



House of Commons
Digital, Culture, Media and
Sport Committee

Sport in our communities: Government Response to Committee's Fourth Report

**Third Special Report of Session
2021–22**

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The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and its associated public bodies.

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Publication

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Third Special Report

On 29 July 2021, the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee published its Fourth Report of Session 2021–22, [Sport in our communities](#) (HC 45). The Government Response was received on 29 September 2021 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

The Government welcomes the publication of the Committee's report and is grateful for the Committee's comprehensive inquiry into 'Sport in our communities'.

The Government wholeheartedly agrees with the Committee's assessment that there is a need to support, sustain and grow community and grassroots sport. It is imperative that we have a rich and varied sport offer so that physical activity is accessible to all, no matter a person's background or location. The Government agrees that the pandemic has reinforced the critical importance of community sport, which brings clear physical and mental health benefits, helps strengthen communities and boosts economic development. The Government also recognises the key role that governing bodies have played during the pandemic to distribute information and guidance to organisations.

Sporting Future – a new strategy for an active nation was published in December 2015 and a huge amount has been achieved since then. DCMS, Sport England and UK Sport have continued to embed the five outcomes that *Sporting Future* set out in everything that we do and invest in. These five outcomes are: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development.

The Government is working to improve the evidence base through the Active Lives survey and have established close working with Arms Length Bodies: Sport England, UK Sport, UK Anti-Doping and the Sports Ground Safety Authority, as well as the National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and sports themselves. DCMS have continued to work across government to harness the benefits that sport and physical activity can give rise to across a range of agendas – health, education, social cohesion, transport, the environment, and planning.

During the pandemic, the Government has worked to support the sport sector. The Government has provided unprecedented support to businesses through tax reliefs, cash grants and employee wage support, which many sport clubs have benefited from. On top of wider economic support, the Government announced a £100 million support fund for local authority leisure centres to ensure these important facilities remain available once public health restrictions are lifted.

Sport England has provided £270 million directly to support community sport clubs and exercise centres through this pandemic, via a range of funds including through the:

- **Community Emergency Fund (£35 million)**—awarded and paid to support clubs & community organisations.
- **Tackling Inequalities Fund (£20 million)**—targeted help for audiences worst affected by COVID, including people from BAME backgrounds, people with a disability and people with long term health conditions.

- **2020–21 (£115 million)**—allowed for awardees (NGBs, Active Partnerships and national partners) to resume normal service delivery once pandemic has passed. Since renewed up till March 2022.
- **Return to Play (£16.5 million)**—small awards and crowdfunding to help groups return to play.

As part of Sport England's 10 year strategy *Uniting the Movement* they have committed an extra £50 million (included in the £270 million figure at the start) to help grassroots sports clubs and organisations affected by the coronavirus pandemic. As at 31 March 2021, Sport England had made 9,216 awards and distributed £207,491,971 of this funding to a range of sports.

The £600 million Sports Survival Package has protected the immediate futures of major spectator sports in England. To date, we have publicly announced more than c.£230 million of support across 11 sports including: football, rugby union, rugby league, netball, badminton, basketball, ice hockey, tennis, horse racing, speedway and motorsport. In addition to the protection of spectator sports, the Survival Package has ensured provision for community sport has continued, demonstrated in the £36 million Rugby Football Union and £16.7 million Rugby Football League onward community loan schemes. The Summer phase of the Sport Survival Package has now launched and eligible organisations with financial need are invited to apply.

In addition to this financial support, throughout the pandemic, the Government has worked closely with Sport England to produce return to play guidance to support the effective assessment and management of COVID-19 risks in sporting venues.

The Government remains committed to increasing participation and activity levels amongst the population. As such, the Government is working towards a refreshed sport strategy to reflect the current environment with Covid. As part of this process, it will be consulting with the sector to capture their expertise and advice. The Government will look to bring together this work, as well as the Committee's own findings, and will set out its position and next steps for this work later this year. The last decade has seen fairly steady levels of engagement in community sport, however Covid has clearly had an impact on this. It is important we look at all the options to build back better and fitter from Covid, and to ensure a successful and sustainable future for grassroots sport.

