

Written evidence submitted by the Reading Royals Futsal Club

8th December 2020

SUBMISSION BY READING ROYALS FUTSAL CLUB

TO THE

DCMS SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO SPORT IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Introduction

This written submission is made by Reading Royals Futsal Club. We are a community club run by volunteers that has developed a strong youth section and has three adult teams, two men's teams and a women's team that play in the national leagues; the National Futsal Series and the National Futsal League. Last season the adult men's team were the champions of the Premiership South of the National Futsal League.

The views expressed in this submission are based on the recent experiences of a grassroots futsal club. We believe our experiences can contribute to the Committee's appreciation of some of the challenges and issues that community sports clubs face and can highlight some of the existing and/or potential issues of current sport governance models.

The National Governing Body [NGB] for the sport of futsal in England is the Football Association [FA].

This submission aims to specifically address the three questions raised by the DCMS Committee enquiry into Sport in our Communities based upon our experiences as a dedicated grassroots futsal club.

1. Are current sports governance models fit for purpose?

A simple test that can be applied to determine if current sports governance is fit for purpose is to determine whether the governing body is always putting the sport that it governs at the forefront of all its actions; is it fully committed to the sport?

The sport of futsal in England is in a unique position, as it is one of very few sports where the NGB, the FA, governs another sport, in this case football.

The FA, as the NGB of futsal, do not pass this simple test, as it has removed all funding to the England futsal teams and significantly reduced, by 90%, the funding for grassroots futsal from this season onwards.

The FA stated that this decision was made so that they could prioritise *core functions that regulate and serve English football and also have a duty to support our men's and women's senior [football] teams in their efforts to win major tournaments.*¹

Through this single action the FA reneged on its responsibilities to govern a sport that it openly states it does not recognise as a *core function*; the governing body of futsal has decided to *focus more than ever on our key priorities.*²

As a result, futsal is left without a NGB that will put the sport that it governs at the forefront of its actions. Futsal has been left without governance that is fit for purpose. The removal of funding, at disproportionate levels, has cut the umbilical cord of the sport of futsal from the FA.

It is clear from the experiences of futsal that a NGB cannot, at least in the FA's case, provide fit for purpose sports governance for more than a single sport. The Committee need to ensure that the failure of this sports governance model is not repeated elsewhere.

¹ <https://www.thefa.com/news/2020/sep/24/statement-futsal-240920>

The FA: Thursday 24 September 2020

An update on our funding of futsal at both elite and grassroots level

² *ibid*

At what level of sport should the government consider spending public money?

Specific action that the government can take to guarantee the future survival of the community sports sector is for public money to be targeted directly at local leagues and/or clubs that have strong associations with their communities.

The public money would help build sustainable foundations from which the sports can grow by strengthening the links with the community and creating future income streams; which will in turn reduce future reliance on government money for support.

This is an effective way of ensuring public money reaches the intended target 'audience', rather than funds being diluted by passing through organisations over-burdened with inefficient bureaucracy.

Public money can be allocated on measurable deliverables and be granted when those deliverables have been met. This would ensure that public money is being spent on agreed, measurable and completed outcomes, which maximises the 'value' of government money to the community sports clubs. Each pound [£] of public money will be spent in an accountable, cost effective and measurable manner by the target 'audience'.

2. What are the biggest risks to the long-term viability of grassroots sport?

Based on our experiences the biggest risks to the long-term viability of grassroots sport are:

A. A lack of suitable venues

The lack of venues is probably the most significant risk to the long-term viability of grassroots sport.

Without access and availability to affordable and quality venues community sports clubs cannot attract players and volunteers and they cannot continue to grow.

The performance of the National Governing Body [NGB] can, where it is not fit for purpose, provide significant risks to the long-term viability of grassroots sport:

B. Where the NGB is not committed to the sport that it governs

The risk of the NGB prioritising one sport over another, which can result in one sport being abandoned without financial support; futsal is the prime example of this risk.

C. Where the NGB does not prioritise and sustain the foundations of the sport; preferring to focus on the elite level of sport

Chasing success at the elite level of a sport at the cost of supporting and sustaining the foundations of the sport will, inevitably, lead to long-term failure in the grassroots game and reduce the opportunities for the active involvement of communities in sport.

D. Failure to adhere to and to support adopted strategies

For example, within two years of the adoption of the FA's adopted strategic plan for futsal; 'Fast Forward with Futsal' The FA's Futsal Strategy 2018-2024, funding for futsal was withdrawn. Within this period three out of five priorities can no longer be achieved as a result of the FA's decision:

Create a high-impact identity for futsal in England; Increase National and International Profile

Establish Competition and Player Pathways; A route to the top of the game, improving our England Futsal teams

Build the Bedrock for Successful England Futsal Teams; Witnessing England Futsal teams make an impact on the international stage is a long-term objective.

This included the establishment of a competitive England women's futsal team with the commitment to "Field our first England women's Futsal team, to compete in the 2021 UEFA Women's Futsal Championships..."

All the other priorities of the strategy have been directly affected by the decisions made by the FA, to focus more than ever on our key priorities, after such a short period of time and after so much had been promised for futsal. This decision of the FA does not take into consideration the significant investment made by clubs and leagues, in time and money, to ensure that their own plans and structures were compatible with the FA strategy.

E. Where the NGB fails to distribute funding in a proportionate manner to community sports

Adopted strategies and programmes can be susceptible to change without consultation with the communities involved. This can result in the allocation of funds to *focus more than ever on our key priorities* by the NGB rather than where the money needs to be targeted.

There is a need for the delivery of funding locally, rather than centrally or nationally, to community sports clubs.

What key measures could the Government introduce to increase the resilience of sports clubs and venues?

- A. The provision of quality venues that are accessible, available and affordable.
- B. Ensure each sport has a NGB that is dedicated solely to a single sport.
- C. The prioritisation of funding to the foundations of sport.
- D. Rewarding the delivery of adopted strategies.
- E. Funding is delivered through local sources rather than central or national organisations.

3. To what extent should elite professional sports support the lower leagues and grassroots?

There is a common presumption that elite sports have an obligation to support lower leagues and the grassroots of sport.

The FA have turned this presumption on its head by removing resources, including coaches and mentors from grassroots football and 90% of the funding from futsal, as they have stated *a duty to support our men's and women's senior [national football] teams in their efforts to win major tournaments.*³

This is an example of a short-sighted unequitable strategy that removes scarce resources from the community sports clubs to focus on efforts to win major international tournaments. In sport there are no guarantees of success, but a lack of support to the lower leagues and grassroots will guarantee that it will be made much harder for community sport clubs to survive. The FA are gambling with the future of the foundations of the game.

The government needs to ensure the relationship between elite professional sports and the lower leagues and grassroots is equitable and that the foundations of the sport are given priority and are maintained in a sustainable manner.

The elite professional sports do not have to support the lower leagues and grassroots, but they do need to avoid being a drain on the limited resources available to the foundations of the game. The allocation and

³ *ibid*

distribution of public money needs to be improved to the lower leagues and grassroots so that they become increasingly independent of any reliance on elite sports.

How should the Government make this happen?

The foundations of sport can be underpinned with the delivery of funding locally, rather than centrally or nationally, to community sports clubs.

The targeting of money by people that know the communities and the clubs will provide a cost effective way of funding the grassroots of sport. This will improve the accountability and the cost effectiveness of funding; ensuring that those communities in need and those that can deliver have access to funding and can continue to grow.