, education and training, and **Coach Core**<sup>50</sup> builds social mobility by placing 16 to 24-year-olds into sports coaching apprenticeships.

**Premiership Rugby’s HITZ**<sup>51</sup> education and employability programme is delivered by its clubs’ foundations, and the **Leadership Skills Foundation**<sup>52</sup> works across the sector to support organisations in providing young people with skills and nationally-recognised qualifications. In late 2022, more than 50 Coalition supporter organisations contributed learning and evidence to the **‘Active for Employment’**<sup>53</sup> research report and policy brief, produced by the University of Bath. It aims to help inform public policy interventions by demonstrating the potential impact of sport-based employability interventions on developing key skills for work and providing opportunities to secure and sustain employment.

### 📍 **Reduced crime and anti-social behaviour**

National networks such as **StreetGames**<sup>54</sup> and the **Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice**<sup>55</sup> help co-ordinate Coalition supporters around the role of sport and physical activity in community safety and reducing re-offending. They worked together to oversee a £5million **Youth Justice Sport Fund**<sup>56</sup> from the Ministry of Justice in early 2023, delivered by 220 local organisations. **Level the Playing Field**<sup>57</sup> tackles over-representation of ethnically diverse young people in the criminal justice system, and other Coalition supporters such as **Fight for Peace**,<sup>58</sup> **3 Pillars Project**<sup>59</sup> and **Project Turnover**<sup>60</sup> offer a range of preventative and remedial programmes to help young people build better lives. In late 2023 this theme will underpin the next policy brief to be published in the #OpenGoal series.

### 📍 **Stronger communities and social cohesion**

**Peace Players**<sup>61</sup> in Northern Ireland brings together young people from Protestant and Catholic communities to play sport and build stronger ties, while across England and Wales, **Goodgym**<sup>62</sup> encourages people to run, walk and cycle to support local community organisations and isolated older people by doing practical tasks. Other national networks like **Sported**,<sup>63</sup>

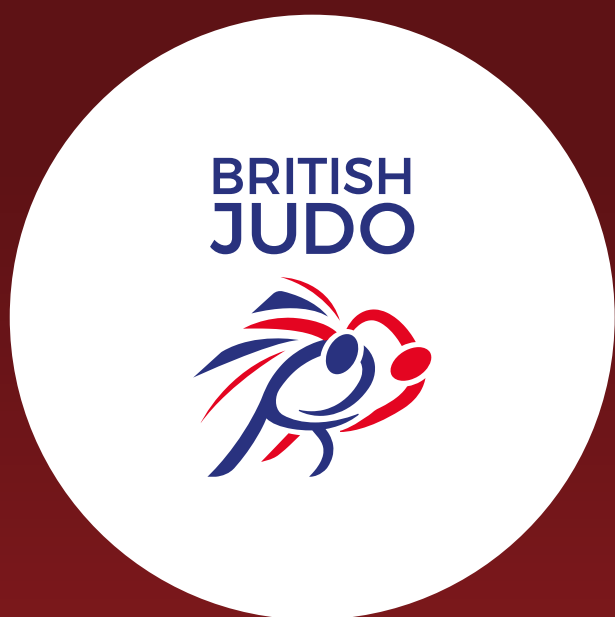
with its 3000 community clubs and groups, and the Club Community Organisations across the **EFL Trust**<sup>64</sup> and **SPFL Trust**<sup>65</sup> in England and Scotland respectively, play a vital role in strengthening local communities, while multi-partner projects like **'Breaking Boundaries'**<sup>66</sup> – led by **Sporting Equals**,<sup>67</sup> Youth Sport Trust and **Spirit of 2012**<sup>68</sup> – have seen Coalition member organisations team up to drive social cohesion through sport and physical activity. The Coalition also supports a Community of Practice led by the **Belong Network**,<sup>69</sup> StreetGames, **Sporting Equals**<sup>70</sup> and Youth Sport Trust.



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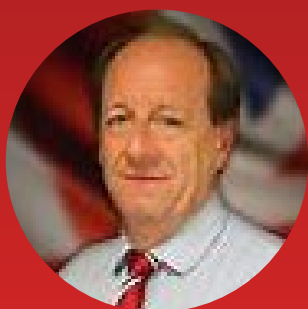
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Chapter Two: Community Sport  
and Inclusion in Sport

# British Judo Association



Written by:

**Andrew Scoular**



## A grass roots community perspective: Judo

### **British Judo's mission and vision**

Judo has significant reach across the UK with around 700+ clubs and sites where activity takes place. In addition, there are also around the same number again that deliver Judo but are not affiliated to the national governing body (NGB), British Judo.

British Judo is responsible for the sport's grassroots within England and has direct relationships with 500+ clubs. British Judo is also responsible for the GB Olympic and Paralympic Programmes and our vision is to unite the Judo community as one that is renowned for excellence and podium success.

However, the meaning of Judo in Japanese is “the gentle way” and it originated as an educational activity long before it developed into a competitive sport. Our mission is to ‘maximise the contribution of Judo to British society by providing easy access to safe and inspiring clubs, centred on these Judo values’.

### **Where we are – the challenges**

British Judo works with grassroots clubs and participants to help them develop and prosper in very challenging and complex community environments. Of the 500+ clubs in England, nearly half (42+%) are located within the top five most challenging areas of social and economic deprivation.

For our clubs to thrive, they need a lot of support in overcoming the barriers and hurdles they face. The main challenges for clubs are:

- Bureaucracy and increasing red tape.
- Limited public funding and sponsorship.

### **Examples of work – the positive impact of judo**

British Judo received funding from Sport England's Together Fund to help support clubs to provide opportunities for people to access the sport. One of the examples of the transformative impact of the funding is Pudsey Judo Club in Leeds. The project is a testament to the power of collaboration and shared vision and has yielded a multitude of positive outcomes that have not only elevated the club but have also reverberated across the community it serves.

The Together Fund served as a catalyst for developing new relationships and partnerships with other organisations. This strategic network building has expanded the club's reach and impact, forging connections that extend beyond its' physical location.

The project's location – within one of the most deprived areas of Leeds – underscores its significance. In a landscape where free access to sports equipment is a rarity, the project has opened doors for children to engage in judo and improve their motor skills. Therefore, the project's impact is not confined to the club; it ripples through the community, offering diverse individuals an opportunity to come together.

It also provided a platform for upskilling individuals within Pudsey Judo Club. Coaches have gained valuable experience in navigating school environments and school hours, imparting the benefits of judo within a limited time frame. This innovative approach has not

only enabled the club to connect with students but has also paved the way for new opportunities and learning experiences.

There are many, similar examples of how direct intervention with individual clubs has created opportunities for people to access sport and physical activity as well as creating significant impact on health and wellbeing of the underrepresented and the country at large.

For that to happen, there is a need to tackle the barriers that small-to medium-sized sports, such as judo, faces.

### **Policy suggestions**

#### **1. Cut the red tape – make it easier for volunteers to get involved**

Volunteers are the lifeblood of every sport at grassroots and community level.

The challenge judo – and sport in general – faces is that the volunteer workforce is ageing. To make matters worse, COVID-19 saw many coaches decide not to continue. This has had a negative impact on clubs, even resulting in some having to close or reduce capacity.

While safeguarding should always remain a primary concern – alongside ensuring quality and safety when it comes to club operations – the impact of red tape on the volunteers' time and finances is significant.

We see navigating bureaucracy as the single biggest contributing factor for volunteers not taking up coaching. For those who do become coaches, the additional responsibilities and amount of administration and management they face in the role often puts them off from continuing. It is not just coaching that is impacted, either.

Volunteers fill crucial roles at every grassroots club and are the key to clubs being able to deliver positive, exciting and safe environments. From secretaries, treasurers and development staff to welfare officers, communications specialists and IT people, clubs simply couldn't run without volunteers.

Having healthy grassroots in sport is entirely reliant on volunteers. We need to find a better balance between the amount of red tape and support that we offer volunteers. This will help us better engage with the most challenging areas of social and economic deprivation in our nation to help them get and stay active.

## **2. Ensure those delivering sport at school adhere to standards**

When it comes to schools working with external deliverers of sport, in our experience, many Head Teachers pick the cheapest option available. This is particularly true for Primary PE activities. In some cases, those responsible for the decision, fail to check the relevancy or currency of the qualifications and whether they even achieve the Primary PE requirements.

There are many private operators who are involved in Primary PE but operate outside the remit of national governing bodies. Most worryingly, some have not got the appropriate safeguarding measures in place, which presents a risk to both the sport and the school.

To support schools and Head Teachers, British Judo has developed minimum standards for delivery of judo, which has enjoyment, development and welfare at its heart. All British Judo clubs already meet the standards as part of their membership and British Judo continues to support the clubs on an ongoing basis to maintain and further develop the standards.



If an operator does not sign up to these standards – which are an agreed set of principles based on successful good practice – they should be questioned over their decision.

We would like to see the standards being set as a prerequisite for operators delivering sport at schools not only in judo but also across all sports and activities where a national governing body exists.

By signing up to (and maintaining) the standards set by a recognised NGB, the organisations delivering sport and activities at schools – whether a club or private operator – would be able to demonstrate that they adhere to best practice and follow recognised guidelines at all times.

This would be a cost-neutral solution to ensuring that sport delivered at schools by external organisations (at the cost of the public purse), would always achieve its goal – to get children active in a safe way.





Chapter Two: Community Sport  
and Inclusion in Sport

# Sported



Written by:

**Tom Burstow**



## The societal impact of community sport is worth investing in

“ I struggled in life. I was that kid who was neglected, who wasn't taken care of, who was in a dark place. And running is what saved me. And without running, my life would have been different.

To have someone to look out for you and believe in you... the local club, it saved me from going in different directions. Because if I would have gone the other direction, who knows where I would have been? ”

**Sir Mo Farah**

**The power of community sport to shape a young life. In this case, that of Sir Mo Farah, who went from being a youthful refugee, trafficked from his homeland, into the most successful Olympic athlete the UK has ever fielded.**

From grassroots to greatness. For Farah, the transformation was priceless, engineered by the dedicated mentors who shaped him and the sporting family who took him and provided a nurturing environment, away from the malign influences outside. The greatest return was not gold medals, acclaim or wealth, but a life enriched.

A far from unique story. Across the country, thousands of local hubs utilise sport and physical activity as a tool to reach parts that other methods cannot.

These are not the high street gyms, council-run swimming pools or leisure centres overseen by profit-driven companies or arms-length trusts. This is a potent collective network, driving physical activity and ignited change in each of our communities, frequently staffed only by volunteers, but reaching millions without due fanfare.

And yet, these are assets often under-valued by sporting governing bodies. And, fundamentally, they are under-served by government and ignored in policy-thinking, channels of activity which deliver real economic and social impacts despite minimal investment, solving pressing problems in real time as true forces for good.

Sported's own research among its 3,000 community groups throughout the country illustrates why this neglected sector is essential and effective. 28 per cent of these organisations address crime and other disruptive behaviour. 38 per cent build community cohesion. 31 per cent enhance education and employability.<sup>71</sup>

And then, unsurprisingly, comes the inarguable pluses of "sport," and its benefits for health, and physical and mental wellbeing. Invaluable. A diversion and aspiration that should be a right to all.

But it is not. Sported's insight spotlighted the barriers to accessing this support network and the life tools offered. In a survey from Spring 2023, 49 per cent of groups said a lack of money impeded young people from continuing to participate.<sup>72</sup>

## **Community sport – at the sharp end**

Cost of living pressures are as destructive as Covid. A stark 94 per cent of groups expressed concern about the economic squeeze on their young people.<sup>73</sup>

Three in four across the UK flagged a negative toll on their attendees' mental health with almost the same proportion fearing a lack of pounds in the pocket might cause them to disengage or reduce their participation.

Mark Rawthorpe, who runs RABC Boxing Club in Huddersfield, spends much of his time outside the ropes. Based in an area plagued by gang-related violence and knife crime, he doesn't wait for those at risk to venture through the door. He proactively seeks them out as a trusted face with enough equity to engage powerfully with those involved – and with the capacity to offer alternative diversions, a positive role model aligned to a safe space.

Rawthorpe said: "We see some of the issues in the area with knife crime or violence. Mums and dads are crying down the phone asking us to help them because social services are stretched. We want to keep helping in our community but it costs money to keep doing the work."

There is a whole family approach at play where elder siblings can be moved onto a trajectory of aspiration that in turn alters the path of their young brothers or sisters – and parents. Helping one, helps more, at a decreasing cost per intervention.



It saves lives. Additionally, it reduces the use of police or social work resources. Illustrated in a University of Gloucestershire study, such activity provides “positive psychological capital” among marginalised and vulnerable youth, allowing them to control emotions, socialise better, and develop a sense of worth.<sup>74</sup>

In short, these are effective interventions, undertaken with the support of a wider local community, through an alternative structure driven by those with lived experience who acutely understand the environment in which they operate.

They nimbly respond to challenges before they emerge or offer cost-effective answers in a manner that feels attractive and non-challenging to those they seek to help. This is a sector that quietly delivers at scale across the nation.

### **Cross-departmental benefits**

Holistically, community groups, using sport as a tool for engagement, deliver on aims that match the policy objectives set by multiple government departments.

Examples include:

- **Justice** – Grassroots organisations address crime, anti-social behaviour and social inclusion, particularly among hard-to-reach marginalised groups or those who ripe for preventative interventions for Violence Reduction Units and similar agencies.

- **Health** – Mental health and wellbeing, physical health improvement, reduction in NHS spend, all could be ameliorated by running select initiatives through community clubs.
- **Education** – Attainment, reducing absenteeism and alternative schooling are all the subject of initiatives available at a community group level and this could be extended. However, availability of school estate at an affordable rate remains a barrier.
- **Levelling Up** – Grassroots organisations have a high penetration into areas of deprivation where they build community cohesion, fight exclusion and alleviate the poverty gap at low cost.

Studies commissioned by Made By Sport through Keda evidenced that for every £1 invested in sport-for-good, there is a return of £6 in social value,<sup>75</sup> however government funding has to date found it difficult to reach and support the grassroots organisations it was intended for. Consequently, programmes such as the Holiday Activity Fund, backed by the Department of Education for England, have failed to generate the expected scale or impact the investment warranted.

### **A shift in sport strategy**

The UK’s government’s new strategy for sport ‘Get Active’ acknowledges that sport and physical activity that it is not merely a conduit to address physical and mental wellbeing but also that it has key role to play in individual, social and community development.

Yet it does not explicitly recognise that inequalities in opportunity are widening, nor how we can tackle disparities in participation levels if the targets for improving the rates of activity in our society are to be met.

Non-traditional “sports clubs” are frequently not recognised by government and governing bodies. They are no less impactful for their efforts to deliver local solutions to local problems, driven by trusted local leaders. This approach offers the greatest potential long-term returns, widening the funnel rather than simply seeking marginal benefit from repeating what has gone before.

The government strategy places emphasis on ‘Integrity,’ ensuring that sport – whether at grassroots or elite level – is “inclusive and welcoming for all.” Yet disability inclusion, for example, remains a challenge as much due a scarcity in investment in accessible infrastructure as cultural shifts.

There is significant spend where participation numbers are the primary metric of success. However, the ‘who’ is as vital as the ‘how many.’ It is essential that some of these funds are targeted at our marginalised communities who are least active and are less likely to engage with traditional sporting structures.

Community-based, grassroots organisations offer this alternative pathway. Properly resourcing their endeavours will allow a national strategy to accomplish more, placing a strong and specific emphasis on real social impact.

### **Barriers vs opportunities**

Policymakers strive to reach the individuals and communities that grassroots groups support. As significantly, these groups have an appetite to do even more good.

That will not be realised unless they have a simpler and more progressive relationship towards government and public sector agencies, one which recognises the time and resources constraints.



Charities like Sported alleviate some of the burden by bridging the gap that exists between large-scale institutions and these micro-organisations. But our insight highlights the over-complexities of funding applications or subsequent documentation. Evidenced analysis is important. But excessive paperwork injects disincentives which disrupt the intended outcomes.

Simpler mechanisms for submitting grant applications, clearer signposting, and effective but abbreviated evaluation would add to the returns and improve connections between communities and government.

Many of these groups own or operate small facilities or take on public spaces on an asset transfer basis. Allowing them to access streams of support or tax relief currently reserved for publicly-owned facilities or those overseen by leisure trusts would place them on a more sustainable footing without displacing reach.

Small shifts in the mechanics of government and its agencies would be largely revenue-neutral. But by profiting from the ecosystem of community groups, tangible social impacts can be multiplied.

Teth in London is an entirely volunteer-led group, established to address an urgent need to get more inactive young people active. Besides sport, it runs developmental workshops, alternative education programmes and a mentoring scheme aimed at 11-25s drawn from disadvantaged backgrounds. They must seek funding to support their initiatives which benefit hundreds of families.

Founder Trudy-Ann Campbell said: “Through sports, we use that as active points to take them on a journey.”

## Contact

Sported is a leading charity transforming the lives of young people through sport and physical activity. Find out more at [sported.org.uk](https://sported.org.uk)

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Chapter Two: Community Sport  
and Inclusion in Sport

# StreetGames



Written by:

**Mark Lawrie**



## Clubs and community sport

**22% of the UK population participate in sport through what many would recognise as the traditional model of ‘community sport’. That 22% train, compete and possibly even excel at their chosen sport through this model. 50% of the adults that volunteer their time in the UK do so in sport and physical activity. Communities lucky enough to host thriving local football, cricket, tennis, netball and cricket clubs (to name but a few) recognise them as an important part of the social fabric of that community.**

And yet there is a problem. These long established, valued, community sports clubs are, in many cases, not the way to involve those least likely to participate. Location, cost of membership, accessibility of facilities, cost of personal equipment and club culture can all be barriers to participation in the traditional club model by those groups: disabled people, women and girls, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and those from less affluent households, that have for decades been far less likely to play sport and be active. Whilst some

clubs have adapted and developed to address these barriers and are beacons of inclusivity, for many others, often those with a focus on performance and competition, this is not the reason they exist and not something that they are currently well-equipped to do.

So, what is the solution? There are two ways to address the problem, both valuable and in need of support.

One part of the solution is to support and equip traditional sports clubs to understand and engage the sections of their community who do not consider their club in its current form as ‘for them’. This takes time and strong local leadership but a fully inclusive, community-led (by all sectors of the community) sports club, that listens and adapts its offer to the needs of its community is a powerful base both for increasing activity levels and for club sustainability. More power to those progressive clubs and National Governing Bodies of sport leading the charge to open up their offer to the widest possible cross-section of their community.



There is a second element to the solution. In many areas, particularly less affluent areas, an ever-growing number of locally embedded, locally trusted community organisations are offering sport and physical activity across the life course and especially to children and young people. These organisations are not established to search for medals, trophies and develop future international sports stars. They exist to improve the quality of life in their neighbourhoods and for the communities in which they are situated. Sport and physical activity are a great tool for achieving this and many of them will also be providing arts, dance, music or environmental activities and opportunities for volunteering, mentoring, employability and advice. These organisations remove the barriers of location, cost (sessions in low-income neighbourhoods are often free or charge a nominal fee (50p/£1), cost of equipment (usually provided) and their culture is inclusive from the outset, with the wellbeing of the individual a greater focus than their sporting capability. They are Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs) – offering sport and physical activity on the doorstep of their communities. The people that run them are often of the community themselves, they understand what is needed locally and also what works. They are trusted by those that live there and have won the right to make positive community change happen whilst delivering that community’s sporting offer. They are often community activist first, sports coach/administrator second.

So, what are the challenges faced by these groups: traditional sports clubs and LTOs offering sport?

- **Facility costs and access:** both types of provision heavily rely upon hiring or leasing facilities to provide sporting opportunities in their local communities. Very few clubs or LTOs are asset-owning and for those in low-income areas, this would create

a further fundraising challenge to already stretched resources. The financial pressures on public leisure in a post-Covid, high cost-of-living world now often mean that facilities in communities are so focused upon their income bottom line that LTOs supporting those most in need are excluded, through inability to pay hire fees, the closing of less financially viable facilities (very often in the areas of greatest need) and the lack of availability at the time that LTO users want to participate.

- **Short-term nature of funding support:** whilst many sports clubs have paid membership that provides them with a degree of surety of income, many LTOs do not. LTO leaders are agile and creative. They find ways to raise funds through a mix of charity fundraising events, applying for grants and commissions from statutory funders and producing bids and proposals for trusts and charitable foundations. This funding is very often only available for a short period – up to one year at the most and renders LTOs unable to plan to support their communities for the longer term.
- **Complexity of commissioning approaches:** LTOs are often ideally positioned to reach into those communities that present both the greatest challenges and costs to statutory services. In commissioning, due diligence on areas such as safeguarding and health and safety are obviously non-negotiable, however, simplification of commissioning processes and consideration of collaborative (as opposed to competitive) commissioning approaches, such as those being tested in Greater Manchester could lead to a stronger body of LTOs delivering outcomes and strengthening the social fabric in local communities.



**‘Resource neutral’ policy asks:**

- ◆ **Support and scrutinise Sport England’s planned investment in community-based facilities rather than larger scale leisure facilities.** Monitor and scrutinise the impact of that investment in terms of its reach into Levelling Up/high IMD areas.
- ◆ **Use existing investment streams to develop a network of Active Wellbeing Hubs,** through refurbishing and developing existing community facilities to be more suitable for sport and physical activity and to play a wider role in cross-policy aspects of wellbeing (see the North Paddington Youth Hub, Maida Vale for an example). This might also be a role for future NLUK Funding
- ◆ **Enact an expectation that statutory bodies (LA, PCC, NHS) must consider the capacity-building role of LTOs in local neighbourhoods as a priority within their procurement processes** – this could lead to a greater level of sustained supported for the organisations with reach into key target audiences and over time, reduce the burden on statutory services. This aligns with the approach proposed by Demos in ‘the Preventative State: Rebuilding Our Local Social and Civic Foundations’

- ◆ **Establish a Healthy Active Neighbourhoods strand within DHLUC** and connect to key sector partners at a national level to collate and disseminate effective practice – over time mirror this with a Centre of Excellence for Healthy Active Neighbourhoods
- ◆ **Explicitly recognise the value and differences of both the traditional sports club model and the community wellbeing approach** of LTOs in terms of stated policy priorities.
- ◆ **Explore the potential for discrimination against those from lower socio-economic groups to become the tenth protected characteristic in the Equality Act** legislation and set appropriate expectations linked to provision for their needs.
- ◆ **Sustain the funding for and improve upon existing government programmes that enable clubs and LTOs to contribute towards prevention and improvement of wellbeing in local communities** including the DfE Opening School Facilities and Holiday Activity and Food programmes.

### **Street Games**

StreetGames is one of the UK’s leading ‘sport for development’ charities – changing lives and transforming communities through the power of sport. We harness the power of sport to create positive change in the lives of young people living in underserved communities right across the UK working to make young people and their communities healthier, safer and more successful.

**[www.streetgames.org](http://www.streetgames.org)**



## Chapter Two: Community Sport and Inclusion in Sport

# Sportily



Written by:

**David Thorpe**

# Developing community through sport and physical activity

**The Church of England (CoE) has always been rooted in local communities, responding to community needs. This is true of sport and physical activity in which the Christian Church has a rich history. In the late 1800s, a movement emerged which promoted the integration of sport and exercise into an individual's personal, religious, and civic life. These principles flourished in Victorian society, creating a physically active and healthier society, and influenced local churches to establish football teams, which have become some of our best loved clubs today.<sup>76</sup>**

As part of a recent sport and wellbeing movement within the CoE, the Diocese of Gloucester, initiated and funded Sportily, as it sought to react to the increasing issues of inactivity and associated wellbeing challenges in Gloucestershire. As the Church has explored serving the community, particularly young people, and their families through sport and physical activity, dioceses across the country have created a network of sports and activity projects to encourage physical activity, create community, and provide places where faith can be explored.<sup>77</sup> The potential positive reach of churches was highlighted in the Diocese of London's and Sport England's (2015) commissioned report, which showed that churches played a significant role in helping Londoners be active.<sup>78</sup> Early data from Sportily shows its positive impact on participants, offering not just physical benefits but also fostering a sense of community and trust alongside other social outcomes.<sup>79</sup> As this approach matures,

several challenges have emerged that have the potential to hinder the creation of a more equally active nation, with stronger active communities.

## 1. Faith and public policy

A significant issue for the Church is being accepted in this policy space by both national and local government and funders. One in four UK charities are faith based, and account for a quarter of the voluntary sector's income in England and Wales.<sup>80</sup> Evidence shows that faith organisations are quietly undertaking significant social action worth more than £3 billion each year,<sup>81</sup> and as the recent, Bloom Review highlights, 'whether people like it or not, faith plays a profound role in the life of the UK' and 'for many people, religion, faith and belief inform what they do and how they interact with their communities, inspiring them to engage in both the civil and civic activities which build social capital and strengthen the ties that bind our country together'.<sup>82</sup> These organisations often have a unique, trusted position in their communities, making them effective at reaching and helping individuals often considered 'hard to reach'.<sup>83</sup> Despite this substantial role in society, this engagement is often underappreciated. As Danny Kruger MP argued, as advocates for social justice and a fairer society, faith-based organisations are builders of social capital and social cohesion and provide a great number of well-embedded health-related activities, however, these were seldom thought of as interventions.<sup>84</sup>

This broadly reflects the experience of the dioceses developing sport and physical activity projects. They often face uncertainty as public bodies lack confidence in how they might best partner with them to make a social impact. There is commonly an ideological divide, alongside concerns about working with just one faith group and not others, fears of proselytizing or persistent views that the Christian Church is dying, so has little value. That said, while this remains, there is an emerging and welcome shift. The Covid-19 pandemic helped to ‘change the contours of partnership between local authorities and faith groups and faith-based organisations’, opening a ‘new normal’ in the relationships between them’.<sup>85</sup>

While the Church needs to continue to build sustainable relationships and partnerships with public bodies, and to learn to speak their language to help overcome these challenges and become trusted partners,<sup>86</sup> public bodies also need to collaborate with them.<sup>87</sup> Kruger recognised this and recommended the Government should create ‘a new deal with faith communities, by which government supports faith groups in meeting social challenges’.<sup>88</sup> This was supported by Bloom’s 22 recommendations to the Government to ensure understanding of the role of faith in society remains current and the contribution that faith makes is better and more positively supported by policy makers.

To expedite this collaboration and better support Get Active and other social outcomes, public bodies need to proactively and more rapidly, explore and engage with faith organisations at a strategic level. They should develop and communicate positive and supportive frameworks that encourage funders and local authorities, to set aside their concerns and grasp the fundamental role faith organisations play in society. This should focus on enhancing community cohesion, delivering social

outcomes, and getting more people active to ensure society makes better progress in tackling stubborn inequalities.

## **2. Community facilities**

As was evidenced in the London Diocese, churches already play an important part in hosting local place-based physical activity. Christian Churches are well accustomed to running parish halls and community spaces. If a local leisure facility needed local management, the Church, as an untapped resource, could provide a solution for community asset operation for community benefit. This was a key part of the vision for Sportily – the willingness to investigate purchasing and/or operating local community sporting facilities that were closing in Gloucestershire. The Government has created a £150 million fund to not only change the way it invests in local areas but to support community groups to take ownership of assets which are at risk of being lost to the community. After all, local communities are often best placed to understand the needs of their local areas and more aligned to the local economics. While this policy is welcomed, dioceses have experienced challenges in taking such community assets into local ownership.

For example, Sportily has engaged extensively with a council, regarding one such mothballed centre. Despite development of a robust business plan to provide sporting activities alongside availability of the hall for a range of community uses, the facility remains closed and unused after three years.

While transferring facilities into community ownership can be complex, and must be undertaken responsibly, local authority indecision about how to deal with an underutilised asset is often driven by a risk-aversion. Even when a direction of travel is agreed, council bureaucracy, can be

burdensome and time consuming. In turn, this can have a significant impact on a community's ability to remain actively engaged in the process and support it financially. Furthermore, when community assets remain unused and in disrepair, this reduces community cohesion, pride in place and trust in civic and other institutions.

National and local policy makers should consider new ways they can encourage and support local authorities to be more innovative and less risk-adverse when developing plans to pass sporting community assets into community ownership. Policy makers should also encourage local authorities to proactively work with dioceses, through community consultation, to develop these assets for dual use, both sporting and faith activities.

### **3. New housing developments**

The CoE's approach in bringing forward land to develop is grounded in a desire to create high-quality and innovative spaces that foster sociable, satisfying, vibrant, and thriving communities including sports facilities, recreation areas, walking and cycling links.<sup>89</sup> Dioceses are supporting that vision through sport and physical activity in new developments throughout the country – simply, developers know how to build houses, and the Church knows how to build communities of people, so working together is key. Increasingly they do this to ensure residents are fitter and healthier. Recent research highlighted, how challenging that is when health outcomes are 'largely absent' in local government guidance on housing supply and transport policies.<sup>90</sup> This means that national urban development policy is not creating the right context for healthier places within the 300,000 new homes planned every year across England.