The Government's response to the Committee's recommendations is below. The Minister for Sport and Tourism would also be happy to meet with the Chair of the Committee and continue the dialogue on this topic.

Responses to recommendations

1. ***We recommend that the Government initiate a sporting equivalent of the 'Eat Out to Help Out' campaign, entitled 'Work Out to Help Out', to incentivise volunteers and participants to get involved, participate in organised sport and support the sporting infrastructure, both in England and across the UK.*** (Paragraph 11)

The Government agrees with the intent behind this recommendation to encourage participation in organised sport, however it believes that the focus should be on allowing exercise and investing heavily to ensure community facilities are there, as a means to do

so. We believe this is the best action in the first instance and will continue to work on campaigns to encourage take-up of sport such as Sport England's successful *This Girl Can* campaign. We do not think that a financial incentive to 'work out' is needed but will continue to ensure everyone regardless of background can have the opportunity to participate.

Sports and physical activity are incredibly important for our physical and mental health, and are therefore important tools at our disposal as we seek to combat coronavirus. As such, grassroots sport and activity have been one of our priorities throughout the pandemic: we made sure that people could exercise at least once a day even during the height of the first period of enhanced national restrictions, and we opened up grassroots sport and leisure facilities as soon as it was safe to do so. The Government has provided unprecedented support to businesses through tax reliefs, cash grants and employee wage support, which many sport clubs have benefited from.

On top of wider economic support, the Government has delivered a £100 million support fund for local authority leisure centres to ensure these important facilities remained available once public health restrictions were lifted. The £600 million Sports Survival Package has protected the immediate futures of major spectator sports in England and provided onward benefits to grassroots sports through the RFL and SRU onward community loan schemes. The Government's Arm's-Length Body, Sport England has provided £270 million directly to support community sport clubs and exercise centres through this pandemic, via a range of funds.

To galvanise activity, Sport England created the *Join the Movement* campaign and this will be continuing as we recover from the pandemic. We are continuing to work with organisations to understand what they need and how we may be able to support them. In addition, the *This Girl Can* and *We Are Undefeatable* campaigns have also been running throughout Covid to support less active groups to be active.

The Department for Health and Social Care has also announced it will run a pilot scheme to explore what role incentives can play in helping encourage people to make healthier choices. Inspired by international examples such as the national programme in Singapore, the pilot will use financial incentives to support people to move more and eat better, and will launch in January 2022.

2. Before the end of this year, the Government should initiate a nation-wide communications campaign, similar to that of the '5 A Day' campaign, to emphasise the importance of children and young people engaging in at least 60 minutes of moderate activity every day. (Paragraph 15)

The Government agrees with the committee that it is important to encourage children and young people to engage in regular physical activity and intends to look further at this in our refreshed sport strategy.

We've seen in recent months in Tokyo how major sporting events can inspire the nation. Finishing 2nd and 4th in the medal tables at both Games is a major achievement which should not be underestimated. This country consistently punches well above its weight as a sporting nation. The athletes are inspirations to those young people starting out on their own sporting pathways and the Government is supportive of all Olympians and Parlympians getting out into schools to inspire the next generation. National Fitness Day

on the 22nd September also provides a clear opportunity to encourage young people to engage with physical activity and sport support the country to build back better following the pandemic.

The Government published the latest UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines in September 2019 which set out a clear recommendation that children and young people should engage in moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity for an average of at least 60 minutes per day across the week.

The Government is committed to ensuring that all children and young people have the best opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity. Our Sporting Future strategy sets out how important it is for all children to have a good experience of sport and physical activity while they are young.

Sport England has invested over £190 million into physical activity for children and young people over 2016–2021, including programmes such as the £40 million Families Fund, which encourages low-income families with children to do sport and physical activity together. Initiatives such as the Studio You video platform, funded by Sport England and powered by *This Girl Can*, are also encouraging more teenage girls to be active.

