

# Written evidence submitted by Sport England

## Introduction

Sport England is an arm's length body of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport with the responsibility in England to transform people's lives by getting them active and playing sport. We are committed to using our advocacy, insight and investment of Exchequer and National Lottery funding to harness the wide-ranging benefits of sport and physical activity for individuals and communities across the country.

## Executive Summary

1. The impact of Covid-19 on community and grassroots sports organisations has been significant and can be distinguished from the challenges faced by professional or elite sporting organisations in terms of how it has affected the public's sporting and physical activity habits across the nation.
2. Sport England has worked quickly to co-ordinate its response to Covid-19 in collaboration with DCMS to focus its work on two immediate priorities:
  - Supporting community sports organisations, the sport and physical activity workforce and volunteers with action to ensure they come through this period in as strong a position as possible;
  - Keeping the nation moving to ensure that everyone can continue to lead happier, healthier and more active lives during this period.
3. To deliver these priorities, Sport England has: allowed partners greater flexibility to sustain themselves using existing National Lottery and Exchequer investment; announced up to £195 million of additional funding available to help sport and physical activity providers, and launched 'Join the Movement', a new campaign to inspire, advise and encourage the public to be active using the hashtag #StayInWorkOut.
4. New insight, collected through a weekly Savanta ComRes survey, has started to indicate that Covid-19 has caused a significant disruption to adult and children's participation in sport and physical activity, making it harder for them to enjoy the health and social benefits of being active.

5. For sports sector providers, Covid-19's immediate operational impact has resulted from restrictions on people's ability to gather or to access appropriate facilities and equipment with events rescheduled and cancelled, resources repurposed to support communities in new ways or delivered online, and difficulties for interventions that serve inactive demographic groups. The financial impact has been an immediate loss of income resulting in cashflow issues and difficulties covering the ongoing costs of facilities.
6. The long-term impact is hard to predict; however, Sport England is committed to ensuring that community sports organisations can play a critical role in reconnecting communities once lockdown conditions begin to relax. Sport England expect the operational and financial risks of Covid-19 to increase in scale with each extension to the period of social distancing.
7. While emerging trends are yet to be fully explored, it is likely that the sports sector will need to continue its evolution to accommodate: less transactional and more collaborative relationships with consumers; continuing digital transformation; business resilience, and; positive outcomes through social action.

**Q: How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?**

8. As an arms-length body of DCMS, Sport England has co-ordinated its response to Covid-19 in close collaboration with Ministers and officials. This has included weekly update briefings with the Minister for Sport and daily contact with senior officials in the department. Additionally, Sport England has taken care to coordinate its response alongside other ALBs within DCMS, including UK Sport. This deliberate action has focused its work on two immediate priorities:
  - Supporting community sports organisations, the sport and physical activity workforce and volunteers with action to ensure they come through this period in as strong a position as possible;
  - Keeping the nation moving to ensure that everyone can continue to lead happier, healthier and more active lives during this period.

9. Sport England has subsequently added to these priorities to include a focus on the future to reflect, understand and learn from the collective response of different community sport organisations and the wider sports sector.

10. In recent weeks, Sport England has introduced new measures to complement other sources of Government support and new sources of funding made available by other funders of sport and physical activity, including:

***Allowing greater flexibility in how partner organisations use existing funding***

11. On 17<sup>th</sup> March, Sport England gave specific assurances to individuals or organisations who have already received funding to introduce significant flexibility about how and when this funding can be used to sustain community sports organisations. This will last for an initial period of three months and includes flexibility around what or how activity is delivered, timelines for this and the KPIs, targets and conditions that had previously been agreed. Sport England anticipate a review and possible extension of these assurances in June 2020.

***£195 million investment in sport and physical activity organisations***

12. On 31<sup>st</sup> March Sport England announced a new £195 million support package - additional to any support available from central Government - targeted at local sports clubs, community organisations and regional and national partners. This is a combination of National Lottery and Exchequer funding and includes:

- A £20 million Community Emergency Fund available to grassroots sports clubs and community organisations to bid for grants of between £300 and £10,000.
- A £5 million pot for existing partners to bid into if they are facing specific financial difficulty as a result of Covid-19.
- An additional £55 million to support the sport and physical activity sector during an ongoing period of restrictions, to fund new and innovative ways to keep people active and, when the period of restrictions is over, to help organisations get back to business and adjust to a different environment.

- A £115 million rollover of current funding into 2021/22 to give long term certainty to over 100 well established partners who play a vital role in the delivery of sport and physical activity in England.