This resonates with dioceses. The first residents are eager to be active and to create community from day one. Developers, however, are often

not required to provide sports facilities, green space, or schools until a significant percentage of the new houses are occupied first. When they do, this is also often done with little or no consultation with the new emerging community. To fill this gap, churches attempt to help residents to connect with their neighbours, nurture community and a sense of belonging alongside preventing anti-social behaviour and crime, through providing games, activities and community gatherings, often in locations outside of the new development because no facility exists there. This issue is real and simply solved.

Policy makers should align the needs of future residents through Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Agreements to ensure new facilities and green space, and schools, are planned for from the outset and provided from day one, or at least, be required to create temporary facilities and space. Furthermore, Councils should also work with local churches to help develop good community from the outset. Community consultation should be mandatory, and developers should be held to account by local authorities to ensure they provide the facilities required by the community. Initial revenue funding for these facilities should also be expected from developers.

### **4. Supporting stronger families and communities**

The importance of developing neighbourhood activities around the family has other outcomes too. In 2023, the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households explored the diverse needs of families and households, irrespective of their shape and size. The Commission discerned what was required to facilitate the flourishing of families and households: supporting relationships throughout life, empowering children, and young people, and advocating for the wellbeing of families should be placed at the heart of both government policy.<sup>91</sup>

This commitment to family and community welfare is also a guiding principle of those dioceses engaging through sport and physical activity.

Those dioceses and churches, often design programmes that encourage families to come together, to build connections not only between children and parents but also among different families and inter-generational ‘families’ – strong ‘families’ lead to resilient communities. Walk and Talk, for example, creates space for conversation and reflection on morning walk after school drop-off walk connecting parents, often with younger siblings, those referred by medical practitioners, and older individuals from the local church.

The Government’s recently published Get Active strategy to promote physical activity across the population, regrettably pays limited attention to the crucial role of families, nor builds on the insight from Sport England’s 2018 Family Fund. This highlighted most adults (83%) and young people (90%) agreed or strongly agreed that the family sport facilitated their families in ‘supporting each other more.’<sup>92</sup> Policy makers should therefore reconsider the role of ‘families’ in getting the nation active. The evidence is clear: family activities have a transformative impact on both familial bonds and community cohesion. Policy makers should align their policies with these findings.

## **Sportily**

Sportily is a network of fun-loving sport and activity groups, where everyone can try a wide variety sports and physical activities, make new friends, and explore what life is all about. Developed and supported by the Diocese of Gloucester, Sportily operates across Gloucestershire in schools, community facilities and open spaces, providing opportunities for people of all ages to get involved in sports-based activity youth clubs, afterschool multi-sports clubs, residential activities, adventure sports, family sports and fun fitness activities.

Find out more at **[sportily.org.uk](https://sportily.org.uk)**.

Both Sportily and the Gloucester Diocese are part of the Church of England network of Sports projects.

**[www.cofesport.org.uk](https://www.cofesport.org.uk)**

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Chapter Two: Community Sport  
and Inclusion in Sport

# Women In Sport



Written by:

**Stephanie Hilborne**

# Mind the gender play gap: Recommendations for women's sport

## Sport matters to women and girls

**We've seen that reflected in the success of our inspirational elite sportswomen and the increased profile that women's sport is enjoying. However, it is still the case that too many ordinary women and girls are missing out disproportionately on the joy, fulfilment and lifelong benefits of sport at every stage of their lives.**

The result of this can be seen in the staggering physical and mental health inequalities that women face. 90% of those hospitalised with eating disorders are female. Self-harm is five times more likely in women. Two million women in England and Wales have osteoporosis. Half of women over 50 will break a bone because of this disease, compared to 20% of men.

The word 'sport' comes from an old French word that means 'to divert, amuse, please, play'. It's about freedom from responsibility. For too long, society has systematically taken this freedom away from women and girls. It's time we united to right this wrong.

## Where we are now

Women and girls are less active at every stage of their lives. The gender play gap is wider than it has been since **reporting began**,<sup>93</sup> with 39% of women in England not meeting the recommended 150+ minutes of activity a week. When we breakdown activity levels for women by ethnicity the picture is stark. Just 51% of Black women are 'active' compared with 62% of Black men. Asian women are also far less active than Asian men and compared with White British women.

Female participation in sport has been slower to recover since the pandemic. Inactivity levels among women have increased, with 27% of women doing less than 30 minutes of activity a week. There is a particular gap around team sport, with just 3% of women taking part. When it comes to **children**,<sup>94</sup> a staggering 22% fewer girls than boys take part in team sport. This equates to 860,000 girls who are missing out.

We know that simply encouraging women and girls to play sport isn't enough. The value of sport to women and girls is still not fully recognised. Deep rooted gender stereotypes tell women and girls that sport is not for them from a frighteningly young age and society reinforces these messages throughout their lives. We must smash these stereotypes and the misogyny that goes with them. We must empower teachers, coaches and others who work with girls to recognise the impact of stereotyping, as well as the unique physiology and biology of being a girl.

We must fund women's sport properly, give it the media coverage it deserves and make the systemic change needed to ensure that women, as half the population, are half the decision makers in sport.

At Women in Sport, our purpose is to create lasting change for women and girls in sport and society. We want to close the gender play gap between boys and girls, men and women. We stand ready to make this a reality, working with the next Westminster Government and the governments across the UK, alongside our partners in the home nations.

## The policy changes: where we could be

Greater government investment in women's sport will be necessary, in the longer term, if we are going to achieve meaningful change. Some important measures such as setting up an **independent regulator**<sup>95</sup> for sport, to tackle the harassment and abuse that disproportionately affects women and girls, will require financial commitment.

However, there are cost neutral steps that a new UK Government and governments in the devolved nations should prioritise to close the gender play gap.

### 1. Gender budgeting

**Make gender impact assessments mandatory for all sports organisations in receipt of public money and use this data to make resources in sport more equal, including equal pay.**

It is an ongoing injustice that more public resources are allocated to men's sport than to women's. Denying the existence of this inequality only serves to further it. This is why gender impact reporting – an honest assessment of how much of the resources of a sport are benefitting women and girls – is the first step. Like environmental impact assessments and gender pay gap reporting, gender impact reporting will shine a light on the effects that budgeting decisions have on girls and women. Gender impact reporting is about considering all aspects of a sport that are affected by financial decisions.

Gender budgeting – analysing the results of a gender impact report and adjusting resources accordingly – can then be implemented. This would include things like equal prize money, equal pay for athletes and staff, equal access to facilities and equal investment in sports research. For some sports this will take many years to achieve, given the history of inequality that has existed.

### 2. 50-50 representation

**Make it mandatory for all sports organisations in receipt of public money to have 50-50 representation of the sexes on their boards. Work with public service broadcasters to achieve parity in their sports coverage.**

Across the biggest sports in the UK, nearly all senior posts are held by men. A recent count of leaders in the top twenty sports by participation in England<sup>96</sup> showed that just 23% of the CEOs, Chairs and Performance Directors were women. Whilst existing initiatives within the sector to improve this situation are welcome, they are not enough on their own. We need to see political leadership too.

The media is a vital factor in growing audiences and revenues for women's sport. Both broadcast and print media need to take proactive action to equalise coverage of women's sport on a consistent basis: while the big international events are getting coverage on mainstream channels, in-between times, it is more hit and miss. Governments should require public service broadcasters to move towards 50% of their sports coverage being women's sport.

The media narrative about women and sport also needs to change. Elite male athletes are celebrated for their strength and skill, female athletes are still often discussed in terms of their appearance and their relationships. If the media truly valued women's sport, it would understand the female category and avoid using undermining and inflammatory language in relation to it. Increasing the number of women in the sports media landscape, particularly in leadership roles, would go some way to achieving this.

### 3. Stamp out misogyny

**Make anti-misogyny policies and training mandatory for any organisation in receipt of public money, including governments themselves and their agencies.**

Misogyny is a belief system with a long history. It is “prejudice, malice and/or contempt for women... attitudes and behaviours that relegate women to a subordinate position”.<sup>97</sup> It is the foundation on which many of the barriers that prevent women and girls being active are built. We can’t close the gender play gap if we don’t stamp out misogyny in sport and in wider society.

Anti-misogyny policies and training would ensure that every organisation is playing their part. They help employees and employers to understand what misogyny means and looks like within the context of their organisation and outline the environment in which women deserve to work and participate. And, crucially, they set out how penalties for breaches of the policy will be enforced. They create safe spaces for women and girls to truly thrive; important in sport and in wider society.

An anti-misogyny policy is not a cure all solution for misogyny. But it is a crucial first step; one which governments should be taking the lead on. Promoting misogyny is still legal in the UK and in a wider context, there should be discrete legislation in each nation to criminalise misogyny (as recommended by Baroness Helena Kennedy in **her report to the Scottish Government**<sup>98</sup>).

### 4. Tackle gendered health inequalities

**Embed sport and physical activity into women’s health strategies to ameliorate the most pronounced gendered health inequalities.**

Women and girls continue to face health inequalities at all stages of their lives that could be alleviated by sport, particularly during the crucial development years. To take just two examples:

- Over 50% of women over 50 will break a bone **as a result of osteoporosis**<sup>99</sup> compared to 20% of men.
- Young women between the ages of 16 and 24 are almost three times as likely to experience a common mental health issue as men of the same age.<sup>100</sup> Five times as many girls as boys self-harm and nine times as many **are hospitalised for eating disorders**.<sup>101</sup>

In both cases sport could be playing a vital preventative role and saving the NHS money. For example, weight bearing exercise increases bone mineral density, **90% of which is laid down by the age of 18 in girls**.<sup>102</sup> Sport, and particularly outdoor team sport, can play a fundamental role in reducing anxiety and improving mental health. There are many other gendered health inequalities that could be addressed through sport and yet this is rarely recognised in government strategies and initiatives around women’s health. These strategies should be updated to recognise the vital role sport has to play.

## 5. Recognise the reality for girls

**Improve the training offered to teachers and coaches on the physical, biological and sociological realities of being a girl, especially the impacts of female puberty and gender stereotyping.**

**Our research**<sup>103</sup> shows that gender stereotyping undermines girls' sporting lives from a very young age. Girls are told that they are delicate and should be kind and careful not to get dirty, rather than brave or daring. These limiting expectations mean that girls are exposed to less physical activity from an early age, which leads to a disadvantage in skills development. As girls get older, they continue to hear the same underlying narrative about their relationship with sport, but they hear it louder and from more voices. Add to that the harassment and unwanted attention teenage girls are subject to when exercising and quite simply, taking part becomes a burden, instead of bringing freedom and joy. This can be exacerbated by gender stereotyping being reinforced, often subconsciously, by teachers, coaches and peers.

On top of this comes puberty. Female puberty can be a shocking experience. The physical changes of female puberty are substantial and can create barriers without the right support.

**71% of girls avoid exercising during their period.**<sup>104</sup> 56% of girls experience breast pain when exercising (only 14% of girls say a sports bra is included on their school PE kit list).

We need to transform the understanding of all those who surround girls in their sporting lives. It is not acceptable to continue to make assumptions based on false premises. Girls are not born under confident, they do like competition, but unsurprisingly they don't like oppression. It does matter to girls that their



sporting achievements are meaningful and recognised. It is vital that teachers and coaches are both aware of and confident to support girls with the physical and emotional changes female puberty brings, layered on top of the existing impact of gender stereotyping. This should include a focus on creating female-only opportunities, which should be the norm for teenage girls.

We are already seeing what is possible within the sport sector, such as the female health education from **The Well HQ**<sup>105</sup> and **Women in Sport's Big Sister project**.<sup>106</sup>

Governments should take every step to improve the education, understanding and training of all those it influences who affect the everyday experience of sport girls have.

The next Westminster election will take place in 2024, the 40th anniversary of the founding of the charity Women in Sport and mid-way through the UK's hosting of the International Working Group on Women and Sport. There has never been a better opportunity for government to show it is serious about women in sport.

Founded in 1984, Women in Sport is the longest-standing charity in our field with a proud history of securing change for women and girls. At our heart lies a deep understanding of the needs of women and girls in relation to sport and a passion to address the stubborn gender inequalities that still exist.

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**Sporting**  **Equals**

Chapter Two: Community Sport  
and Inclusion in Sport

# Sporting Equals



Written by:

**Simon Webb**

# How to win the race for equality

## The current situation

### **There remains stubborn inequalities in opportunities and access to sport and physical activity among ethnically diverse communities.**

More than a third (67.3%) of mixed or white adults are likely to be physically active, compared to only little over half (56.4%) of those from Chinese, Black, Asian or other ethnically diverse backgrounds (Sport England's Active Lives, 2023).

### **Underrepresentation still rife**

When looking at specific groups, people of British Asian heritage are the most underrepresented, with only 1.1% of athletes reported in the Race Representation Index (RRI) being British Asian. The group's representation is even lower among coaching roles, where only 0.8% of coaches reported in the RRI were British Asian.

The Race Representation Index 2022 measured workforce data for publicly funded English and British wide National Governing Bodies (NGBs). It graded NGBs against census data to measure how representative of the population sports are.

One NGB (Basketball England) scored an A grade overall, with the average grade being E across all sports. Board level representation had an average score of C for those who did respond, though this drops to a D average when NGBs who declined to take part are considered. Senior Leadership and coaches scored an average of an E while players scored an average of a D. So few NGBs collected data on officials that it was not possible to report on them in any meaningful way in 2022.

Of 66 NGBs invited to take part all but nine participated. Those that declined to take part pointed to a lack of resources or conflicting methodology internally as the reasons for not participating.

Disappointingly both the Football Association and British Cycling, some of the most high-profile and well-funded sports declined to participate. This decision undermines the efforts of other sports and charities such as Sporting Equals to be inclusive and accountable. However, it was good to see the likes of the England & Wales Cricket Board, England Rugby Football Union and England Netball take part – showing that there is increasing understanding by NGBs about the value in transparency and accountability.

Overall, however, Sporting Equals is pleased to see that ethnic diversity is a priority for the vast majority (86%) of NGBs. The situation is not perfect and there are clear improvements to be made but there is an appetite from most sports to sincerely engage and be more inclusive.

### **Barriers to funding**

Access to and knowledge of opportunities across ethnically diverse communities remains poor. The feedback given to Sporting Equals by the community groups and clubs was that they did not have the knowledge of how to apply, the capacity to do so, or awareness of pathways for funding.

To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, Sport England launched the Together Fund, which was a continuation of the Tackling Inequalities Fund, to encourage underrepresented groups to apply for funding. This fund reduced the amount of



red tape usually attached to funding, and kept to minimum. It worked, as approximately 80% of organisations applying for funding were entirely new to Sport England.

This highlighted that bureaucracy, while having its place to ensure fairness and accountability, is a significant obstacle for many ethnically diverse communities seeking to fund their projects and activities.

### **Active Partnerships**

Active Partnerships (APs), the “place-focused” approach championed by Sport England, is one which Sporting Equals endorses.

Community and faith centres are already destinations for ethnically diverse communities, and they can also be used to deliver sport and physical activity. Where APs need support is in how to communicate most effectively with these communities including embracing new media. It is good to see that some resources are available in languages other than English. It is the message however, that is most critical. Being audience-centric with content aimed at underrepresented groups will help. While it can be cost-effective to produce templated content – which can be used across many areas – the messaging needs to be adapted to suit the specific audience the AP wants to reach.

### **What does good look like?**

Basketball England are the standout NGB when it comes to promoting ethnic diversity in their sport. It is a sport that is geared toward its audience and is user-centric. The different formats of basketball enable it to be played in nearly every conceivable community across the country – indoors and outdoors and by a wide range of ages and sizes of groups (one-on-one, three-on-three, etc.).

There is also plenty of basketball competitions that take place – from recreational events, local

city leagues and county leagues all the way to regional and national leagues. Basketball’s talent pathway is inclusive, with ethnically diverse coaches across the sport. The NGB celebrates coaches and athletes of all ethnic backgrounds, ensuring that all know they are welcome.

The leadership of Basketball England challenges itself to be more inclusive and embrace services such as the Race Representation Index to hold itself to account. When appointments are made to board or senior management level, they are celebrated publicly – and the protected characteristics of those individuals are highlighted subtly.

Among the challenges faced by Basketball England is funding, as the current funding model is based on medal success at international competitions – which Britain is unlikely to achieve in the short- to medium-term. However, the NGB has utilised volunteer networks across basketball to mitigate resource issues.

### **What needs to change - the policy calls**

There are several relatively easy, cost-neutral (for the public purse) measures that can tackle inequalities and deliver tangible change quickly.

- 1. Formation of an All Party Political Group (APPG) looking specifically at ethnic diversity in sport and physical activity.**  
This will focus on community assets, policy changes for NGBs and holding stakeholders to account.
- 2. A legal requirement for NGBs to participate in RRI data collection,** with funding set aside by each NGB to facilitate this. A consistent methodology across all sports, with real consequences for not participating, is the only way to ensure all sports engage. This should be monitored by the APPG.

**3. Mandatory education of all employed NGB staff on racism and inclusion.**

Only by understanding the lived experiences of their membership and the wider public can an NGB truly empower those from ethnically diverse backgrounds to take part.

**4. Establish an Independent Regulator across all sports**

to address instances of racism. Situations where NGBs must appeal against their own disciplinary board – as has happened in football – should never happen. An Independent Regulator acting across all sports would ensure consistency and promote best practice. The regulator would help establish and build confidence in the process and ensure the integrity of any complaints of racial discrimination being raised.

**5. Adapt the funding model for sport**

to account more for participation and diversity, not prioritising medal success over everything else.

**6. A requirement that all interview panels for jobs contain ethnically diverse representation**

would help empower candidates and ensure a fairer interview process.

**7. Require all jobs within the sports and physical activity sector advertise the salary,**

as this is proven to be important in empowering ethnically diverse people in applying for roles.

**8. Make it mandatory that all NGBs establish Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committees**

which are representative of the population as much as possible – rather than reflective of the existing sport specific participation.

**9. Make it compulsory for NGBs to review policies on a regular basis,**

reporting on progress to the APPG.

**10. Require all NGBs to have clothing policies that empower ethnically diverse communities to participate,**

knowing they are explicitly welcome. Specifying religious headwear and items of clothing such as base layers or leggings can ensure none are indirectly excluded.

**11. Remove bureaucracy in funding application processes**

so that community groups and clubs who are less well-resourced and unfamiliar with the processes have opportunities to succeed.

**12. Advertise opportunities for funding, sports and physical activity in a manner tailored to ethnically diverse communities.**

We recommend utilising community and faith centres and other physical – as well as digital – spaces to advertise opportunities directly to an audience that NGBs and APs struggle to reach with their messaging.

**13. APs and NGBs must be not only permitted to but encouraged to engage with corporate partners**

to deliver projects on a community level. An example would be delivering bicycles to Mosques that can be loaned out, with training in Bikeability, alongside the provision. This will then enable Muslim women, typically of South Asian heritage who are statistically likely to be the least active demographic, to use cycling as a means of transport confidently and safely.

**14. Make it obligatory for NGBs and APs to report on their community outreach and projects with ethnically diverse groups.**

This would increase accountability and make it a priority for all organisations. National programmes are fine in principle, but real impact is made by tailoring the programmes to local communities. By building relationships with clubs and groups in local areas the NGBs and APs will not need to increase resources, but can improve delivery.



**activity  
alliance**  
disability  
inclusion  
sport

Chapter Two: Community Sport  
and Inclusion in Sport

# Activity Alliance



Written by:

**Sarah Brown-Fraser**



## Disabled people, inclusion, sport and activity

**We know that sport and activity have huge benefits for everyone in our population. There are around 16 million disabled people in the UK. 11% of children, 23% of working age adults and 45% of pension age adults are disabled.**

Yet disabled people participate in sport and activity less than non-disabled people and are also twice as likely to be inactive. At Activity Alliance, we call this the fairness gap. We urge the government to prioritise closing this gap and to ensure disabled people have fair access to all opportunities.

### About Activity Alliance

Activity Alliance is the national charity and leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity. Our work and impact are built on our insight, expertise, and resources across various specialisms, at local, regional and national level. Our vision is to see fairness for disabled people in sport and activity. As an Alliance, we can draw

upon a range of expertise from across a variety of sectors. Our vision is to see fairness for disabled people in sport and activity.

For this vision to become a reality, however, it requires policy changes across the full breadth of government. It also counts on joined up thinking between parties and departments to create a holistic strategy that puts disabled people first. This includes across factors like employment, education, transport and health to ensure more disabled people can reap the same benefits as non-disabled people.

To drive change, we are focussing on two key goals. These are changing attitudes towards disabled people in sport and activity and embedding inclusive practice into organisations. Alongside physical fitness and management of health conditions, sport and activity provide vital opportunities to improve wellbeing and tackle loneliness. At a time when mental wellbeing is worse than ever for many disabled people, our work could not be more important.

## Activity Alliance’s Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23

It is first important to recognise the existing landscape for disabled people and sport and activity. **Our Annual Disability and Activity Survey<sup>107</sup>** continues to track disabled people’s perceptions and experiences of sport and activity. It is seen as the primary insight source for policy makers, leaders and organisations working to improve inclusion for disabled people in sport and activity.

This year’s survey illustrates the challenges facing disabled people to participate in sport and activity. The key findings include:

- Disabled people remain far less likely to feel that they have the opportunity to be as active as they want to be (41% vs 70% of non-disabled people). Disabled people were the hardest hit during the pandemic and insight shows disabled people facing challenges as sport and activities reopened.
- Disabled people were more likely to say they wanted to be more active compared to non-disabled people (77% vs 54%). This “activity gap” has remained consistent in previous years, showing an ongoing unmet need.
- Disabled people were nearly three times more likely than non-disabled people to feel lonely always or often (23% vs 8%). Nearly two-thirds of disabled people who felt lonely agreed that being active could help them feel less lonely (65%).
- Disabled people were half as likely to ‘see people like me’ playing and working in sport and physical activity. 12% of all disabled people wanted the opportunity to become a coach or have a role in delivering physical activity (vs 17% of non-disabled people). This increased to 26% of disabled people who were taking part in organised activities, and to 31% of young disabled people.

## Recommendations and cross-departmental thinking

Cross-government action is vital. We welcomed the government’s recent Disability Action Plan and Sport Strategy. The next government must go further to ensure a joined-up approach to close the fairness gap in sport and activity. Alongside this, parties should commit to ensuring disabled people are consulted and included in every relevant policy.

Our research shows that it costs more for disabled people to be active. The average spend each month for active disabled people is £68, compared to £46 for non-disabled people. One explanation for this is the lack of supply available for such activities and the specialist support required to make them operational, meaning the cost is driven up. When combined with insight from disabled people and their fears of losing their benefit allowance if they became active, this results in a worrying outcome. Indeed, an activity trap.

Without collaboration between the relevant departments covering work, benefits, and sport, such issues easily fall through the cracks and become overlooked. The interconnected nature of this makes tackling the issue more complex.

We fully appreciate the size of the task to close the gap and truly tackle inequalities. That is why Activity Alliance has been working in partnership, including with sporting organisations, healthcare professionals and activity providers. We continue to share better practice and improve access to opportunities for disabled people. Successful programmes, like **Get Out Get Active<sup>108</sup>** delivered in the community, show what genuine inclusion can achieve for our least active disabled and non-disabled people.

We are now calling on the government to take action and help tackle concerns about the gap between disabled people’s level of inactivity compared to that of non-disabled people.

The next government must recognise two overarching priorities:

**1. Deliver cross-government action:**

Disabled people want more influence on the policies that affect them and the activities they are involved in.

- Disabled people must be consulted on the cross-government action plan for disabled people, with a Cabinet-level position to co-ordinate its work.
- This should have measures for and specifically address some of the challenges faced by disabled people in sport, activity and employment.

**2. Protect benefits:** Our research shows that almost half of disabled people fear losing their benefits if they are seen to be physically active.

- In its proposed changes to the disability benefits system the government must provide safeguards to reassure disabled people that being active will not threaten their benefits.

- Our **Activity Trap**<sup>109</sup> research also found that almost two thirds (65 per cent) of disabled people said they rely on benefits to be active. More than half (55 per cent) said they were likely to be more active if benefits weren’t at risk of being taken away.

- Protecting benefits and promoting activity for disabled people has health benefits which can, in turn, deliver wider economic value through other ways such as increased employment.

The statistics are stark for many disabled people in sport and activity - less likely to be taking part, less likely to be part of the workforce, and less likely to have opportunities. Investing more into sport and activity that is truly inclusive and accessible will help address these deep-rooted barriers. It will also go a significant distance in tackling loneliness and improving mental wellbeing for a large proportion of our nation, enhancing our communities and creating a better society for everyone.

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## References

**107. Annual Disability and Activity Survey**

(<https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/how-we-help/research/annual-survey>).

**108. Get Out Get Active** (<http://www.getoutgetactive.co.uk/>).

**109. The Activity Trap** (<https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/how-we-help/research/the-activity-trap>).



Chapter Three: Preventative Health:  
Recreation and Leisure

# Intelligent Health



Written by:

**Katherine Knight**

## Routes to roots

### **At Intelligent Health, we believe that a healthy society is one with active citizens.**

Our social nature is core to us as a species and sport and physical activity can enable us to connect and thrive. When this socialisation is removed, our resilience to stress events is impacted and it affects our health. For an individual to prosper, they must feel that they are safe, that they are valued and that they belong. Only when these three conditions apply will individuals build resilience. Whilst this resilience builds, stress is reduced and people feel empowered to adopt and maintain new health behaviours and thus, this leads to improvement in health outcomes (Figure 1). This can be measured through markers such as increased physical activity, social cohesion, wellbeing and nature connectedness.



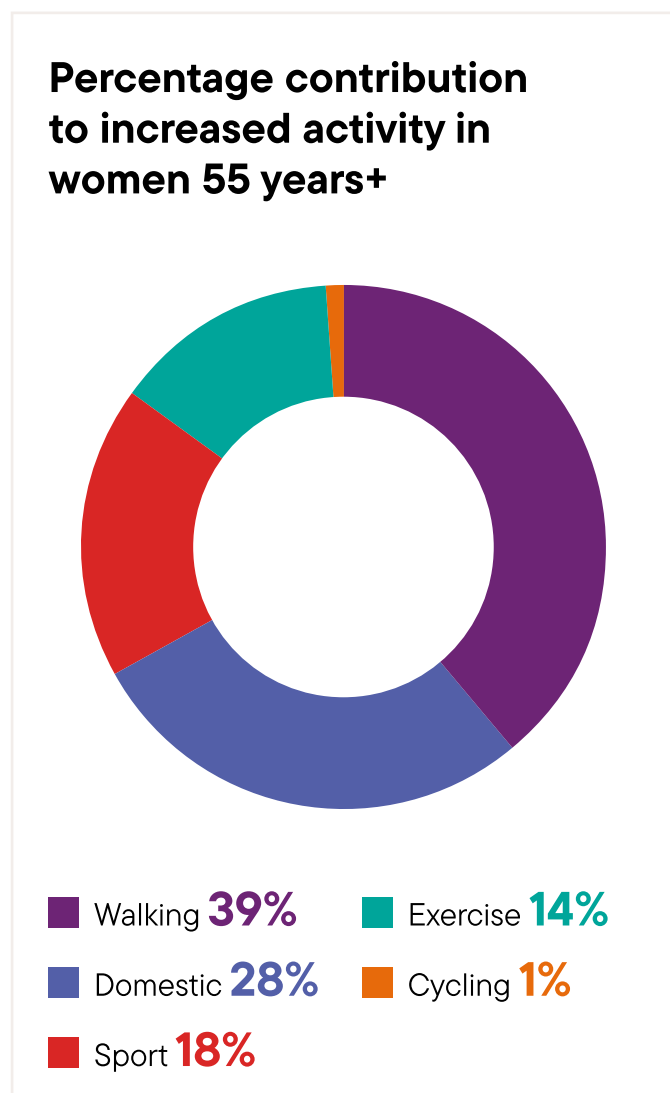
**Figure 1: Adapted from Grocke-Dewey et al (2021)**

We recognise the power that physical activity has in improving both mental and physical health. Physical inactivity is cited as fourth leading cause of reduced mortality, being accounted as one of five major risk-factors for developing non-communicable diseases such as Cardiovascular diseases, Chronic respiratory diseases, Type II Diabetes and some types of Cancer. All of which can be improved, and in some cases can be completely reversed, through a physically active lifestyle (amongst other health-benefitting factors). Physical activity improves mental health by reducing Chronic Inflammation and increasing the hormone BDNF that repairs synapses in the brain so helping to prevent depression, anxiety and dementia.

Whilst traditional sport can be a wonderful, life-affirming activity for some, it does not work for all. The sport and physical activity sector has made strides to make activity more accessible, but the highest success in increasing activity and impacting health is made by small changes to daily behaviour. We need to nurture both to support all needs. We know that walking (for leisure and active travel) makes up the majority of daily physical activity for most people. That is why we believe creating places and spaces where people are encouraged to walk, wheel or cycle for most short journeys, will go some way in tackling the nation's deep inactivity crisis. This includes being able to move more through active travel choices and for leisure, using parks, green spaces and waterways to connect and move. At the same time, it connects us to our place and each other, good for our health and that of our planet.