The Government's School Sport and Activity Action Plan was jointly published by the Department for Education, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and Department for Health and Social Care in July 2019. A key driver of this Action Plan is to ensure that all children and young people have access to at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. This is supported by £320 million per year through the Primary PE and sport premium.

More recently, in 2021 the Government has hosted roundtables on how to take support for young people even further. The Government has also committed to updating the Government sport strategy and the School Sport and Activity Action Plan in the coming months. Continuing to enable children and young people to engage in physical activity will be central to this work.

3. We recommend that the Government reconsider our previous recommendation to ring-fence further funds to ensure that the progress that was being made in physical activity levels within these groups is not set back by Covid-19, both by encouraging participation and by attracting leaders and volunteers from a range of communities and backgrounds across the UK. (Paragraph 20)

The Government agrees with the intentions of the recommendation in the importance of providing funding for tackling inequalities in participation. The Government has already provided a significant amount of funding in this area as set out below.

The Government is committed to tackling inequalities in participation and ensuring no groups are left behind and is working with Sport England to deliver on this commitment. Sport England's 10 year strategy *Uniting the Movement* is focused on providing opportunities to people and communities that have traditionally been left behind, and helping to remove barriers to activity. The Government, through DCMS has allocated £117 million Exchequer and £219 million Lottery in 2021–22 to Sport England in order to deliver on this strategy.

Sport England has devoted funding to specifically tackle inequalities in participation through the Tackling Inequalities Fund (TIF). TIF was set up in April 2020 to help the sport and physical activity sector through the Covid-19 pandemic. TIF was created with £20 million of National Lottery funding to try and help reduce the negative impact on activity levels in these under-represented groups, with a specific focus on: Lower socio-economic groups, Culturally diverse communities, Disabled people, people with long-term health conditions. Since its launch, it has enabled community groups to continue to exist and engage with their communities, supporting people to be engaged and active. With the first 12 months delivering some positive results, Sport England are planning for a further £20 million of investment over the autumn/winter of 2021/22.

Furthermore, the Government has allocated £600 million through the Sport Survival Package as a direct response to the spectator restrictions placed on sports organisations as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the package's primary objectives is to minimise the long-term damage to participation through safeguarding investment into grassroots community activity and women's sport which is vital to tackling inequality. As such, grassroots and community sport have benefited from funding through the £36 million Rugby Football Union and £16.7 million Rugby Football League onward loan schemes as part of the package. Likewise, women's sport have received in excess of £12 million funding supporting sports such as rugby, football, netball, basketball and badminton.

4. We recommend that the Government should set out, in its response to this Report, how else it will work with Sport England over the next 18-months to encourage people to volunteer across the community and grassroots sport sector and reduce drop-out rates among existing volunteers. (Paragraph 26)

The Government agrees that working with Sport England to encourage people to volunteer in the grassroots sector is valuable. DCMS will continue to support Sport England to deliver against their ambitions around volunteering, as set out in Uniting the Movement. This includes a focus on skills, behaviours, diversity and inclusion to open up and increase volunteering and employment opportunities for people from a broader range of backgrounds and experiences. Sport England is also looking at the support and experience for volunteers within the sport sector, focusing on what is needed to attract and retain volunteers, and the Government supports them in this. We know that despite the pandemic, the Active Lives survey indicates that 10 million people gave up their time to help make sport and activity happen last year (2019/20).

Sport England currently provides guidance and resources to support volunteer development, marketing and management via their free-to-access Club Matters website: <https://www.sportenglandclubmatters.com/volunteer-development/>. Alongside this, work in train includes forthcoming research due to be published this autumn, into Innovative Volunteering practices. This will provide greater insight into what innovative approaches emerged as a result of the pandemic that could be shared and replicated more widely to help modernise the volunteer experience and that may help make volunteering more inclusive. This will be used to create a series of case studies and practical resources to be shared with the wider volunteer sector. Sport England are also involved with consultations being led by NCVO, Volunteering Matters the Association of Volunteer Managers and NAVCA to support the sector called 'Vision for Volunteering'.

