

## Sportsgroup – Written evidence (NPS0056)

The document provides information on the following question:

**Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?**

1. We are aware that the Committee has asked some questions about data in the sport and physical activity sector. We therefore thought it might be helpful to provide a summary of the current position.
2. There are two main types of data in the sector – data relating to **participation**, and data relating to **facilities**. These are summarised below:
3. **Participation**
  - A) The **Active People Survey (APS)** ran from 2005-2016 and provided an annual overview of participation in sport and active recreation by adults. It also included other data such as volunteering, club membership, and receipt of tuition or coaching. It was replaced in 2016 by the **Active Lives Survey (ALS)**, which now provides data on both adult and children's participation
  - B) The **Health Survey for England (HSE)** is a series of annual surveys, commissioned by the Health & Social Care Information Centre. It interviews members of the public on core topics such as general health, height, weight and blood pressure, use of health services, and indicators such as smoking and drinking. Each year the survey focuses on a particular topic such as cardiovascular disease; in 2008, 2012 and 2016 this topic was physical activity<sup>1</sup>.
  - C) The **School Sports Survey** ran from 2003 until 2010, measured how much PE was being offered within curriculum time.
4. Meanwhile, surveys related to other areas also collect data which is relevant to physical activity. These are as follows<sup>2</sup>:
  - A) **The National Travel Survey** – average number of trips per year by mode of transport
  - B) **Labour Force Survey** – normal mode of travel to work
  - C) **Taking Part Survey** – what sport has been undertaken in the previous 4 weeks

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/areas-of-interest/public-health/health-survey-for-england---health-social-care-and-lifestyles/survey-content>

<sup>2</sup> A complete list of surveys from other areas which include questions about physical activity can be found at <https://khub.net/documents/31798783/32394974/Physical+Activity+Data+Sources.pdf/c0ec997a-c14c-4d4b-9094-f764c105582a>

- D) **Local Area Walking and Cycling in England** – percentage of time spent walking and cycling
- E) **Understanding Society** – participation in games and physical activity
- F) **Health Behaviour in School Aged Children** – percentage meeting physical activity recommendations.

### Facilities

5. In 2001, the then Secretary of State for DCMS, Tessa Jowell, commissioned a survey of the public sports facilities in England, as a “Doomsday Book” of sports facilities, to aid the targeting of lottery funds. This became the Active Places Survey, which provides a list of sporting venues with their associated facilities throughout England.
6. Whilst these data sources are useful, there is still a lack of effective and useful data in the sector. At the same time, there are a number of issues with the data which is available. These points are summarised below.

### Issue 1 - Omissions in data

7. There is still a lack of data in a number of areas, as follows:
  - **Absence of robust evaluation of any of Sport England's interventions** - Over the period 2005-2016, Sport England allocated over £2.2bn worth of funding, including over £690m in Exchequer Funding and over £1.5bn in Lottery Awards. There has no evidence of a formal evaluation of any programme they have funded. They claim to have 'results from studies' that support PR around various programmes, but these studies are never in the public domain and subject to scrutiny. For example, “This Girl Can” was claimed to be a success on multiple occasions, but it was never made clear how its impact would be evaluated and there has been no published evidence. Moreover, despite massive investment in interventions, Sport England’s own survey show that prevalence trends have been flat for many years.<sup>3</sup>
  - **Facilities which aren't open to the public** – Active Places only provides information on facilities which are open to the public – eg municipal facilities, sports facilities with community use. There is no audit information of private facilities, making it difficult to analyse or plan facility use and development
  - **Management and operation (eg privately run, publicly run, hybrid model etc)** – over the last two decades, increasing numbers of local authority facilities have been outsourced – whether in ownership, management or operation. They have been contracted out to different kinds of organisations – leisure trusts, social enterprises, charities, public/private partnerships etc. However, there is no public database showing which, and how many, facilities are outsourced, or to whom they have been outsourced. This makes it impossible to analyse the balance of public/private management; how effective the different models are; how profitable they are; and how they impact on the local community

---

<sup>3</sup>Over the period 2005-2016, participation levels changed from 34.7% to 36.1% - a change of just 1.4%.

