

Youth Sport Trust – Written evidence (NPS0115)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Youth Sport Trust is a children’s charity working to ensure every child enjoys the life-changing benefits that come from play and sport. We have 25 years of expertise in pioneering new ways of using sport to improve children’s wellbeing and give them a brighter future.

We work with more than 20,000 schools across the UK, more than 30 national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and have a long track record working with government. Our programmes and networks operate on a local, UK-wide and global level, through our sister charity Youth Sport Trust International. We work with young people directly and equip educators to harness the power of sport, physical activity and Physical Education (PE) to promote inclusion, enhance wellbeing and develop leadership and life skills. We convene partners together from across sport and education to engage collectively with government, including in relation to the development of the School Sport and Activity Action Plan. In September 2020, we launched Well Schools – a growing community of school leaders who recognise the need to put wellbeing back at the heart of education, and celebrate wider educational outcomes alongside exam results.

We welcome the opportunity to submit to the Select Committee on the important topic of a national plan for sport and recreation and its benefits for children’s mental and physical wellbeing, their educational attainment and wider social development. The submission draws upon our years of expertise working with government, schools, young people and sporting organisations to improve young people’s lives through sport, physical activity and PE.

2. SUMMARY

The Youth Sport Trust is calling for the creation of a national plan to tackle the crisis of inactivity and poor wellbeing in young people. This must be joined-up across government departments, be long-term and supported by continued investment and have clear national ambitions which can be monitored and tracked to drive their achievement.

COVID-19 has had a huge impact on young people’s lives and the OECD’s programme of international student assessment shows young people in the UK have among the lowest life satisfaction of any country. A national plan is needed to turn this around.

Within the plan, there should be clear roles and responsibilities and leadership for each element. It should draw on past successes, as referenced within this response, and what has been learned from these. It should focus on:

- The benchmarking of physical activity and physical development across all age groups as part of a wider national wellbeing measurement programme.

- A national teacher training programme to i) transform physical literacy and the wider wellbeing outcomes of the PE curriculum and ii) support all teachers to engage young people in activity across the school day.
- An inclusive 'active extended day' offer at every school.
- A globally admired School Games programme which extends the success of the current competitive school sport programme to include daily physical activity, fitness, dance and outdoor activities. The profile and reach of this national programme should be harnessed to improve parents' awareness of the benefits of play and sport for their children.
- A local infrastructure of nationally deployed professional school sport and activity organisers and young volunteers responsible for implementing the plan.

A national strategy should deliver on three national guarantees of:

- **A daily physical activity guarantee**
- **A weekly active after-school sport guarantee for every child**
- **A guaranteed million hours of youth sport volunteering**

3. QUESTIONS

3.1 **How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as active partnerships, leisure trusts, local sports clubs and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?**

We believe there is a need for a bolder, long-term, national ambition to tackle inactivity. This should be joined-up across government with targets that can be tracked and used to inform investment and best practice, which will galvanise all organisations with an interest in helping young people keep active.

In 25 years working with governments to deliver national school sport, physical activity and PE programmes, we have engaged with a range of different approaches. The overall level of public sector investment in this area has largely been protected or increased over the past two decades. Continued public sector investment is essential but we have seen through experience that how funding is allocated is often the biggest determinant of impact.

For future investment to achieve government ambitions, there should be a coherent strategy with joined-up funding streams where individual programmes feed into a strategic and impactful whole. If individual strands of a strategy are planned carefully and in parallel, they will be more impactful and efficient. For example, work strands can combine volunteer projects which add value to engagement programmes and investment in a local delivery network facilitating training. We recommend investment covers the following themes:

- **Co-ordination** – ensuring policies do not become a postcode lottery in terms of impact
- **Leadership** – the need for appointed leadership to galvanise followership and be accountable

- **Leverage** – using national targets to engage all providers and programmes, not just those funded through national strategies
- **Transformation** – system development and improvement rather than short-term change
- **Sustainability** – embedding change which lasts

Within current levels of public investment, we believe there is a more impactful way of transforming the health, education and life chances of young people specifically through school sport, physical activity and PE. This is why the Youth Sport Trust [has consistently called](#) for the Government to build on aspects of its investment in the Primary PE and Sport Premium and the School Games, to make more effective and efficient use of the resources available.

We would like to see Government's School Sport and Activity Action Plan enhanced and elevated into a wider strategy which delivers strategic long-term investment, joined up across departments. Within our recommendations, we have presented five key areas which we believe the Government should target to drive lasting change. Included within this is a local infrastructure of nationally deployed, professional school sport and activity organisers and young volunteers, who would be responsible for implementing the plan.