More generally, the Civil Society and Youth Directorate in DCMS is leading the development of work across sectors to support and strengthen volunteering. Sport England is feeding into this work.

5. We recommend that the Government work with Sport England, UK Sport and the National Lottery to review and revise the current funding models to enable sports organisations to accumulate greater reserves and, as a result, have more of a cushion to support themselves should another situation like the Covid-19 pandemic occur. (Paragraph 31)

Whilst the Government does not allow funding to sports Arms Length Bodies to be in advance of need, it agrees that the current funding models should be reviewed to ensure sustainability of sports organisations. The Government will be reflecting on this in the new sport strategy where it will consider lessons learnt of Covid for financial sustainability and governance for sports.

The Government's ambition is to make it easier for people and organisations with good ideas and significant potential to contribute to the ambitions of their strategy and to access the right forms of investment for them.

Sport England's *Uniting the Movement* strategy commits to distributing funding in new ways, including: continuing to diversify and develop their investment approaches beyond their traditional grant programmes, so our offers reflect the realities of the market, the needs of partners and understand impact.

During the pandemic, Sport England has taken decisive action to mitigate many of these risks, including being flexible and responsive with their own resources and investing £270 million of Exchequer and National Lottery funds. However they recognise that given ongoing uncertainty, additional support is likely to be required to help community sport and physical activity to endure the current pandemic and especially to 'learn the lessons of now' and seek to be best placed to help the population to be active and enjoy the benefits that this offers long into the future.

Sport England's 2021–22 implementation plan committed to "work[ing] with partners with a major role to play in implementing Uniting the Movement, including NGBs and Active Partnerships, to review our approach to future investment in the spring and summer of 2021."

Sport England is currently adopting new processes to support existing partners who will play a major role in Uniting the Movement, moving away from a more traditional and transactional 'you apply—we assess and award' model to focus on setting the foundations of relationships through honest dialogue about partners' roles and priorities and the collaboration and investment needed to support it.

This will benefit 'system partners' who play a role in connecting *Uniting the Movement* to a larger part of the sport and physical activity eco-system through either a systemic (connecting and influencing) role and/or a governing role, and therefore can shape, influence and grow the movement. This includes National Governing Bodies and Active Partnerships, but also a range of other existing partners including National Disability Sport Organisations, organisations working in the field of sport for development and health, and those with a focus on the sport and physical activity sector workforce.

6. *To reduce the administrative burden on volunteers across the sport sector, we recommend that the Government work with governing and funding bodies to introduce a standardised application methodology for grassroots and community sport funds.* (Paragraph 37)

The Government agrees that there needs to be a simplified method for grassroots sports organisations to access funding. As described above, Sport England's *Uniting the Movement* strategy commits them to distributing funding in new ways, including: simplifying access to available funding, including open funds. Whilst this may not necessarily result in complete standardisation, we hope that some improvements will assist community sports organisations to access funding.

7. *In its response to this Report, we recommend that the Government set out the ways in which it intends to encourage schools across the country to make their facilities more available to community and grassroots sports clubs at a fair rate.* (Paragraph 46)

The Government agrees with the need to make best use of school sport facilities to support community use. This is why through the Government's School Sport and Activity Action Plan, an initial £1.5 million supported 230 targeted primary and secondary schools to open their sports facilities outside the school day, in order to broaden the offer of extra-curricular and sporting and physical activities available to pupils and the wider community. This initial programme enabled us to develop an understanding of the key drivers and barriers for schools opening their sports facilities.

In February 2021, the Government announced a further £10.1 million investment into schools across England, to help open existing sports facilities to pupils and the community. This targeted investment provided schools with funding needed to open their facilities outside of school hours and encourage their pupils to be more physically active.