- **Impact at community level-** there is very little information showing the impact of different facilities on the health, wellbeing or activity levels of the local community. This means it is impossible to analyse what facilities or delivery models are successful in having an impact at local level; whether the investment was correctly made; or whether the facility and management model is correct for the area
- **Lack of live figures** – there are no live numbers of sites opening or closing on a daily basis and no live participation figures (only selective historic or survey data based on a sample of the population<sup>4</sup>). This provide a snapshot of what has been done, but not accurate current or trend data. For example, in the past ten months, evidence from millions of social media feeds and bookings of digital classes indicates that the top six activities have been Yoga, HiiT, Pilates, Barre, Dance and Stretching. But it is not clear that this will be recognised in the next ALS.
- **Lack of up current consumer figures on facilities** – to encourage participation, it is vital to provide easily accessible information which the consumer needs – pricing, opening times, events schedules. However, this is no longer carried out by Active Places, meaning that this data is harder for consumers to find.

## **Issue 2 – Accuracy within surveys**

8. The primary challenge for the participation surveys relates to accuracy. All participation surveys rely on self-reporting, which are subject to well-known biases. These biases generally lead to overestimates of the true prevalence of sport and physical activity.
9. For example, the HSE relies on self- assessment of physical activity, which often bears little resemblance to actual physical activity patterns. In the 2008 HSE, physical activity was measured by means of a questionnaire. 39% of men and 29% of women reported that they met the recommended minimum level of physical activity. However, when accelerometers were used on a group to measure their physical activity objectively, the real percentages were actually 6% and 4%. In children, the HSE 2008 found that of the 60% of children who said they were sufficiently active, only 10% truly achieved the minimum requirements. Of the 40% who reported being inactive, 8% did actually do enough physical activity.
10. In addition, such biases may be systematically different in population sub-groups, making it difficult to know the truth about differences in prevalence between people of different socioeconomic groups or ethnicities. For example, if people in higher socioeconomic groups over report and those in lower groups under report then you would falsely conclude there is a large inequality in sports participation according to socioeconomic group. There is insufficient accurate data on this topic to be able to analyse this.

## **Issue 3 – Consistency within and across surveys**

---

<sup>4</sup> ALS survey about 200,000 people are surveyed each year, spread throughout the year

11. There is no evidence of consistency across the different data collection methods and in the metrics used. For example, the APS survey measured participation in conventional competitive sports and other selected active recreations, such as mountaineering and orienteering. However, it did not measure general physical activity – for example, until recently it did not include recreational walking or recreational cycling. As a measure for how generally active the population is, it is therefore extremely limited.
12. Meanwhile, the HSE data includes figures on participation in a broader range of non-sport activities such as housework, DIY and occupational activities, which were not included in APS.
13. Similarly, the School Sports Survey, as it was, measured how much PE was being offered within curriculum time. It did not measure activity outside school and provided no data on health and fitness levels.
14. This inconsistency can exist even within the same system. For example, there is a difference between APS (which ran from 2005 to 2016) and ALS (which has been running since 2016). The primary metric for APS was:

***“participation by adults (16+) for 1 session a week (at least 4 sessions of at least moderate intensity for at least 30 minutes in the previous 28 days) in moderate intensity sport”;***

15. The primary metric for ALS is:

***“Participation by adults (16+) for 2 sessions of moderate activity for at least 10 minutes in the last 28 days”***

16. This is a significant change in the criteria for measurement, and makes consistent measurement from 2005 to the present day very difficult.

#### **Issue 4 – Alignment across surveys**

17. There is no evidence of alignment between the different types of surveys – eg between HSE and ALS, or the Taking Part and Travel to Work surveys. It is not clear whether they use the same metrics or methodology, or whether there is coordination across results.
18. This means it is impossible to judge the relative accuracy of the surveys; whether there has been duplication between them; and whether the data arising can be aligned to enable effective analysis and interrogation.

#### **Issue 5 – Lack of long term continuity**

19. There is also a lack of long term continuity in the ongoing delivery of such surveys. For example, the School Sports Survey measured the proportion of pupils receiving two hours of curriculum PE and the proportion participating in at least three hours of “high quality” PE a week.
20. However, the School Sports Survey was scrapped in 2010 and since then there has no national PE / school sport survey providing schools – or the government -

with a set of basic indicators to compare provision. This has meant that whilst data did exist, there has now been no data for a decade – which makes it impossible to measure any improvement or decline, or observe potential trends in participation.