A study from Scotland showed that for a target group of older women the greatest contribution of type of activity to move from inactive to active is through walking, 38%, with Sport, Exercise and Cycling contributing to 18%, 14% and 1% respectively (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Strain, T., Fitzsimons, C., Foster, C., Mutrie, N., Townsend, N. and Kelly, P., (2016). Age-related comparisons by sex in the domains of aerobic physical activity for adults in Scotland. Preventive medicine reports, 3, pp.90-97.**

Consistent high levels of physical inactivity are recorded annually in Sport England’s Active Lives survey in areas of high deprivation, Black and South Asian communities, those living with life-limiting conditions and women. These trends start in childhood, creating a worrying pattern of inactivity throughout the life course. These very communities, experiencing the most inequalities, are exactly who we should be actively engaging with to provide them opportunities to take ownership of their place and their health.

This is why we need to work collaboratively to empower communities to feel that they have the agency to create better places to live for themselves and to also build connections with each other and their surroundings. These empowered, connected communities are the key to a healthy place.

Where a person feels that they are not safe, in both a physical or mental capacity, their brain tells them to stay in a heightened mode of ‘fight or flight.’ Safety not only applies to the safety of oneself, but also the safety of one’s environment. Making a place safer can contribute to making a place healthier. We know that high deprivation negatively impacts on healthy life expectancy, and we also know that areas of high deprivation are also more likely to have higher incidences of crime. For children and women, walking around where they live may not always be a safe thing to do, whether this be related to a risk of injury or crime. Making a place more walkable can relate to a plethora of solutions, mostly related to infrastructure improvements such as better lighting along pavements, dedicated cycle lanes and properly designed and maintained footpaths and roads. Placing onus on local government to ensure that a place is more ‘walkable,’ must be a priority.



Infrastructure is vital, but we must also consider how we then look at changing behaviours. We are all aware that communities are not always listened to by decision makers. The reality is that interventions are often put into a place without consultation, decided by someone removed from the local nexus. We believe that active communities not only relate to physical activity, but also to an individual's civic connection and engagement with a place.

To truly build connection to a place, local communities must have a voice and some decisions decentralised. Therefore, we propose that Citizen's Assemblies should be created and public voice heard to determine what a healthy

place looks like to them, ideate how to remedy local issues, identify a baseline from which needs to be built upon and finally to own, measure and report on progress. The Assemblies should include children as they are an indicator species for our places, if they thrive then we all can.

Alongside this, we advocate for the implementation of an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to sustainably improve physical activity and health outcomes. ABCD builds on the skills of local people, the power of local associations, and the supportive functions of local institutions, drawing upon existing community strengths to build stronger, more sustainable communities for the future.

ABCD can be used to underpin community work to drive up physical activity levels. This focusses on what is working well already in a place and enables local people to grow these strengths, as opposed to a traditional deficit-based model which instead looks at what is missing.

Loneliness is equitable to smoking 15 cigarettes daily. Worldwide, trends are showing a steady decline in the number of people who smoke, yet we are witnessing a growing epidemic of social isolation as our communities become more disconnected from each other and their local environment. At the same time, the health of our people and of our planet is in freefall. In the West, people are living longer but with modern advancements in medicine, many are now spending much more of their lives in ill health and it's projected to be getting worse. We are also being gripped by climate change, with the global average temperature increasing and being accelerated by human action. We believe at the heart of this change is community involvement. Social contact is the antidote to tackling loneliness. Policymakers must enable environments that encourage cohesion, build on existing networks and create new communities.

Across policymaking, siloed working is touted as a barrier to accelerating progress. A joined-up approach is the only way forward to truly bring communities together to tackle health inequalities and we believe that physical activity, namely by encouraging walking, can be a means to achieve this. We need an ambitious forward-thinking modern approach with multiple sectors working together with a common purpose, which is to improve health and resilience. To deliver more walking will create a healthier and more resilient community. We believe that a local resilience steering group could bring together the necessary partners to deliver this change with walking both an input and output of greater resilience.

We have named our considered steps towards an active society: 'Routes to Roots.' Both Routes and Roots are treated as having a dual meaning here. Routes refers to creating pathways towards a better future, but also improving physical routes (dedicated pathways and pavements) to enable people to be active. Roots here means the familiar roots that are built within a community, enabling strong foundations to embed healthy behaviours and finally, the greening benefits by designating more green spaces in places that are notably bereft of nature and biodiversity.

With these ideas in mind, we propose the following asks of the relevant government departments:

### **Department for Culture, Media and Sport**

- Champion Asset-Based Community Development as a means to grow sustainable physical activity in a place.
- Commit to the longevity of the Physical Activity Taskforce, to ensure physical activity for health remains a cross-departmental priority and enable the aims of Get Active to be delivered.
- Launch an awareness month where facilities are opened and provide taster sessions to encourage everyone into a new physical activity or sport. Run a social marketing campaign that promotes small tangible changes, particularly walking, to encourage behaviour change.

### **Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**

- Recommend the creation of Citizen's Assemblies to determine what a healthy place looks like in their local area. Ensure participants are demographically representative, including the voice of children and young people.

- Ensure community researchers are working in places to better understand these communities from their own perspectives.
- Work with local authorities to implement a policy that considers ‘Playstreets’ within the planning process. Making it a simpler process for communities to close streets off to encourage play, community and physical activity.
- Follow the National Forest planning policy that requires any new build, either housebuilding or infrastructure to dedicate 20 - 30% of land to safe, equitable and accessible green space.

### **Department for Transport**

- Change the funding model for highways. Dedicate 5% of spend on every new road dedicated to supporting active travel, creating safer walking and cycling routes including better lighting and surfacing, particularly repairing potholes that affect all road users.
- Blanket adoption of ‘20 is plenty’ on all school streets and change the Highway Code to fully ban pavement parking, reducing air pollution and making the streets outside schools a safer place to walk.

### **Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs**

- Create new urban green spaces by reclaiming disused land into community ownership. Encourage urban allotments and use a volunteer system to educate local people on the benefits of connecting to nature.
- Increase the biodiversity of active travel routes to create wildlife corridors, through planting wildflowers and trees, encouraging users to be active amongst nature.

### **Department of Health and Social Care**

- Create and issue a national annual census that measures children and adults’ wellbeing. This could form part of existing data sets, such as the Local Health survey under OHID or the English Housing Survey that sits within DLUHC.
- Place focus on the role of community in resilience building and preventative health. Deliver a social marketing campaign that empowers the public to understand that they don’t always need to rely on the NHS, educating them on their own agency to take action to help their health.
- Ensure that Integrated Care Boards ringfence a set percentage of budgets to go towards community-based preventative health programmes operated outside the public sector.

### **Department for Education**

- Require OFSTED to measure wellbeing of children and staff as a standard for reports. Similarly, to how student satisfaction is measured in Higher Education.
- Advise schools to permit a uniform policy that encourages the use of footwear that enables daily activity through walking and cycling and moving actively through the day, i.e. allowing pupils to wear trainers for lesson (Active Soles).

This is not by any means a one-size fits all approach. We hope that with prominence placed on community decision-making through Citizen’s Assemblies and moving away from a deficit-based approach, ownership will blossom into the creation of a healthy, active place. Once this place is formed, activity (both physical and civic) will only flourish further.



Chapter Three: Preventative Health:  
Recreation and Leisure

# The Active Partnership Network



Written by:

**Hayley Lever**

# Place and health

**The Active Partnership<sup>110</sup> network authors this chapter, drawing on evidence, evaluation, insights, and practical knowledge from diverse local systems and communities in every part of England.**

As Active Partnerships our work engages us in very many, if not all, of the areas covered in other chapters (referenced) in this document. Many of the chapter recommendations much align with our wider policy considerations such as a new Wellbeing Minister to maximise cross-departmental working, embedding environmental issues in all we do, using Active Design in every planning submission, strengthening statutory requirements and coordinated investment across education, children and youth services to benefit physical activity, supporting the ‘pivot’ of leisure to wellbeing. We welcome wider consideration of these as part of an overall transformed policy approach to tackle inactivity.



## Health and place policy recommendations

- 1. Each ICS and/or Devolved Authority to publish annual spend on prevention as a proportion of total spend, to a consistent definition/description of prevention.**

This is a low/no cost measure and will enable benchmarking and tracking so resources can be focussed where they are needed most. Longer term, once consistent and meaningful data is captured, a target % spend on prevention could be helpful if aligned to a social, expansive model, rather than a narrow, reductive approach.

- 2. Physical activity integrated within measurement frameworks such as the health inequalities framework, Quality Outcomes Framework (QOF) and/or local incentive frameworks across the health and care system.**

Integrating physical inactivity into the healthcare inequalities and other outcomes frameworks is supported by evidence indicating that tackling inactivity is crucial for achieving their goals. This integration will lead to increased prioritisation, action, and data collection regarding inactivity, thus reducing the need to incentivise primary care to address it. There is particular interest in understanding the effectiveness of initiatives such as local incentive frameworks in driving action compared to QOF.

**3. Patient Lifestyle Data related to movement and physical activity (alongside smoking, alcohol and weight) to be explored as part of every health and care conversation, with data captured at scale and made public at LA/ICS/ Devolution Authority Level.**

This is a low-cost measure, which is vital to make the change from a medicalised model of healthcare and to link directly the benefits of movement and the reduction on healthcare costs.

This change would transcend mere individual choices; we would be embracing physical activity as a collective societal value. We would see and hear evidence of big shifts in our existing mindsets, systems, and structures, harnessing community assets and building on strengths.

**4. Wellbeing to be a mandatory consideration for, and included in, Devolution Deals.** No cost and an opportunity to ensure local places can identify and prioritise their resources.

**5. A Wellbeing Impact Assessment in decision making and policy.** This is a zero-cost measure, as with equality impact assessments this will lead to a culture where health and wellbeing is always considered in every policy and decision-making.

Embedding the importance of place and key services such as health and how they directly impact on wider wellbeing, re-enforce the reasons why place is so fundamental.

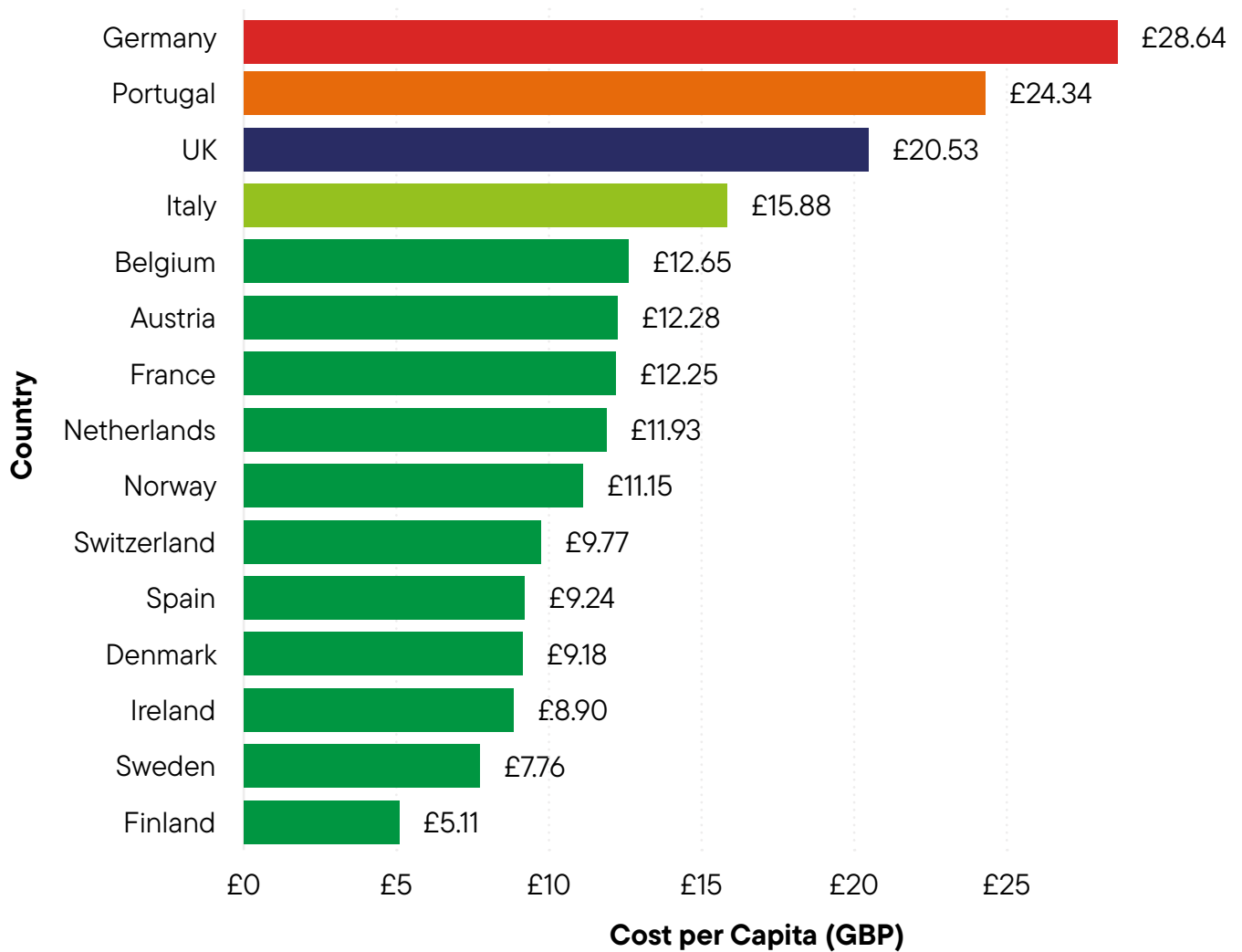
These policy changes can be implemented without significant additional financial resources but require commitment, coordination, and adjustments in resource allocation. By focusing on specific timelines and delivery mechanisms, these policies can have a tangible and positive impact on reducing inactivity and health inequality and enhancing sustainable economic development in communities across the country.

**1. What is the current situation?**

When we move, we are stronger. As individuals, families, communities and as a nation. The evidence is overwhelming—physical activity has the power to transform lives from birth to the end of life. It yields substantial benefits to our healthcare systems, society, and economy as well as to the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

- Inactivity has been highlighted as a key modifiable preventative risk factor for all six major condition groups outlined in the forthcoming Major Conditions Strategy.
- Reducing inactivity plays an important role in addressing other significant risk factors: e.g., hypertension, blood glucose levels, and helping maintain a healthy weight.
- England has some of the highest levels of inactivity in Western Europe.
- Disabled people and people with a long-term health condition are twice as likely to be physically inactive than those without a disability or health condition.

**Direct healthcare costs per person related to inactivity**



The UK has the **3rd highest** direct healthcare costs of non-communicable diseases and mental health (NCDs) attributable to physical inactivity\* per capita.

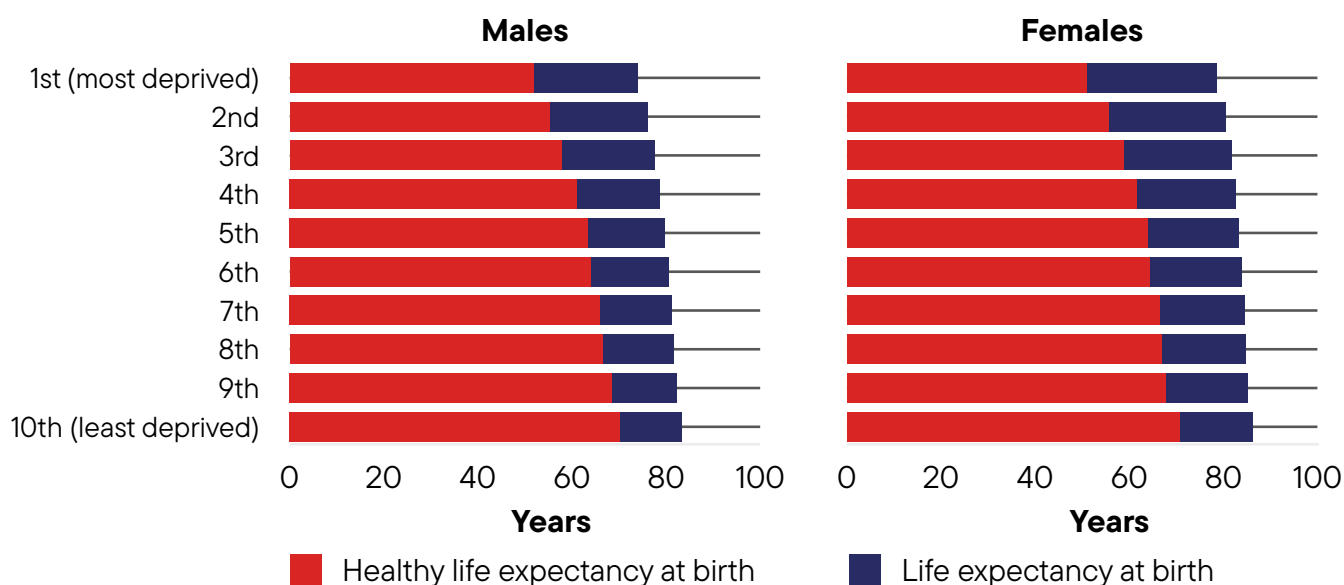
On average, physical inactivity costs the UK **£20.53 per capita** in attributable direct healthcare costs.

The most active nation, Finland, has a per capita direct healthcare cost attributable to physical inactivity of **£5.11**. This is **£15.42** less than the UK.

The average cost across these 15 nations is **£13.31** per capita, highlighting how much greater the per capita spend is in the UK.

\*These costs are for new preventable cases of coronary heart disease, stroke, type-2 diabetes, hypertension, seven cancers (breast, colon, endometrial, gastric, oesophageal, renal, and bladder), dementia and depression resulting from physical inactivity per year.





## 2. What do we want to achieve?

We can tackle inactivity and inequality across England, through a whole system, place-based approach, enabled by national policy and legislation. National-level decisions can create optimal conditions for active lives for all; working with and building on the strengths of people and communities. This is complex. If one thing changes, everything changes in response and changes at government level can create a decisive ripple effect across the whole country.

**Our aim is to make movement a cultural norm in every community;** designing activity back into life and ingraining this understanding of its importance across systems and sectors. This vision hinges on a fundamental shift in how society perceives movement, with a **greater recognition of intervention and investment into prevention and early intervention.**

Effecting change at the national level to achieve this mission necessitates shifts in mindset, policy, legislation, and strategies to enable local level action and change. This integration extends to the health and care system, transport, planning,

education, environment, community safety, sport and physical activity sector and beyond.

All these things interact in place and set the conditions to design moving back into life - for everyone. By aligning intention, capacity, resource, and investment, it becomes possible to make significant strides towards a future characterised by health, sustainability, and equity.

This ambitious and collective mission is backed by DCMS' Get Active and Sport England's Uniting the Movement strategies, and in each of our local strategies. It is not just about improving individual well-being in the short term; it's about safeguarding the health and wellbeing of current and future generations of people and planet. This mission is also vital to our economy: to support a healthy, active, working population.

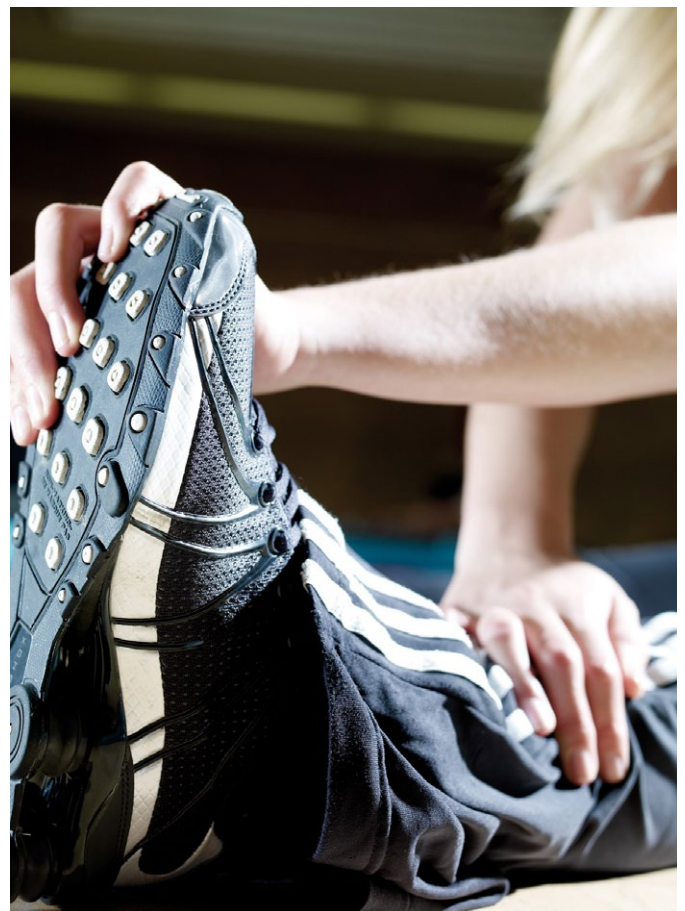
Both 'Get Active' and 'Uniting the Movement' recognise that two of the most significant interventions are a focus on Place to maximise impact and integrating activity and movement into health and care systems, pathways, and settings.

### **3. What are the barriers you have identified to achieving the goal of an inclusive active nation?**

Evidence, evaluation, data, and insights from across England point to a repeating pattern of barriers as policy makers, practitioners, and clinicians seek to integrate physical activity and health.

- ‘Physical activity is everybody’s problem and so it can be nobody’s’. Because of the complex number and range of barriers to activity it requires multiple agencies to coordinate effort and measure improvement, a minister with a direct leadership role and overall accountability for addressing inactivity, inequalities and improving wellbeing would help to address this barrier.
- There is a broad understanding and belief in the benefit of movement to individuals but the ability to link that movement to ‘simple cause and effect’ reductions in demand on other services and wider benefits to societal priorities is not possible.
- Globally, there is only emergent understanding of how to implement whole systems, place-based approaches and effective ways to understand their impact.
- Measuring activity and its outcomes is complex, particularly in a social model of health, where the work is beyond discrete services, interventions, or programmes and includes the full range of influences on inactivity and inequality in a place. There is a need for new methodologies to measure and track activity levels more regularly/in real time, and evidence the direct and causal relationship between increased activity to reductions in cost or improvements for wider societal issues.

- Disjointed, often short-term investment in programme delivery, especially for children and young people. Turning the tide on youth inactivity, excess weight, and addressing the growing mental health crisis, will require long-term, coordinated, cross departmental ambition, with a particular focus on closing the ‘activity gap’ for children experiencing the greatest inequalities.
- There is a lack of understanding and recognition of how the VCSE sector supports healthy, well-connected communities and has a bigger part to play.
- There is a need to invest in and develop a cross-sector workforce which has different skills, behaviours, capabilities and approaches to lead and deliver the change required.





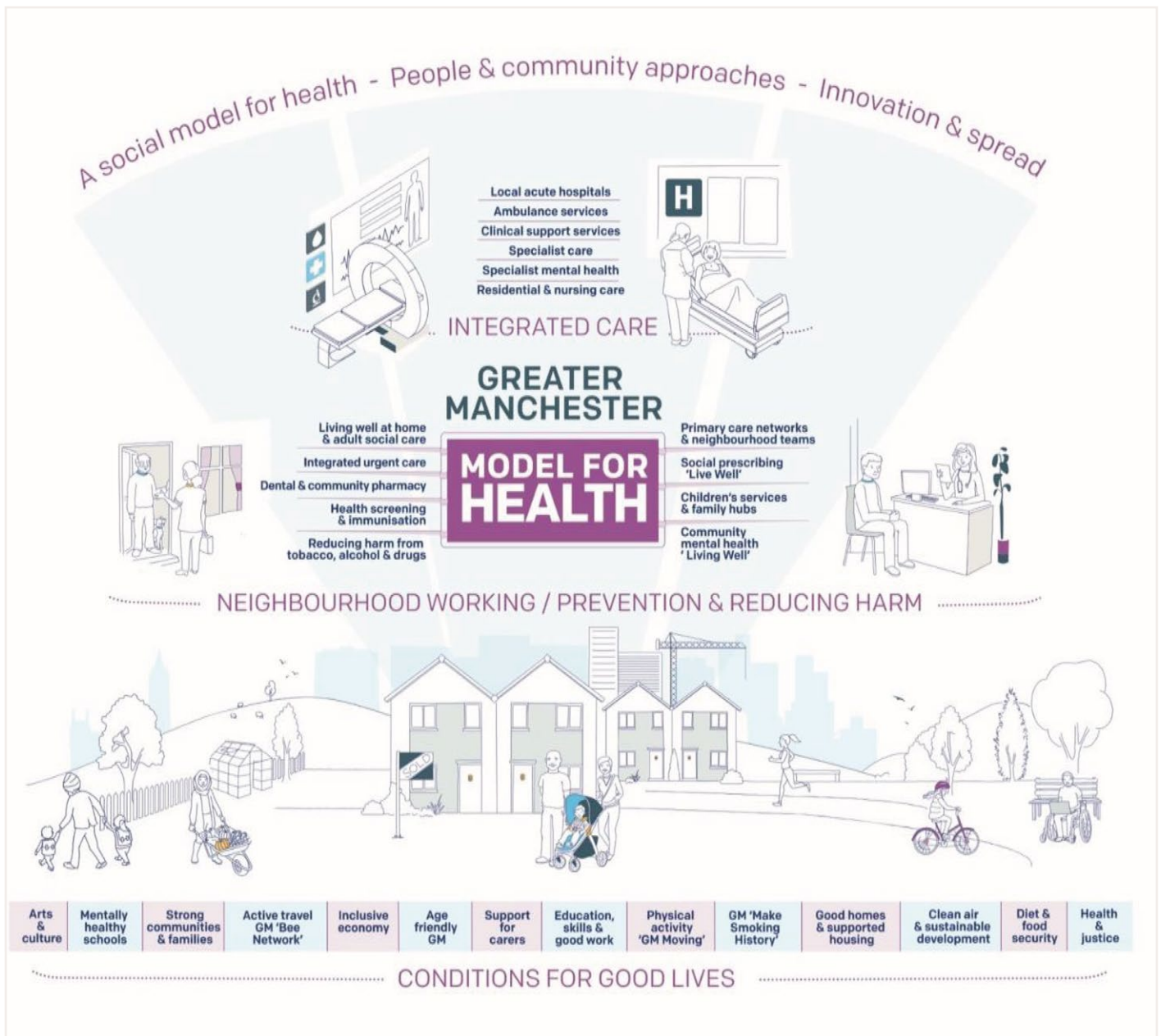
#### 4. What would good look like?

Together, through the approach described in section 1 and 2 above, we will add years to life, and good life to years at a population level and support social wellbeing through stronger, more resilient communities. We will drive significant reduction in risk, and healthcare costs related to inactivity for the nation. We will support health equity and a population that experiences greater life satisfaction, productivity and can contribute to our nation being a great place to live. This requires clearly understood levels of expenditure on primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and the relationship of that to healthcare costs, with meaningful data collection that helps to embed physical activity into health and care.

##### **Specifically, what is needed in place and health?**

- **Cross-government leadership and accountability that enables collective whole system leadership in place:** One significant barrier is the absence of cohesive leadership across government. To address this, there is a pressing need for a unified approach that transcends departmental responsibilities and political cycles, with a long-term approach that supports the wellbeing of people and planet.

- **A health and care system no longer prioritising medicalised interventions:** Moving away from a predominantly medicalised approach to a social model of health is vital. An integrated, cross-sector health and care workforce can play a pivotal role in supporting physical activity as a preventative and therapeutic measure, and health and care systems can support the role of people and communities in health creation. In a social model of health such as that shown below from Greater Manchester, it is possible to release the energy of all sectors and society to support active lives; creating meaningful change at Place level from those supporting strong communities, education, skills and good work, support to carers, good homes, sustainability, active travel and much more. It is vital to rebalance the focus towards proactive, targeted prevention opportunities alongside our work on medical or clinical interventions. A fundamental shift to reducing the likelihood of illness and creating structural and environmental conditions at Place level.



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Chapter Three: Preventative Health:  
Recreation and Leisure

# State of Life



Written by:  
**Will Watt**

# Sport and activity as the National Preventative Health Service?

## Welcome to the world of the WELLBY

**Could parkrun really be 25 times more cost-effective than the NHS at delivering health outcomes? Does strength and balance work for adults with long-term health conditions have a social value of £22,000 per person per year?**

Welcome to the world of Beyond GDP economics and the WELLBY: a new opportunity to provide robust evidence of the preventative health, social and economic value of sport and physical activity.

### What is beyond GDP and WELLBY economics?

GDP is a monetary value of all the goods and services produced in a country - it attempts to measure everything, good and bad, and in the UK that includes illegal activity such as the drugs trade and prostitution. And while GDP gives an idea of the level of economic activity in a country, it gives no indication whatsoever of the happiness of its people. Indeed, the Nobel laureate economist Simon Kuznets, who in 1937 first standardized GDP measurements, stated, “the welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measure of national income.”