13. Sport England is continuing to explore additional financial support measures and ways to stimulate alternative sources of investment such as crowdfunding, loans and social investment to further support the sector to stabilise and start 'self-helping' on the road to recovery.

14. Many of Sport England's partners have also launched their own packages of support and interest-free loans and are establishing practices to work together to avoid duplicating investments.

***Join the Movement, a new campaign to inspire activity***

15. On 26<sup>th</sup> March, Sport England launched a new National Lottery-funded 'Join the Movement' campaign, using the hashtag #StayInWorkOut to share tips, advice and guidance on how people can keep or get active in and around their home. A range of content which anyone can access freely has been collated on the campaign hub at <http://www.stayinworkout.org/>

16. The campaign has its own online hub to give access to a range of home workout options - including existing free exercise content and advice from organisations such as the NHS, and workouts from popular fitness brands and influencers such as Les Mills on Demand, Joe Wicks (The Body Coach) and FiiT, many of whom are offering free content and extended trials to help people get easy access to home exercise.

17. These resources are necessarily broad in order to cater to the needs of everyone experiencing inactivity as a result of Covid-19. Importantly, Join the Movement recognises that no one solution will be appropriate for everyone. Its campaign hub contains more bespoke support that is particularly relevant to different demographics and audiences like parents, older people, pregnant women and people with long-term health conditions.

18. The campaign has also encouraged people to go outside close to where they live for one session of exercise a day, alone or with their household, in line with Government guidance.

### *The future of Sport England's response*

19. Sport England will continue to review and - if needed - add to its response to better meet the needs of community sports organisations.

20. Should lockdown conditions continue for an extended period, Sport England would ask that DCMS and HM Treasury commit to providing the necessary Exchequer funding to continue providing financial support once current resources are exhausted.

### **Q: What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?**

21. Covid-19 has led to significant disruption in how sport and physical activity can be delivered during lockdown conditions and has therefore required Sport England to engage positively and work collaboratively and flexibly with community sports organisations, use agile techniques to serve them and commission new research to better understand and respond to the challenges they face.

### *Listening to the experience of sport and physical activity providers*

22. Sport England's response to support community sport organisations through this period has been designed using insight from continuous discussions with its funded partners and other sports bodies (for example Leisure Operators) as their needs have evolved.

23. In addition, Sport England established a new Coronavirus Email Address (coronavirus@sportengland.org) to ensure that our response also supported grassroots clubs, community organisations, charities and businesses who might not have received support from Sport England in the past. This received more than 800 submissions<sup>1</sup> describing the sector's most pressing concerns, medium and longer-term issues and has been supplemented by colleagues' ongoing dialogue with partners.

24. The measures Sport England has announced received positive feedback about both the campaign and financial support measures from its funded partners and the wider sport and physical activity sector. For example, Chief Executive of Badminton

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<sup>1</sup> As of Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020

England, Adrian Christy, tweeted: “I’m sure I speak on behalf of many sports and community sports clubs in saying a huge thank you for this investment. It’s an absolute lifeline not just for those in sports but those who participate. Great job.”

### ***Using agile techniques to distribute National Lottery and Exchequer funding***

25. The scale and pace of Sport England’s response has been particularly praised across the sector. It received numerous comments from partners who were grateful for the very genuine listening exercise that was undertaken to inform its response at this difficult time.

26. Three specific examples of this feedback, amongst many others, came from:

- Lee Mason, Chief Executive of the Active Partnership Network, who said: ““I just wanted to feedback how positively Sport England’s response over the last couple of weeks has been received within the network. Proactive, focused, flexible and timely, and perhaps most importantly, an early example of demonstrating in practice the new values and ways of working you have been talking about.”;
- Sara Sutcliffe, Chief Executive of Table Tennis England, who said: “on behalf of the Board, staff and membership of Table Tennis England I would like to record our sincere thanks to you both, the senior leadership team and the Board of Sport England for your outstanding leadership in this period of crisis. To know that we are partners in this together and that we are all going to work incredibly hard to bring the sector through and to hopefully thrive on the other side gives us all a lot of pride as we help our members, coaches, volunteers and everyone involved tackle the immediate challenges they face”, and;
- Mark Lawrie, Chief Executive of StreetGames, who said: “I just want to say ‘thank you’ ... for being so swift to offer flexibility in the face of the COVID-19 crisis - this has enabled by and many of our locally trusted partners to focus on the most important thing for us - the young people and communities we support [and] ... for presenting a package of measures yesterday that reflects the needs of organisations in short, medium and longer term”.