21. More information on all of the above is available on request.

## **11 years of the Active People Survey: an analysis**

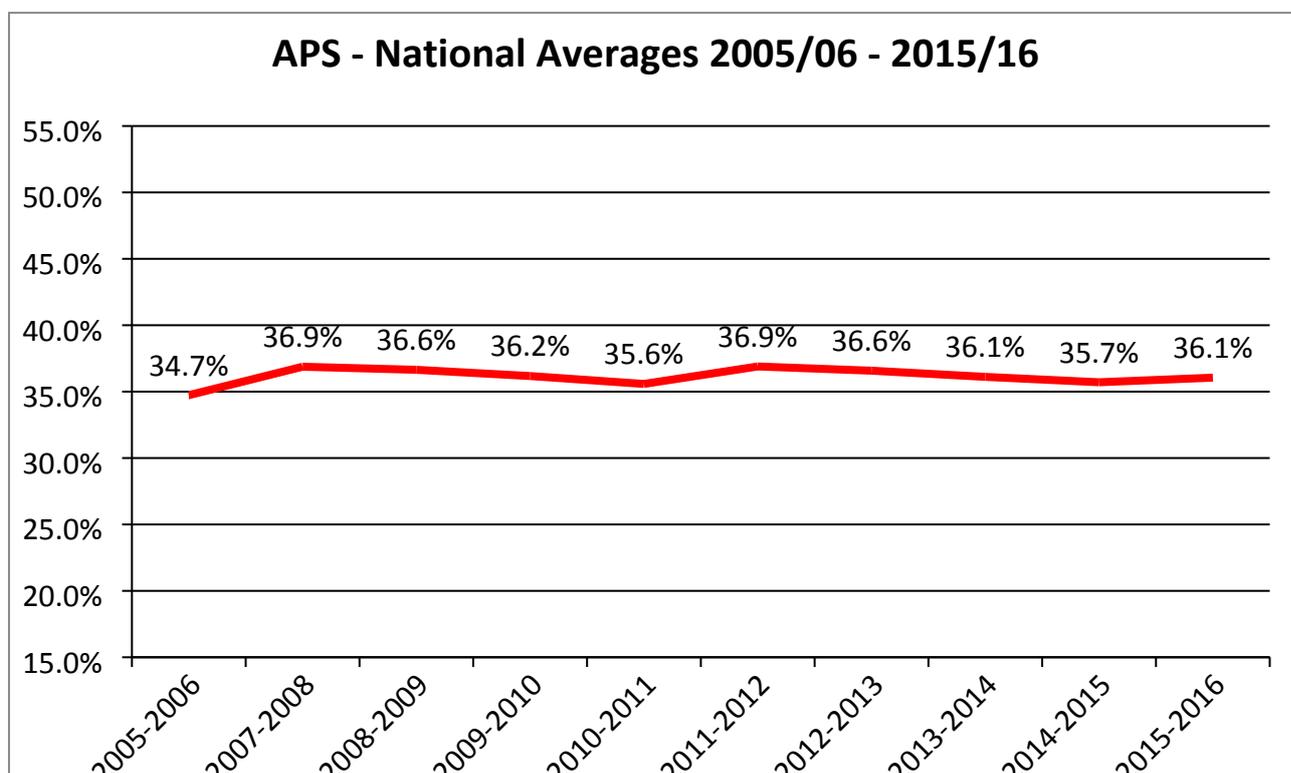
1. Sportsgroup is an unincorporated body representing a number of organisations and SMEs in the sport and physical exercise sector. It spun out of the former Business in Sport and Leisure in 2016 to focus more closely on growing the market for physical activity and the improvements to health in the community.
2. As part of their research, Sportsgroup have carried out an analysis of participation in sport and physical activity, based on the results of Sport England's Active People Survey (APS). This survey ran from 2005-2016 and tracked, nationwide, the number of people taking part in sport and wider physical activity in England.
3. Sportsgroup analysed the results of the APS to see how participation had changed over the period 2005-2016 and trends for participation rates for all 326 local authorities in England.
4. Sportsgroup then examined those participation rates against other available data across a number of areas, including central and local government funding and the contributions of Sport England, to see how funding impacted participation.
5. The participation data was then reviewed against a number of factors that were thought to impact on participation. The data was also analysed against social and health parameters which are thought to be impacted by participation.
6. The findings from these analyses are summarised in this document. To summarise, they indicated:
  - no significant increase in participation in 270 authorities from 2005-2016
  - significant increase in participation in only 47 local authorities
  - no correlation between participation and either local or central government funding
  - no significant correlation between key social and health factors
  - significant correlations between participation and education levels.
7. The results of this analysis predate the present pandemic but over the past year, the group has reviewed these results in terms of repair, renewal and changes in the sector and believes that a radical new public policy is required.
8. First and foremost, the important role of physical exercise must be embedded in public health and wellbeing policy in order to address inequalities in community health.
9. Secondly, private sector operators were engaging only 10.5% of the population pre Covid and is estimated to drop to only 9% post Covid there is a real opportunity to place public sector facilities at the heart of a new strategy. In the main those public sector assets are ideally located with 84% of the population within 2 miles of such facilities.
10. Thirdly, the virtual/online delivery of exercise and activity which grown apace in lockdown has probably started a trend which will continue. Sportsgroup believes that is important that a common digital solution is developed and made available to all. The barriers to engagement need to be reduced and the benefits communicated and then the community can benefit across all the multiple channels.