Achieving long-term sustainable change requires investment to drive development, as well as delivery. Development occurs when investment is made into content (new approaches and ways of working), delivery (high quality training of the workforce and capacity-building of providers), and networks (existing or new local structures which ensure training and content is embedded locally for the long term, rather than parachuted in by external providers for short-term interventions).

From our experience, the most sustainable and transformational national programmes have been those where a local organiser, who is embedded locally and connected nationally, has driven activity on to the ground. They work alongside schools and in support of local need and the wider education agenda (for example, the School Games, Change 4 Life Sports Clubs, the Young Ambassador Programme, Inclusion 2020).

Research from the Sport and Recreation Alliance has shown that young people are significantly more inactive in some local areas than others.¹ The creation of a nationally deployed local infrastructure of organisers who support schools would assist the Government in their levelling-up agenda by addressing inequality between those living in different areas of the country. They can provide both insight at a local level whilst working as a member of a co-ordinated national team, sharing best practice and learning from others. While public funding for School Sport Partnerships (SSPs) ended in 2010, our evidence shows that schools in areas which still have an SSP are more likely to engage in national school sport initiatives such as the School Games, School Games Mark and Active School Planner. SSPs can work successfully within the local ecosystem and connect National Governing Body clubs, community facilities and Active

¹ Childhood activity levels by local authority. *Sport+Recreation Alliance* Available at: <https://app.polimapper.co.uk/?dataSetKey=b025cd68183b4d1b9cedab60e1263541>. (Accessed: 24th September 2020)

Partnerships. Strengthening this network and aligning to a national strategy will address the current inconsistency and help improve opportunities for young people across all areas of the country to be active.

Enduring challenges of access to school sites and school-to-community pathways need to be tackled if the Government wants to grow participation in sport, particularly in the most disadvantaged communities. Nearly 40% of all sporting facilities in England are on school sites. 77% of sports halls and 61% of artificial grass pitches are located on school, college and university sites. However, over a third (38%) of school sports facilities across England are not available for community use.² We believe the most impactful way to tackle this is through ringfenced funding directly to schools, with the addition of a 'premium' fund for schools in disadvantaged areas. There is potential alongside this funding to build new models of community use of school sites, whereby a school would become a multi-sport home to youth sport.

3.2 How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

The need to focus on children and young people's health and wellbeing is now more pressing than ever. Sport England research in 2020 found that the numbers of young people meeting the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines for taking part in 60 minutes of physical activity every day dropped from 47% to 19% during the first lockdown. Social and health inequalities have also continued with 13% of children from less affluent backgrounds having done no exercise vs. 6% from more affluent backgrounds and 9% of secondary school pupils are also doing nothing vs. 5% primary.³

Physical Education and sport have an essential role to play in helping young people to recover from the huge impact that COVID-19 has had on their lives and education. We are concerned that if this is overlooked, it could have a long-term detrimental impact on a generation. As pupils returned for the 20/21 academic year, some schools reduced the amount of PE they were delivering, with logistical issues and lack of confidence interpreting new guidance cited as factors.⁴ Investment in getting young people more active can bring significant value in helping the Government to deliver on wider priorities including jobs and skills, levelling up opportunity, improving outcomes in public services and ensuring every young person receives a superb education.

Prior to COVID-19, pupils at state secondary schools in England have experienced significant cuts to the amount of Physical Education on the timetable. Hours of PE taught in state-funded English secondary schools reduced

² How can we increase community use of schools sports facilities? - Sport England. Available at: <http://direct.sportengland.org/our-work/partnering-local-government/scenarios/how-can-we-increase-community-use-of-schools-sports-facilities/>. (Accessed: 24th September 2020)

³ Sport England. Active Lives: Children and young people survey 2018/19. *Sport Engl.* 1–34 (2019)

Sport England. Children's experience of physical activity in lockdown. (2020).

⁴ Children return to PE with low levels of physical fitness | Youth Sport Trust. Available at: <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/news/children-return-pe-low-levels-physical-fitness>. (Accessed: 24th September 2020)

from 333,800 in 2010 to 280,725 in 2019 – a loss of 53,075 hours.⁵ Research also shows that an unenjoyable experience of PE is demotivating some young people from being more active.

