

## Written evidence submitted by Sport Works

### Impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors

#### Introduction:

Sport Works is a social enterprise which supports individuals aged 4-94 to improve health, gain qualifications and move into sustainable employment or further training. Our team passionately believes in the power sport has to effect positive social change and in its ability to enrich the lives of individuals and entire communities.

Since 2009 we've been designing and delivering award winning programmes which change lives. Through our Community Sport Programmes, Inclusive Disability Sport and Wellbeing for Older Individuals our work addresses health inequalities and contributes towards a healthier, more active nation.

<https://www.sportworksltd.co.uk>

- 1) What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?
  - The majority of project delivery has ceased, thus reducing the ability to provide exercise, wellbeing and educational programmes (especially to disadvantaged individuals / communities)
  - Reduction in ability to reach vulnerable individuals and groups, leading to social isolation
  - Increased prevalence of mental ill health
  - Likely increase in sedentary behavioural profile, though it is too early to verify this assumption
  - The majority of development activity (specifically, roll out of new projects) has ceased thus resulting in lost time in implementing Government strategy
  - Increased focus upon the role which digitalisation can have in the sector and how it can be used to influence behavioural change
  
- 2) How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?
  - Sport England's Covid-19 response and financial commitment/support for community sports groups was very positive and well received by the majority of the community / sports sector.
  - It was encouraging to see the speed of response from Sport England, excellent.
  - The nature of Sport England's response appears to focus upon volunteer led, community based organisations. Whilst these are important, the work of professional organisations within the sector has not been recognised nor facilitated. Sport England and DCMS could do more to directly support those organisations who are seeking to improve the health demographic of the nation.

- Volunteers should not be relied upon to address health inequalities and physical activity, but they should be part of a coordinated professional AND voluntary sector partnership approach.
- 3) What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?
- Likelihood that a number of organisations (sports clubs, community groups, charities, social enterprises, businesses) will experience financial hardship and may need to reduce or cease operations.
  - The impact of this is a reduced ability to keep the nation physically active and achieve widespread targets of addressing sedentary behaviours
  - The highest risk groups will likely require increased efforts to encourage physical activity in the community, especially given the (perceived) health risk is likely to remain for some time
  - Organisations which have a demonstrable history of supporting the growth (and sustainability) of community sport/ wellbeing should be tasked with ‘resurrecting’ the various community projects as quickly as possible, and addressing any changes in behavioural profiles of vulnerable individuals
  - An increased investment into virtual exercise should be made to enable organisations to facilitate physical activity lessons and education directly into areas where there are high levels of inactivity e.g. care homes, hospitals, community organisations within socio-economically deprived regions
- 4) How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?
- Repurposing Sport England to focus their time more directly on supporting organisations which directly address physical inactivity within communities. This should focus more time and investment on “rolling out” initiatives which are producing effective results in creating long term behavioural change, rather than continually looking for ‘new approaches’. The sector already knows what is working and what isn’t!
  - DCMS should support the community sport sector to come together more effectively and provide a platform for collaboration of resources, communications and access to funding.
  - Access to funding should be more transparently managed by Sport England; this is an opportunity to ensure funding goes to those organisations making a difference
  - Increased Sport England and DCMS support for crowdfunding within the sector – this is an area which would gain traction very quickly with the right level of support behind it

I hope this response is useful.

Neil Cameron  
 Founder & Director, Sport Works,  
 April 2020