11. There is an opportunity to connect physical facilities with coaches, leaders and organisers as well as volunteers and participants and consequently improve the viability of facilities and organisation and redress some of the present inequalities.
12. Sportsgroup believes that such a process can track better data about usage and participation, informing public health and future investment.
13. Sportsgroup believes that the partnership of public, private and the strong voluntary sector will be the way forward and that will need leadership and a more sensitive, accessible and joined up approach across government at national and local level.

## Key findings

### 1) Did participation increase?

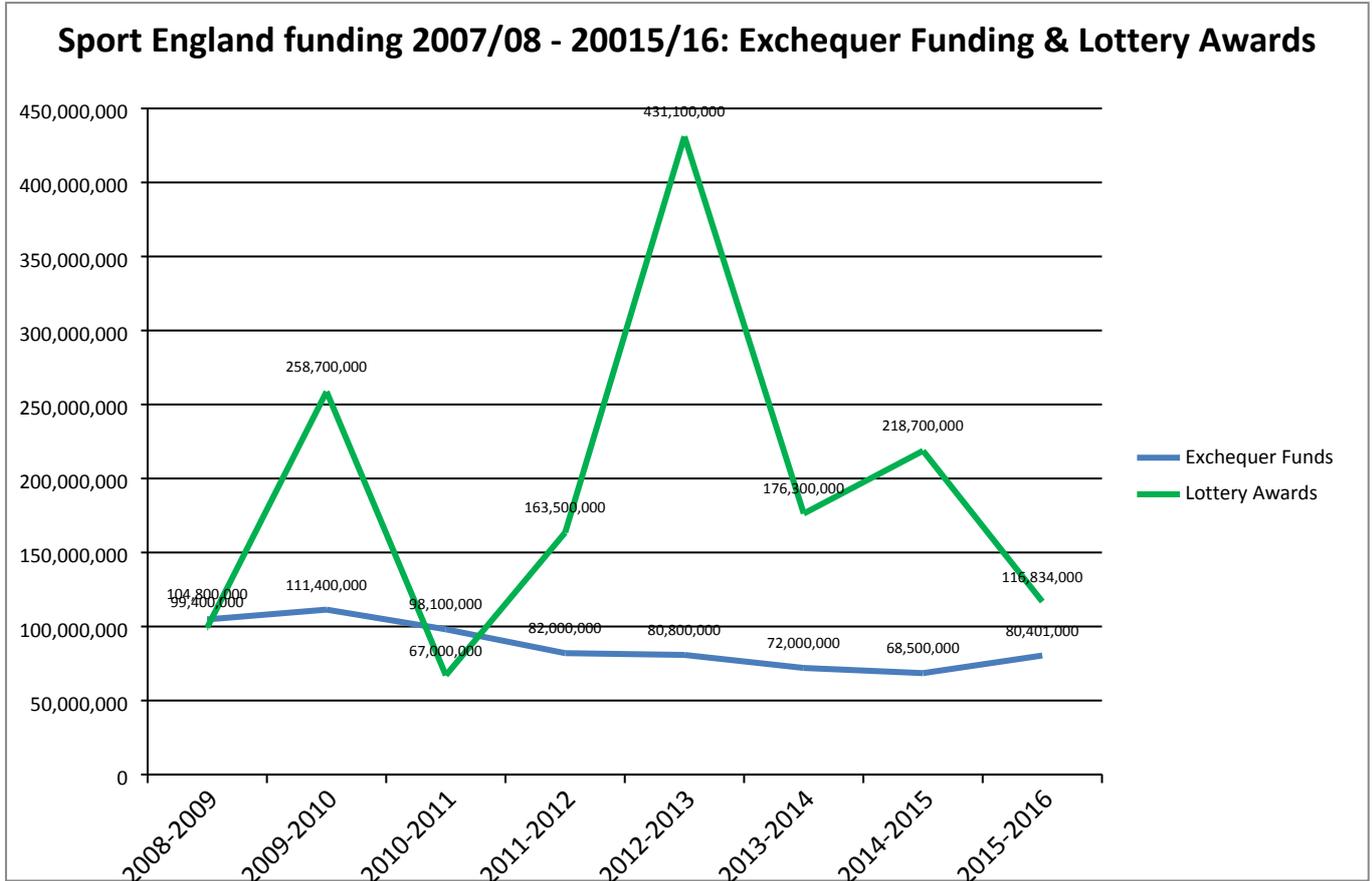
- There was **no significant increase** in participation in sports, as measured by the Active People Survey, over the period 2005-2016.
- Average participation across 326 districts in England increased **less than 2%**, from **34.7%** to **36.1%**:



- Of the 326 districts studied:
  - **83%** (270) of district councils **saw no significant change** in their participation rate
  - Only 47 improved their APS participation rate (**14%**)
  - 12 saw their participation rate decline (**3%**)

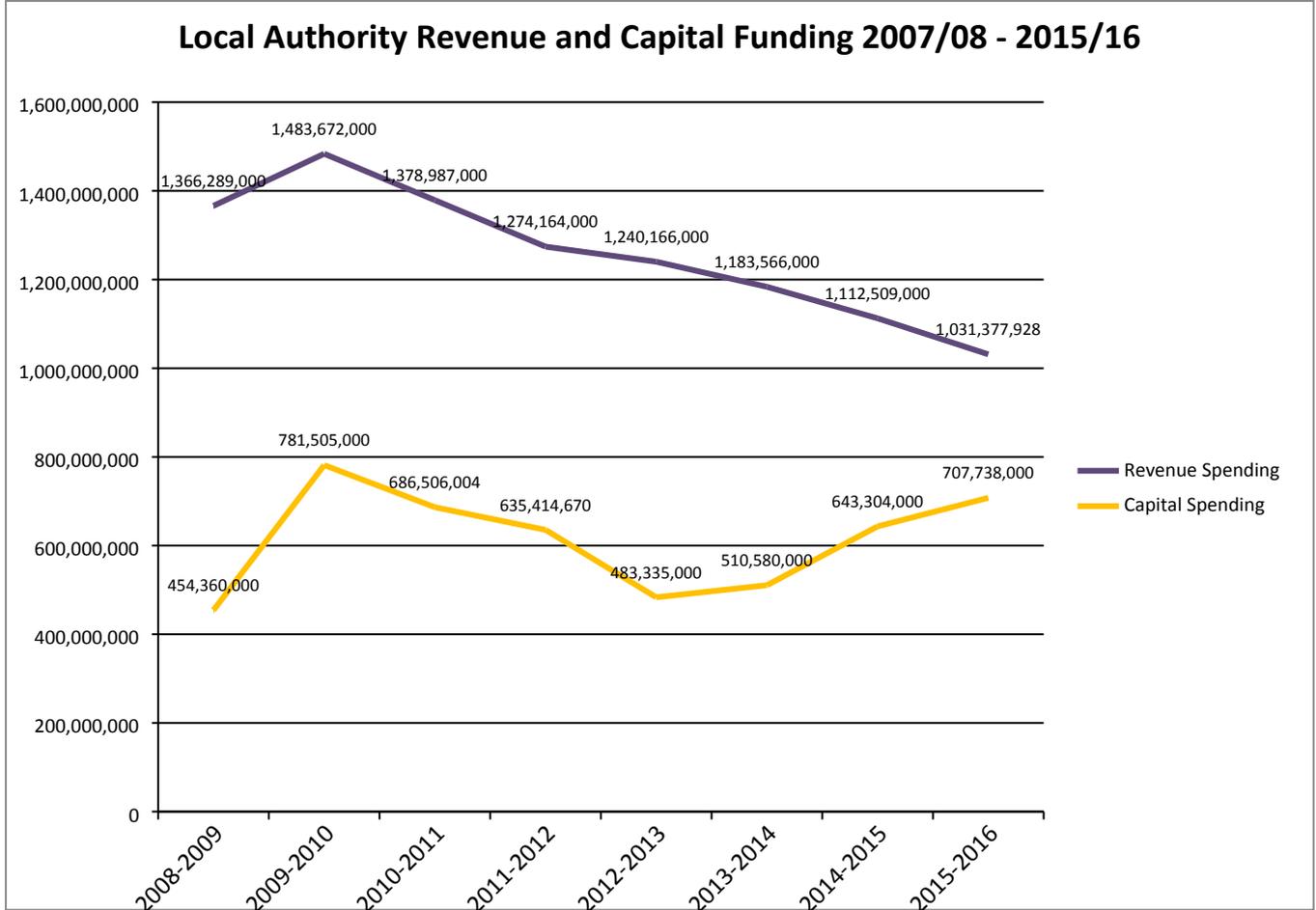
## 2) Did funding make a difference?