### The UK is a world leader in how to measure what matters to our lives

GDP’s shortcomings have long been known and debated. In 1968 Senator Bobby Kennedy echoed Kuznets, saying that GDP measures, “everything in life except that which matters”. And just last year the UN issued a report stating

that the international community must now go Beyond GDP, in order “to correct a glaring blind spot in how we measure economic prosperity and progress.”

Beyond GDP is no longer fringe thinking; it is front and centre for modern economics. In 2023 social scientists, statisticians and economists have a broad consensus that goes beyond simple metrics of output - we are now measuring what matters, and that is overall Life Satisfaction.

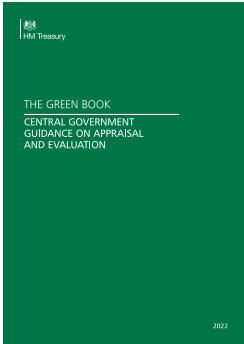
To do this, we ask real people a single, simple question: on a scale of 0 to 10, overall how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

This fundamental question is asked alongside inquiry into other elements of people’s lives: age, income, gender, ethnicity, employment, anxiety, happiness, health, physical activity, volunteering, mental health, trust in others, education and almost anything else you can think of.

From this data we can work out with a high degree of accuracy and confidence what affects our life satisfaction and by how much. And it turns out that money matters, as do jobs, but health, and especially mental health, loneliness are far greater determinants of people’s happiness.

At State of Life we work closely with Lord Gus O’Donnell, who was chief cabinet secretary and head of the civil service under John Major, Tony Blair and David Cameron. While in government he and others made sure that the UK measured life satisfaction. As a result, in 2023 the UK has possibly the world’s leading data sets for measuring life satisfaction and wellbeing.

## The WELLBY - the UK and HM Treasury on social value and wellbeing



Over the last 10 years the economics of wellbeing has gone from being ‘interesting and experimental’ to the very front of the Green Book (the Treasury’s bible of policy evaluation).

On page 5 the Green Book explains that the appraisal of social value, also known as public value, is now based on the principles and ideas of welfare economics and concerns overall social welfare efficiency, not simply economic market efficiency.

“Social or public value therefore includes all significant costs and benefits that affect the welfare and wellbeing of the population, not just market effects.”

This was a significant shift in public policy and economics. And when that happens, the Treasury issues new supplementary guidance on how to implement such a change. In 2021 that supplementary guidance endorsed the widely held view that overall Life Satisfaction is the best survey question to measure social value and personal wellbeing.

The guidance also recommended a metric for the social value of improving the wellbeing of the population. This new measure of economic value is called the WELLBY. State of Life are users of the WELLBY and named advisors on this guidance.

### The WELLBY is linked to the NHS measure of economic value the QALY

The NHS is a £180bn sector of the UK economy - that’s as much as the police, military and education budgets combined.

The measure of economic cost and value in the NHS is called the QALY - this is short for Quality Adjusted Life Year. The QALY is a measure of

the monetary value of a year in good health to the average adult. It is used by the NHS to understand the cost-effectiveness of different treatments (drugs, operations etc.).

The WELLBY is short for “Wellbeing-adjusted Life Year” and the smart bit of the WELLBY is that the cost and value is benchmarked to the NHS QALY measure.

Combining these two metrics gives us a Treasury-approved economic value for wellbeing as preventative health and compares to the costs of NHS treatments.

### Physical activity - the National Preventative Health Service

Sir Simon Stevens, a former head of the NHS, used to say, “if sport (physical activity) was a pill then every doctor would prescribe it”. And using the WELLBY we can now confidently and directly compare the cost and value of these preventative health and wellbeing activities with the costs and value of NHS treatment.

Physical activity, sport and volunteering contribute to mental and physical health and wellbeing. It is now evident that there is huge value in reducing people’s anxiety, loneliness, and improving their social networks of support, increasing happiness, confidence, and trust in others. In other words, this is a new National Preventative Health Service,

This presents an exciting, new opportunity for the Sport and physical activity sector to start to make credible, Treasury-consistent claims for funding based evidence rooted in healthcare.

In 2023 State of Life has already demonstrated robust, credible evidence that:

- Parkrun could be up to 25 times more cost effective than the NHS
- Working with adults in social care on their strength and balance could be 14 times more

cost effective than treatment by the NHS and reduce care needs

- Churches are potentially generating twice the social care budget of the UK in wellbeing benefits through provision of food banks, drug and alcohol support and more.
- Working with those most in need of the benefits of physical activity and/or access to sport yields up to two or three times more impact and value.

### **A new model of social and economic value for sport in the UK**

In the coming months and years we will all be able to start making decisions based on the new evidence and economics of preventative health. We will, in short, be moving Beyond GDP and into a much richer, nuanced assessment of what makes people happier and healthier.

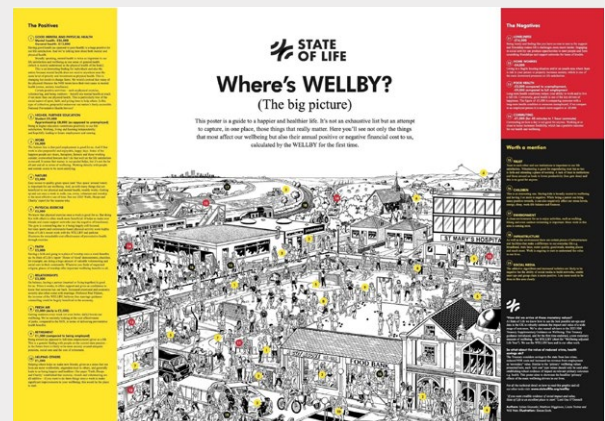
Some of you reading may see this as a threat; change can often feel that way. But we should all recognize the huge opportunity here. Let's grow the recognition and value of sport and physical activity and generate more funding for the enormous preventative health value it provides. It really is a win-win for all.

So rather than fight over a share of the £300m Sport England budget, let's start to train our sights at the £180bn NHS integrated healthcare budget. Because once we start to measure

wellbeing, compare to NHS costs and evidence the huge savings on offer, it's the logical place to pitch the new social value and economics of sport and physical activity.

### **Where's WELLBY?**

At State of Life we have put all of what we know about what improves our health and wellbeing into one big picture - our WHERE'S WELLBY guide to what matters to our life satisfaction. Love, jobs, trust, loneliness, church and more.



**Click here or scan the QR code to view the guide.**

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A large white circle containing the text "David Morley Architects". "David Morley" is in a light green font and "Architects" is in a grey font.

David Morley  
Architects

Chapter Three: Preventative Health:  
Recreation and Leisure

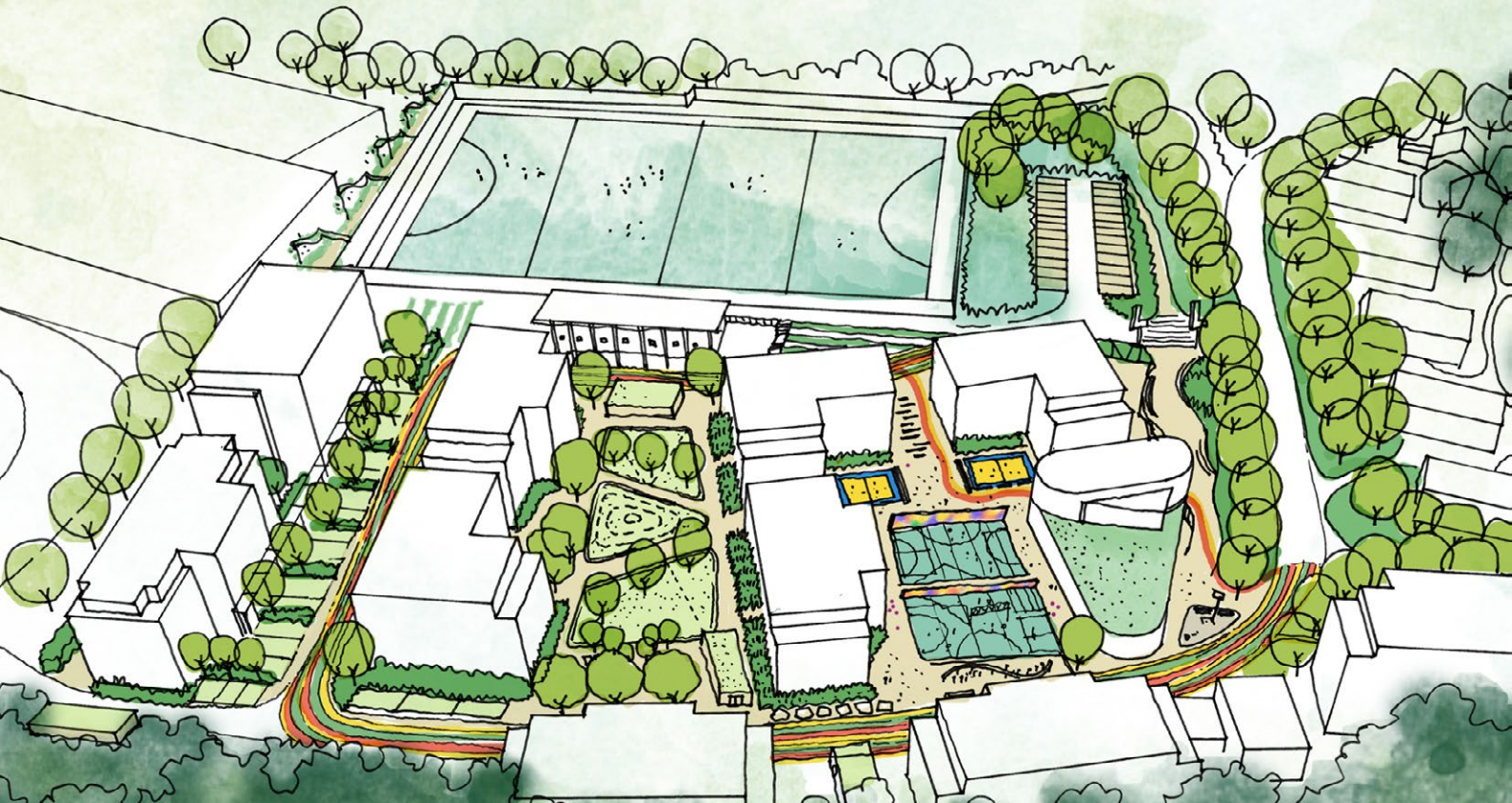
# David Morley Architects



Written by:

**Andy Mytom – Partner**

Every space, every surface, can enhance lives through active environments.



## Creating spaces for movement

### Standfirst

In 2021, Sport England published *Uniting the Movement* as its 10-year strategy recognising the importance of spaces between our buildings for movement that support health and wellbeing. In 2023, we saw further recognition of, and support for, inclusive spaces for movement.

- ◆ Government's sports strategy;
- ◆ Sport England's Active Design update (May 2023); and
- ◆ Sport England's Physical Literacy Consensus Statement (September 2023).

The Physical Literacy Consensus Statement provides a narrative to improve and develop

people's "relationship" with movement and physical activity. This includes an overt recognition, from sector partners, that the quality and nature of the places in which physical activity happens are as important, if not more so, than the actual activity itself, in terms of its potential impact on an individual's motivation to be active.

The benefits of creating spaces for movement are huge no matter if you are an elite athlete, a committed non-professional sports enthusiast, a parent trying to get their children more active, or encouraging seniors to take part in activities. These benefits are just not for individuals but also for communities by developing positive social contacts and can forge the development of communities through positive social contacts.

## Where we are

A staggering one in six deaths is caused by physical inactivity. The total economic cost of inactivity to the UK is estimated at around £74 billion annually.

As architects and designers of built environments, we can have a huge role in tackling these outcomes.

## The goal? To scale up, enable movement, and deliver a ROI by creating the spaces for movement

To make every £1 spent on the spaces between our buildings contribute to the health and wellbeing of the nation.

### Some food for thought:

- The government's own figures show that every £1 spent on sport and physical activity generates almost £4 in return across health and wellbeing – providing an annual

contribution of £85.5 billion to the country through social and economic benefits.

### Sport England breaks this £85bn figure into two:

- £72 billion in social value – including physical and mental health, wellbeing, individual and community development – provided via a healthier population, greater work productivity, improved education attainment, reduced crime, and stronger communities.
- £13bn in economic value – through the sports-related goods and services we consume as a nation.

### The big “What if?”

What if we could take the learnings from the work done at Loughborough University's Claudia Parsons Hall, where residents say that living there **“hits our subconscious to be more active – we don't know why, but we like it”**, and apply it to all the places people live in?



Activating infrastructure: Changes in level interpreted as a bouldering wall

## What are the barriers to creating spaces and environments that encourage movement?

- There is, to quote Sport England, ‘an implementation gap’ to navigate. They have the evidence that we need to do things differently, but knowing is not enough. Creating the spaces for movement requires ownership/influence over land use within existing and new developments.
- Progress happens at the speed of “Trust”. Built environments that look, and act differently can be seen as a risk. We need data-driven evidence of improved health and well-being outcomes to educate developers, local authorities, and local communities alike.
- The government’s sports strategy and Sport England’s physical literacy statement (or any other paper, plan, or policy that advocates movement) are not uniformly embedded in any planning policies.
- There is room for improvement in algorithms and formulas that calculate space allocation and activity types to be relevant to more people.
- To create active environments requires land. Therefore, those who own or develop land need to formally consider space for movement for all building occupants and adjacent communities.
- Developers, designers, and architects currently must navigate a complex planning system that has variable policies and sometimes differing (and even contradicting) attitudes toward the creation of active environments.

## How to achieve this - the manifesto calls

### 1. Unlock latent potential through a review of permitted development not built

Future action is important, but when it comes to creating active environments, there is also an opportunity for immediate, even retrospective, action.

We would like to see the introduction of a scheme whereby projects with play and pitch strategies that pre-date Sport England’s 10-Year Strategy are reviewed to ensure the detailed designs that are delivered respond to what we now know to support activity for all for life.

This would allow the community to reassess and confirm that what is being delivered is what is needed – for the entire community (be it formal or informal sport/play or open space) in the context of the “new normal”.

### 2. Include active environments in planning policies

There are two “sides” to creating built environments. The people who create and put forward developments and those who review and approve them. Both have a crucial role in ensuring the developments that are delivered embrace the idea of embedding movement and physical activity.

Take the developers who have the land budgets, and, more importantly, the wish to create good outcomes for the communities that will inhabit their developments. We are seeing tensions in the planning system when new ideas come from developers.

They might have the best intentions, but their frames of reference regarding physical activity are often tied to play for those under the age of 14 and sports pitches.

If we really want to get everyone moving, we need more than that. Both architects and local authorities need to raise the bar by moving on from established policies to implementing new ideas that confirm we can do more in the future than we did in the past.

That's why we call for all future governments to include policies for health and activity, inclusion, and diversity through active environments in planning.

We would want to see them sit alongside those for active travel, play, sports pitch, and facility strategies. This could be a cost-neutral exercise, as active environments (more than play and pitches) would then become included in all development plans.

### **3. Case studies and design guidance that accelerate understanding of what an active environment looks like and showcase best practice**

To quote, 'progress happens at the speed of trust'. Trust requires understanding.

Sport England highlighted active design as one of its focus areas and principles in its Uniting the Movement strategy. In late 2023, it also published a consensus statement on physical literacy. These are significant moves.

We would like to see the development of updated design guidance that includes inclusive play, movement, and sport which highlights success stories through relationships with organisations such as IPLA (International Physical Literacy Association) who have an established global network that can provide insight and evidence of good practice to accelerate understanding in the UK.

Another area of focus is school design which, too often, misses the opportunity to design-in health and well-being for pupils, staff, and the communities they serve.



Reinterpretation of a MUGA within a residential community

For example, there would be immediate benefits in permitting larger plot sizes for some education projects, where co-location with sport would be beneficial to communities. One has only to look at how current plot budgets exclude cricket in state primary schools.

Regarding this, we congratulate Sport England's appointment of a Director of Space. Through their recent "Uniting the Movement", they seek to deliver a space-based approach with clear health and well-being outcomes. By taking the lead on what constitutes an active space and how it is designed and delivered, as well as providing clear advice and defining benchmarks, any future government could make a huge difference.

#### 4. Improve local partnerships

The need for system-wide support, as outlined in the recent sports strategy, needs to stretch from central government to the smallest of local authorities. The most crucial arena for partnerships, however, is at the local level.

That's why one of our policy calls is a pledge to facilitate local partnerships through community engagement. We need to effectively build relationships with local organisations if we really want to create sustainable and inclusive active environments.

For active environments to provide the outcomes we desire; the environments must take into consideration the needs of the people and communities that live within them. Accessibility, inclusion, and diversity must not become buzzwords that lose their true meaning at the planning stage.

Spaces must be accessible, inclusive, and diverse in real terms, for them to inspire ALL people to move. The best way this can be achieved is to listen to the local communities. Using best practices, utilising ideas, and sourcing examples of what works elsewhere is fine – but if local communities have buy-in, they will opt-in.

#### Easy wins?

Here are our thoughts.

- ◆ Unlock latent potential – look back, as well as forwards, to maximise impact.  
Developments approved several years ago, but not yet built, may not reflect what we know now about designing space for movement.
- ◆ Build trust through evidence – to quote, 'progress happens at the speed of trust'.  
Highlight success stories and workable solutions from the UK and around the world.
- ◆ Review space for movement in Schools and access by communities  
Some guidance unnecessarily limits space for movement, and design for use outside of school hours has greater potential than often achieved.
- ◆ Consider the individual – the 'talent pathway' isn't for everyone.  
Use the Physical Literacy Consensus statement to re-imagine spaces for movement that allow everyone to be active in their own way, in their own time, and at their own speed.
- ◆ Make designs that deliver health and well-being outcomes!  
Seeing designs that deliver improved health plus well-being outcomes raises awareness and increases the chance of replicating it. Let's design inclusive ways to be active that respond to the different things people want to do throughout their lives, respecting their abilities.



Chapter Three: Preventative Health:  
Recreation and Leisure

# Max Associates



Written by:

**Lisa Forsyth**

# Public sector leisure facilities: Planning and innovation

## Introduction

**The aim of this chapter is to consider two priorities which are inter-related. The first is to enable joined up planning of swimming, sports, and leisure centres across the public sector, specifically education and local authority sites. This will reduce duplication of facilities and enable innovative and needs based facilities being delivered in local communities.**

The second is to increase the number of children with physical literacy and swimming skills, to enable physical activity habits to develop at a young age.

**Objective:** increase activity levels and reduce the cost of providing publicly accessible swimming, sports, and leisure centres.

## Where are we now?

There is a clear case that increasing levels of participation in sport and physical activity increases peoples' health and wellbeing but also improves individuals' development, builds stronger communities, and contributes to economic development, both directly through job creation, and indirectly by improving the health and mental wellbeing of the workforce.

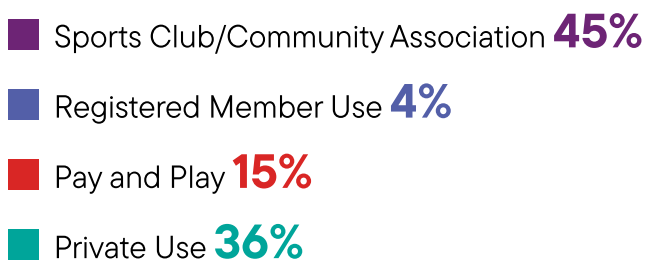
The challenge is to provide sport and physical activity opportunities for people in their local areas, which the country can afford, given other priorities and reducing financial resources.

## Levels of activity

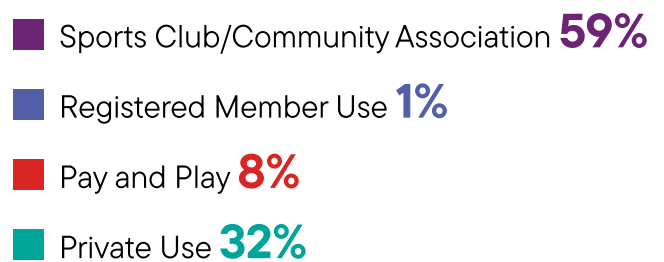
- Between November 2021 and November 2022, **63.1%** of the population in England met the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines of doing **150 minutes**, or more, of moderate intensity physical activity a week.
- But the number of people classed as **inactive** – averaging fewer than 30 minutes a week – is **25.8%** of the population. This remains slightly above pre-pandemic levels and is in line with where we were in 2015-16. Whilst there was a slight improvement to 24.6% in 2018/19, the negative impact of Covid has meant, over the last seven years we have not been able to reduce the level of inactive adults.
- **30% of children and young people do less than an average of 30 minutes** of activity a day in England.
- The number of children who can swim 25m at key stage 2 is projected to be just **43% by 2025/26**, children living in more deprived areas have poorer results, with only 35% projected to meet the 25m target. These projections are partly a result of the impact of COVID reducing face to face teaching and the closure of public swimming pools.



### Education sites: Swimming pools



### Education sites: Sports halls



### Public asset landscape

- There are 2,703 public swimming pools across 1,646 leisure centres in the UK
- 77% of UK population live within 2 miles of a public sector pool (but many are not accessible).
- Many school facilities are not available to the community; in England, out of 1,212 pools on educational sites, only 15% of these are available for the local community to use on a casual basis. 45% are available for sports clubs and **36% are not accessible at all.**
- Similarly for sports halls **a third of the halls in education sites are not available for any community access.**
- As well as swimming pools and sports halls, many schools have other sports facilities, including grass pitches, artificial pitches, and smaller halls which can be used for different activities including dance.

- Even if schools use their sports facilities between the hours of 9am and 3pm during terms times, this is only a third of the time which sports facilities could be open, with facilities often closed in evenings, weekends, and school holidays.
- Most state schools are academies (c. 80% of secondary schools and 40% of primary schools, June 2023). Local authorities have less control over academies. This extends to how sports facilities are managed and whether there is community access to facilities (unless part of a planning condition). Even when there are community use agreements in place, lack of resources or growing curriculum demands of the school can mean they are often not adhered to, and facilities are not available to the community.

## What are the challenges?

- Prior to the pandemic the Chief Leisure Officers' Association estimated that two thirds of the leisure estate was aging and past its replacement date. This position will have only worsened since the pandemic. With increasing construction costs and costs of borrowing, it is significantly harder now to develop a successful business case for investment.
- Leisure Centres contribute between 10-40% of local authority direct carbon emissions (sited by CLOA) and many councils are looking to retrofit lower carbon technologies into centres to meet net zero commitments.
- The challenge for schools in making facilities available to the community are **safeguarding issues between pupils and public during the school hours and lack of resource and experience to open and manage the facilities out of school hours.**

This is culminating in a situation where schools and local authorities have less resources, but are trying to keep open, invest in and replace aging sports facilities, across education and local authority sites.

Schools are reducing access to sports facilities out of school hours to save money (as there is no incentive for them to do otherwise) and councils are considering reducing facilities for similar reasons.

**Joint planning across both education and local authority sites in respect to sports facilities doesn't happen** because there is no incentive to; there are different drivers and budget holders for each service.

Schools are driven to deliver academic success and thus prioritise their resources to do so. Local authorities have a public health responsibility but not a statutory duty to provide swimming

pools and sports centres and thus whilst both services know the benefits to school children and residents in **maintaining a fit for purpose co-ordinated sports and physical activity infrastructure**, neither has the true incentive and budget to do so.

## Solutions; regulatory, legislative, policy or cultural

With local authorities estimated to spend over £1.1bn a year on leisure centres and parks and green spaces it is believed a more **joined up approach with education sports facilities** could have a significant impact on the cost of managing the centres, but also increasing population activity levels.

If schools' measurement of success includes academic achievement, physical literacy and swimming ability, schools would plan access to sports and swimming facilities with the same priority as classrooms and science labs.

## Recommended actions:

- Joined-up planning and delivery of sports infrastructure between education and local authorities' facilities, so there are **complimentary facilities, programmes and activities offered across sports, swimming pools and leisure centres in an area.**
- **Planning guidance / DFE guidance** for all new / refurbished schools' sports facilities (including swimming pools, sports halls, artificial and grass pitches) to include **designed-in safeguarding measures** so facilities can be accessed safely by public and include **formal community use agreements as standard.**
- **Incentives** (tax) for independent schools to enable access to their sports facilities for local communities.

- Protection of existing **community use of sports facilities out of school use** for all education facilities and incentivised agreements with universities for community use of facilities outside student use.
- Continued **financial support and guidance for schools to provide community access to sports facilities** out of school opening times.
- **Monitor and report data** (akin to academic performance), numbers of **children who can swim 25m at key stage 2**.

If more education sports facilities can be used by the community, it will reduce the total number of facilities required. Therefore, limited resources can be prioritised across a reduced number of facilities.

Whilst major conurbations and urban areas will require larger venues, regional and national facilities, a more streamlined model can be delivered in many cities, towns, and districts across the country.

- **Education sector focus on providing traditional sports facilities;** pools, sports halls, pitches (which the community can access).
  - **During school hours**
    - Support school pupil sport and PE delivery – 2 hours a week,
    - School games, sports, and competitions,
    - Swimming lessons and water safety,
    - After school clubs / sports competitions,
    - Holiday Activities and Food programmes.
  - **Outside of school hours**
    - Swimming lessons,
    - Activity programmes,

- Clubs' programmes with support from National Governing Bodies to grow participation (through to elite level).

- **Local authority facilities**, can then have less reliance on 'traditional' swimming pools and sports halls, but focus on fitness and a wider physical activity offer, and could provide community pools (e.g., 20m swimming pools, leisure pools, lidos, teaching pools, etc).

- **Local authority facilities**, with outcomes to increase physical activity and wellbeing can align their facilities to local population need and other council and health services including for example:

- Fitness and group exercise,
- Community swimming,
- Recreational sports,
- Walking sports,
- Social activities,
- Exercise on prescription,
- Physical activity, and
- Co-locate with other council services including health, library, children and young people and adult services.

## Examples of innovate facilities include:

### Tameside Wellness Centre

Delivered March 2020.<sup>114</sup>

#### Vision

The vision for the centre was simple; to deliver a space that focused on public health whilst providing a variety of flexible, multi-use areas.

It has an eight-lane, 25m swimming pool that includes space for 150 spectators and a learner pool. The wellness area includes a thermal suite other treatment and relaxation facilities, a 60-station gym and three group exercise studios.

Further community activities include, children’s soft play area and a ten-lane ten-pin bowling alley. The roof space has been transformed into a mixed-use terrace that functions as an outdoor gym.

### **Social interaction zone**

An innovative feature is the ‘social interaction zone’, a concierge-style approach replacing the reception desk to enable staff and visitors to interact in a more informal way. The wider space functions as a cultural hub that supports an integrated library and catering, while a performance space can host anything from a music group and a talk, to children’s ‘Time for Rhyme’ sessions. Four flexible rooms, can be used for health services, including GP referral programmes, consultation rooms, training spaces and business meetings.

Active Tameside who manages the centre describe it as offering leisure, health and wellbeing facilities and activities for all ages and abilities. People can swim, go to the gym, relax, eat, socialise, and come together as friends, or family, or a community in the centre, built around ‘wellbeing’.

### **Wiltshire Council: Trowbridge**

New facility.<sup>115</sup>

Max Associates has recently undertaken a feasibility, which considered secured community access to a school facilities; (sports hall, squash courts and gymnasium), which meant that the new towns’ leisure centre, could incorporate other facilities to support increased activity and wellbeing for residents.

Planned facilities include a swimming pool, gym, studios, and interactive adventure play.

## **Outcomes**

### **Following this model would:**

- Increase utilisation of many schools’ sports facilities across the country.
- Reduce duplication of swimming pools and sports halls and other sports facilities across education and local authority centres.
- Increase opportunities for local authority leisure centres to include innovative facilities, which will attract those for whom traditional sports facilities will not encourage them to be active.
- Improved financial sustainability of swimming, sports, and leisure centres.

### **What does good look like?**

- Joined up planning and delivery of sports, fitness and leisure centre buildings across education and local authority sector.
- Increased use of school sports facilities by local communities.
- A network of community sports, wellbeing, and activity hubs, delivered across the country which meet the needs of local communities.
- Improved physical literacy and increased percentage of pupils who can swim 25m at key stage 2.
- Reduced rates of inactivity across adults’ and children’s’ populations.

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## Chapter Three: Preventative Health: Recreation and Leisure

# SLC

**Transforming public leisure services**



Written by:

**Duncan Wood-Allum**



## Public leisure

**Public leisure in many parts of the UK is failing. It is unaffordable and fails to serve those who need it most: inactive people, people with long term health conditions and people from deprived communities.**

What's needed is for leisure to pivot to active wellbeing. This means high quality, targeted interventions for people with the greatest health needs and a universal offer for all. The principle is supported by Sport England in its report 'The Future of Public Sector Leisure'. But Get Active, the government's strategy for sport and physical activity, has failed to recognise the opportunity. This is a mistake. The next UK government needs to recognise this and shift its policies and resources to support the pivot to active wellbeing.

