

Written Evidence submitted by Sporting Equals

Impact of COVID-19 ON DCMS Sectors

June 2020

Background

Sporting Equals is Britain's leading charity in championing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) diversity in the sport and physical activity sector. We're a national partner of Sport England and have over 20 years of experience in promoting and celebrating ethnic diversity in sport across the UK. We have an extended network of over 5,000 BAME-led organisations including faith centres, community groups, ethnic media and sport clubs. Over the years we have acquired extensive insight into local communities and "on the ground" knowledge garnered through delivering projects in cities throughout the country.

Executive Summary

- **For micro and small BAME-led organisations providing sports and physical activity services, COVID-19 has drastically impacted finances and income streams.**
- **The Coronavirus Job Retention scheme has been utilised by many in our network, but they have raised issues with their furloughed staff not being able to volunteer for their organisation.**
- **The Sport England Community Emergency Fund has been well received by the sector, but smaller organisations without the understanding of application have missed out.**
- **BAME communities have been disproportionately impacted by the virus, and as a result this may have an impact on their return to play once lockdown ends.**
- **DCMS and arms-length bodies must consider enlisting organisations like Sporting Equals to act as fund distributors to ensure organisations that are most in need, get adequately funded.**

Questions

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

1. The immediate impact of COVID-19 on the sports and physical activity sector has been drastic since the lockdown began on 24 March 2020. Following the Government announcement, all sports and leisure facilities providing indoor and outdoor play had to cease business and as a consequence the BAME sport and physical activity sector has been financially impacted, as have participation levels amongst the communities that they serve.

Financial

2. As across many sectors, the financial impact on the BAME sports and physical activity sector has been vast. Often BAME community groups are funded project to project, and when these projects cannot be undertaken, this means excess funding needs to be sourced to guarantee the continuation of the organisation. A report conducted by UBELE on the BAME community and voluntary sector found that micro and small BAME

organisations that receive less than £10,000 and upwards of £100,000 per annum were most affected (87 per cent of its respondents).¹ Furthermore, the majority of micro and small organisations were found not to have any reserves (68 per cent) and 19 per cent only had enough reserves to last three months.² Consequently, most of the organisations that we work with fall under the small and micro organisation category.

3. Where in many instances emergency funding has been made available to retain organisations throughout the crisis, the amount given through grants is often not enough to sustain the organisation. Many smaller grants of around £500 have been made available to local organisations, but it has only really been the Community Emergency Fund³ (grants of up to £10,000) administered through Sport England that has been able to provide a sustainable level of funding for the smaller organisations. This level of funding has been limited, and due to the popularity new applications are currently frozen. Whilst these funding streams have been helpful in sustaining the organisations, it is not an endless supply of funding. Further, not all organisations have been successful in applying for larger grants due to eligibility issues, problems applying for the fund and even where they largely fund activities through the founder of the organisation and do not have a bank account specific to the sports provider.
4. BAME organisations all over the country have worked hard to mitigate these impacts. Thousands of local organisations (both members and our wider network) have provided ongoing support including food aid, medical aid, hygiene awareness, welfare checks and hundreds of other interventions. A consequence of the crisis has been that organisations that previously largely focussed on sport and physical activity are now having to diversify in their position as community hubs. They have access into these communities and are providing help where they can. Where some previously dealt with young BAME people, they are now helping their families who are struggling during lockdown. Feedback from our ongoing consultation with these organisations indicates that they are extremely concerned about their financial position and their ability to continue delivering vital services. Several community organisations we know have already been forced to close permanently, with all experiencing significant reductions in voluntary and service income.
5. Our work with organisations highlights that many BAME organisations are worried about their ability to develop and about threats to their sustainability. Lack of easily accessible funding followed by lack of funding geared to the specific services provided, were the two most commonly cited constraints to growth and development. Some organisations speak about the growth of the 'contract culture', the growth in paperwork associated with securing funding and a feeling of exclusion from the partnerships and alliances which now form the basis of much bidding for funds. In terms of support, help with grant applications, general fundraising and sponsorship are clear priorities, followed by help with developing project or business plans. The above points to the urgent need

¹<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58f9e592440243412051314a/t/5eaab6e972a49d5a320cf3af/1588246258540/REPORT+I+mpact+of+COVID-19+on+the+BAME+Community+and+voluntary+sector%2C+30+April+2020.pdf>

² Ibid

³<https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/our-funds/community-emergency-fund>

to engage and support these communities in physical activity, in order to improve their health and life chances, and, thus, long-term wellbeing.