- Over the period 2005-2016, Sport England allocated over **£2.2bn** worth of funding, including:
  - Over **£690m** in Exchequer Funding
  - Over **£1.5bn** in Lottery Awards<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> These figures exclude the year 2006-07 as no APS survey was carried out. It also excludes the years 2005-06 and 2007-08 as no data was available

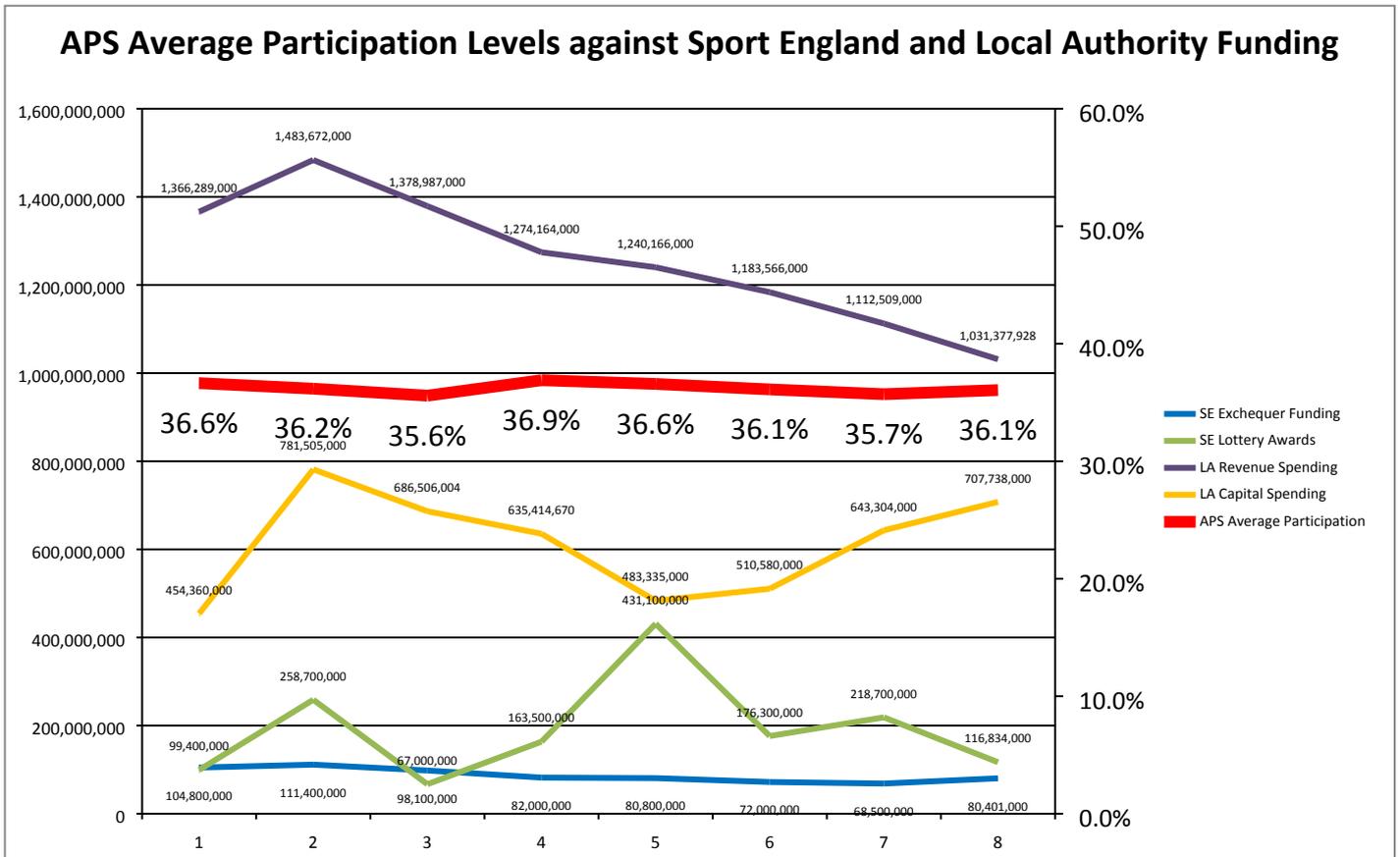
- Over the same period, local authorities spent:
  - Over **£10bn** in Revenue Funding<sup>6</sup>
  - Over **£5bn** in Capital Funding<sup>7</sup>



