

Thirty-second Report of Session 2022-23

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity

Introduction from the Committee

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games cost £8.8 billion. The government committed to delivering a lasting legacy as part of the Games, including increasing the number of adults participating in sports. The proportion of adults participating in sport at least once a week declined in the first three years following the Games. In 2015, government introduced a new strategy to focus on the social good that taking part in sport and physical activity can deliver and enabling more people from all backgrounds to regularly take part in meaningful sport and physical activity, volunteering and experiencing live sport. By November 2019, 63.3% of adults in England were physically active. Community sport and physical activity brought an estimated contribution of £85.5 billion to England in 2017–18 in social and economic benefits, including £9.5 billion from improved physical and mental health.

The Department for Culture, Media & Sport (the Department) has overall policy responsibility for maximising participation in sport and physical activity. It spends most of the money it allocates to this through Sport England, its arm's length body created in 1996 to develop grassroots sport and get more people active across England. Sport England spent an average of £323 million a year between 2015–16 and 2020–21. Multiple other central and local government bodies also have a role in encouraging physical activity and there are a range of stakeholders across the third and private sectors, including facility providers and grassroots sports clubs. The department is currently developing a new sports strategy to replace its 2015 strategy, which will work alongside Sport England's own strategy published in 2021.

Based on a report by the National Audit Office, the Committee took evidence on Monday 31 October 2022 from the former Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The Committee published its report on 8 January 2023. This is the government's response to the Committee's report.

Relevant reports

- NAO report: [Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity](#) – Session 2022-23 (HC 72)
- PAC report: [Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity](#) – Session 2022-23 (HC 46)

Government response to the Committee

1. PAC conclusion: The 2012 Olympic games delivered substantial economic benefits to the UK, but its participation legacy fell short of expectations.

1. PAC recommendation: Using its learning from hosting recent major sporting events, the Department should clearly set out in its Treasury Minute response, the intended participation outcomes from hosting future events. In-particular this should focus on the performance metrics it intends to use and the long-term approach for monitoring these.

- 1.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Recommendation Implemented

1.2 While the government agrees with this recommendation, it notes that participation outcomes will vary from event to event.

1.3 The UK is world-leading in delivering major sporting events. Although the government expect these to have a positive impact on participation in physical activity, they help achieve multiple objectives, also driving economic growth, improving infrastructure, instilling civic and national pride, and spreading the UK's international influence.

1.4 The UK has staged over 130 major sporting events since 2012, and learned lessons from each one. The UK continue to attract and deliver the biggest and best events, a valuable national legacy of the London 2012 Games.

1.5 A UK Sport report found that sporting events (excluding the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games) staged in the UK in 2022 had a direct economic impact of £132 million, supported 1,600 jobs and had a 6:1 return on investment. The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games interim evaluation estimates £870.7 million of economic benefits and 7,400 additional jobs, mainly in Birmingham and West Midlands. Estimates of the impact on participation are due later in 2023.

1.6 The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS or the department) and UK Sport support organisers to galvanise participation and the wider impacts. Over the past decade, DCMS have learned that a clear plan and dedicated funding from the outset are critical; significant benefits do not occur without targeted planning and investment.

1.7 The government has also increasingly embedded robust monitoring and evaluation, throughout an event's lifecycle, including evaluating the impacts of changes to infrastructure and communities that support increased participation.

1.8 This approach is outlined in the [Gold Framework](#) – UK Sport and DCMS guidance on bidding and hosting major events – and has been implemented with success for recent events, including with regard to participation outcomes.

1.9 The Women's UEFA EURO 2022 legacy programme provided over 416,000 new opportunities for women and girls to be involved in football; a full impact report on participation is expected this year. The Rugby League World Cup invested £25.8 million, including £8 million from the UK government which was put towards the social impact programme and included improving facilities.

1.10 Looking ahead, the Women's Rugby World Cup 2025 legacy programme will aim to attract 1,000 new female coaches, 500 match officials and 100,000 female players by 2027. Progress will be measured and published in a post-event report.

1.11 Major sporting events have a transformational impact. The government is clear that all events must have focused social impact plans – including discrete investment towards improving participation. These examples demonstrate that participation objectives will vary depending on the sport, the size of the event, the scale of the investment and timescales involved. The government will continue to ensure that these are built into each of the events as well as within the robust monitoring and evaluation process that we require to be put in place.

2. PAC conclusion: Sport England's focus on local initiatives and encouraging those who are least active to take part has not yet resulted in meaningful change in national participation rates.

2. PAC recommendation: In its Treasury Minute response, Sport England should report back to the Committee on how it expects each of its initiatives will translate into change in participation rates at a national level, and how it will evaluate this

2.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation

Recommendation Implemented

2.2 Population activity levels were at an all-time high prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and Sport England's strategy seeks to mobilise a cross-sector movement to collectively support more people to be active in the way that best works for them.