Public leisure was first introduced in the 1960s, with a rapid programme of building leisure centres and a 'sport for all' ethos. But the cracks started to appear in the 1990s – literally and metaphorically – as the ageing leisure stock needed significant investment. These problems have worsened over the last two decades despite investment from primarily local authorities and the National Lottery via Sport England. But the most significant issue is not the state of the buildings themselves, it's the failure of many leisure services to reach the people who need them most. We used to talk of open door policies, a warm welcome for all and improving access to target groups but these concepts have proved insufficient.

The conversation has rightly moved on to tackling inactivity and reducing stubborn inequalities but fundamentally, the traditional leisure centre model can't address this.

A new approach for public sector leisure is needed. It has become known as the pivot to active wellbeing. This means high quality, targeted interventions for people with the greatest health needs as well as a universal offer for all. The principle is supported by Sport England in its report 'The Future of Public Sector Leisure'. It is being adopted by a number of local authorities.

So, what does an active wellbeing service look like? First of all, it is not simply a contract or service specification let by a council and delivered by an operator.

It forms an integral part of a whole system and place-based approach involving the local authority, public health, the Integrated Care Partnership, adult social care, the voluntary sector, sports clubs, charities, residents and local companies.

It identifies what is needed in places by talking to the people who live there and involving them in the creation of solutions that are right for their communities. It uses movement, physical activity and sport to help get people moving more often. It brings organisations and services together so that residents can access health services in a relaxed, non-clinical setting and in the same space, move, stretch, relax, walk, swim or dance with other people.

It normalises the culture of movement in a neighbourhood/community- a normal part of life for everyone (not just something for the elite and sporty). It brings out the magic that happens when organisations and professionals in a place work together, collaboratively. It removes the artificial distinction between a customer of a leisure centre, a patient of a clinician, a member

of a gym and a resident of a community. It uses local assets – both human and physical – to best effect by backing what's trusted and what works.

Leisure centres are being transformed into Active Wellbeing Hubs – integrated facilities that deliver significant social value and are better value than individual services on multiple sites.

But the journey to active wellbeing is not easy. It takes time, commitment, political will, re-direction of budgets, tough decisions, re-skilling of staff and a significant shift of mindset. It does not necessarily need big capital investment, but it certainly helps, particularly where traditional leisure facilities are tired or neglected.



## A local ecosystem for active wellbeing



We have seen recent active wellbeing partnerships between a Council and its service provider deliver significant added value and investment into addressing inequalities. This is through pricing concessions, targeted programmes and service redesign to meet the needs of less active communities. But much more can be achieved by working together.

So far, this all appears to be in the hands of councils and their communities. If it's happening without specific government policy, then why change anything? There are three reasons:

1. The health problems related to physical inactivity are getting worse, not better
2. Inequalities are increasing and are inextricably linked to wider economic and social inequalities
3. A pivot to active wellbeing is currently too difficult to implement in many places due to lack of knowledge and awareness of the benefits

So, this is what we believe the next government should do to accelerate the pivot to active wellbeing.



## A local ecosystem for active wellbeing

First, integrated care partnerships (ICPs) should be strongly encouraged or directed to collaborate with local authorities on physical inactivity. At present, integrated care partnerships include the NHS integrated care board and all upper-tier local authorities that fall within the integrated care system area. But district councils, who have responsibility for leisure in two tier authorities, are not necessarily part of the ICP. Arguably, they have more responsibility and impact on the determinants of public health, including physical activity, than upper-tier authorities. ICPs that put a social model of health at the heart of their strategies need to be fully integrated with local authorities and their VCSE infrastructure. Furthermore, the focus on health conditions in an area means that broad, quality of life solutions like physical activity may not be on the agenda.

Second, local authorities' discretionary wellbeing powers should be backed by mandatory obligations. The wellbeing powers currently enable eligible councils to do anything which they consider is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of their area. Mandatory obligations could require, for example, councils to lead the preparation of a wellbeing plan for their communities, based on local needs with costed proposals for implementation. Even if there was no additional funding, the wellbeing plan would encourage collaboration, pooling of budgets and refocusing of existing wellbeing activities towards clear and agreed objectives. There is however a need for additional resources to do this - as mandatory obligations are hard to deliver with ever reducing resources.

Third, physical activity should be introduced as a measure in the Quality Outcomes Framework (QOF) for GP practices. The QOF contains five main components: Clinical; Public Health;



Public Health – Additional Services; Public Health – Vaccination and Immunisation; and Quality Improvement. If physical activity were added, perhaps as one of the additional public health services, then primary care would immediately have an interest in making communities more physically active.

There are numerous organisational, political and policy barriers that make this work really tough. But that doesn't reduce its importance, nor does it mean that government should shy away from its implementation. In fact, the converse is true: government should tackle these issues head on with bold policy implementation. They should enable those local councils and their partners who have the desire - to pivot leisure into an active wellbeing offer to benefit the whole of their communities.

When councils have to close old leisure centres that they can no longer afford to run, people protest and local politicians have to defend the indefensible. Replacing the old leisure centre with a new one does not address the health inequalities faced by that community. Pivoting the active wellbeing as part of a wider whole system and place-based approach will have the material impact we all want to see.

Our policy recommendations to support the pivot to active wellbeing:

- Funding local government to enable it to invest properly into its active environments.
- Stop charging VAT on community leisure and active wellbeing.
- Creation of a social model of health with an increasing % of spend over time in early intervention/prevention.
- Prioritising the leisure workforce's upskilling to support building capability in active wellbeing to take pressure off the NHS.



## Duncan Wood-Allum

Duncan Wood-Allum founded SLC in 2009 and is regarded as one of the leading strategic advisors to the sector.



Duncan was behind the concept of 'pivot' for the leisure sector towards active wellbeing – a concept co-produced with the Greater Manchester Local Authorities in 2021/22. This has now influenced national policy with Sport England's 'Future of Public Leisure' Report published in December 2022. Duncan and his team at SLC is supporting thinking on Active Wellbeing with progressive local authorities such as Wigan, North Yorkshire, Sheffield, Bury and Malvern Hills.

His impact on new sustainable facility developments can be seen throughout the Country with over £750m worth of projects opening which he and his team supported in the last 15 year

### Contact

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**OUTDOORS  
FOR ALL  
COALITION**

Chapter Three: Preventative Health:  
Recreation and Leisure

# The Outdoors for All coalition



Written by:

**Ben Seal**



The Outdoors For All Coalition is supported by more than 40 organisations across the environment and recreation sectors.

## Outdoors for all

**Access to nature and the outdoors is good for our minds and bodies. It makes sense for our economy, prosperity and the future of our natural environment.**

We are proud of our rich and varied landscapes – from rivers, canals and lakes, to mountains, crags, coastlines and urban green and blue spaces. Every day, people across the country are walking, wheeling, horse-riding, swimming, paddling, boating, camping, cycling, flying, climbing or simply relaxing in these spaces. People from the most remote parts of the great outdoors to the hearts of our cities get so much from being in our great outdoors.

However, research tells us that the UK ranks lowest of 14 European nations on nature connectedness. It also ranks 11th out of 15 European nations on levels of physical activity. It is no coincidence that those nations that rank higher than the UK have far more freedom to enjoy their outdoor spaces.

The government has set its sights on getting 3.5m more people active by 2030, through its Get Active Strategy. It has also committed to giving the public access to green and blue

spaces within a 15-minute walk of home, through its Environmental Improvement Plan. The most cost-effective means of realising both of these targets is through an expansion of our rights of access to the outdoors.

Current access to green and blue spaces is distributed unevenly.

Less than 4% of rivers in England have an uncontested public right of access. Our path network is frequently inaccessible and 19.6m people do not live within a 15-minute walk of green and blue spaces. The land which gives us our current and limited right to roam covers just 8% of England. This right extends only to pedestrians and excludes others such as equestrians, paddlers and cyclists.

Physical inactivity is associated with 1 in 6 deaths in the UK and is estimated to cost the country £7.4bn per year. Obesity is estimated to cost the UK economy £58bn a year. The cost to the UK economy of poor mental health has been estimated to be in the range of £53-56bn. Our population is 20% less active than in the 1960s and is forecast to be 35% less active by 2030. Good access to green and blue spaces would

bring more opportunities to be active and help reduce pressure on the NHS. This could save an astonishing £2.1bn in health spending every year.

Policies that enable people to be active, lead healthy lifestyles and support mental and physical wellbeing are often the same policies that help promote a sustainable economy, build stronger communities and protect our environment.

New rights of access must provide a duty to behave responsibly and respect to those who live and work in rural communities. It is vital to balance public enjoyment with protection of the natural world. Where there is clear evidence that conservation and enjoyment of the outdoors cannot be reconciled, the long established ‘Sandford Principle’ should be followed. This would ensure that greater weight was given to nature.

**People care for what they love, but they only love what they know.** We must help connect the present and future generation with nature, to create a deep and lasting love, respect and understanding of the outdoors.

**We have an opportunity now to create a lasting legacy for the next generation. Outdoor spaces that are accessible to all.**

### This is Our Vision

This is our vision for a natural health service that is free and available for all:

#### 1. **More people, more active, more often.**

Outdoor spaces in the countryside and in our towns and cities that are welcoming, accessible and in good condition. Spaces that can be enjoyed responsibly by everyone, supported by a culture which addresses barriers to access for all.

#### 2. **Nature-rich spaces that everyone, everywhere, can access.**

Outdoor spaces that are healthy and rich in native wildlife. Stakeholders respecting each other’s rights and working together to recover and enhance the natural world.

#### 3. **A commitment to respect, protect and enjoy our special spaces**

Visitors, communities and custodians of our landscapes united by a shared responsibility to respect, protect and enjoy our precious surroundings. This should be deeply embedded within our culture from an early age.

**To achieve this vision, the next government needs to take a long-term approach, committed to addressing deep inequalities in public access and outdoor recreation. They also need to support improved educational provision to enhance people’s knowledge of how to access the countryside responsibly.**

**Central to delivering a more expansive and inclusive outdoors is new access legislation.**

### Access to nature priorities:

New legislation is required to deliver the government’s commitment to ensure everyone lives within a 15-minute walk of an accessible green or blue space. It’s also needed to expand the freedom to roam, to help protect and improve the existing paths and access network, and to establish sound frameworks to support public access and outdoor recreation in the long-term.

A new bill will create opportunities for more people to enjoy more land and water for activities such as cycling, walking, wheeling, climbing,

horse riding, wheeling, caving, swimming, flying and paddling. Crucially it will enable everyone throughout their lives, regardless of personal circumstances, to live well through better access to the outdoors.

We are calling on a future government to ensure there are provisions to:

- Extend public open access rights to more landscapes. These include waterways, woodland, riversides, and downland, creating more areas for us to enjoy land, water and air, with many more and better connected spaces close to where people live.
- Repeal the cut-off date for registering historic rights of way.
- Amend the Environment Act 2021 to require, not just enable, public access targets and for Environmental Improvement Plans to set out a clear strategy for improving access to nature.
- Establish an Access to Nature Investment Strategy to target resources where there is the greatest need. This could provide additional funding for local authorities, National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Navigation Authorities and National Trails to maintain, enhance, and extend new and existing access opportunities.
- Make the 15-minute to nature commitment a legally binding target, based on Natural England's Green Infrastructure Standards.
- Strengthen the purposes and duties of protected landscapes to enable them to deliver more on nature recovery, climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Maintain investment in promotion of the Countryside Code, ensuring environmental responsibility and good practice for both recreational users and land managers is widely promoted.

- Ensure that all children are given the opportunity to spend regular and extended periods of time in nature, at school at each stage of their education, giving every child equal right to participate in outdoor activity.
- Embed understanding of nature, and essential outdoor life skills such as risk-benefit assessment, self-sufficiency, navigation, and swimming, in early year learning and throughout schooling.
- Ensure that spending on active and sustainable travel includes schemes that enable people to access the natural environment without having to use a car.

Although this is not an exhaustive list, it demonstrates that there are tangible measures to help maximise and strengthen policies on outdoor recreation for everyone alongside nature recovery. A new access bill would ensure this was prioritised and delivered.

Within the first 100 days of a new government, Defra, as the lead department for public access, must commence the necessary policy development and stakeholder engagement to pass a bill (the first for a generation) before the end of the next parliament.

- 1. Less than 4% of rivers in England have an uncontested public right of access.**
- 2. 19.6m people do not live within a 15-minute walk of green and blue spaces.**
- 3. Our current 'right to roam' gives us access to just 8% of England.**
- 4. Physical inactivity is associated with 1 in 6 deaths in the UK.**

The logo for Active IQ, featuring the text "Active iQ" in a purple sans-serif font, centered within a white circle.

**Active iQ**

Chapter Four: Workforce, Higher  
Education, and Data and Evidence

**Active IQ**



Written by:

**Jenny Patrickson**



## Workforce development for a healthy nation

**The sport and physical activity sector has never been more important to the wellbeing of the UK; the Government's latest figures show that in England, 63.8% of adults are overweight or living with obesity,<sup>137</sup> and over a quarter of adults in England are classed as inactive<sup>138</sup> (averaging less than 5 minutes of activity a day), highlighting the need for the sector to operate effectively.**

The government estimates that every £1 spent on sport and physical activity generates almost £4 in return across health and wellbeing, strengthening communities and the economy. Each year, active lifestyles prevent 900,000 cases of diabetes and 93,000 cases of dementia, a combined saving of £7bn to the UK economy.<sup>139</sup>

As well as easing the strain on the NHS, it also recognises that physical activity helps tackle a range of social challenges, from loneliness and community division to unemployment and crime.

All of this demonstrates that it's never been more important for the sport and physical activity sector to be taken seriously in government, with its role in the overall health of the nation as clear as ever. Despite this, the sector faces numerous challenges in its mission to create a healthier nation.



Significant among these challenges is the state of the workforce. Despite its growth, the number of certifications being completed is decreasing and organisations within the sport and physical activity sector are struggling to find the skills required to fill roles. In fact, 42% of gyms and leisure centres say they are struggling to find people to fill fitness instructor roles.<sup>140</sup>

As it stands, a career within the sport and physical activity sector is often viewed as unstructured or without a clear path for development, but this is not the reality and both the government and industry must do a better job of ensuring its seen as an attractive option for potential employees, and taken seriously as a professional career choice.

In an ideal world, the sport and physical activity actor would receive support from the government in promoting its career opportunities at a level that its economic and social value contributions deserve, supported by clearly defined career paths viewed as viable options for anyone keen to pursue it. In turn, filling current gaps with highly skilled and motivated employees can help drive the UK towards the activity goals set out in the recent Get Active Strategy, providing considerable economic and social benefits.



In particular, **the Government should look to expand current employability programmes to include the sport and physical activity sector, such as the National Skills Fund**, which help adults to train and gain the valuable skills they need to improve their job prospects. Presently, the National Skills Fund is focused on meeting ‘current and emerging skills needs’, but sport and physical activity has been excluded.

The sector clearly has a skills gap, and given our sector is capable of providing invaluable support for the NHS at this time, **the government should recognise the need for an expansion of employability programmes to include the sport and physical activity sector.**

Additionally, the rules set by regulators mean there are strict guidelines for how sector qualifications are currently designed. There has been a funding moratorium for the last three years which has prevented the redevelopment of many qualifications. The new reforms, which do give significant weight to the employer voice, are restricted by predefined standards and additional skills set by IfATE. Coupled with this, the approval process for new qualifications is lengthy, taking the L3 cycle 1 announced at the end of January 2023 as an example; full submissions had to be made by July 2023, approval will be confirmed by July 2024 (valid for three years), and the qualification will be operational in August of 2025. This system means that qualifications could potentially be out of date before any learners have the opportunity to complete the qualification. This current system does not allow for flexibility, innovation or the ability to react to demand.

Going forward, **the Government should allow greater flexibility from regulators for sector qualifications to be designed in a way that meets the needs of employers and shorten the approvals process to ensure qualifications are relevant and up to date based on the latest research.** This means we can address skills gaps within the workforce in a more responsive way, ensuring the industry continues to perform its role of keeping the nation healthy.

At Active IQ, we believe these changes can have a significant impact on the sector workforce, driving both the economic and social benefits that we know investment in sport can bring. Tackling the current skills gap is essential to ensure the Government can meet the goals set out in the Get Active strategy, and hope these are among the first changes put in place to create a healthier nation.

### **Active IQ**

Active IQ designs qualifications and high-quality resources that support clear career pathways, and lead the way in health, wellness and physical activity, championing industry standards at the highest level in the UK and internationally.



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Chapter Four: Workforce, Higher  
Education Data and Evidence

# UK Coaching



Written by:

**Heather Douglas**

# Three million reasons why coaching matters

## Shaping behaviour, transforming lives

**As the heartbeat of our local communities, the nation's 3 million coaches are catalysts for positive change.**

Coaches unlock the life-enhancing potential of sport and physical activity (SPA) by providing a person-centred experience that is safe, inclusive, engaging, and rewarding.

They create positive and supportive environments where people can learn, grow, and have fun. They inspire people to challenge themselves, overcome obstacles, and reach new heights.

## Support for coaches does not match the demands on coaches!

It is of the utmost importance for the well-being of our nation that we provide adequate support and protection for our coaches.

Coaches told us before the COVID-19 pandemic that they were struggling with a perceived lack of support from employers, clubs, or national governing bodies of sport [**Coaching in the UK 2019 report<sup>141</sup>**], with 40% saying they did not have access to someone who can support them in their coaching role, i.e. a mentor or coach developer.

Understandably, the pandemic had a significant impact on the coaching workforce at all levels, decreasing coaching opportunities and creating financial uncertainty and a loss of identity for many coaches.

More recently, a substantial number of coaches have been adversely affected by the cost-of-living crisis, whilst the workforce has been further shaken by numerous inquiries into allegations of athlete abuse by coaches in different sports, most notably the publication of the Whyte Review that exposed abuse and mistreatment in the sport of gymnastics.

It is imperative that coaches prioritise the well-being and safety of athletes. It is also imperative that the 'care system' in SPA protects everyone equally – this includes coaches at all levels.

## Striking the balance: Addressing the coach conundrum

In the realm of coaching practice itself, escalating demands on coaches are more intense than ever before, whilst the resources, funding, time, and support needed to meet these demands are often insufficient.

This discrepancy underscores the urgent need for increased investment and focus in this area to redress the balance and fully unlock the benefits of coach-led SPA in our society.

## The demands of the role have increased and can feel overwhelming

### Resources



### Demands

- Additional administration
- Health and safety
- Cost of training
- Time involved in training
- Other coaches
- Dealing with emotive parents
- Managing behaviour in participants
- Risk management

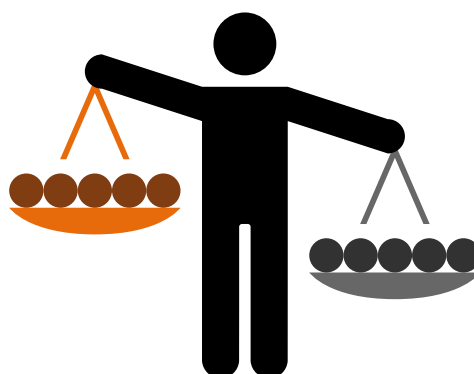
## Support does not match the demands

### Resources

They want but do not have:

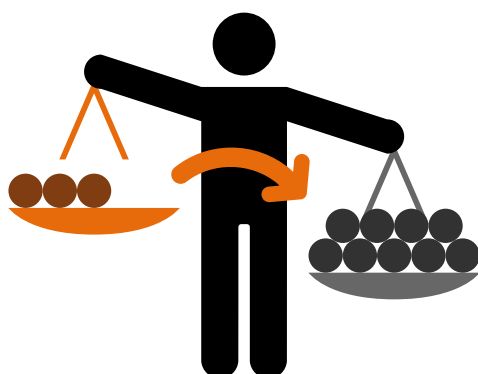
- Peer support
- On demand learning and development
- Mentoring
- A supportive working environment
- Recognition of expertise
- Communities of learning
- Remuneration
- Curated learning and development

### Demands



## Resources provided are adding to the burden of demands

### Resources



### Demands

Most commonly referenced

- CPD courses
- Safeguarding compliance
- IT systems / data collection
- Club volunteers and committees

**These graphics underscore the challenges coaches face due to the imbalance between resources and demands. The paradox lies in the fact that while providing additional resources is intended to aid coaches, it can sometimes be perceived as imposing additional demands on them.**

### **Our mission, vision, and purpose**

Just as coaches are there for their participants, so UK Coaching is Here for the Coach.

As the only organisation representative of coaches, UK Coaching is proud to provide leadership, support, representation, and advocacy for the 3 million coaches who work at all levels, across all activities and in all environments across the UK.

We acknowledge that there are disparities within the coaching system, particularly in terms of **care provision and mental health support for coaches**, as well as **demographic representation within the coaching workforce**.

The findings of UK Coaching and Liverpool John Moores University’s ‘Care for Coaches’ research study in 2023 further illustrates these disparities.

This research surveyed 400 coaches and shed light on their perceptions of care and the challenges they face in their roles:

In terms of what coaches perceive as true care:

- Only 60% feel that someone understands their needs.
- 54% feel safe, comfortable, and trusted.
- 46% receive support with their own well-being.
- 34% experience feelings of compassion, empathy, encouragement, sympathy and affection.

When it comes to the challenges coaches face in their day-to-day roles, whether they are paid or voluntary:

- 65% feel they are meeting the needs of all of their players.
- 65% feel they are finding time for continuous professional development.
- 64% feel they are managing workload and time.
- 58% feel they are supporting athletes/ players/participants’ mental well-being.

These findings underscore the need for more comprehensive support systems for coaches.



“ Time is hugely challenging for me, as it is for any coach. We’ve all got busy lives. Often people are working on very limited time. When I’m working of borrowed time, I find it really hard to give the best of myself. ”

**Sarah Green, England Netball Performance Pathway Developer**

## The urgent need to tackle inequalities

Physical activity and sport should be safe and accessible to everyone, regardless of their background, abilities, or motivations. This principle applies equally to coaching. The workforce should accurately reflect the diverse communities within which coaches operate.

Our recently launched **Coaching in the UK, 2022**<sup>142</sup> report revealed that progress in diversifying the coaching workforce is well underway, but more work needs to be done to develop a workforce that is truly representative of the UK population:

- Coaches are still more likely to be male (55%), compared to 44% who are female.
- 17% of coaches are from an ethnically diverse community (compared with 11% of the UK population who are from ethnically diverse communities).
- 23% of active coaches have a disability or health condition (compared with 17.7% of the UK population).
- 38% of active coaches are from lower social and economic groups, compared to 43% of the UK population.

The statistics look positive on the surface, but they are misleading and hide the deeper inequality issues. Specifically, they obscure the scarcity of advancement opportunities for these groups, as well as their underrepresentation in coach development and tutor positions.

The key to addressing entrenched inequality of opportunities and closing the ‘disadvantage gap’ in SPA lies in fostering a diverse workforce of coaches at all levels, including leadership. This will lead to more inclusive environments and encourage participation from individuals who are traditionally underrepresented.

It’s crucial for participants to see coaches who reflect their own identities – a concept often referred to as the ‘see it, be it’ philosophy. This visibility can serve as a powerful motivator and source of inspiration.

By creating a rich, dynamic environment where everyone feels valued and respected, coaches have an integral part to play in addressing contemporary societal issues, such as tackling social isolation and loneliness; reducing offending and crime; strengthening mental health.



## Turning barriers into bridges: Coaching's role in social cohesion

By providing targeted support, coaches serve as a powerful tool to bridge social differences by cultivating a sense of community belonging and social cohesion.

Regrettably, the journey towards making SPA inclusive and accessible to specific population groups – including disabled people, ethnically diverse communities and those living in marginalised and disadvantaged communities – still has a long way to go.

Too often people with the most to gain from being active are the least able to take part in SPA.

As a member of the Sport for Development Coalition, UK Coaching is committed to reversing this trend and acknowledges the power of young people as agents of change.

Across the country, thousands of coaches, charities, clubs, and community and voluntary sector organisations that deliver SPA are making a significant difference to some of the most vulnerable young people in the country. Coaches who work in sport for development programmes, and those who champion the ethos of equal opportunity, are effectively steering individuals towards realising their full potential and evolving into their best selves. This is achieved by providing access to a safe environment that respects their basic human rights to engage in physical activity and sport, be heard, and develop.

## Pathway to prosperity: Better pay, better prospects

More needs to be done to make coaching an attractive prospect as a career.

Paid coaches make up just 21% of coaches in the UK (this has stayed the same since 2019), while only 9% of coaches cite coaching as their primary source of income, which is low relative to the number of active coaches in the UK.

Sport England research, meanwhile, has consistently indicated a shortage of volunteers, with around 70% of sports clubs reporting a need for more support in this area.

Commenting on coaching as a career pathway, one coach told us: “McDonald’s pays better than sport and has better prospects.”

Investment in coaches is crucial in keeping SPA running in our communities.





## Transforming learning, transforming lives

UK Coaching knows that great coaching can change lives. We also know that great coaching increases participation in sport and physical activity. That is why access to high quality coach learning is paramount to improving participation in SPA across the UK.

There are numerous learning pathways for individuals interested in coaching, including non-regulated courses, apprenticeships, vocational post-16 qualifications, technical specialist courses, and degrees. Some individuals involved in coaching have obtained relevant qualifications in teaching or teaching assistant roles, social work, or youth work, without a specific focus on SPA coaching. A high percentage of coaches (44%) have never completed a coaching qualification. It can be confusing for coaches to know which learning courses or qualifications are necessary for coaching SPA.

UK Coaching is committed to highlighting great coach learning across the sector, so those who want to coach can access quality learning that will enable them to be a coach, improve their practice and increase participation in SPA.

UK Coaching supports The Chartered Institute of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) in developing standards for deployment and the clarity this will bring to the coach learning landscape.

Funding for coaching qualifications is primarily available to those in formal education settings, such as colleges, or those participating in apprenticeships. Unfortunately, there are currently no technical-based qualifications (T-Levels) offered in this sector. The technical education required to coach in a specific sport or physical activity is most often not funded. Individuals are often required to pay for further

education to be able to coach their chosen SPA in their environment or location, decreasing the accessibility of learning.

With low rates of paid employment in the sector, and much of the workforce operating in a voluntary capacity, technical coaching qualifications are not seen as entry into employment, further reducing post-16 funding opportunities and reducing access to quality learning experiences.

## Policy changes we would like to see

### 1. We would advocate for the establishment of an APPG on Coaching in the UK.

We propose the establishment of an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for coaching, with the aim of elevating the role of coaching in sport and physical activity within the political agenda. This would provide us with a direct line to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), rather than solely through intermediaries such as Sport England and UK Sport.

The voice of the coaching sector often gets lost in the broader discourse around sport and physical activity. This is largely because coaching intersects with various government policy areas, including health, criminal justice, education, skills and employment, local communities, as well as physical activity and sport. As it is not its own master, its voice tends to be diluted.

By setting up an APPG for coaching, we can ensure that the unique perspectives and contributions of the coaching sector are heard and considered in policy-making. This would help to address the current imbalance and ensure that coaching is recognised for its multifaceted role in society.

By giving coaching a stronger voice in policy discussions, we can better leverage its potential to drive positive change in our communities, and hopefully speed up the process of change.

An APPG for coaching would therefore serve as a powerful platform for advocating for the importance of coaching in sports and physical activity. It would ensure that the voice of the coaching sector is heard loud and clear at the highest levels of government.

Achieving meaningful change will be significantly more challenging if coaching continues to be merely an appendage to other APPGs, without being accorded its rightful place at the table.

## **2. We would advocate for making Duty to Care mandatory for all coaches.**

We must shine an even stronger spotlight on the need to equip more coaches with an extensive ‘care package’ that they can draw on during their development and throughout their coaching practice. This will enable them to look after the well-being of the people they coach, as well as their own safety and well-being, effectively and appropriately.