27. Recent experiences delivering up to £10,000 of funding through Sport England This Girl Can Community Fund (launched in January 2020) have supported the organisation to improve the outcomes of sport and physical activity using agile funding techniques. These have enabled Sport England to distribute ringfenced

funding for its priorities faster and with 'lighter touch' application processes that make it easier for new kinds of organisations to apply for National Lottery funding.

28. These techniques are similarly enabling Sport England's targeted outreach and engagement to generate Community Emergency Fund applications from organisations who are best placed to communicate directly with its intended audiences. Many of these might not have applied for Sport England funding in the past. Sport England is continuing to better understand how it can stimulate higher application rates from community sport providers who reach a more inclusive range of demographic groups.

29. As a result, Sport England has received 5506 applications with requests for financial support totalling £37.6 million<sup>2</sup>. This is significantly more than the amount available, and on current assessment levels it is likely that around 70% of applications will meet the criteria and be successful.

***Building on existing programmes to increase community resilience through sport***

30. The insight gained from Sport England's existing programmes is having a significant impact on communities by creating networks of support in places that have improved local responses to Covid-19.

31. Throughout its current strategy, *Towards an Active Nation*, Sport England has been working at a grassroots level in 12 places: our Local Delivery Pilots. These have been working to deliver £110 million of National Lottery funding into programmes that test new ways of working with Local Authorities and other partners to engage individuals and communities in sport and physical activity.

32. The early learnings of these initiatives and the links they've created between Local Authorities and community sports organisations have strengthened the resilience of these communities that is now paying dividends. Where Local Delivery Pilots have worked in close co-ordination with Local Authority Public Health Teams, staff who were working on these initiatives are now understood to be using their experience engaging the community to improve local responses to Covid-19 across public services.

33. Sport England's advocacy and investment to support the experience of volunteers is similarly paying dividends in supporting local responses to Covid-19. The Active

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<sup>2</sup> As of Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Lives Adult Survey showed that 6.2 million people volunteered for a sports organisation between May 2018 and 2019, with 1.7 million people volunteering as coaches. These are community sport's key workers providing opportunities who usually enable millions of people to enjoy the benefits that physical activity than bring.

34. Volunteering to support sport is associated with increased self-efficacy, self-esteem, emotional wellbeing and resilience and Sport England understand that significant numbers have mobilised to continue supporting their communities in direct response to Covid-19 as NHS Volunteers or by helping to deliver supplies to vulnerable neighbours.

### ***Understanding the scale of the disruption to the population***

30 On 2<sup>nd</sup> April, Sport England commissioned a one-off weekly survey to explore the levels and types of activity being undertaken by the public amidst the ongoing lockdown, how people are feeling about being active and other key questions. A series of surveys were subsequently commissioned on the 9<sup>th</sup> April. Led by Savanta ComRes, the first results<sup>3</sup> came from interviews with 2,034 adults (16+) between Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> and Monday 6<sup>th</sup> April. The data was weighted to be representative of adults in England by age, gender, region and socio-economic status, and showed that:

- There has been a massive disruption in the physical activity behaviours of adults and children in England. 31% of adults did more physical activity and 41% did less physical activity in the last week, compared to before the restrictions. In the same period 30% of children did more and 38% did less compared to pre-restriction levels.
- There are differences in the levels of activity between different demographic groups, with older people, those on lower incomes and those living in urban areas finding it harder to be active during the outbreak.
- There is also a notable recognition of the importance of physical activity in response to the pandemic, with 62% of adults thinking it is more important to be active in the current circumstances compared to other periods.

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<sup>3</sup> Sport England Survey into Adult Physical Activity Attitudes and Behaviour, Savanta Comres, 14 April 2020: <https://www.sportengland.org/news/new-exercise-habits-forming-during-coronavirus-crisis>

- The majority of adults are using physical activity to help them to manage their health and wellbeing: 69% of adults agree that exercise is helping them to manage their physical health, whilst 65% agree it is helping them manage their mental health.
- Importantly, the government's messages about exercise may be having a positive impact. 53% of adults agree that they have been encouraged to exercise by the government's guidance.
- The types of physical activity participation, showed:
  - 59% of adults walked in the last week;
  - 44% did online fitness, offline fitness or informal activity in the home;
  - 18% went jogging, and;
  - 8% cycled.