Participation

6. It was encouraging that when lockdown was initiated across the country, the UK Government allowed for households to leave their house once a day to partake in physical activity (providing that it allowed for social distancing and only included members of that household). However, in May 2020, Sport England revealed that activity levels for children have fallen during the pandemic, with 44 per cent of children not engaging in any form of physical activity daily or less than half an hour each day.⁴ Additionally, research conducted by Yorkshire Cancer Research in April 2020 found that adult physical activity had dropped by a quarter since the start of lockdown.⁵ Whilst the data did not allow for ethnic breakdown, due to consistent Active Lives data indicating that Black and Asian individuals are the most inactive of all ethnic groups,⁶ it is highly likely that activity levels amongst BAME children have dropped considerably. This has a negative impact on the BAME sport and physical activity sector, as many of the organisations that we work with have worked with determination to increase activity levels amongst inactive communities, and in many respects the lockdown has reversed a lot of these efforts as these communities struggle to stay active. Additionally, one of our respondents representing a wrestling club stated that due to the lockdown, they were losing members for two reasons, membership costs and that they are no longer receiving services. Consequently, this is further contributing to a loss in income as well as seeing a decrease in activity. What is of concern is that it may be difficult to re-engage these individuals back into sport and physical activity once lockdown has been lifted.
7. Consistent data published through the Active Lives Adult Survey has found that those from Black and Asian (excluding Chinese) backgrounds have the lowest activity levels (150 minutes of physical activity a week) of all ethnic groups at 58 per cent and 54 per cent respectively.⁷ Breaking down the statistics by gender, the lowest participation is among Asian females (49.1 per cent) and followed by Black females (52.9 per cent).⁸ In addition, some preventable diseases are prevalent among BAME communities. For example, people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin have higher rates of cardiovascular disease; Black African and Black Caribbean ethnicities have higher rates of hypertension; and Type II Diabetes has a higher prevalence in BAME communities.⁹ An active lifestyle works towards actively combatting and preventing these conditions, operating in areas of high-BAME population, the community groups that we work with serve these communities and provide accessible avenues towards an active lifestyle for the typically inactive. We are concerned that given there has been a clear link

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52546937>

⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/coronavirus-lockdown-physical-activity-reduced-exercise-weight-a9505411.html>

⁶ <https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-02/Sportforallreport.pdf?td0pMbTNOs7caOjvMZ0HCRPwsI3jGnFA>

⁷ https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-04/Active%20Lives%20Adult%20November%2018-19%20Report..pdf?BhkAy2K28pd9bDEz_NuisHI2ppuqJtpZ

⁸ Ibid

⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892085/disparities_review.pdf

between COVID-19 related deaths and co-morbidities such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension and Type II Diabetes and the increased risk for BAME communities, that a decreased opportunity for activity will only exacerbate the opportunity for COVID-19 related deaths. Sporting Equals is currently in ongoing consultation with its network to discuss the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the individual and the sector, we would be happy to discuss this further with the DCMS Committee once published.

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

8. We believe that support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies have been mostly successful in addressing the sector's needs but have not gone far enough to guarantee the longevity of BAME sports and physical activity organisations. Many have welcomed Government initiatives like the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and rate relief supplied to small businesses through local authorities. As an arms-length body serving the sector, Sport England has provided valuable funding support to many of the organisations in our wider network with grants of up to £10,000 provided to allow continuation of these community-led organisations throughout the crisis. However, many of the smaller, and less well known BAME-led community sports organisations have struggled with navigating these newly introduced support mechanisms. Consequently, this has resulted in larger representative organisations, such as Sporting Equals, stepping in to provide support to the smaller, less well established in applying for funding through arms-length bodies like Sport England.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

9. Through engaging with our Associate Members, we know that many of these organisations have opted to use the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme,¹⁰ referred to colloquially as 'furlough'. Many of the staff of our organisations have been furloughed, as their employers cannot afford to keep them in work whilst continuing operations to allow the organisation to remain running. Despite being furloughed, many employees have expressed their concern at not being able to work voluntarily for their employers during this time due to the stipulations of the Government's scheme. At a time where a lot of the workforce is currently out of work due to the ongoing crisis, there are a lot of people being furloughed by charities, not for profits and Community Interest Companies (CICs). We know that many of these individuals would like to spend their time working on a voluntary basis for their employer to ensure the continuation of some of the many services that they provide. Subsequently, whilst the furlough scheme has been welcomed by the sector to provide emergency income for employees, for those operating on a not-for-profit basis, many have been frustrated by the inability to utilise furloughed employees as volunteers throughout this period. Additionally, a report conducted by UBELE found that within the BAME voluntary sector, more than half of their respondents (63 per cent) knew a colleague who had been diagnosed and had to self-isolate.¹¹ This means that where services are already stretched due to the