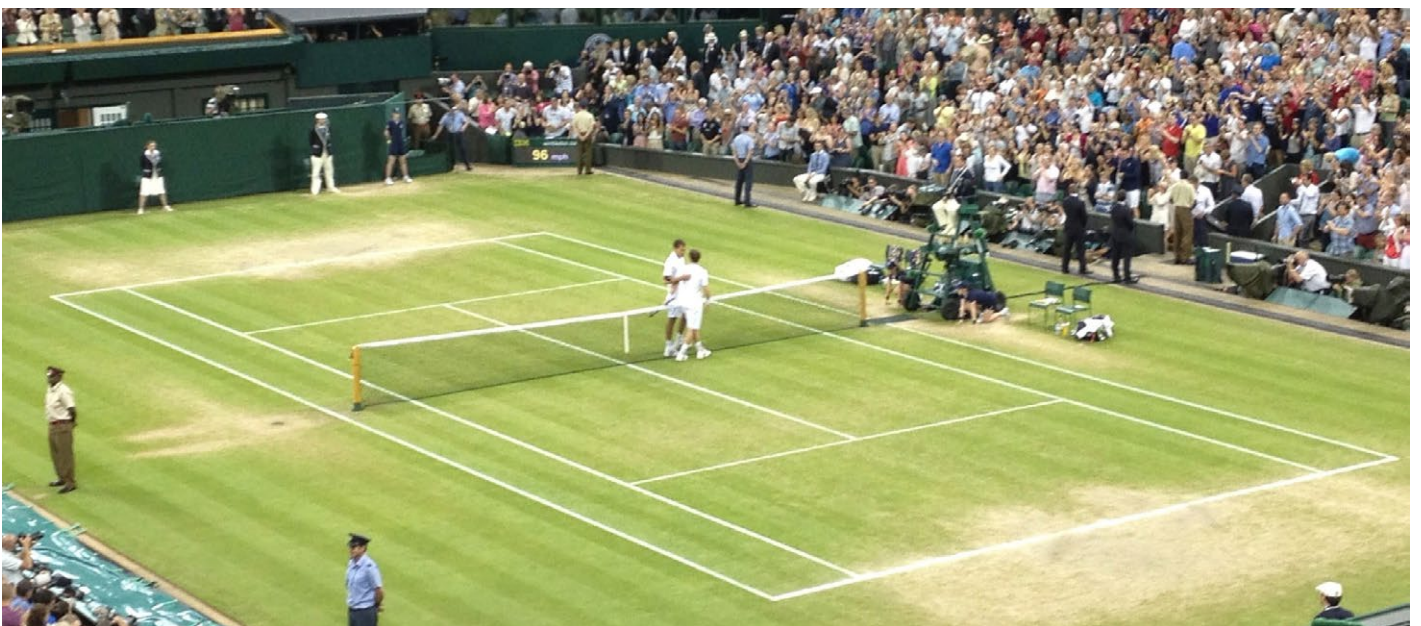
UK Coaching’s **Duty to Care Hub and Digital Badge**<sup>143</sup> is available free of charge and provides coaches with the knowledge and understanding to create a safe and inclusive environment for everyone who is involved in physical activity and sport.

Learners are encouraged to complete six Knowledge Checks – covering Diversity, Inclusion, Mental Health & Well-being, Physical Well-being, Safeguarding and Safe to Practice – to earn our nationally recognised Badge, thereby demonstrating their knowledge of the principles of duty to care. This is also endorsed by CIMSPA and accredits every learner with 3 CPD points.

## **3. We would advocate for the establishment of agreed deployment standards.**

UK Coaching is here for the coach, but we cannot work in isolation. Many partners are key to helping us achieve our ambitions, including major investors and regulators in the sector.

We work in collaboration with CIMSPA (the Chartered Institute for Management of Sport and Physical Activity) to ensure that coaches and



coaching practices are fit for purpose and safe. We align all of our learning and development to the sector-wide professional standards and lobby for coaches to embrace the standards and criteria to provide excellent experiences for all participants from playground to podium.

We support the drive towards workforce governance and harm prevention to move to a culture that embraces coaching excellence. This includes the front-line coaches and the coach development workforce that guides and develops coaches through their learning journey.

#### **4. We would advocate for the provision of professional services for coaches provided by UK Coaching.**

There has been a growing concern for the welfare of coaches. There needs to be a parity with welfare of athletes and the support they receive. UK Coaching continues to consult with coaches to better understand their needs. Coaches are telling us they need the following professional services:

1. Workplace representation, including legal support and consultations for coaches dealing with allegations, complaints, and disputes.
2. Access to medical support, in particular mental health, including a confidential counselling service.
3. Financial advice including indemnity, guidance on operating as a private business, access to tax and legal clinics, and pension support.
4. Public advocacy for improved coaching conditions.

UK Coaching currently provides all these services as part of our tiered **UK Coaching Club membership**.<sup>144</sup> Support from the sector to promote these services would help us help coaches thrive not just survive.

#### **5. We would advocate for modernised, inclusive learning and assessment opportunities that improve coaching practice.**

A system that recognises the responsibility we place on the shoulders of coaches and develops coaches appropriately to deliver safe, inclusive, and fun SPA across the UK:

1. A system that recognises and readily accepts prior learning and qualifications achieved against deployment standards, reducing the need for duplicated training.
2. A coach learning hub where quality learning opportunities that meet deployment standards are highlighted from across the sector, supporting coaches to know how to access appropriate, high-quality learning whatever their experience of coaching.
3. Re-allocation of resources to proactively upskill the coaching workforce:
  - The responsibility for those who employ and deploy coaches to support the training and development of their paid and volunteer workforce.
  - Funding redistributed for qualifications that lead to volunteer as well as paid employment.
  - Explore alternative arrangements to make learning and development accessible to all, such as a ‘contribution’ to fund ongoing investment in the coaching workforce.

**4.** Inclusion of coaching knowledge, skills, and behaviours into the development of T Levels in SPA.

**6. We would advocate for more in-depth sector research into the impact of coaching in the UK.**

Researchers at Sheffield Hallam University conducted a **social return on investment (SROI) of sport study**<sup>145</sup> in England in 2017-18, valuing the role of sport and physical activity to the nation's well-being.

The Sport-England funded research found that for every £1 invested in sport and physical activity, slightly more than £3 worth of social impact is generated.

They calculated it as £42 billion per year – more than three times the total NHS spending on mental health in England in 2018.

Taking into account physical health benefits and economic development, on top of mental well-being improvements, the contribution was found to benefit £85.5 billion to the English economy and society.

The significant contribution of coaches who facilitate SPA should not be underestimated. The findings support the view that coaches – who make sport and physical activity happen – have a hugely positive impact on individuals' health and happiness.

The evaluation report strengthens the case for more research into the broader value of coaching, with more evidence-based examples of how sizeable these benefits can be.

We hope more organisations will undertake similar research projects to enable us to make an even more compelling case for coaching's power to impact on the key outcomes set out in the government's new sports strategy, and the need to support the development of high-quality coaches capable of delivering high-quality coaching sessions.

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Chapter Four: Workforce, Higher  
Education Data and Evidence

# Loughborough University



Written by:

**Prof Dan Parsons**



## The role of higher education in sport policy

**At a time when finances are stretched thin for local and national governments, having resource-neutral, deliverable policies for sport and wellbeing are critical for the health of the nation. With world-leading academics and research facilities, higher education institutions like Loughborough University can help inform and shape policy backed up by strong research-based evidence.**

### **Loughborough University's proud sport portfolio**

Loughborough University is ranked **No.1 University in the world for sport-related subjects**<sup>116</sup> and offers unrivalled research, teaching and partnerships across sport and related topics.

Sport, health and wellbeing is one of three strategic themes that form Loughborough University's strategy, **Creating Better Futures. Together.**<sup>117</sup>

Academic staff in the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences are internationally renowned for the excellence and breadth of their research, the quality of which was recognised in the **2021 Research Excellence Framework**<sup>118</sup> where Loughborough University ranked top for research power in Sport and Exercise Sciences. Key areas of academic expertise include or work on **health technologies**,<sup>119</sup> **integrative physiology and nutrition**<sup>120</sup> and **eating behaviours**.<sup>121</sup>

At Loughborough University's **Sports Technology Institute**,<sup>122</sup> the world-leading Sports Technology Research Group was established to have a positive global, social and economic impact on sport through excellent engineering research, teaching and enterprise. Around 50 academics, research associates, technicians and PhD students carry out wide-ranging research including athletic footwear, technical apparel, protective equipment, balls, bats, clubs, rackets and fitness equipment to benefit those participating in amateur to elite sport.

Academic expertise is enhanced with unique access to world-class facilities, as well as partnerships with leading organisations in sport and health to deliver leading-edge research which has a real-world impact on society, culture and the economy. We have a proud track record of supporting and producing elite athletes across a variety of disciplines.

### Climate change and sport

Climate Change and Net Zero is another of Loughborough University's strategic themes. We recognise the link between sport and climate change – both in sport's contribution to global carbon emissions and its ability to lead the way with innovative policies in the sustainable drive to net zero. **Sports for Climate Action and Nature**<sup>123</sup> is a vibrant new Loughborough University research cluster bringing together expertise in sport sociology, physiology, nutrition, management, ecology and engineering from which a wealth of new policy-relevant research will be conducted over coming years.

Sporting events lead to huge global emissions, and climate change is already having an impact on sport – extreme heat, storms and wildfires have disrupted recent major sporting fixtures including the Tokyo Olympics' long-distance

running events, the Rugby World Cup 2019, the Australian Open Tennis in 2020, the 2023 US Open Tennis and the 2023 Qatar Grand Prix. With 120 out of 180 Olympic nations potentially unable to facilitate sport in the future due to projected changes in environmental conditions, it is crucial that policies are thought through with the global picture in mind.

Loughborough University's research cluster, **Sports for Climate Action and Nature (SCAN)**<sup>124</sup> offers a collaborative, cross-disciplinary approach to address the complex, bi-directional relationship between sport and climate action. SCAN has already been involved in a number of research projects, including:

- A **report**<sup>125</sup> commissioned by the UN Environment Programme is carrying out the first-ever assessment of how sports that take place on landscapes ranging from water, turf, mountains, and cities can act to protect nature. The study creates a baseline for the **Sport for Nature Framework**.<sup>126</sup>
- SCAN researchers are leading a **global review**<sup>127</sup> covering a 30-year period looking at the impacts of sport emissions on climate – published in the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences. The study focuses on the unique role sport can play in engaging billions of people who watch and participate in sports across the world, and particularly on the need for sport to take place in clean and healthy environments.
- SCAN researchers form part of an international team of researchers which conducted a **scoping review**<sup>128</sup> of existing literature (1995–2021) about the impacts of climate change on organised competitive sport entities, with further attention paid to their adaptation efforts.

SCAN researcher, **Dr Jamie Kenyon**,<sup>129</sup> represents Loughborough University on **The Sport Ecology Group**<sup>130</sup> – an international consortium of sport scholars from universities across North America and Europe, with a shared ambition to drive climate action in the sport sector through research and public engagement initiatives.

## Equity and inclusion in sport

Another key strand of Loughborough University's strategy is to create a 'Diverse, equitable and inclusive' culture. Diversity and inclusion are key priorities for government that can be progressed through progressive sport policies with the help of higher education institutions.

In 2022, Loughborough University students launched the **Black in Sport Summit**,<sup>131</sup> an annual event that came about due to their frustration at racial discrimination in sport and the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in key roles.

The summit most recently took place in **March 2023**<sup>132</sup> at the iconic London Stadium. This sold-out event, backed by Europe's leading media and entertainment company Sky, was co-hosted by Sky Sports News presenter and Loughborough University Board Member Mike Wedderburn.



Formula One racing driver Lewis Hamilton outlined how he has pledged to create opportunities through non-profit charitable organisation Mission 44 – an organisation that helps young people receive a better education. There was also a panel discussion on how to 'advance equity in sports governance' – a key policy area that will further the life chances of those from a minority ethnic background.

## Injuries and rehabilitation

Injuries in day-to-day life and access to high quality rehabilitation can be a barrier to participation in normal life, and physical activity and can have a knock-on effect for the UK economy more generally.

Sport injuries can also have an impact in later life, leading to health problems such as dementia which not only has a negative impact on the health of an individual, but is an added challenge for an already overstretched health service.

Loughborough has a key role to play in carrying out world-class research to identify new and innovative ways to treat and prevent injuries.

## National Rehabilitation Centre

One area in which Loughborough's University's world-leading expertise is set to play a key role in pioneering innovative new approaches to rehabilitation that will make a huge difference to people's lives is our work on the impact of life-changing injuries, trauma or illness, following Government approval to build the UK's first **National Rehabilitation Centre**.<sup>133</sup> This project will be delivered by the NRC Clinical and Academic Partnership (NCAP), led by Loughborough University and the University of Nottingham. The NCAP brings together a 'hub and spoke' network of more than 20 universities across the country, allowing educators and researchers to work with and learn from each other, in a coordinated approach to rehabilitation research.





This new centre will accelerate research and innovation in a field where Loughborough University have already made great strides. Research already carried out in the area includes:

- ◆ **Decoding how the brain talks to muscles to help regain mobility**,<sup>134</sup> helping those who have lost function in muscles following injury. This can have a revolutionary effect on a patient and help them participate in daily life.
- ◆ **Self-powered bionic bandages for rehabilitation**,<sup>135</sup> designed to capture energy from natural body movements and to create electrical signals that can be used to measure your body movements as well as physiological parameters. This will allow patients to participate fully in rehabilitation while living their normal life.
- ◆ **Lab-grown tissues for the development of personalised therapies**<sup>136</sup> that can provide an alternative from interventions such as muscle grafts, the effectiveness of which goes down with the severity of the injury. This could open up exciting possibilities for personalised rehabilitation and the development of new clinical interventions, with the outputs tailored exactly to each individual.

## **Concussion in sport**

Concussions can have a devastating impact on those who participate in sport and can lead to health problems later in life. One issue is that the

diagnosis of concussions is still – to a degree – a subjective decision. This may lead to inadvertently misinterpreting concussions, risking player safety.

Loughborough University student, Joel Polter, designed a device that can provide rapid assessment of concussion in sportspeople who receive a head knock. The device, CONTACT, allows for a fast evaluation of concussions by detecting abnormal changes in a person's pupils. It does this by shining a light into the user's eyes and measuring factors such as pupil size, how rapidly they constrict, and the speed at which their eyes respond to the light stimulus.

This is an improvement on the current, subjective 'follow my finger' test and puts player safety at the forefront of concussion diagnosis. This could be transformative in sports where concussion is prevalent such as rugby and American football.

## **Working in partnership for a healthier Britain**

Sport, health and wellbeing are cross-departmental topics and are interlinked to key priorities held by governments at both a local and national level.

With already strong links into local communities, industry and public bodies, higher education institutions are well placed to help solve these challenges facing communities the length and breadth of the country.

Loughborough University's overarching ambition is to create an environment of sustainable and equitable elite sports.

Our world-leading research gives Loughborough University the opportunity to spearhead sporting initiatives, which can then be rolled out through both local and national authorities. These initiatives can target key government priorities, such as climate change, and prove transformative for the health of the nation.

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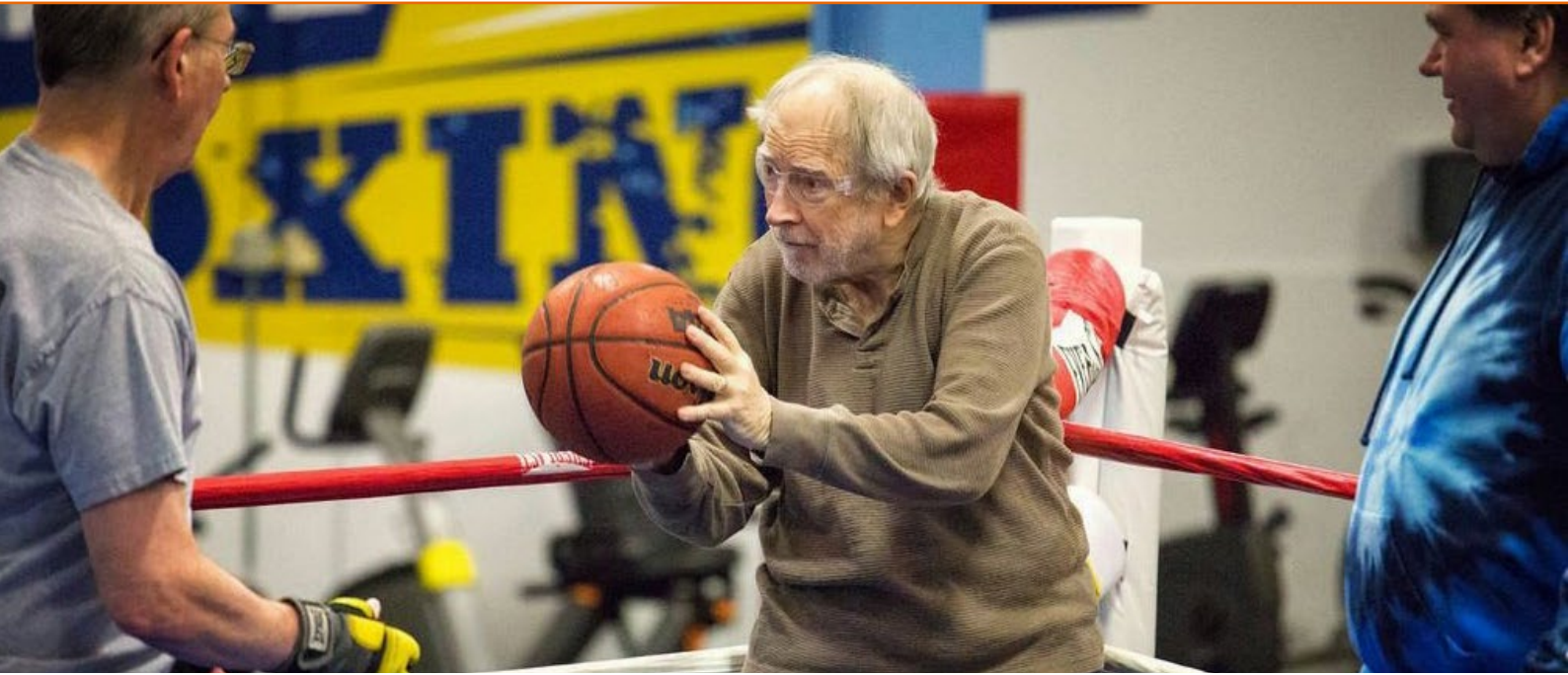
Chapter Four: Workforce, Higher  
Education Data and Evidence

# Fitmedia



Written by:

**Alex Scott-Bayfield**



## Evidencing improvement: Data and evaluation

### **The 2023 DCMS Sports Strategy contained the following core priorities:**

- ◆ To get more people physically active, including one million more children meeting the Chief Medical Officer’s guidelines on physical activity
- ◆ To focus on evidence, data and metrics, to understand and demonstrate the value of interventions.<sup>146</sup>

We applaud these aims and suggest the following policy solutions:

#### **1. Mandatory impact evaluation for organisations receiving public funding**

The 2023 strategy highlighted the importance of evidencing what works, so that investment is made with the confidence that it will have a positive impact.

There has been a long term deficiency in effective evaluation in the sector. For example, over the period 2005–2016, Sport England allocated over £2.2bn worth of funding. But there has been no evidence of a formal evaluation of any programme they have funded,<sup>147</sup> and despite this investment, there has been no significant increase in participation.<sup>148</sup>

This was summarised by the Committee of Public Accounts January 2023 report into grassroots participation in sport and physical activity, which condemned Sport England’s lack of effective evaluation of previous spending.<sup>149</sup>

Mandatory evaluation would ensure that government can see where the funding has gone, its impact, and its efficacy in making more people active.

Evaluation information could be centralised and made available on a cross-Whitehall database, searchable by reference to sectors and key project areas (e.g. health, crime prevention, youth participation).

This would have significant benefits:

- At **project level**, it would ensure clarity on how funding has been spent and if projects have achieved their objectives.
- At **departmental level**, it would ensure the funding body not only distributes grants, but can demonstrate the impact of their distribution.
- At **strategic level**, it would provide an archive of funded and evaluated projects containing best practice information on what works, what can be done and how to do it.

No extra resource would be required from either the government or the funding body as these mandatory evaluations would be funded using a percentage of the grant total.

No extra legislative or regulatory resources would be required as these would be made a condition of any grant received.

## 2. A single aligned system for sector data

There are several governmental and sector bodies collecting data on physical activity participation and health. These include:

- a. The **Active Lives Survey (ALS)** – an annual survey of participation in sporting activities and active recreation.<sup>150</sup>
- b. The **Health Survey for England (HSE)** – interviews the public on core health subjects. Each year the survey includes an additional topic: in 2008, 2012 and 2016 this was physical activity.<sup>151</sup>

Other surveys include:

- c. **Moving Communities** – participation and use of public leisure facilities.
- d. **The National Travel Survey** – average number of trips by mode of transport.
- e. **Labour Force Survey** – normal mode of travel to work.
- f. **Taking Part Survey** – sport undertaken in the previous four weeks.
- g. **Local Area Walking and Cycling in England** – percentage of time spent walking and cycling.
- h. **Understanding Society** – participation in games and physical activity.
- i. **Health Behaviour in School Aged Children** – percentage meeting physical activity recommendations.

In addition, individual organizations, such as National Governing Bodies, collect their own data.<sup>152</sup>

However, these systems often differ, duplicate or use inconsistent metrics. This limits their usefulness in accuracy, analysis and planning.

For example, the Active People Survey (APS) measured participation in conventional competitive sports and other selected active recreation. However, until recently it did not include recreational walking or cycling, limiting its use as a measure for general activity levels in the population.

Meanwhile, the HSE data includes figures on participation in a broader range of non-sport activities such as housework and DIY, which were not included in APS.

Such inconsistencies also exist even within the same system.<sup>153</sup>



### 3. Minimum standards for fundamental movement skills

Nearly half of primary school pupils are now leaving school without Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS).<sup>155</sup>

FMS are as important as the ability to read and write.<sup>156</sup> They significantly contribute to children's physical, cognitive and social development: Ofsted have recently highlighted their importance.<sup>157</sup>

Without FMS, children's interest and ability to participate in physical activity is vastly reduced.<sup>158</sup> Low levels are related to childhood obesity, and linked to increasing inability to participate in activities as children age.

However, there are no minimum requirements for FMS at primary school level.

The **National Curriculum** lays down guidelines for what children should be able to do by the end of Key Stage 1 and 2.<sup>159</sup> However, these merely comprise broad descriptions, and do not set out any criteria or standards to measure and assess ability.

For example, the only check made on children during their 13 years of compulsory PE is whether they can swim 25m in Year 6 (and this is most often done merely by asking them). Despite having this single (very modest) target for attainment, a recent survey found **45% of 7-11 year olds can't swim 25m.**<sup>160</sup>

PE and PSHE are the only core curriculum subjects without attainment targets and/or examinations. Children's 'attainment' in PE is commonly graded simply on their presence, attitude and appearance.

This contrasts with other core academic curriculum subjects, which are assessed in Year 2 and Year 6 through SATs.

There is also no evidence of alignment between the different types of surveys – eg between ALS and the Taking Part survey. It is unclear whether they use the same metrics or methodology, or whether there is coordination across results.

One central, aligned survey data system should be established.

It could be initially set up using results from existing surveys. Any subsequent / ongoing surveys would be aligned to use the same or complementary metrics. These could then be cross referenced across other areas (eg health, physical activity, demographics, etc).

This would provide a single, common point of reference, accessible for all government departments and agencies, for collaboration, planning and policy.<sup>154</sup>

It would support and encourage cross-departmental working and help make the case to HM Treasury for future funding. It could also support HM Treasury's Green Book Supplementary Guidance on Wellbeing.

This would be resource neutral as it would require no additional expenditure, legislation or regulation. It could be established and operated using existing human and software resources. It could also potentially save future funds, by preventing duplication of work between departments.

Minimum standards of FMS would set out clearly the basic movement skills which all children should achieve before leaving primary school.

Such standards could be set for Year 5 or 6, to identify struggling children and establish specific programmes or interventions before they leave for secondary school. These could also be optionally expanded to cover other areas, such as physical capabilities<sup>161</sup> and health related fitness.<sup>162</sup>

Such standards would:

- Provide children with the skills and confidence to be physically active as they grow.
- Help children engage with fitness and movement at an early age.<sup>163</sup>
- Identify natural talents and signpost appropriate activities.
- Help less sportive children to find equivalent healthy behaviours.

Such standards would require no extra funding – simply a policy change with accompanying guidelines setting out, with clarity and certainty, what PE teachers are expected to achieve at primary school level.



#### 4. Fitness assessments in secondary schools

Fitness is the most important independent measure of children's physical health.

But 20% of pupils starting secondary school are clinically unfit. And by school leaving age, that 20% has risen to 46%.

Children's cardiorespiratory fitness (stamina) has **declined by about 10%**<sup>164</sup> in the past 10 years - even in areas which have escaped the obesity epidemic.<sup>165</sup>

One reason for this is the lack of regular assessments for fitness in secondary school. This leads to several problems for children, including:

- Being unable to take part in physical activity.
- Being unaware of their fitness and health status.
- Measuring their health using inaccurate criteria, such as weight.

Standardized assessments would use evidence based tests to measure fitness levels and physical aptitudes. Results would demonstrate the improvement required by the National Curriculum for PE.<sup>166</sup> Results could also be centralized and analyzed against different areas (age groups, areas and regions).

Such assessments have significant benefits, including:

- Increasing participation.
- Improving fitness.<sup>167</sup>
- Encouraging effort.
- Highlighting health risks.



- ◆ The government strategy “**Be Active, Be Healthy**” (2009) emphasized how physical assessment data by region, school and age group, could help target interventions and identify trends .

Fitness assessments could also help the wider health system by contributing to its following long term aims:

- a. “Getting Serious About Prevention.” <sup>169</sup>
- b. “The Information Revolution.” <sup>170</sup>
- c. “Intelligent Transparency.” <sup>171</sup>
- d. “Self-Directed Improvement.” <sup>172</sup>

Fitness assessments would be resource neutral as they could be carried out within curriculum time, using methods within the existing knowledge of PE teachers. Recording of results could be done online using current software and human resources.

Other countries already implement fitness testing or frameworks.<sup>168</sup> And the need for such assessments is becoming increasingly recognized in the UK. For example:

- ◆ **UKActive’s** “Generation Inactive” report (2018), called for routine testing of children’s fitness, like Maths and English.
- ◆ **The Sports Think Tank Sector Survey** (2015) showed 61% of the sector believe the government should record fitness levels of children in schools.
- ◆ The **Association for Physical Education** Health Position Paper (2015) stated “[fitness assessments] can potentially play a positive role in promoting healthy active lifestyles”.
- ◆ The report of **Chief Medical Officer for England** in 2010 advocated for physical assessments in schools and recognized their importance in public health surveillance.

## **Fitmedia**

Fitmedia is an award winning company which evaluates children’s health and fitness. We evidence the impact of interventions and programmes on children’s physical fitness, their fundamental movement skills, and their mental health and wellbeing. We work for schools, charities and local authorities.

**[www.fitmediafitness.co.uk](http://www.fitmediafitness.co.uk)**



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**SPORT:80** 

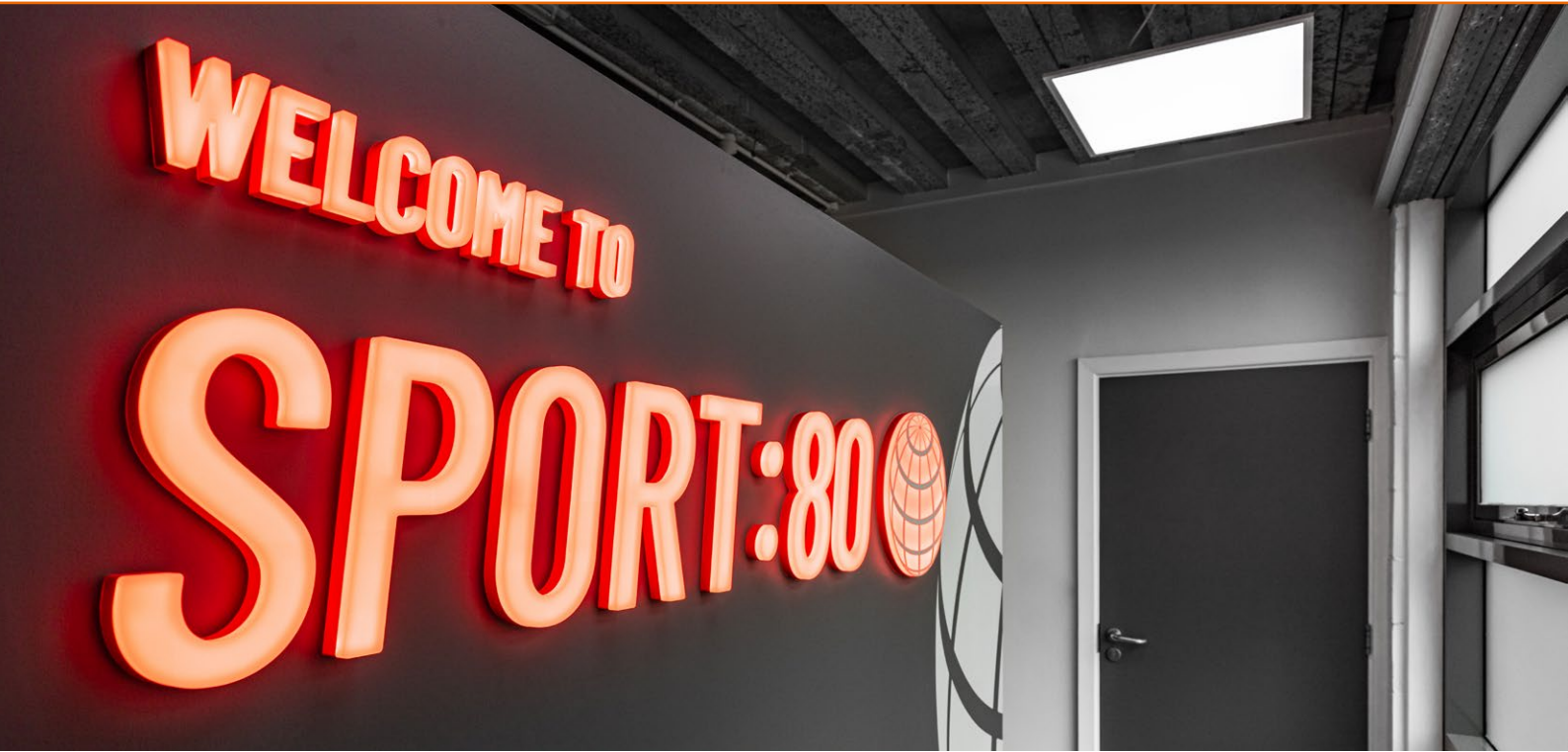
Chapter Four: Workforce, Higher  
Education Data and Evidence

**Sport:80**



Written by:

**Jonny Turner**



# Revolutionising sports governance: Embracing data-driven strategies for operational excellence

## Introduction

Over the course of the last decade, the use and power of data has skyrocketed in the world of sport. We have seen countless examples of athletes, clubs, organisations, medical professionals, and more, using the power of data to improve performance, streamline processes, and seek out the marginal gains that can often make a career-defining difference.