35. Sport England published the first of these weekly surveys on 14 April and will continue to advise Government and the sport sector to make informed decisions about community sport and physical activity based on evidence collected from future results. This growing evidence base will also guide Sport England's response.

## **Q: What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?**

36. Covid-19's short-term impact on sport and physical activity has led to an evolving picture for providers, supported by new measures and funding from both Government and Sport England.

### ***Operational Impacts***

37. In 2018-2019, Sport England awarded £260.3 million in investments of National Lottery and Exchequer funding<sup>4</sup> across its priorities to support 67 different sports and activities. These funded projects, and those given subsequent awards, are delivered by a wide range of partners across Local Authorities, Schools, Businesses, Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs), Charities, Social Enterprises and other community and voluntary groups.

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<sup>4</sup> Sport England 2018-19 Annual Report and Accounts: <https://www.sportengland.org/corporate-information/annual-report>

38. Across Sport England's investment portfolio, lockdown conditions have impacted the operations of community sports organisations by removing the ability to gather and restricting access to appropriate facilities and equipment for people to play sport or be active. This is particularly relevant for schools and facilities who are no longer able to open their doors or delivery opportunities for participation.

39. Covid-19 has affected each provider in unique ways according to their circumstances, but there are some common trends in how sport and physical activity providers are immediately adapting to lockdown conditions:

- Regular programmes of events and education courses, leagues and other activities have been rescheduled or cancelled removing opportunities for people to be active or maintain their habits;
- Resources are being repurposed to adapt projects for delivery under lockdown conditions and to take on new roles that maintain the connections between participants or mobilise volunteer support for their local community's response to Covid-19;
- Interventions are increasingly moving online, potentially creating new barriers for those without access to the internet, suitable space at home or sufficient digital skills to access these opportunities;
- Projects that support demographic groups who are typically under-represented in sport and physical activity for health, socio-economic, family and other reasons are finding it more difficult to access support or to continue interventions that were designed for these audience's lifestyles before Covid-19;
- In some cases, capital investments to improve community sports facilities through Sport England's Community Asset Fund have been delayed or paused because builders have experienced a shortage in the supply of materials and labour as a result of Covid-19.

40. These trends demonstrate the ongoing challenges faced by sport and physical activity providers, but they also demonstrate the key role that providers play in the lives of their communities. For example, upcoming improvements at The Sands Centre in Carlisle will be funded via a £2 million investment from Sport England's Strategic Facilities Fund. However, the centre now expects to house up to 100

recovering Covid-19 patients as the operator, GLL, is working closely with the NHS in the area. There are many similar examples of providers supporting their communities across the country.

41. Sport England also understand that Covid-19 is having an acute impact on the workforce who regularly provide sport and physical activity offers and how they operate:

- Self-employed or sole trader instructors and coaches have seen the most immediate impact with the loss of opportunities to deliver sport and physical activity projects in their regular settings;
- Significant numbers of staff in community sports organisations have been furloughed or made redundant, resulting in some additional pressures on the remaining workforce;
- Once furloughed, the rules preventing staff from voluntarily maintaining some of their professional duties, for example, maintaining playing fields or sharing home workout tips for their communities, have limited some provider's ability to protect their offer to customers;
- Like many community and voluntary organisations, managing and co-ordinating organisations under these new conditions has required the adoption of new ways of working, planning, holding meetings and making decisions.

42. Community sports organisations have increasingly looked to Sport England for advice and guidance about Government activity guidelines, support schemes and for examples of best practice. Club Matters, Sport England's online portal of practical resources to help sports clubs, published a 'Coronavirus support' web page which has been accessed over 3500 times since its launch on 31<sup>st</sup> March.

### ***Financial Impact***

43. Measures introduced by Government and by Sport England have relieved some of Covid-19's immediate impacts on short-term cashflow for community sports organisations. But Sport England do not expect this funding to keep the entire sports sector in good financial health in the medium or longer term.

44. Community sports organisations have been impacted financially by immediate losses of income caused by the loss of trading, fewer opportunities to fundraise or renew memberships, losses in contractual and service delivery income and the prospect of an economic downturn.

45. The impact of these losses on community sports organisations has varied depending on a number of factors, namely:

- Their level of reliance on public funding - with the largest and smallest national governing bodies (NGBs) being the most secure in the short-term;
- The timing of Covid-19 on competition structures and membership periods - particularly those ending their Winter season or delaying the start of a Summer one;
- Levels of financial reserves;
- The strength and diversity of commercial, merchandising or corporate sponsor relationships.