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wages-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

¹¹ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58f9e592440243412051314a/t/5eaab6e972a49d5a320cf3af/1588246258540/REPORT+I+mpact+of+COVID-19+on+the+BAME+Community+and+voluntary+sector%2C+30+April+2020.pdf>

ongoing situation, many are doing so on a reduced workforce from not only staff being furloughed, but also where they have needed to self-isolate.

Sport England

10. Our Associate Members report that the support provided by Sport England has been particularly well-received during the crisis. The Community Emergency Fund¹² was designated from public funding to support community sport and physical activity organisations through the unexpected period of financial hardship. Applicants were able to apply for grants of £300 up to £10,000. Through our Associate Membership scheme, we have supported many of these smaller BAME-led organisations through the application process. From past experience, we have found that many of these smaller and less-established organisations struggle to apply for funding and find the application process difficult to navigate. This is something that has been reported as a barrier to funding by many of these organisations, which is partly a reason as to why we launched our Associate Membership scheme in February this year. It is often those who are well-versed in writing bids and filling in application forms for funding that attain the most capital, meaning those without these skills often miss out. We have found that by providing this level of support to organisations in our network, many have been successful in funding. However, we are concerned that the experience would not be the same for other smaller organisations who may not be aware of the support that is available for them. We have largely relied on word of mouth through organisations in order to extend the benefits of our Associate Membership, however, it would be useful if platforms larger than ourselves were able to spread the word on our behalf in order to ensure funding goes to those who most need it.

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

11. From the perspective of the BAME sport and physical activity sector, we believe that the long-term impacts of COVID-19 will be substantial, in that it may be extremely difficult for many providers to return to play where income streams have dried up and social distancing needs to be a consideration. Further, also taking into consideration the complexities in dealing with service users whose communities have been vastly affected by COVID-19 related deaths, these community groups will have to adopt new levels of sensitivities. We believe that support will need to be given by taking a holistic approach to the sector, by designating larger umbrella organisations with on the ground knowledge to distribute funding and provide support for these BAME sports providers.

Return to play

12. Despite the levels of activity dropping amongst BAME communities, as discussed in Paragraph 4, many of our network have been aiding the communities they serve in different ways and as needed. In regard to the concern in reengaging these people back into sport and physical activity, many BAME-led organisations have been having ongoing conversations with their service users throughout lockdown. However, as previously discussed many organisations have had to cease operations entirely, and without viable funding streams we are concerned as to how the activity levels of their service users will be addressed once lockdown ceases. Many organisations

¹² <https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/our-funds/community-emergency-fund>

will struggle to be in a financial position where they can continue providing sport and physical activity sessions. We are already providing advice and guidance to many of these organisations, pointing them to funding opportunities, supporting them to apply, helping them to re-structure their activities and several other support areas. However, these organisations are in desperate need of investment for both existing activity and for their new, innovative responses to COVID-19.

13. Many of our members have expressed concern that whilst there has been a suite of funding opportunities made available on an emergency basis during the crisis, funds for new projects have been scarce. As a level of normality resumes, many organisations will begin seeking funding for new projects. However, with the COVID-19 crisis affecting every element of our country's infrastructure and economy, there are concerns that opportunities for funding will become less-frequent and less available. Should this happen, it is likely that these organisations will look to Sporting Equals for additional support. We now look to the Government and Sport England to ensure the longevity of these organisations for tailored support packages to allow the continuation of the vital services provided by community-led organisations.
14. The continuation of social distancing will mean that many BAME sports providers will need to diversify what they currently offer their service users. Whilst many have already been doing this through the provision of digital services, and other community-based support, these are not necessarily services that may continue once a level of normality has resumed. Following DCMS Guidance,¹³ we are expecting many of our Associate Members who offer team sports that do not allow for the social distancing standard of two metres to begin offering activities that do. As with many other issues arising from the COVID-19 crisis, it is likely that this could have an associated cost for purchasing new equipment and potentially the cost for retraining staff and volunteers. Additionally, some of our partners have stated that to host sessions indoors they will be restricting attendance numbers, where these are cost-associated, they will be missing out on the additional revenue from limiting the number of attendees. Due to this, providers would like to host more sessions to meet demand, but worry that the additional cost (room hire, staff hire, refreshments etc.) is not feasible.