When considering the impact of COVID-19 on the wider sport sector we believe that a strong focus should be on the current challenges facing schools through public investment in PE, school sport and physical activity. There is a compelling social and economic case for this, as we know that across all ages, every £1 invested in sport generates £3.91 for the economy and society.⁶

Investment alone, however, will not drive the cultural change needed to improve the physical activity of young people. We need to encourage and empower young people to make a change in their life by getting active. We would recommend doing the following:

- **Focusing on physical literacy**, building the confidence and competence of young people so they enjoy playing sport.
- **Remove negative experiences** by focusing on the essentials of inclusion and targeted interventions through coach education.
- **Transforming PE**, as negative experiences currently discourage some young people from being active. An example approach is the Sport England Teacher Training programme, where our role has been to support senior leaders in schools to raise the profile of PE as a tool for whole school improvement.
- **Focus efforts of parent awareness and understanding**, bringing them on board as advocates. For example, our [Healthy Movers](#) programme to develop physical literacy in early years has shown that engaging and supporting parents is key to nurturing healthy habits.
- **Harness the role of young leaders and peer influence** in inspiring participation. For example, our [Girls Active](#) programme empowers girls to take a lead in transforming the sport and activity offer in their schools and has successfully engaged over 80,000 girls in peer-led activities over the past five years.
- **Make participation beyond the school day easier** by developing community youth sport hubs on school sites and an active wraparound offer.
- **Develop a more diverse workforce**, attracting more BAME teachers, women and those with a disability.

In achieving these ambitions, the Government should introduce three national guarantees:

- 1) **A daily physical activity guarantee** - Looking to support reducing obesity, improving physical fitness and promoting positive mental health

⁵ Statistics: school workforce - GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-workforce>. (Accessed: 24th September 2020)

⁶ Why investing in physical activity is great for our health – and our nation | Sport England. Available at: <https://www.sportengland.org/news/why-investing-physical-activity-great-our-health-and-our-nation>. (Accessed: 23rd September 2020)

- 2) **A weekly active after-school sport guarantee for every child –**
Every school in the country should have an after-school sports club offer. This delivers the benefit of improving opportunities available to young people to enjoy sport, but also supports working parents who may face childcare challenges outside of school hours. The experience of PE and school sports clubs at secondary school had a very strong influence on continued sport participation, with the early years at secondary school being a key point for some disengaging from sports ³²
- 3) **A guaranteed million hours of youth sport volunteering -** Building employability and contributing to the voluntary sector of sport.

These guarantees should be measured annually through a school-level survey of provision conducted by a locally deployed national network, alongside the benchmarking of physical development as part of a broader national wellbeing measure. National ambitions and guarantees such as these have proven successful in leveraging significant investment of time and resources as well as aligning a range of services (for example, the Public Service Agreement Target for PE and School Sport between 2002 and 2010).

We believe the PE curriculum should be overhauled to put the enjoyment and motivation of all pupils at the centre of every lesson and to promote more active lifestyles. It should focus on sustained periods of vigorous physical activity, accompanied by a physical and personal outcome (social, emotional, cognitive) which is progressive across all four key stages. Inclusive pedagogy should ensure access and enjoyment for pupils across all ability levels, with the teaching of relevant activities that match pupil interest and community provision.

A professional development programme designed to help teachers better develop physical literacy and educate through physical activity and sport would be transformational. It should help to ensure every young person benefits from the outcomes a superb Physical Education should deliver; physical development and fitness, wellbeing, character, engagement, motivation, and life skills which support future employability.

We also recommend the Government focuses investment in developing a globally admired School Games programme, which extends the success of the current competitive school sport programme to include daily physical activity, fitness, dance and outdoor activities. The profile and reach of this national programme should be harnessed to improve parents' awareness of the benefits of play and sport for their children.

There are 21,000 schools registered in the School Games programme with over 10,000 School Games Marks being awarded last year – it is one of the enduring legacies of the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games. In 2018/19 the School Games provided 2,053,278 opportunities for young people to enjoy competitive school sport, from major county-level events to smaller competitions between and within schools. The inclusion strand of the programme has transformed access to competitive school sport for young disabled children, with 484,062 participation opportunities created in 2018/19. Building on the commitment in the Government's School Sport & Activity Action Plan to extend the School Games, the successful model of this national programme should be harnessed to promote daily physical activity and parental engagement.

3.3 How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? if possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

Childhood physical activity levels are key predictors of physical activity levels in adulthood.⁷ The experience of PE and school sports clubs at secondary school had a very strong influence on continued sport participation, with the early years at secondary school being a key point for some disengaging from sports.⁸ Evidence shows that the most impactful way to tackle this drop-off in levels of physical activity is to improve young people's experience and enjoyment of it. Research from the University of Middlesex shows that such poor experiences can put people off exercise, sport and physical activity for life, with some adults choosing sedentary jobs and inactive hobbies as a result.⁹

It is therefore vitally important that the Government's approach encompasses a strong focus on getting children active so that future generations grow-up to be fit and healthy adults.