46. For the smallest organisations, short-term cashflow issues are exacerbated by inconsistent approaches to venue and sessions cancellation fees. Those with the fewest liabilities have largely been able to cease immediate activities without creating significant financial risk.

47. However, the loss of income remains an acute concern for larger organisations who pay mortgages or lease and rent facilities, need to retain staff and continue to pay bills, taxes and business rates during this period.

48. For example, Leisure Trusts and Operators who manage facilities on behalf of Local Authorities currently find themselves with no revenue to maintain their services.

49. In addition to Government relief, these providers are requesting support for the additional costs needed to maintain and secure public sport and leisure facilities from Local Authorities which is dependent on further support from Government. Delays in funding for Local Authorities to meet their obligations has created an immediate cashflow crisis which threatens these organisations' viability. ukactive, a membership body for sport and physical activity providers, has suggested that 2,800 fitness facilities employing 100,000 people are "set to disappear"<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> ukactive Statement, 8<sup>th</sup> April: <https://www.ukactive.com/news/2800-fitness-facilities-and-100000-jobs-at-risk-of-being-lost-from-high-streets-and-communities-within-next-11-weeks/>

50. The closure of services would significantly limit people's ability to lead healthy, happy and more active lives, and would have a drastic impact on England's community infrastructure.

**Q: What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?**

51. Sport and physical activity's ability to bring individuals together and to unite communities will be of critical importance to our nation once the restrictions of lockdown begin to be lifted. Sport England is therefore committed to ensuring that individuals and organisations come through this period in as strong a position as possible and are ready to resume delivering sport and physical activity along with the benefits they create.

52. Public Health England's 'All Our Health' resources indicate that "physical inactivity is responsible for one in six UK deaths (equal to smoking) and is estimated to cost the UK £7.4 billion annually (including £0.9 billion to the NHS alone)"<sup>6</sup>. This finding demonstrates the severe implications of disruption to the nation's activity habits.

53. Without modern precedent, it is difficult to predict Covid-19's long-term impact on the sports sector. However, Sport England do anticipate the operational and financial risks of lockdown conditions to increase in scale with each extension to the period of social distancing.

54. Sport England will therefore adapt its response - and the development of its next strategy - in order to suit the evolving needs of sport and physical activity providers.

55. Sport England added to its immediate priorities in response to Covid-19 to better reflect, understand and learn from the collective response of different community sport organisations and the wider sports sector.

***Operational risks***

56. Sport England is working to avoid a situation where:

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<sup>6</sup> Public Health England, 'Physical Activity: applying All Our Health':  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-applying-all-our-health/physical-activity-applying-all-our-health>

57. Recent increases in the activity levels of our nation (evidenced by Sport England's Active Lives Surveys of adults and children) will be threatened by long periods of inactivity caused by Covid-19: this is an acute challenge for demographic groups who struggle to already struggle to maintain their activity levels like women and girls, those with long-term health conditions, older people, some BAME communities and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds;
58. Reductions in the sport sector's workforce leads to a loss of institutional knowledge, expertise and experience as professional and voluntary staff, coaches and instructors repurpose their skills into other areas of the labour force;
59. Difficulties in maintaining our nation's sports facilities and playing fields reduces the quality of these assets, making it harder for people to return to pre-Covid-19 sports or habits;
60. The sustainability of the sport sector is diminished as individuals or organisations become unable to pay subscriptions to relevant member bodies, disrupting the cohesion and distribution of best practice across our sector at a critical time.

### ***Financial risks***

61. Sport England is working to avoid the risk that fewer organisations are able to return to delivering sport and physical activity because:
62. Community sports organisations may fail to adapt or cover their costs by delivering sport and physical activity offers under lockdown conditions;
63. Shrinking reserves, continued costs and a long-term loss of income risk the financial viability of an increasing number of community sports organisations;
64. Costs for essential services increase as third parties seek to reduce their losses or struggle to acquire the materials and labour they require.
65. Leisure Providers and Operators, who manage public sports facilities on behalf of Local Authorities, would be particularly impacted, with facilities unable to open and clubs and voluntary organisations unable to resume delivering opportunities for the public to be active.
66. As lockdown restrictions begin to be lifted, it is also likely that a phased re-opening would further limit the revenue needed to sustain providers and increase the time needed for their recovery. Reductions in the capacity of gyms and swimming pools

is expected to result in higher running costs and have knock-on effects across the sport and physical activity sector.