The power of data can also be used to transform the way in which sport is governed, and for National Governing Bodies (NGBs), embracing data-driven insights can be the key to creating successful strategies and processes that lead to growth and sustainability.

## The power of data in sports governance

To understand the significance of data-driven strategies in sports governance, it is essential to first recognise the profound importance of data. Data is not just a collection of numbers and statistics; it is the lifeblood of a business.

Making this data accessible can enable a wealth of opportunities and insights that have the potential to redefine how sports are managed, experienced, and enjoyed.

Throughout the history of sports, decisions have often been made based on intuition, tradition, or limited information. However, in an age where

technology has revolutionised how we collect, analyse, and utilise data, it's imperative that sports governance follows suit. The application of data-driven strategies is no longer a luxury but a necessity, as it allows for better decision-making, increased efficiency, and the creation of a more inclusive and engaging sports sector.

The challenge that the sector is facing today is not so much a lack of vision or awareness of the techniques such as those discussed within this chapter, but more so lies within a combination of funding & expertise.

### **Audience insights and fan engagement**

The first building block in any data-driven strategy is understanding audiences and potential 'customers' (customers in this case will be current, interested, or potential participants, fans, volunteers etc). Through demographic data analysis, we can gain a profound understanding of audience composition, enabling us to tailor our offerings to cater for a wider range of groups, ensuring broader and more diverse participation is made more attainable. By tracking participation rates (through technology rather than the more traditional questionnaire-style submissions), we can identify areas of growth or decline, guiding strategic investment with a greater degree of accuracy and in real-time.

Data-driven insights not only enhance our understanding of audiences but also guide strategic decisions aimed at maximising participation and engagement. By centralising multiple data sources from across the industry, we can offer NGBs and other sporting bodies the capability to uncover trends and target new participants who may previously never have been discovered. Utilising techniques that have been the backbone of retail and commercial sectors for years will transform the way governing bodies operate, both when understanding the

true potential of their 'customer base' and how to entice them in. A wealth of data on individuals' preferences, tastes, spending habits and physical activity can be obtained through many legitimate techniques/sources. It can then be used both to inform broad marketing activity and enable more targeted communications once a potential customer engages with the organisation.

NGBs and other sporting bodies must embrace the above techniques (amongst many others) if they are to grow their reach, build sustainable revenues, and increase participation. There is no lack of technology available, however, the support and guidance often does not come cheap, and to truly deploy the techniques being used by 'big business', relatable budgets are required. We will cover in our conclusion how we believe the bridge can be built to enable more NGBs to benefit from technology that exists.

### **Athlete and member optimisation**

Nurturing athletes and supporting members is pivotal to fostering a sustainable sports sector. To achieve this, simple-to-use but powerful membership solutions are required to provide NGBs with access to knowledge and insights, and to provide the capability to act decisively and with purpose.

Access to data is key to understanding and effectively supporting a member base. Individuals in the digital age expect to have experiences comparable with the biggest tech providers, such as Amazon. The reality is that running an NGB is complex and is not simply a commerce operation. Combine membership functionality with performance departments, events, education teams, and governance (on a national scale), and you begin to see how and why challenges have rarely been overcome when it comes to the use of data for commercial and sustainability purposes.



Through the combination of functionalities, access to data (be it participation or financial) is made a lot easier. Analytics tools enable trends to surface that can inform strategic decision-making, in particular, improving member retention, identifying new talent and attracting new individuals into a sport.

Empowering NGBs with such data enables investment in purposes that enrich the landscape and therefore provide more opportunities to capitalise on role models, trigger events, or simply enable more targeted approaches to attract and retain customers.

By bringing such a diverse set of capabilities into one single ecosystem, with partners who are all working toward a common goal, we can transform the way the sector operates and is able to act on the data that is captured.

### **Digital domination and engagement**

In the increasingly digital world of sports, fans are presented with more ways to engage with their sport than ever before, and data can play a key role in ensuring NGBs keep up with this fast-changing engagement. Monitoring social media engagement and website traffic informs digital strategies, leading to effective social media marketing, content optimisation, and platform targeting. Through the intelligent use of AI in this space, NGBs can align themselves with big brands, to reach and present without the need for comparable resource requirements.

Additionally, gamification is evolving as a new and effective tool to engage with audiences, both new and existing. If used efficiently, we are finding that users engage with games that can be up to 220% more likely to lead to a ‘click-through’ than more traditional methods of communication, such as emails.

Combining techniques to unearth new customers through monitoring and utilising web traffic, social interactions, and deploying engaging tools such as gamification, is a modern approach to customer acquisition and it is our belief that NGBs will be able to grow their interactions, and therefore, their customer bases.

### **Improving athlete safety**

Athlete safety and the deployment of safeguarding best practices has been a challenge for all governing bodies. The subject has become more topical globally since the very public incidents in gymnastics (both in the U.S. and the U.K.). Though technology cannot solve or stop bad practice at ground level, it can create a safer environment through the automation of processes that are historically manual.

Embracing technology can put training, awareness programmes and incident reporting in the hands of every individual, whether that be a coach, volunteer, or athlete. Integrated into a membership ecosystem, NGBs can automate their reporting and monitoring capabilities on a national scale with a great degree of granularity and accuracy. Combined with the tools to execute compliance requirements and the production of public registers (E.g., coaching registers that only include licensed coaches that are fully trained, DBS cleared etc), there are a variety of mechanisms to support with improving the culture around managing athlete safety.

Once again, the building of a robust ecosystem is paramount to ensuring an NGB can provide the necessary tools to its community,

to enforce and deliver good governance at all levels. Through integrations with services such as Globocol (in the U.K.), the U.S. Center for SafeSport, and etrainu's online learning solution developed and tailored for the sports industry, Sport:80 are working to ensure the above challenges are being catered for with accessible and effective tools.

In addition, CIMPSA (The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity), have recently been tasked with the production of a centralised coaching database. There is no better time to ensure that the technology being used within the sector can produce data in a standardised format, and that it can be shared securely and effectively.

### **Driving revenues and commercial sustainability with data**

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing NGBs today is generating consistent revenue streams. Data can be the key to tackling this challenge. Data can support a multifaceted approach to revenue generation, extending beyond traditional sponsorship and merchandise sales. By harnessing data, NGBs can unlock several avenues for financial growth and operational efficiency.

Understanding the various facets of their operations, such as member demographics and audience preferences, empowers NGBs to identify opportunities for financial expansion. Data offers insights into participation trends, which can be instrumental in boosting revenues by increasing the number of athletes and participants in sports. Data can also guide NGBs in enhancing the delivery of events, supporting the growth of event programmes locally, and increasing the regularity and effectiveness of delivery. This, in turn, contributes to increased revenues (growth in this example comes from the bottom-up).

Data can also serve as compelling evidence for NGBs seeking grants, sponsorship, and funding from other sources. Organisational data, supported by financial metrics, can enable NGBs to access resources that support their activities, ensuring financial stability and opening doors to investments in athlete development and infrastructure.

Financial data is imperative to the efficient running of any business including in sport. NGBs often have multiple disparate systems to run the programmes that sustain them. These convoluted solutions make financial reporting difficult and time-consuming and can impact accuracy. By coordinating solutions into a central ecosystem, NGBs can streamline their processes and allocate resources more efficiently, ultimately contributing to financial sustainability.

By utilising data, NGBs can benefit from a holistic approach to revenue generation that goes beyond traditional methods. This approach encompasses increasing participation, optimising event delivery, accessing funding opportunities through enhanced marketing capability, enhancing operational efficiency, and tailoring programs to diverse demographics. This multifaceted strategy ensures that NGBs not only secure their financial stability but also pave the way for sustainable growth and excellence in sports governance.

### **Promoting diversity, equality, and inclusion with data**

Diversity, equality, and inclusion are fundamental values in modern sports governance, and data is a powerful tool for achieving these goals. By analysing data on participation rates, NGBs can identify underrepresented groups and implement programs to encourage their involvement in sports. Moreover, data can inform diversity and inclusion initiatives by providing insights into the impact of such programs,

ensuring that they are effective in creating a more equitable sports sector.

Data-driven diversity and inclusion programs could involve tracking the progress of initiatives and identifying areas that require further attention, for example. By continuously monitoring data, NGBs can adapt and improve their strategies, developing a community that is more reflective of the diverse members it serves. Data can also play a crucial role in identifying opportunities to celebrate cultural diversity within sports, encouraging cross-cultural participation and understanding. The careful analysis of data can lead to more inclusive governance, where everybody is given the opportunity to participate and thrive.

## Conclusion

How do NGBs capitalise on the wealth of opportunity discussed in this chapter?

In our opinion, firstly it is about truly embracing a pro-innovation culture. Those that we have seen be most successful completely buy in to the use of technology throughout their organisations. They look to technology to improve the way they understand and engage with audiences; to make their sport safer; to drive operational efficiencies; and to ultimately grow their sports.

It's similar to a 'start-up' mentality that embraces the need to change and continually evolve with an acceptance that not everyone is going to like it and join you for the ride. The sport sector is steeped in tradition and for many people (at all levels) change is an uncomfortable thought. This culture shift and the ability to unify people towards an over-arching goal is one of the biggest challenges we see leadership at NGBs face.

Finding trusted technology partners, solutions, and services is also crucial. We have encountered many NGBs that have been sold a dream or taken for a ride when it

comes to technology. In the past, situations where companies over-promise and under-deliver, or not deliver at all, have been all too common. Sadly, it still happens today and as a result the sport sector is cautious when choosing what to adopt and who to work with.

We also believe there needs to be more support, education, and guidance when it comes to procuring the right technologies, from the right providers. This is one of the reasons we have forged close partnerships with the likes of the Sport and Recreation Alliance, Welsh Sports Association, and Sport Think Tank. Alongside leveraging these partnerships to share best practice, we have also established a collective called the Sports Technology Alliance that is committed to helping NGBs make the most out of technology. Stronger thought leadership is needed to help NGBs become more confident in the world of technology.

Finally, the sector needs a shift of mind-set from the belief that technology is a cost-centre and to a revenue-generator that provides the tools necessary to drive NGBs towards self-sustainability. The reality is that market leading technologies and their providers are not cheap, but any worth their salt will be able to demonstrate how NGBs can leverage innovations to become more efficient and grow their sport.

Policy makers, funders and NGBs must work collaboratively with trusted technology providers to bridge this topic. Doing so will open the door to enable greater cost-efficiencies to be realised, and the ability to tie the use of technology closer to Government policies and priorities.

Every NGB recognises that they need to modernise and embrace technology to drive their organisations forward. But there needs to be more advice and support to ensure they can navigate this world and make the required advancements.





Chapter Four: Workforce, Higher  
Education Data and Evidence

# Oaks Consultancy



Written by:

**Emma Atkins**



## Financial stability

**Oaks is the strategic planning and income generation consultancy for organisations with a social purpose.**

Sport has always been at the heart of what we do: we were born out of a shared passion for improving the business and strategy side of the sport sector, giving us a unique insight into the challenges that face its leaders. Our services equip organisations in the sport and sport for development sectors with the resources and confidence to deliver life-changing impact by enabling them to transform their approach to fundraising and achieve long-term financial sustainability.

While sport fosters unity, discipline, and a spirit of cooperation and competition, navigating through its commercial and financial aspects requires a strategy that is as dynamic and adaptive as the games we love. Our experience doesn't just stem from a sterile business environment but is deeply rooted in understanding the vibrancy, challenges, and the unmistakable energy that sport brings into our society.

Every year, we survey over 150 organisations using sport as a tool for good, to benchmark fundraising performance, analyse income generation strategies and forecast the future direction of fundraising in the sector. Our most recent report revealed that:

- 64% of respondents were forecasting an increase in fundraising income this financial year compared to the previous year. However,
- Fewer than half of organisations met or exceeded their fundraising target in 2022.
- 54% of organisations are reliant on grants from trusts, foundations, and institutions as their largest source of income.
- 25% of organisations rely on a single donor for more than half of their total income.
- 30% do not have a formal fundraising strategy in place.

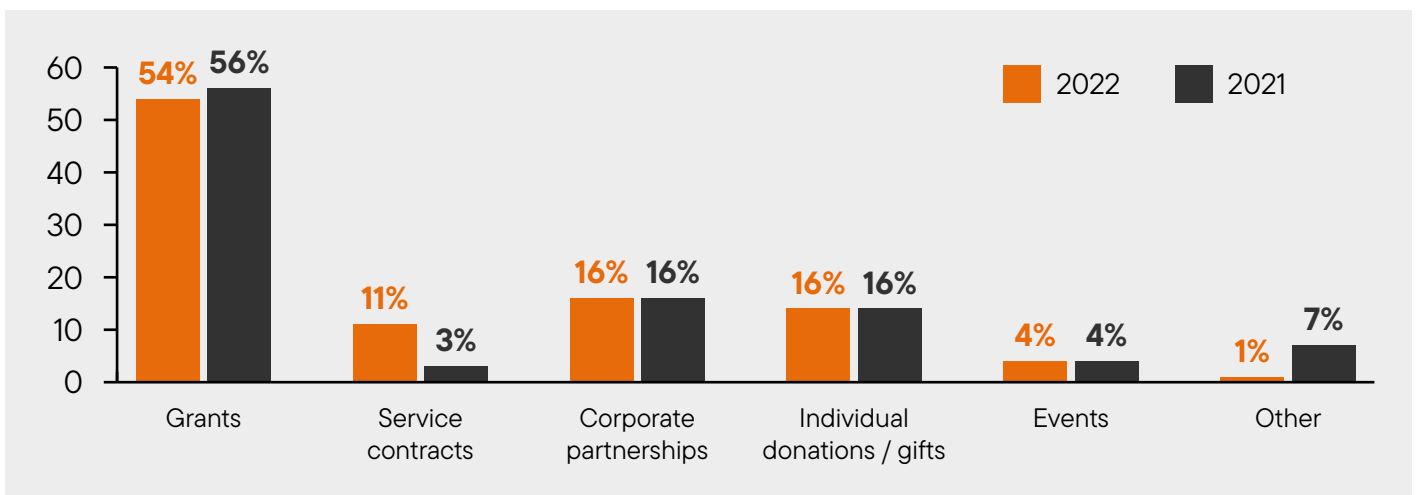
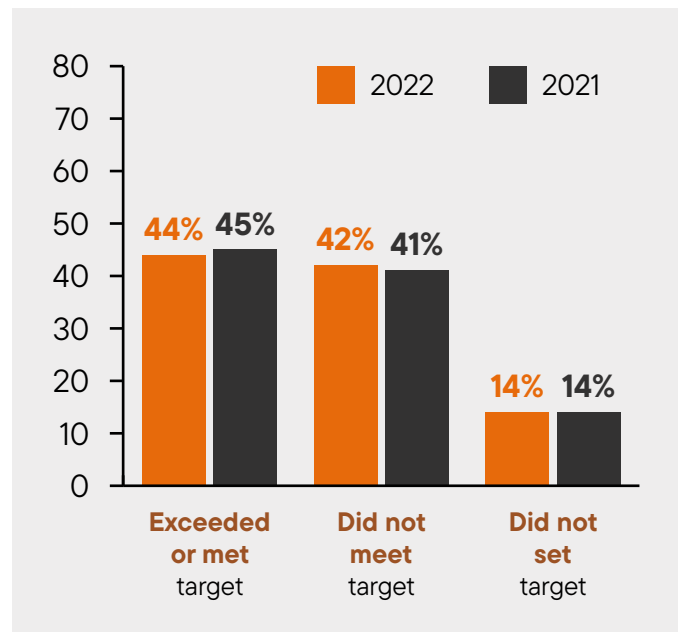
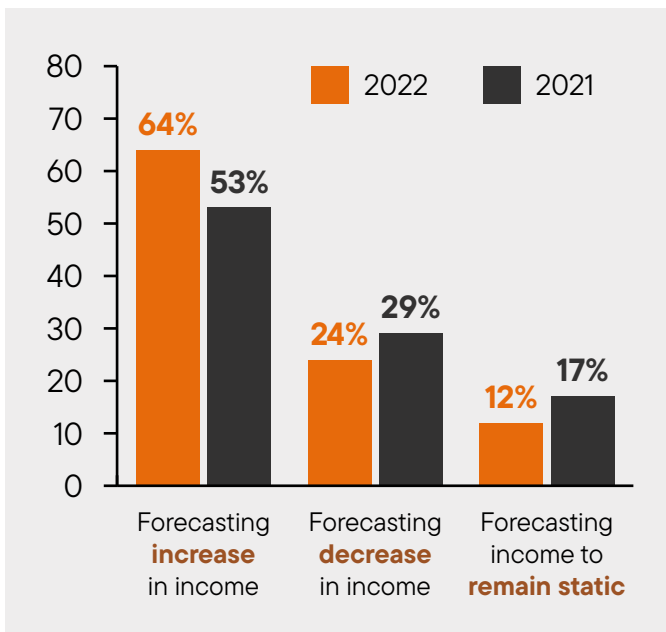
Of those that failed to reach their targets, lack of fundraising skills and capacity was identified as the primary contributory factor, with the second being the challenging economic conditions.

Organisations that increased their investment into fundraising and focused on innovation were more likely to experience income growth and more confident about their future fundraising prospects.

To put this into perspective, consider a hypothetical grassroots organisation, ‘FootballForAll’, which brings the joy and educational benefits of football to

underprivileged children. They depend heavily on a single donor for their annual operations. If that donor withdraws their financial support, it threatens the continuity of the programs, impacting the children, the community, and the potential societal benefits the organisation was bringing. Sustainable financial strategies and diversified funding are imperative to safeguard against such scenarios, ensuring longevity and consistent impact.

**Findings from Fundraising in Sport for Development: State of the Sector Report 2022-23**



Through a combination of this primary research and our work with clients in the sport sector, we have identified the following challenges, while widespread, are far from insurmountable. With strategic redirection, innovative approach, and an adherence to adaptive planning, the future can indeed be shaped to be more secure, sustainable, and conducive for all stakeholders in the sport and development sectors. The need is to identify, collaborate, and leverage the varied opportunities available and potential ones that can be created in this digital age.

1. There is a disconnect between income generation strategies and sports strategy for enhanced commitments to Environmental, Societal and Governance outcomes and Duty of Care.
2. Organisations currently lack the long-term fundraising strategies and financial/funding risk management that make financial sustainability possible. This is accompanied by an over-reliance on grant funding or a single major donor, plus a lack of awareness of new and innovative methods of fundraising.
3. Start-up organisations that exhibit creative thinking and entrepreneurial flair are often suppressed due to capacity limitations and/or access to unrestricted funding sources. They face challenges whereby funders will only invest once they can demonstrate delivery and impact but are unable to do so without the requisite funding.
4. Inconsistent and often exclusive financial athlete support throughout the pathway.
5. An outdated prioritisation of commercial funding and sponsorship into high profile or fan-based sporting competitions. A lack of support or even consideration of the benefits of supporting the pathway and wider stakeholders which leads people to elite level sport.
6. A lack of an entry route for first time or lower financial level/local commercial sponsors into sport sponsorship – there is little incentivisation and no simple steps to activation.
7. Vulnerability to external socio-economic challenges that threaten commercial sponsorship in sport.
8. Vulnerability to the damaging effects of negative PR surrounding governance and duty of care incidents.
9. As volunteering in sport continues to fall, costs of delivery will rise. There is a need to incentivise volunteering in order to reduce expenditure.
10. Professional athletes are ready and willing to give back their time and money for the development of the sport, however there is a high rate of failure among athlete/player charity start-ups. On the flip side, existing charitable organisations who are seeking great athlete ambassadors to raise their profile are unable to find suitable candidates.





Despite the challenges faced by the entire sport ecosystem over the past few years, there is cause for optimism. Of those organisations we surveyed in 2022, 64% were forecasting income growth this year, and 78% reported they were confident in their ability to increase their future fundraising income.

Sports organisations are not just mere entities; they represent the collective dreams and aspirations of athletes, fans, and countless individuals working behind the scenes. The potential for income growth, despite the adversities encountered in recent years, is a testament to the unyielding spirit and the intrinsic power of sport to bring about positive change, even amidst economic uncertainty.

In the UK, a major opportunity for a new administration is the current enthusiasm among sporting organisations to collaborate more than ever before: to share skills and resources and work together to provide advocacy on shared issues. In this context, establishing a cross-political, long-term

commitment to sports investment should be promoted as a strategic priority and the solution to many of the sector's current challenges. In the shorter term, we propose these potential ideas for fast solutions within a quadrennial cycle.

Our key recommendations to achieve financial sustainability:

1. A genuine commitment from funders and policymakers to support investment-readiness across the sector. The fundamentals – governance, MEL, culture, capacity, systems and marcomms – rarely receive sufficient prioritisation and focus, which presents huge risk to organisations' ability to attract – and manage – sustainable funding sources. Investment needs to be directed much more acutely into this area, and not just into programmatic delivery.
2. Establish a central government commercial sponsorship matching fund, which activates local smaller sponsorship, makes it easy to do so and recognises a matching system from VIK contributions from volunteering.

3. Funders to collaborate to ensure systems are easy/efficient and inclusive, exploring the potential to allow some agencies to receive higher percentages of unrestricted funding and operational overheads.
4. A centralised offer for professional athletes to give back (both with finances and time) to the sporting community whilst competing (NBA Cares, Common Goal examples) and the provision of capacity and capability support to those athletes who are keen to start social purpose organisations, enabling innovation to thrive, their voices to be heard and athletes to be successful with charitable causes – whilst reducing risk and ensuring finances are used wisely.
5. A campaign in partnership with the business networks – such as the IOD, CBI etc to incentivise sponsorship to sport and educate regarding long term impact to change the norm.
6. A start-up capacity fund and support package to diversify and help new people with great ideas to make an impact in sport.

It is imperative not to view these recommendations as standalone solutions but as interwoven strategies that uplift and stabilize the sporting ecosystem. From integrating funders and policymakers to streamline financial inputs to ensuring athletes are provided robust platforms to give back, each element creates a future where sports entities are financially strong and programmatically impactful.

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Chapter Five: Elite and Professional Sport

# Farrars Building Chambers



Written by:

**Stuart Brady & Holly Girven**



## The government’s 2023 grassroots concussion guidelines: Weaker than a 1980s tribute act

### Tackling concussion

**New concussion guidelines were released by the Department of Culture Media and Sport in April 2023. They were clearly derived from Sport Scotland’s 2016 and 2018 Guidelines. Both shared the tag-line “if in doubt sit them out”, and the “cut and paste” function had clearly been used liberally to reproduce passages verbatim. However, much of the Scottish Guidelines was omitted from the UK Government equivalent.**

The guidelines also only apply to “non-elite” sports. This poses the questions: why leave professional contact sports, one of the most dangerous professions in the country, unregulated? Why omit safeguards in the Scottish guidelines from the UK document? What about the total exposure to subconcussions that leads to CTE? Is it now time to have proper regulation of contact sports like those applying to those exposed to noise, asbestos, chemicals or other dangerous industrial agents? The answer to this last question has to be yes.



In April 2023 the Department of Culture, Media and Sport released “If in doubt, sit them out: UK concussion guidelines for non-elite (grassroots) sport”. There was the usual press-release and choreographed praise for the measures but all they did was to repeat and in many ways dilute guidance that has been around since the 1970s.

The role of medical practitioners set out in its Scottish predecessor decreased, with no recommendation that medical approval be sought before return to play and no recommendation of seeing a medical professional on the same day of a concussion. When one considers that the guidance in rugby since the 1970s and 1980s was that a **neurological examination** was required before return to play **after** a three-week rest, this is was a significant backward step, leaving critical judgements about a player post injury in the hands of unqualified and often conflicted coaches, parents or others who are untrained and may prioritise non-medical considerations.

Secondly, the return to play process or protocol omitted the requirement to drop down a stage of the process should symptoms be experienced, and it is suggested that the return to sport protocol can proceed at a rate that does **“not more than mildly”** exacerbate existing symptoms, which is a subjective test that lacks clarity. It is further suggested that full contact training can be resumed after 14 days symptom free **when at rest**, rather than 14 days completely symptom free, as was the case in the Scottish document, and as has been the case in the vast majority of such concussion protocols in sports ever. Additionally, it has been scientific consensus for around the past five decades that a rest of three weeks to one month ought to be

observed post-concussion before any sport is played or practiced that could cause head injury. For example, the lead text in this area “Essentials of Sports Medicine”,<sup>173</sup> made such a recommendation in 1986.

Thirdly, the new UK Guidelines fail to address the concern regarding multiple concussions and does not recommend seeking medical advice if multiple concussions are experienced within 12 months which is concerning in light of the risks associated with multiple concussions. Notably the Scottish guidance does have a warning (with a massive exclamation mark next to it!) suggesting that in the case of a second concussion in 12 months attention be sought from medical practitioners with experience in sports-related concussions.

Fourthly, there are no methods in the document recommended or established to protect players from multiple head injuries, for example through the recording of head injuries. When a major cohort study from Oxford University<sup>174</sup> has clearly shown that cognitive deficits are triggered by multiple concussions and get worse with each, and given the incidence of persistent post-concussion syndrome, the sometimes fatal second-impact syndrome, and the propensity of some players to experience concussions from increasingly trivial blows over-time, these omissions are very significant.

Finally, the guidance does not take the opportunity to regulate professional sport, instead focusing solely on non-elite sport, when what is needed in professional sports is more regulation of head contacts than in amateur sports, not less.

## Contact sports: a workplace in need of health and safety regulation

Many readers of this helpful compendium of policy ideas will have little or any knowledge of the workplace protections that are in place to protect the health and safety of workforces across the country: from the general, like the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to the particular, covering everything from working at height, to working with asbestos, vibrating tools, chemicals, noisy machinery or even dust.

The rationale behind health and safety regulation is that the market itself will not deliver safe and healthy workplaces. Indeed, in many workplaces what is best for output or profit is often the worst thing for health and safety.

But it is my contention that one of the most dangerous workplaces in today's economy is largely unregulated when it comes to health and safety, and that is elite sport, and in particular contact sports. Contact sports, where sheer bravado and the need to earn appearance fees, prize money or glory, often overrides all else.



It has been the job of court-made common law to set the standard of care in the cases that have come before it. For example, when Michael Watson sued the British Boxing Board of Control following an injury sustained in September 1991, the Court determined that there was a duty of care to take reasonable care to ensure adequate ringside treatment and made findings on what that should comprise: which the BBBC was in breach of.<sup>175</sup>

More recently in *Czernuka v King*,<sup>176</sup> a case where the Claimant became paraplegic following an injury during a rugby match, the court made determinations on the duty of care owed by rugby players to other players: which the Defendant in that case had breached through her reckless tackle technique.

However, in my view relying on litigated cases to set the standard of care is no way to ensure the safety of sportspeople in a deliberative and systemic manner. This is all the more the case when medical knowledge has established that very serious and life-altering brain injuries are being suffered by a significant minority of players in sport. And, even more the case when the likelihood of sustaining those injuries, is so closely correlated with the amount of head contact exposure experienced.

Just last week an authoritative scientific paper suggested that a rugby player's likelihood of developing chronic-traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), formerly known as dementia pugilistica, increased 14% for each year that a player played rugby.<sup>177</sup>

Law-makers have long recognised the need to limit exposure to agents which can cause injury or disease, whether that be from a single "one-dose" exposure or from the cumulative effect of multiple exposures over time.



For example, by 1972 the Health and Safety Executive had set out quite precise parameters for noise exposure: someone should not be exposed to over 90 decibels over the course of an eight-hour day. There were also absolute upper limits of exposure of 135 and 150 dB depending on circumstances and measurement. In other words, there was a limit to stop the exposure that over-time would cumulatively do harm, and another limit to the very loud noises that could damage hearing instantly.