2.3 Sport England invests money in five broad areas. Each of these has its own specific objectives, a robust 'theory of change' that sets out how its work in each area will increase activity levels, decrease inactivity levels, address inequalities in sport and physical activity, and improve the experiences of children and young people. These five areas also have their own measurement and evaluation plan to robustly evidence progress and the contribution they are making to the organisation's overall objective to 'unite a movement' for sport and physical activity.

2.4 These five areas are:

- System Partners – Sport England's investment to sustain a network of more than 130 organisations that forms (and transforms) the backbone of sport and physical activity in England and that underpins the activity habits of around 14 million people each week. Sport England have worked closely with partners to build a collective approach to evaluation, tracking the impact of investment at individual organisation, system and community levels, and are in the process of commissioning an independent evaluation supplier to lead this moving forward.
- Place – Sport England's investment in facilities, statutory planning function, work in the 12 Local Delivery Pilots (LDP's) and the planned expansion of place-based working into more and more places across the country, in a way that ensures people in those areas are more likely to be active. Sport England are currently working with an independent evaluation and learning supplier to understand how the LDP's and other place-based investments are delivering impact, and target outcomes. This work will inform the expansion programme and ensure the resources invested are best targeted at reducing inactivity levels and addressing and reducing the stubborn inequalities that currently exist.
- Open Funding – Sport England's mechanism for getting money directly into the hands of local and national organisations to provide opportunities to get active and address inequalities. Sport England evaluate the impact of its high-volume low-value open funding via surveys of funding recipients, supported by direct evidence from participants in some cases, and through working with independent evaluation suppliers for Sport England's larger scale open funds. Sport England recognise that part of the impact of our Small Grant funding is the maintenance of existing activity, but future prioritisation will be on driving activity levels by reaching those clubs and community organisations previously less well served by public funds.
- Campaigns – Sport England's work to change attitudes towards sport and physical activity, particularly for those less likely to take part, in a way that encourages them to become more active. Sport England evaluate the impact of our campaigns through nationally representative surveys of campaign target groups, tracking the change in key outcome metrics over time
- Other – Investment into targeted areas to support the wider sport system and create the long-term conditions for success, e.g. improving governance and safeguarding standards. This is vital underpinning work to ensure that anyone participating in sport and physical activity in the community has an experience that is safe, accessible and enjoyable. Sport England follow its evaluation and learning approach for delivery across Uniting the

Movement, and likewise its measurement and accountability framework, to structure and design the approach to measurement and evaluation for all new investments.

3. PAC conclusion: The Department has not yet set out how it will determine whether its efforts to tackle persistent inactivity levels are a success.

3. PAC recommendation: In its new strategy, the Department should set out the specific outcomes it is aiming to achieve with inactive groups, what targets it is working towards, and how it will measure progress.

3.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: June 2023

3.2 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation and will set this out shortly in the new Sport Strategy.

3.3 The government's new Sport Strategy will build on the success of the previous government strategy 'Sporting Future' and have a clear focus on addressing inactivity levels and the barriers that prevent people from participating in sport.

3.4 At the heart of the strategy is the ambition for more people to have access to facilities and participate in sport and physical activity, no matter their location or background.

3.5 As part of the development of the strategy, DCMS will work alongside Sport England to establish a new measurement framework ensuring that it remains consistent with that of [Uniting the Movement](#). DCMS will do this by monitoring how money is being spent and the core key performance metrics as set out through Uniting the Movement and ensuring the government have the data to show how it is having an impact at a local level. This framework will allow us to clearly measure progress against the targets which will define success of the strategy.

3.6 The government believes that there is no single policy solution to delivering significant change to population wide activity levels and that collaboration and a shared ambition across various sector partners and government will be required for real, sustained impact to be achieved.

4. PAC conclusion: Sport England has not yet translated its understanding of the barriers to participation into action to enable inactive groups to participate in sport and physical activity.

4. PAC recommendation: Sport England should, by June 2023, write to us with details of the barriers for the least active groups, and what action it is taking to address them to ensure people have the motivation, confidence and opportunity to participate in physical activity.

4.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: June 2023

4.2 Sport England will write to the Committee to set out the headline barriers for the least active groups, and the action they are taking to support people to be active in the way that best works for them.

4.3 The barriers to getting active and taking part in different forms of sport and physical activity are complex, multi-faceted and personal. Barriers to activity are often driven by specific social, cultural and economic factors.

4.4 The appropriate action to address inequalities in activity are therefore equally multi-faceted, with action varying from one demographic group to another and from person to person.

4.5 Sport England will continue to support people to be active where they are able to exert specific influences to contribute to behaviour change, and cross-government working will be crucial. This will be a key pillar throughout the government's new sport strategy.