8. *In the short-term, we recommend that the Government set out the ways in which it will support community sport groups which are successful in applying for match funding through the Community Ownership Fund. In the longer term, we recommend that the Government ringfence money, either from the Community Ownership Fund or elsewhere, to enable sports clubs and teams to purchase and upgrade their own facilities.* (Paragraph 49)

The Government is now assessing bids to the Community Ownership Fund (COF) and will work with successful applicants to implement their bids. The £150 million fund delivers on the 2019 manifesto commitment to strengthen community rights and support community groups to protect and take over local assets of community value. We will work directly with communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. They know local people and places best, and we want to help them prosper. This is part of the UK-wide levelling up agenda, helping to support recovery, build opportunity and empower communities to improve their local places.

From July 2021, voluntary and community organisations across the UK can bid for up to £250,000 matched-funding to help buy or take over local community assets at risk of closure to run as community-owned businesses. In exceptional cases, up to £1 million matched-funding will be available to help establish a community-owned sports club or help buy a sports grounds at risk of being lost without community intervention.

The COF will drive greater community ownership of assets that support the social wellbeing and interests of communities but are at risk of closure. In this way, important parts of the local social fabric, such as pubs, sports clubs, theatres and post office buildings, can continue to play a central role in communities across the UK. It should be noted however that purchasing and upgrading sport clubs' own facilities is out of scope.

9. We recommend that Sport England conduct an audit of how National Governing Bodies communicate with their grassroots clubs and develop best practice guidance for all NGBs. (Paragraph 52)

Sport England's remit does not extend to regulating National Governing Bodies however, over the course of the pandemic, Sport England has sought to encourage greater communications capability across the sector.

Research conducted for Sport England by the Digital Marketing Institute surveyed more than 1,000 people involved in sport and physical activity marketing and communications. This showed that 63% of them had no clear plan to attract new audiences through digital channels.

As a reaction to this digital skills gap, and to help sport and physical activity providers encourage people back to activity as coronavirus restrictions ease, Sport England teamed up with CIMSPA and used £450,000 of National Lottery funding to develop the free Digital Marketing Hub this summer. More info: <https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/digital-marketing-hub>. Sport England provide guidance and resources to support communications capability via free-to-access Club Matters website: <https://www.sportenglandclubmatters.com>.

10. We recommend that Sport England and UK Sport should be required to publish, at least annually, information about the diversity of candidates for all advertised roles in their organisations and the boards that make those appointments. (Paragraph 58)

Sport England and UK Sport made changes to the Code for Sports Governance in 2021 to ensure bodies in receipt of substantial public funding from Sport England or UK Sport have a detailed and ambitious diversity and inclusion action plan to increase diversity on their boards and senior leadership teams, as well as across their wider organisations. The requirement to set plans, and publish them, focusing on organisations as a whole, will encourage transparency about where organisations are making progress and where they're falling behind. Organisations will be expected to publish their first plans by the end of summer 2022, with meaningful progress made within two years. Sport England and UK Sport will secure additional support to help develop and monitor these action plans. If a sustained lack of commitment or progress is not evident, this will be deemed non-compliant and withdrawal of funding will be actively considered. See more here: <https://www.sportengland.org/news/changes-made-strengthen-code-sports-governance>.

Sport England itself is committed to creating sustainable, lasting change in their approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, and their internal Diversity and Inclusion Action plan is our roadmap to making this a reality. The Plan was published in summer 2021 and covers actions for 2021–24. Their plan for progressing and retaining diverse talent in 2021–22 can be found on the Sport England website here: <https://www.sportengland.org/corporate-information/equality-and-diversity>.

UK Sport will also be publishing its own diversity and inclusion action plan, setting out clear ambitions to ensure that their Board, Senior Leadership Team and wider workforce represent and reflect the diversity of the national community in all its forms, including but not limited to women; people from ethnically diverse backgrounds; and those with disabilities. In June 2021, UK Sport also published a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy, setting out clear priorities to drive change in its organisation and high-performance sport. As part of this strategy, UK Sport will identify and implement targeted actions to recruit, develop and retain more people from under-represented groups. UK Sport will measure progress and publish an update report at least annually on their website.