Impact on BAME communities

15. Following the publication of Public Health England's COVID-19 Disparities report¹⁴, it was been confirmed that those from a BAME background are 10-50 per cent more likely to die from a Coronavirus related death than their white counterparts. Statistics for those from a Bangladeshi background are even more alarming, and these communities are twice as likely to die from COVID-19 than a white person. These are statistics, but the communities that our Associate Members serve have lived through this experience, with their service users being highly likely to have family members and friends that have died from the virus. Many of our organisations have reported that due to this, they are also finding themselves offering counselling services, mental health support or

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-phased-return-of-outdoor-sport-and-recreation>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-review-of-disparities-in-risks-and-outcomes>

signposting to counselling services. This is because, as trusted members of the communities they serve, employees and volunteers for the BAME-led organisations are finding themselves positioned as places to go for help and not just as sports and physical activity providers.

16. These statistics need to be taken more seriously, being public knowledge, this may act as a deterrent for BAME groups to return to play upon the loosening of lockdown. We believe this needs to be a consideration moving forward, and also how to engage with these groups to ensure that their safety is paramount once play resumes. Furthermore, with the above in mind there also needs to be a particular focus on BAME coaches, who may also have the same level of concern to other BAME individuals participating in sport and physical activity. These coaches will need a level of reassurance that they are not putting themselves and their loved ones in danger through resuming work, but also need a level of financial security through being able to begin coaching their given sport again.

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

17. Our Associate Members have reported that during this time, flexibility has been key in terms of support provided. Allowance for the provision of other services during this time has provided a lifeline not only to service users but the organisations themselves, of which have not been able to perform many of their normal sport and physical activity services. We think it is testament to the sport and physical activity sector in how it has responded during lockdown. Many have shown how individuals can remain active from their own homes and remain in contact with their community through digital technology. Others have provided sports and workout equipment through doorstep drops. In the instance that we may see a second spike of the virus at a later date, DCMS and Sport England need to be prepared for further provision of emergency funding to ensure the longevity of BAME-led sport and physical activity providers. We would also like to see more allowances to provide very small community groups funding streams where they do not have dedicated bank accounts for their services, as these organisations have suffered most during this period of lockdown.

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

18. It is difficult to determine exactly when “after COVID-19” is. However, for many it may not necessarily be a return to the normality of pre-Coronavirus for a dearth of reasons, including deaths in the community, social distancing and as reiterated throughout this response, income. How this new landscape will develop is uncertain for many of the organisations that we represent.
19. Some of our Associate Members have reported that they have had varied a level of success with online provision of services. We expect many sport and physical activity providers will continue to see the value of online workout sessions and training. What needs to be considered is that in many cases, providing exercise sessions through digital delivery is cheaper than providing physical sessions. On the other hand, many within the BAME communities, particularly in areas of high economic deprivation, do not have access to digital equipment and the

Internet. This can also be attributed to the high amount of the BAME population living in the most deprived areas (15.7 per cent Asian and 15.2 per cent Black)¹⁵, making internet access and devices a less-affordable option. This statistic increases for Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups who were over three times more likely as White British people to live in the most overall deprived 10 per cent of neighbourhoods.¹⁶ This digital diaspora for poorer communities has become particularly apparent during the lockdown where the Government has made digital devices available for students who are most in need. This is also an issue where organisations work with the elderly, where access to digital skills is more difficult for this generation than others. To combat this disparity to access services, should a second spike occur, we believe that DCMS should make sports equipment available for small community organisations to distribute, to encourage all households to continue fit and healthy lifestyles. We have seen some of the National Governing Bodies of sport providing such equipment to outreach groups, but in order to reach more communities, DCMS should make this equipment available to distribute through Sport England and those it funds to promote active lifestyles for all, and not just those who can afford equipment to participate in their homes.

20. Further, should any additional challenges arise after COVID-19, we would like to see organisations like Sporting Equals being designated as fund distributors with funds allocated from DCMS. Organisations like our own have vital access into community groups and those who they serve, as well as the insight to determine the suitability of a project or organisation. DCMS and the arms-length Government bodies must now consider allocating funds to designated distributors in order to ensure that smaller and less well-established community organisations receive much needed funding to continue the legacy of these vital service providers.

¹⁵ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/people-living-in-deprived-neighbourhoods/latest#overall-most-deprived-10-of-neighbourhoods-by-ethnicity>

¹⁶ *ibid*