5. PAC conclusion: It is unacceptable that Sport England does not know where in the country its grants are spent or whether these are genuinely helping those most in need.

5. PAC recommendation: Sport England should, as part of its 2023–24 Annual Report and Accounts, clearly set out a full geographical breakdown of where its funding is being spent and how it is ensuring spending is targeted at deprived and less active communities. If this is not possible, it should write to us and explain why that is the case and commit to implementing in future annual reports.

5.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: October 2024

5.2 Sport England will take appropriate action to build on the substantial investment data already published and recorded its Annual Report and Accounts to date.

5.3 Sport England invests public money responsibly and transparently, recording and [publishing data on all grant recipients](#) – including location data down to postcode level. Sport England publishes an updated register of grant awards on a quarterly basis, with awards dating back to 2009 listed in full.

5.4 These records demonstrate Sport England's commitment to providing funding to deprived communities, as 19.2% of local level investment from July 2021 to June 2022 has been for projects in Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 1 areas.

5.5 Sport England will continue to provide a breakdown of where National Lottery and Exchequer funding is invested on a quarterly basis.

5.6 In some cases, where funding supports the delivery of activity across a local authority area, counties or regions, Sport England does not currently capture the range of locations where beneficiaries may reside but will seek to capture these data moving forward.

5.7 Sport England will endeavour to set out appropriate detail in their 2023-24 Annual Report and Accounts and explain how investments are being targeted at deprived and less active communities.

6. PAC conclusion: The Department's approach to working in partnership with other organisations to encourage people to take part in sport and physical activity is not yet effective.

6. PAC recommendation: In its new strategy, the Department should set out what it and Sport England will do differently to ensure sustained integration and collaboration with other bodies to achieve increased levels of physical activity.

6.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: June 2023

6.2 Both DCMS and Sport England believe the barriers to getting active cannot be solved by the sport and physical activity sector alone. Both organisations are committed to working together to build greater collaboration from all parties to support more people to be active, including across government departments. This was evident in the recent joint announcement on school sport which committed to long-term funding for PE, an expectation of 2 hours of PE per week, and parity of PE provision for boys and girls. DCMS, the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care all contributed funding to this shared aim.

6.3 In recognition of this, Sport England has made a clear commitment in Uniting the Movement to influence change by connecting with health and wellbeing, creating active environments and creating positive experiences for children and young people.

6.4 Sport England's partnerships with organisations within and beyond the sport and physical activity sector have played a critical role in increasing population activity levels over the past decade.

6.5 Sport England are working to broaden their network of system partners who they fund on a regular basis. From 2015 to 2022, Sport England increased its number of funded partners from 107 to 135 whilst investing project funding in thousands more.

6.6 DCMS is now working with Sport England to establish a new measurement framework that will provide clear evidence on the impact of Sport England's distribution of public money, whilst also evidencing better the contribution of specific funding interventions.

6.7 This will include working with Sport England who have introduced a new partner evaluation framework which tracks the impact of sector partners and provides six-monthly reports evidencing spend and impact. In addition to this, DCMS will look towards new sources of data which will allow DCMS to track the progress being made in tackling inactivity in real time.

6.8 These changes will improve DCMS's understanding on what spending is proving effective and when it is appropriate to scale successful projects up. Equally DCMS and Sport England will also be able to identify when they are required to adapt in instances that projects are not succeeding.

7. PAC conclusion: The Department does not know if leisure facilities are financially sustainable or are delivering the sports facilities that communities need.

7. PAC recommendation: The Department should urgently review the condition of leisure facilities and, working with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and other government departments, take action to ensure their financial sustainability. The Department should write to us with an update on this review by June 2023.

7.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: before Summer 2023

7.2 The government recognises the positive impact that leisure facilities, gyms and sports clubs can have on individuals' physical and mental wellbeing. They also provide vital social spaces and community hubs.

7.3 The government also recognises that the recent rises in cost of living and energy costs is of concern for many clubs and local authorities. In response to this, DCMS have provided support via two schemes which leisure facilities were eligible for.

7.4 In September 2022, the government announced the Energy Bill Relief Scheme (EBRS) which provided £18 billion worth of support for all businesses and other non-domestic energy users. This will then be replaced with the Energy Bills Discount Scheme (EBDS) which will support businesses between April 2023 and March 2024. In addition to these schemes in March 2023 the government announced the £63m Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF) that will provide targeted support to leisure centres with swimming pools to help mitigate short term pressures and deliver longer term sustainability through capital investments.

7.5 Through the SPSF, the government will continue to review the condition and financial suitability of the sector and provide targeted support as necessary. DCMS will be able to provide an update on the progress of this work in June 2023. DCMS is also working on the creation of facilities strategy which will outline the government's vision for the future of these vital assets including to provide guidance to the sector and local partners on the role of this provision, reinforcing the need to join up with the health sector, and encouraging investment in sustainable facilities.