

Written evidence submitted by Youth Sport Trust

DCMS Select Committee inquiry on the impact of COVID-19 on DCMS sectors

About the Youth Sport Trust

1. The Youth Sport Trust is an independent UK children's charity dedicated to creating a brighter future for young people through the power of sport and physical activity. We want to ensure that every child — regardless of age, gender, background or ability — has the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of an active lifestyle and has access to high quality PE and school sport. We passionately believe this is crucial to tackling some of the biggest challenges facing today's generation of children and young people.
2. Founded in 1995, the Youth Sport Trust has pursued this charitable mission to great effect, working with public and private funders to impact upon the lives of millions of young people using sport as a tool for social impact.
3. The charity's work is funded by a range of sources including trusts and foundations, businesses, National Governing Bodies of sport, local authorities and government departments. A significant proportion of our funding comes from National Lottery Sport England investment, which funds our national delivery of the School Games.

What has been the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the sector?

4. As a sport sector organisation, it has been positive to see the increased profile of the importance of daily physical activity and some high-profile influencers have emerged and brought volume and profile to the importance of daily activity and the benefits of sport.
5. The immediate challenges we faced as a charity have been the impact of restrictions placed on so many of the organisations, charities, clubs and societies which facilitate sport and activity on a daily basis (from leisure centres, to playgrounds and from schools to community sports clubs). School closures meant that we could not do any school-based delivery for a number of weeks and we are now adapting delivery based on what is possible. Social distancing measures meant that much of our normal training delivery had to be adapted. The autumn term is our busiest period of the year for delivery so we may face a potential surge in demand at that point which we may not be able to service
6. The impact on our income has been significant in the short and mid-term and the consequences are likely to be long-lasting. Fundraising events have been cancelled or postponed. Corporate sponsors have pushed back delivery of commitments and therefore the associated income (which may not now come through in the 20/21 financial year). Trust and Foundations have closed funds to redirect their resources to front-line charities tackling the immediate impact of COVID-19.
7. There are two impacts which are common to both the sport and charity sector. One is the challenge of maintaining relationships and the engagement of volunteers throughout this period. The other is the competitiveness that arises when there are scarce resources and airtime and everyone is battling for both. There has been a significant response from the charity and sport sectors, but these have not always been co-ordinated.

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

8. We have made use of the Treasury's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to put around two-thirds of our staff on furlough leave. This has meant we have been able to avoid significant redundancies so far, but the reality is that our vulnerability will extend beyond the next 6-12 months following the outbreak.
9. Sport England's response has been exceptional, acting quickly to provide flexibility on delivery and maintaining core staffing to help put sports organisations and charities like ours in a strong position to resume delivery after the pandemic.
10. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, along with Sport England, have been highly receptive and supportive working with us on the redeployment of the national network of 450 School Games Organisers, to run a weekly digital sport and physical activity programme to keep children active during the period of school closures.

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

11. We are concerned that some charities and sport organisations including National Governing Bodies may not be sustainable without further government support, especially once the Job Retention Scheme is removed.
12. [Research](#) from Sport England in April painted a mixed picture of the impact of the lockdown on physical activity levels. While some were able to maintain or increase levels of physical activity, 38% of parents said their children were less active since the lockdown started. We are concerned that a negative consequence of the lockdown may be a long-term reduction in young people's activity and physical literacy levels. It could be particularly damaging to young people's wellbeing if this coincided with a reduction in the capacity of the sector to inspire and facilitate greater opportunities for young people to enjoy sport and physical activity.
13. The redeployment of the national network of School Games organisers to keep young people active at home during the crisis has shown the value and importance of sustaining a robust national infrastructure dedicated to delivering high quality youth and school sport. With the sport sector likely to be weaker and more vulnerable following the pandemic, we believe it will be even more vital that government continues to invest in this national infrastructure and sets out a cross-government strategy for tackling the generational challenge of inactivity among young people.

What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with COVID-19?

14. Sport England, Spirit of 2012 Trust and the People's Health Trust provide great lessons learnt in how to be a responsible and conscientious funder, recognising that it is not only programme delivery that suffers when funding/activity is stopped. The flexibility offered by Sport England to allow us to

maintain investment in core staffing costs has been central to our charity avoiding an immediate wind down.

15. While there has been significant national discourse on physical activity, Physical Education has very rarely been a formal part of the school virtual curriculum. This highlights the need for greater recognition of the fundamental place of the subject in young people's education and development.

How might the sector evolve after COVID-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

16. There have been some 'silver linings' from this crisis which the sector should harness and learn from. There has been more public discourse on the importance of exercise and physical activity to people's health and wellbeing. There have also been successful examples of partnering and collaboration between the charity sector and the sport sector which have driven powerful campaigns and fundraising activities. There has also appeared to be an increase in people's engagement with 'free to access' sport and exercise like running, walking and home workouts online.
17. Sport, culture and civil society can play a significant role in helping society to recover from the lockdown, building up communities and connections between people and supporting young people's wellbeing.
18. The decline in levels of physical activity among some young people since schools closed is evidence of the important role schools play in nurturing healthy active lifestyles. It will be vital that they are supported to develop young people's physical literacy and boost activity levels when they return.
19. Our liaison with National Governing Bodies of Sport and community sport organisations has found that many are nervous that schools may be reluctant to open up their sites for sport, particularly if some degree of social distancing remains once schools are reopened. This could have a significant negative impact on community sport provision and participation among young people. Clear advice and guidance to schools and sport organisations from the Department for Education and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will be needed to help manage this potential situation. If schools reopen while other restrictions remain it will be important that government gives clarity on whether sport coaches working in and with schools will be considered key workers.
20. A consequence of the lockdown has been to place a renewed emphasis on the importance of digital delivery. For our charity, face-to-face training has moved online, and we expect that the more widespread adoption of online delivery models will continue after social distancing. With more emphasis on online delivery it will be vital that steps are taken to tackle digital deprivation if we are to avoid the risk of leaving behind those most in need of the sector's support.
21. In summary, the sector is likely to emerge from the crisis less financially resilient, facing a greater challenge to tackle inactivity, but with a huge opportunity to harness a national appetite to reengage in sport and embrace its potential to bring communities together. We believe government has an essential role to play in ensuring the sector can rise to this challenge. Central to this should be a long-term, cross-government national strategy for youth sport and physical activity backed with funding and infrastructure to ensure the sector can deliver it.