67. Sport England is also concerned that direct investment for good causes could be threatened by any possible reductions in the sale of Lottery tickets. This would directly limit Sport England's ability to respond to the impacts of Covid-19 in the long-term and would reduce the amount of investment available for community sports organisations working to support individuals and communities and deliver the positive health and other outcomes of being active.

## **Q: How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?**

68. Just as Covid-19 is changing the population's activity habits under lockdown conditions, it is likely that these habits will continue to change after restrictions are relaxed rather than simply 'returning to normal'. It is also possible that a longer period of social distancing may add additional pressures on membership organisations and have further reaching effects on the public's participation in team sports for the foreseeable future.

69. In order to support its response, Sport England recognises the potential value of comprehensive scenario planning to support sport and physical activity providers and its immediate 'horizon-scanning' work has been repurposed to better understand how current trends might continue to shape people's lives in the post-Covid-19 world.

70. While emerging trends are yet to be fully explored, it is possible that the sport sector will need to continue its evolution to accommodate:

### ***Adapting to changing behaviours using collaboration***

71. After the disruption Covid-19 has caused in people's activity habits and behaviours, it is unknown if the public will feel comfortable and safe to continue doing the sports, clubs and events they did before the lockdown, especially if restrictions are lifted but some social distancing rules remain.

72. It is therefore possible that projects designed to support and engage the public before the lockdown might no longer be suitable or deliverable after lockdown conditions are lifted.

73. Sport England anticipates that community sports organisations will need to collaborate with communities to recognise, understand and adapt to the new requirements of their target audiences. As a result, Sport England hopes that providers will evolve to develop less transactional and more supportive relationships with members and participants building on the techniques developed by its Local Delivery Pilots.

### ***Continuing digital transformation***

74. Some providers have already embraced digital delivery and engagement, but Sport England expect that digital offers will becoming an increasingly important feature of successful sport and physical activity offers.

75. These need not be purely digital or home-based opportunities, but it is likely that community sports organisations will be required to better balance digital and in-person offers, or offer a mix of the two, in order to reach people and engage them effectively.

76. Community sport organisations need support to design and deliver high-quality experiences. But as the current crisis has shown, the public value a diversity of simple and engaging online content so providers do not need to create complex or overly 'produced' material so long as it is targeted and meets the demands of its audience.

77. Collecting data, analysing it and using insight will be necessary to stimulate new markets and reach new audiences, but not all providers feel they have the resource to undertake this work.

78. There is significant opportunity to use this period as a catalyst for digital transformation of organisations across the sector, but community sports organisations must be careful to ensure that inequalities in activity levels across demographic groups are narrowed, not widened. As a result, the design of funding and support packages offered must avoid leaving important audiences behind.

79. DCMS and Sport England already work together to champion the role of insight, data and digital innovation within the sports sector, but Covid-19 is already

generating new examples of best practice and new opportunities to support this agenda further.

### ***Continuing to increase business resilience***

80. Sport England anticipate community sport organisations will look to commit increasing resources to business transformation including reassessments of financial protocols, risk management, reserve policies and governance structures where these might no longer be considered suitable.

81. After the immediate uncertainty caused by Covid-19, it is likely that many organisations will need support to decide if their current structures are appropriate and effective under new conditions. Where sustained engagement has not been possible during lockdown, re-establishing relationships with local communities will require more than just transactional relationships with consumers.

82. Sport England already provides some business planning support to many of its funded partners but will be looking to expand this offer in response to Covid-19.

### ***Driving positive outcomes through social action***

83. Sport, volunteering and social action are well placed to support our nation's transition out of lockdown, improving social connection, wellbeing and community cohesion as the nation adjusts to the 'new normal'.

84. Previous research from Sport England has estimated<sup>7</sup> that 1 volunteer enables 8 participants into activity. Under lockdown conditions, Sport England understand that many people who have volunteered in community sports organisations are already mobilising their resources to support crucial health and community services.

85. Sport England anticipates that community sports organisations will need to maintain a high quality of experience for volunteers in order to safeguard their critical contribution to the sports sector and their communities. It is already considering how volunteers in sport can continue to deliver this socially responsible work as the response to Covid-19 evolves.

## **Further information**

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<sup>7</sup> Hidden Diamonds report, 2015 - <https://www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/pages/volunteering-research>

86. Sport England is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and would welcome to the opportunity to give further oral evidence.

**Sport England**

**April 2020**