<sup>6</sup> These figures exclude the year 2006-07 as no APS survey was carried out. It also excludes the years 2005-06 and 2007-08 as no data was available

<sup>7</sup> These figures exclude the year 2006-07 as no APS survey was carried out. It also excludes the years 2005-06 and 2007-08 as no data was available

- There was therefore almost correlation between funding and participation levels:



### 3) What impacted upon participation?

**Participation rates were also analysed against social and economic indicators:**

- Population Size and Age Structure
- Education and Qualification levels
- Social Deprivation
- Median Gross Weekly Pay
- Employment Rate<sup>8</sup>

There was **no significant correlation** of APS rates against any of these except in relation to Education and Qualification levels:

- There was a **positive correlation** between **participation rates** and **percentage with Level 4 Qualifications** (Correlation value of 0.6)
- There was a **negative correlation** between **participation rates** and **percentage with no qualifications** (Correlation value of -0.7)

This would indicate a link between levels of education and participation in sports. This is supported by a number of other studies<sup>9</sup>.

### 4) What did participation impact?

**Participation rates were also analysed against the following community and health indicators**

- Crime
- Life Satisfaction
- Worthwhile Activities
- Happiness
- Anxiety
- Childhood Obesity
- Male/Female Life Expectancies
- Male/Female Life Spent in Good Health
- Male/Female Life Spent Disability Free

**There was no significant correlation of the rates of participation in sport against:**

- Rates of crime
- Average "life satisfaction" ratings
- Average "worthwhile" ratings
- Average happiness ratings
- Average "anxiety" ratings
- Childhood obesity

**The largest correlation was with Life Expectancy:**

---

<sup>8</sup> Data sources and references available on request

<sup>9</sup> References are available on request

- There was a **positive correlation** between **participation rates** and:
- **Life Expectancy for Males (0.4)**
- **Life Expectancy for Females (0.4)**

### **Key conclusions**

- Despite concerted efforts, participation rates have remained stubbornly low for 11 years.
- The participation rate remained broadly the same from 2005-2016, despite:
  - London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games
  - Approximately £2bn in Sport England Funding
  - Approximately £15bn in local authority funding
- Participation did not correlate with any key social or economic indicators
- The biggest correlating factor seems to have been levels of education:
  - those areas with a higher percentage of people with Level 4 Qualifications<sup>10</sup> or above had a higher rate of participation;
  - those areas with a higher percentage of people with no qualifications had a lower rate of participation
- Rates of participation did not impact significantly on community or health indicators, such as rates of crime, or rates of life satisfaction and anxiety
- The largest correlation value with health indicators was with Life Expectancy, but even here the correlation value here was only 0.4.

*28 January 2021*

---

<sup>10</sup> Level 4+ qualifications: Degree (for example BA, BSc), Higher Degree (for example MA, PhD, PGCE), NVQ Level 4-5, HNC, HND, RSA Higher Diploma, BTEC Higher level, Foundation degree (NI), Professional qualifications (for example teaching, nursing, accountancy)