It is important the Government considers specific pathways for under-represented groups and again, COVID-19 has presented some challenges that will need to be addressed. Among girls, 24% of those aged 11-14 and 50% of those aged 15-18 reported that COVID-19 and lockdown had a negative impact on their mental health.¹⁰ There has also been a significant deterioration in mental health in recent months for many young people but particularly for those of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) origin who appear to be suffering disproportionately worse damage to their mental health than their white peers.¹¹

The Youth Sport Trust has worked successfully to target under-represented groups to grow levels of physical activity through programmes such as [Girls Active](#) – raising participation among girls, [Breaking Boundaries](#) – improving social connectedness and attitudes to diversity, Project Ability and Inclusion 2020 – increasing participation and confidence among young people with SEND and [Active Across Ages](#) – tackling loneliness and increasing activity through partnering young people with older care home residents.

We would be happy to provide further insights and details of these programmes and their impact.

3.4 Sporting future: a new strategy for an active nation, the government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome

⁷ Public Health England. Everybody Active, Every Day. *Public Heal. Engl.* 1–23 (2014).

⁸ Sports participation amongsts 14-21 year olds: How do we encourage young people to stay involved in sport? *Sport Wales* (2012).

⁹ UK Active. Generation Inactive 2 - Nothing About Us, Without US. *Uk Act. kids* 32 (2018). doi:10.1016/0022-1694(88)90150-3

¹⁰ Girlguiding research briefing: Early findings on the impact of Covid-19 on girls and young women May. *Girlguiding* (2020).

¹¹ Covid-19 affects BAME youth mental health more than white peers – study | Society | The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/21/covid-19-hits-bame-youth-mental-health-worse-than-white-peers-study>. (Accessed: 24th September 2020)

priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the Government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?

We believe these five outcomes should remain the priorities of any sport and physical activity strategy going forward, as long as outcomes in individual development also considers activity through education. We would also reiterate that we feel the Government should present a long-term generational strategy with joined-up funding streams where individual programmes feed into a more strategic and impactful whole. This should be aligned to an overarching national ambition to make young people in the UK the happiest and most active in the world.

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

We believe the annual benchmarking of physical development of children through PE is required as part of a broader national wellbeing measure for children and young people. This would better inform the effective use and targeting of future investment. The current lack of any formal assessment and benchmarking of children's physical activity levels and physical development undervalues its importance to a child's education and development, and results in an accountability deficit. We are united with other sport organisations and children's charities in calling for young people's wellbeing to be benchmarked alongside other national data sets such as the National Child Measurement programme.

It would be beneficial for ongoing studies to be conducted to monitor how much activity children participate in across a whole year. This would allow more insight into seasonal trends and help target support further.

We currently have good data on where sporting facilities are, but we have less of an understanding about where and how activity happens across the different types of facilities.

Lastly, we can currently only calculate an average across the whole nation of the number of schools providing 2-hour PE classes per week. A greater understanding of this would help us to target schools that require more support from investment in PE and school sport.

3.6 Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?

There should be a national plan for sport and recreation that includes a specific focus on school sport. This must be joined-up across government departments, be long-term and have clear national ambitions which can be monitored and tracked to drive their achievement.

The plan should draw on past successes, as referenced within this response, and what has been learned from these. It should focus on:

- The benchmarking of physical activity and physical development across all age groups as part of a wider national wellbeing measurement programme.
- A national teacher training programme to i) transform physical literacy and the wider wellbeing outcomes of the PE curriculum and ii) support all teachers to engage young people in activity across the school day.
- An inclusive 'active extended day' offer at every school.
- A globally admired School Games programme which extends the success of the current competitive school sport programme to include daily physical activity, fitness, dance and outdoor activities. The profile and reach of this national programme should be harnessed to improve parents' awareness of the benefits of play and sport for their children.
- A local infrastructure of nationally deployed professional school sport and activity organisers and young volunteers responsible for implementing the plan.

It should also deliver on three national guarantees of:

- **A daily physical activity guarantee**
- **A weekly active after-school sport guarantee for every child**
- **A guaranteed million hours of youth sport volunteering**

These guarantees fulfilled and supported by a joined-up strategy and held accountable by a national wellbeing measure could help deliver on a national ambition to make our children the happiest and most active in the world.

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