These standards have been developed over time, through Regulations laid before Parliament, to be more stringent and sophisticated, not least through regulations made pursuant to European Directives.

There are equivalents for vibration exposure in the workplace to stop the development of related conditions such as vibration white finger, and in relation to chemicals through the “Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002”, and of course in relation to asbestos exposure.

The way that these regulations are made is very similar across the board. The epidemiological evidence is examined to explore how an agent or source of exposure causes an illness, thresholds are established to state what level of exposure the regulators or politicians deem acceptable, and then the regulations are made commensurate with that knowledge and judgement.

Of the above examples, noise is arguably the most straightforward to regulate. It has been well known for centuries that noise exposure causes deafness, once science could discern the level of noise where this damage commences, a regulation could then be implemented to limit exposure through hearing protection or other means.

So where does this leave us with contact sports? We have known about dementia pugilistica or punch-drunk syndrome in boxing for a century or more. There has also been very serious medical opinion suggesting it may be present in rugby players for decades. It has also been known over



this entire period, that the more times your head was contacted, the more likely you were to suffer. This condition is now more generally referred to as Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (“CTE”).

There are now a substantial number of high-profile sports-people in the public domain suffering from various diseases related to concussive and sub-concussive exposure whilst playing sport. These range from CTE,

to Persistent Post Concussion Syndrome, to Parkinsons to motor-neuron disease. They come about owing to the sub-concussive hits, that are smaller head-knocks sustained at pretty much every contact event in rugby, and from concussions. Meanwhile, sports are completely self-policing in relation to the amount of games a player plays, how much contact training there is, and the safeguards that they put in place in to limit or respond to concussions or sub-concussions.

It has to be the case that when we know cumulative sub-concussions cause CTE and cumulative concussions also cause brain damage and impact cognitive function, limits must be placed on exposure, not by commercially interested sporting governing bodies, but by government regulations informed by the science. It is almost inevitable that this would lead to significant reductions in contact exposure over a career and a lifetime in matches and competition, and a dramatic improvement and revision of the Government’s own concussion guidelines.

This is a very urgent problem, with some quite obvious answers. A reduction in exposure will lead to fewer brain-damaged players. What is needed is political intervention.

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Chapter Five: Elite and Professional Sport

# Sports Communications



Written by:

**Tim Payton**

# In sport and politics, leadership matters

## **Tim Payton sets out why change needs the Government's captain – the PM – to lead**

**'One form of exercise a day - for example a run, walk, or cycle - alone or with members of your household'.**

Sound familiar?

It is of course the public health message broadcast daily to the nation by the Prime Minister and Chief Medical Officer during the pandemic.

The Government recognising the importance of exercise to everyone's physical and mental health. A clear statement from the top about the importance of being active.

Alongside this focus on activity we saw the Government prioritise professional sport being played behind closed doors – giving us some national hope and entertainment during extremely challenging times.

It was proof that sport mattered with the Government tapping into the national sporting psyche.

I had hoped this focus would bring a sea change to the approach to sport and exercise. If it was so important during lockdown, surely that commitment would transfer to peace time?

Sadly not, and we are back to a world of sport and physical activity being far too low on the political agenda.

It is a frustrating situation. I've had a ringside seat on sports politics for almost thirty years now.

Much of this time saw continuous progress driven firstly by the introduction of the National Lottery to transform sport's finances followed by the impetus of the Olympic Games and a decade of major sporting events to act as the best possible marketing strategy.

The landscape feels less optimistic now. The Treasury cupboard is declared to be empty and local authorities have been squeezed to the bone.

So what can be done?

The good news, to borrow a sporting analogy, is that outcomes aren't always reliant on spending more money. Often a difference can be made through hard work and the focusing of energy on innovative ideas that will make a difference.

## **Collaborative working with the sector**

To start, we should tap deeper into the networks and infrastructure we already have.

Why spend money building new structures and delivery partners when we have the reach and knowledge of the existing National Governing Bodies (NGBs) for Sport?

NGBs in 2023 are transformed from the traditional blazer image. Their governance is in much better shape thanks to the updated Sport England code and an increasingly professional approach on how to increase participation in their sport focusing on those who've traditionally not accessed sport.

If there has been a success story in English sport in recent years it has been in the strides that NGBs have made in advancing women and girl's sport, from participation to elite success.

Just look at the impact of the double headers in The Hundred or how the Lionesses Euro's win has seen Women's sport grip the nation's attention. Participation is increasing too.

## **Grassroots facilities**

Next we need to the Government to continue to work with NGBs and maintain the investment it makes in the nation's sporting facilities. Long term investment in good quality facilities is shown to increase participation. In practice this means extending the proven Football Foundation facilities investment model. The Foundation is a unique model that takes significant Government investment into community sports facilities and leverages matched funding redistribution from the Premier League and FA. It's making a huge difference, delivering high quality multi-sport facilities across every community in England.

Facilities investment works. Another example already paying dividends is the LTA's Park Tennis Project, which is investing UK Government and LTA Tennis Foundation money into renovating dilapidated park tennis courts across Britain, and delivering an innovative digital platform for bookings that is already showing intervening to improve facilities drives footfall.

There is also some fantastic evidence to build on from the recent Rugby League World Cup. Government investment in facilities around the World Cup venues, from pitches to wheelchair access, has already started to bridge the gap between a successful global event and genuine legacy for the local communities.

The lesson is we must maintain the drive to host world events but double down even harder in considering the sporting legacy they offer local communities, a dividend that far outlasts the short term economic boost delivered by the tournaments themselves.

## **School sport**

No sports strategy will succeed if it doesn't start in schools. The place where children learn their love of sport and gain a physical literacy that will not only equip them with skills for life but very likely extend their life given the preventative health benefits of being fit and active.

The Department for Education has to deliver on the commitment of 2 hours of sport in the National Curriculum. Not as an aspiration or an intention but as a codified commitment within the National Curriculum.

Then when we have the two hours, how to best deliver? Of course not every primary school can employ a specialist PE teacher nor buy equipment that is used only a few times a week. So let's revisit a model of school sports coordinators, centred around a dedicated PE specialist teacher looking after a batch of schools together. The economy of scale in this model easily extends to sharing facilities and equipment and delivers a ready-made structure for competitive sport.

And how to make sure every school treats this seriously?

By making school sport part of the OFSTED inspection regime. Nothing would signify the recognition that society places on every child being fit and healthy than the standard of provision they receive at school being formally measured. This accountability would drive an overnight transformation.

## **Captaincy (leadership)**

Sport and politics share one common factor. Leadership matters. The manager and captain set the tone. So if we want to see transformative reforms in the sport sector, it will need a cross-Whitehall effort, led by the Prime Minister and ensuring buy-in from all of their Cabinet Ministers. We know the positive impact sport

can make to the agendas of so many Government departments.

Those who have read this far will know of the positive impact sport can make across so many of the Government's departments – beyond the obvious and enormous health benefits it can boost our efforts for tackling crime, preventing anti-social behaviour, building local community spirit, underpinning global diplomatic missions, all the while maximising outdoor green and blue (water) spaces and protecting our environment.

We need no less than the Secretaries of State covering these responsibilities to fully embrace sport. This is where the Government's captain – the Prime Minister – comes in. We need the PM to chair a sport and activity committee that joins the dots in the Government's effort on sport.

First item on their agenda should be an effort to join up the projects and initiatives that stretch across these Departments into a co-ordinated offer to give every child the hour a day of physical activity (inside and outside of school) as recommended by the Chief Medical Officer.

### **Creative accountancy**

Finally, some innovative ideas for extra funding that won't worry long distance runner Chancellor Jeremy Hunt or his shadow, the swimmer Rachel Reeves.

Let's increase physical activity by not turning off our precious daylight. In other words, not turning our clocks back in the autumn. Children and adults across the country see their opportunities for activity dwindle as the dark kicks in. And those fortunate enough to play on must consume expensive floodlight energy resources we want to minimise to save money and the environment.

A simple idea that would at a stroke increase participation, without costing a single extra penny, is to provide an extra hour for people to play sport in the daylight, and being bolder, let's see those who profit from sport make their contribution.

Betting companies are using sport every single day. Yet sport does not receive a fair return for the use of its events and competitions (fixtures and match data) in these services. Every other commercial entity that uses sport – broadcasters, sponsors, hospitality providers, merchandisers and ticket sellers – pays in full for the right to do so. Betting does not.

Sports do not receive any rights fees due to anomaly of an EU Database law and an ECJ judgment that found against British sport. Let's use a Brexit dividend to correct this wrong and unleash a flow of funds to our grassroots.

Sport and exercise have a fundamental role to play in dealing with the obesity crisis. Activity is a literal magic pill that keeps you fit and healthy. How about giving sport a much needed helping hand in this direction by taxing products that create the obesity in the first place – food and drink products that are high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) – and redirecting the proceeds into our sporting infrastructure.

Just as the soft drink Levy has made a real difference to the formulation of soft drinks and allowed the investment in the PE premium, a HFSS levy could unleash the third wave of sporting progress.

To end on a note of optimism we know that the leaders of both political parties both understand this brief and live it. Keir with his Arsenal and five-a-side and Rishi who loves nothing more than batting at the crease.

I hope this pamphlet will see them transfer this commitment to their day job.





Chapter Five: Elite and Professional Sport

# Olympic and Paralympic Sport and Major Events



Written by:

**Sally Bolton**



# Cohesion, reputation, impact – The UK leading the world in elite sport

## Olympic and Paralympic Sport

We all remember where we were for those Olympic and Paralympic moments so indelibly etched in our nation's history. Seb Coe taking gold in Moscow and LA, Sally Gunnell's stunning performance in Barcelona, Tanni Grey Thompson taking Sydney by storm, Kelly Holmes lighting up Athens and Ellie Simmonds winning the nation's hearts in Beijing to name just a few. These are the moments that bring communities across our nation together, that inspire a country of sport lovers and that demonstrate the very best of Britain to the world.

Thanks to the continued investment from the Government and the National Lottery, the UK public has been able to experience more and more of these moments over the last 25 years

as the UK has become an established Olympic and Paralympic powerhouse. Since Atlanta 1996 when they finished 36th in the medal table, below the likes of North Korea, Algeria and Romania, winning just a solitary gold medal, Team GB has gone from strength to strength. Finishing in the top 5 in the medal table at the last 4 Olympic and Paralympic Games and, at Rio 2016, becoming the first team ever to increase their medal count at the Games immediately following a home Games.

These astonishing successes are not just impressive sporting feats, they also deliver significant positive impacts for the UK public. For example, we know that the UK's success in Olympic and Paralympic sport drives economic growth (generating 1.3% of the UK's Gross Value Added), generates pride in Britain (with ¾ of the

population feeling a sense of pride when British athletes succeed at an Olympic and Paralympic Games) and inspires people right across the country (with 66% of the British public saying they were inspired by the success of our Olympic and Paralympic team at Tokyo 2020).

We should also recognise that the UK's success in Olympic and Paralympic sport showcases the best of Britain to the world and can help unlock greater value for the UK beyond sport alone. Sports diplomacy and sport as a form of soft power is increasingly recognised as an important tool within the international landscape. Our Olympic and Paralympic success can play a leading role in strengthening international sporting partnerships and the UK's influence as a force for good, while delivering diplomatic and economic benefits.

But the incredible levels of performance of British athletes in the last 20 years and the resultant positive impacts on communities in every corner of the UK cannot be taken for granted. It takes dedication, expertise and investment to ensure that our athletes can access the very best coaching, training facilities and medical support and therefore arrive at an Olympic and Paralympic Games with the best possible chance of achieving their dreams, inspiring the nation and contributing to the success of our wider sporting system.

We know that Olympic and Paralympic sport plays a vital role in generating the revenues and growing fan engagement that are so crucial to the sustainability and viability of our sporting system. This is why it is not 'either/or' when it comes to funding elite and grassroots sport but must be a combination of both as both are crucial to the future success of sport in the UK at every level. It is also why it is so important that future memorable moments from Olympic and Paralympic Games remain free to air and accessible to the whole British public - both

on television screens across the land as well as on digital channels - so that these moments can continue to bring the nation together and inspire a love of sport and physical activity in people from every background.

Continuing to compete at the top of the Olympic and Paralympic medals tables however is becoming harder and harder to achieve. Our competitors such as Japan, Australia, France, the USA and China are investing more and more heavily in their athletes' potential.

If the UK is to continue to lead the world in Olympic and Paralympic sport and ensure the nation maximises the benefits of this success, then the following are essential:

- ◆ Securing the long-term investment necessary to ensure the sustainability of the UK sporting system and to enable Great Britain and Northern Ireland to continue to compete in the top 5 of the medal table at Olympic and Paralympic Games in Los Angeles 2028 and Brisbane 2032.
- ◆ Leveraging the power of sport, and UK sporting excellence, to enhance the UK's sporting, diplomatic and economic interests by creating and delivering an integrated Sport Diplomacy Strategy.



## Major sporting events

London 2012 was a defining moment in the history of the United Kingdom; it improved Britain's reputation in the world, drove economic and trade benefits for UK plc and brought the nation together.

It also helped secure the UK's reputation as a world leader in successfully delivering the biggest and best sporting events in the world and began a golden decade for the hosting of major sporting events in the UK. Since 2012, National Lottery and Government funding has helped to secure 130 international major sporting events for the UK, providing many inspirational moments for people in every corner of our country to enjoy and supporting athletes to reach their potential.

These events deliver significant positive impacts for communities the length and breadth of the UK. In 2023 alone, major sporting events have been hosted in towns and cities from Portsmouth to Sunderland and from Swansea to Glasgow. We know these events deliver positive impacts for the UK public by: spreading prosperity around the country (the host cities of Euro 2022, for example, received an £81 million boost in economic activity as a result of the tournament), enhancing Britain's reputation on the world stage (through initiatives such as 'UK House' at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games ) and driving positive social change (with 70% of people thinking that the London 2012 Paralympic Games had a positive impact on attitudes to disabled people).

The UK sporting system is ambitious about what is possible for the next decade with plans to bring some of the biggest sporting events in the world to the UK, including the Men's European Football Championships, the Tour De France, the Women's and Men's Rugby Union World Cups and the World Athletics Championships.

It is estimated that the events earmarked to be brought to the UK in the next decade will generate over £2.5 billion of socio-economic benefits to the UK, offering excellent returns on the amount of public money invested and building on the legacy left by the golden decade since London 2012.

But the international landscape is becoming more and more competitive, and the UK is having to work harder and harder to secure the biggest and most impactful sporting events in the face of huge competition from rivals in the Middle East and amongst the BRICS nations. To stay ahead and to ensure the biggest and best sporting events in the world continue to come to the UK we therefore urgently need to:

- ◆ Deliver a long-term event hosting strategy, backed up by a long-term budget. This would provide the flexibility to adapt to international event hosting timelines and prioritise those major sporting events which have the most relevance to the British public, the most potential to deliver lasting social impacts on communities across the UK and can demonstrate the best value for money.
- ◆ Introduce a Major Events Bill to Parliament which provides the capability for a national interest status to be conferred on the highest priority events. This would support their smooth delivery by providing the necessary commitments in areas including taxation, prevention of secondary ticketing and protection of commercial rights.
- ◆ Build on the UK's position as a world leader in women's sport by hosting the biggest and most impactful women's sport events in the world over the next decade.



Chapter Five: Elite and Professional Sport

# Sport and Soft Power



Written by:

**Nick King** (MD Henham Strategy)

# Sport and soft power – making the most of our sporting credentials

**Most of the contributions within this pamphlet focus on the potential of sport and physical activity within the domestic context. They are right to do so given that most voters (and therefore most politicians) prioritise this in a General Election campaign.**

But one of the themes which emerges from the other contributions is a story of untapped potential; of how much more could be done if the UK were to use sport and physical activity more deliberately and more strategically. That same truth also applies in an international context, including with regards to soft power.

The concept of soft power was established<sup>178</sup> by the American political scientist, Joseph Nye, and relates to a country's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion (as opposed to hard power, which concerns countries' ability to coerce or compel others). It is widely accepted that the UK has an abundance of riches when it comes to the soft power it can wield. Shakespeare, the monarchy and the BBC all have huge global appeal and the UK's creative industries are consumed (normally in the English language) right around the world. Each of these helps the UK appeal to international audiences and to further its own values, and interests, accordingly.

But this chapter is predicated on the idea that its sporting assets are the soft power tools the UK has at its disposal which are perhaps the least appreciated, and the least well exploited.

Virtually every Briton who travels overseas and talks to a foreign taxi driver will have had the 'Which Premier League team do you support?' conversation, demonstrating the reach which just one domestic league has around the world. But the UK is known for far more than the Premier League and its sporting appeal cuts across class and cultural boundaries – that's where its power lies.

The UK is not the only country whose sport reaches global audiences. As the author Simon Barnes put it, 'sport has far more effect on the way we see and understand other nations than trade, or cultural exchange or tourism' before pointing out that if you asked people to pick any country in the world and then to name a leading politician, artist or athlete, it will almost always be the athletes who get named (comparing Cristiano Ronaldo to the Portuguese Prime Minister to make his point).<sup>179</sup>

But the UK probably is unique in terms of the pre-eminence of its historic reputation in sport (a grounding upon which it can capitalise) and in terms of the vast array of sport it has as its disposal to use in a soft power context.

It would be churlish to claim that recent Governments have not had some understanding of the power of sport in an international context. Both Labour and Conservative Governments have worked hard to attract major events to the UK, and to capitalise on their presence when hosting them. Obvious examples since the turn of the century include the London Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Manchester and Birmingham Commonwealth Games and the Rugby, Cricket and Netball World Cups.

But major events are just one piece of the jigsaw when it comes to the potential for the UK to use sport effectively as a soft power tool. Other events and the UK's wider sporting assets are barely considered at best and routinely ignored at worst.

This is despite the fact that the UK is uniquely blessed when it comes to its 'blue riband' events, such as Wimbledon, the Lord's Test Match, the FA Cup, Royal Ascot and the Grand National (to name but a few). Each of these are internationally renowned but barely exploited by the Government as a means of trying to build relationships or further specific interests or ambitions.

Beyond these blue riband events, the UK also benefits from the fact it is one of the most diverse in terms of the sports in which it participates (offering opportunities to forge relationships with a large range of countries), has globally recognised athletes in multiple sports and, perhaps most obviously in this context, is lucky enough to be home to the Premier League – the most internationally consumed sports league in the world.

The UK does not suffer from a lack of opportunities then, but from a lack of strategy and of implementation.

The idea that sport can reach important audiences, and extend influence abroad, is why so many countries are investing in their sporting credentials. Perhaps the most obvious current example is Saudi Arabian investment in a new domestic football league, in international assets (such as Newcastle United) and in new sporting properties (e.g. LIV golf). But Saudi is just following a trail blazed by others – including almost every football World Cup or Olympic host, India with its Indian Premier League in cricket and countless other examples from history.

Some of the more notorious historic examples are cases where authorisation states

(including Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and the Apartheid regime in South Africa) have tried to use sport to demonstrate sporting prestige and thereby generate support. But there are just as many examples of countries with whom the UK shares values taking a more deliberate approach to the use of sport as a tool of soft power.

The diplomatic potential of sport has been recognised by countries including, but in no way limited to, Australia, Canada, France, Japan, Singapore and the USA. In each of those countries one can find a strategic approach to sport and it being utilised in a way which recognises sport's reach, value and impact.<sup>180</sup>

Yet despite being able to see this international best practice, and having a surfeit of assets at its disposal, the UK neglects to plan or act in a strategic, joined up or deliberate way. This despite the fact that landmark research by the University of Edinburgh has shown that soft power generally, and sport specifically, allows the UK to attract international students, foreign visitors and inward investment.<sup>181</sup>

In the case of the Premier League, this is beyond doubt: VisitBritain research shows that hundreds of thousands of international visitors watch Premier League football each year, with hundreds of millions of pounds spent, with many visitors travelling outside of London, helping boost regional economies. According to international polling conducted by Yonder, 97% of people who say they are interested in the Premier League state they think better of the UK as a result of the League.<sup>182</sup>

So what more can the UK do to take advantage of its unique sporting pedigree and assets?

A sensible first step would be to follow the lead of like-minded nations and produce a sports diplomacy strategy. That should set out what the UK wants to achieve through sport and how it intends to achieve it.

But to be successful in that regard, the Government needs to ensure the ‘background plumbing’ of Whitehall is working well. The FCDO, the DCMS and DBT all have skin in the game – and other Departments (e.g. the MOD) might too. At the moment these Departments rarely come together even to share intelligence and relevant developments, let alone to produce coordinated plans. There should be better coordination between these Departments, ideally overseen by a No10 or a Cabinet Office secretariat.

The UK has a proud record of successfully bidding for, and making the most of, major international events. This ambition should be maintained, but far more emphasis should be put on the ‘everyday’ events which are anything but. Premier League matches, Wimbledon, Royal Ascot and a whole host of other events, should be the focus of events for UK Embassies overseas and, more importantly, used as opportunities to entertain and influence key diplomatic and commercial targets on home soil. The Government should become far less parochial in its approach and recognise that, in most cases, this would be money well spent.

But the Government should not expect, or be expected, to do everything itself.

It should encourage others, including the Devolved Administrations and the Mayoral Combined Authorities, to use sport more actively and effectively and it should support their efforts wherever possible.

And, finally, the British Council should put far more emphasis on sport as a weapon in its armoury. It ought to think of sport in the same way as it thinks of the arts – a superb way of furthering UK national interest and advancing British soft power. The British Council wants reach, relevance and respect – and sport in the UK provides that in spades

In fact, sport is probably unrivalled in terms of its ability to reach hundreds of millions of people at a stroke – as well as providing a means to build relationships with some of the people most important to the UK Government, diplomatically and commercially. Sport has global reach, impact and influence. It should be considered the jewel in the UK’s soft power crown – and the UK Government should treat it accordingly.

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# Conclusion

**We aimed to generate 100 cost-neutral policies that could stimulate policy makers thinking and the political parties could champion in their manifestos and future policy agendas. This has been achieved. We were surprised by the level of desire by sporting organisations, perhaps not often so well known, to have the opportunity to contribute and ensure their ideas were heard. It is these policy ideas, generated by the contributors, that are the heart of this book and provide policy makers with some potentially excellent solutions.**

One of the challenges of this type of wide-ranging policy book is that it is almost impossible to provide a satisfactory conclusion to all the conclusions reached by the contributors. As this book shows, the sector operates and engages at many different levels of policy making, and amongst multiple policy areas making it complex to navigate. While we must be cautious about what conclusions we draw from this 'self-selecting' book – where some parts of the sector are more represented than others – there are some broad conclusions we can draw.

If the book does one thing it highlights the diversity of the sport and physical activity sector which runs along many vectors – elite and grassroots, public and private, local, and national, independently run and government regulated. It highlights multiple policy touch points: from intervention in some of our most deprived communities supporting a range of social policy outcomes including improving physical and mental health, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and enhancing community cohesion; to providing leisure and recreational services in

urban and rural areas; to elite and professional sport that supports economic growth, regeneration and can be used as soft power to help position the UK internationally. While there is cross-over, these are provided by many different organisations with different objectives and approaches. This makes the policy narrative for the sport and physical activity sector complex.

This also means that the sector faces many challenges, which will need to be addressed as part of implementing any policy ideas contained in this book. Such challenges include:

- ◆ Developing its workforce capability.
- ◆ Increasing its use of data and evaluation.
- ◆ Upgrading existing physical infrastructure.
- ◆ Improving its own financial sustainability.
- ◆ Evidencing its own performance in tackling social issues.
- ◆ Utilising better the wider public realm.

Policy ideas that do not take these challenges into account will not be as effective. Equally, tackling these issues will be crucial; firstly in providing capacity, and secondly in demonstrating its credibility as a partner to tackle national challenges.

In addition, there are several common themes which underlie the landscape in which the sector operates and so must inform any discussion. We summarise these briefly below:

## ◆ Financing

Calls for more investment from government are frequent and common. But it should be recognized that much of the current

investment in sporting activity is required to simply maintain the current system, leaving little over for strategic policy changes.

In addition, the current economic and global challenges mean that it is hard to see where new resources will come from. This is despite the ambitious objectives which have been set out in recent Government strategies. There has always been hope that the sector can attract monies from other departments and areas, but those more experienced in the sector remain skeptical. The sector will therefore need to be realistic in its expectations of government funding.

But it is also clear the current models of government funding, using Treasury models which look solely at financial cost, are no longer appropriate for the long social value provided by sport and physical activity.

Perhaps the best opportunity we have to bring together the dual challenge of finance and value lies in the concept of WELLBY: to recalculate of GDP from a pure economic measurement to one based on a wider measurement of social value now embedded in the Treasury Green Book. This would provide a huge opportunity for the sector but would require much better use of monitoring and evaluation than the sector currently employs.

### ◆ Resources

Like being in Government, sports organisations are often expected to do everything, now. This is unreasonable. Not all policy imperatives can be implemented at the same time, especially at time of budget constraint and ever-expanding demands. These need to be strategically staggered over a long period of time. Both Get Active and Uniting the Movement provide some guidance about where the sector should

focus its energies. As the contributions in this book highlight however, the sporting sector has many elements and not all of them are equally or commercially resourced or focused to deliver immediate change.

Grass roots and community activity will always have the biggest impact, at population level, on activity levels. Whilst elite sport inspires, it is these organisations who are actually the deliverers and providers on the doorstep. People may be inspired by Rafael Nadal, but is their local tennis club, school or community organisation who will enable them to play. It is this part of the landscape, however that has the most limited resources. This means that our often most community-based organisations are being relied upon by government departments to deliver the largest strategic objectives. If that is going to continue to be the case, a new approach will be required.

### ◆ Healthcare backdrop

Sport and physical activity can be most effective in the role of preventative and rehabilitative health. It can therefore play in crucial role in assisting the health sector. If it is to partner the health sector, it needs to be realistic about the funding challenges which that sector itself faces, specifically in relation to social care, and its credibility in helping with those challenges. As one of our Advisory Panel members pointed out, (although not in this book), any incoming government will need to recognise the significant challenge of social care funding. Any effective attempt to solve this problem will include pivoting Integrated Care Systems towards prevention.

This provides a huge opportunity for the sector, and, if successful, it would have a massive impact on improving public health. In addition, it could trigger longer term savings over many years that would then allow local authorities to fund sport

and leisure. The benefits to our sector could therefore be huge. However, in order to achieve this, it will need to reconsider how it can be most effective in society. This may involve moving away from a “Sport for Sport’s Sake” mentality to a recognition of serving broader societal aims. In many instances, this may require a significant shift in mindset, at both individual and organisation level.

### ◆ Position of local authorities

Local authorities have a crucial role to play in delivering local community sport and physical activity. They are the biggest public sector investor in sport and leisure, traditionally investing over £1bn per year. They are the biggest funder of sport and leisure services and facilities, whether parks, swimming pools or community centres. The facilities they provide enable vast amount of physical activity, whether conventional sports in a leisure centre or private activities in a park.

However, they have also seen extensive and wide-ranging cuts over the last decade, as well as increasing responsibilities for social care. The financial pressures they are under is reflected in the number of councils either declaring or warning of bankruptcy. To set ambitious targets for participation, whilst ignoring the financial difficulties faced by local authorities, is unsustainable. Central government cannot rely on local authorities to facilitate their public health objectives without the necessary resources.

Addressing this issue will be a vital part of improving physical activity levels.

### ◆ Role of central government

Many areas of our sector run along the public/private vector. This means that the role of central government can be crucial in some areas and almost irrelevant in others. As a result, the place of central government

in the ideas in this book is not always consistent. Many of our contributors call for greater governmental intervention to help deliver change. There are calls to introduce new legislation and for more regulation to make certain policies and approaches mandatory.

Other contributors highlight that sporting organisations are already over-loaded and over-stretched and call for ‘less red tape’ to help stimulate the supply-side. This inconsistency can make it difficult for even the most sympathetic policy makers to know how to respond. One of the issues our sector must address is to ensure that our approach to government must be strategic and well defined, so that where differences occur, it is clear how these fit into a wider overall picture.

What emerges overwhelmingly in this book is how everyone in the sector, despite their differences, wants the same outcome: for a healthy, active, and productive population with a flourishing elite and professional sport environment. To be unified on the objective is a huge first step. The difficulty is how to bring together a diverse and complex sector to achieve it. The importance of collaboration cannot be understated. And what is equally clear is that the existing, conventional approaches are no longer appropriate. The last 20 years have not produced the results that are needed.

So to seriously tackle the ongoing issues, we need to refocus our approaches and work together to achieve them. As a sector, we do not yet know exactly what those approaches are. We must work together to find the answers. But we believe this book starts to put some of this thinking in one place and sets up the connections and conversations that need to take place.

We have as much work to do as the Government does. The prize could not be more important.



## Interactive policy

Scan here to view our interactive policy table.

Published by The Sports Think Tank

January 2023

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