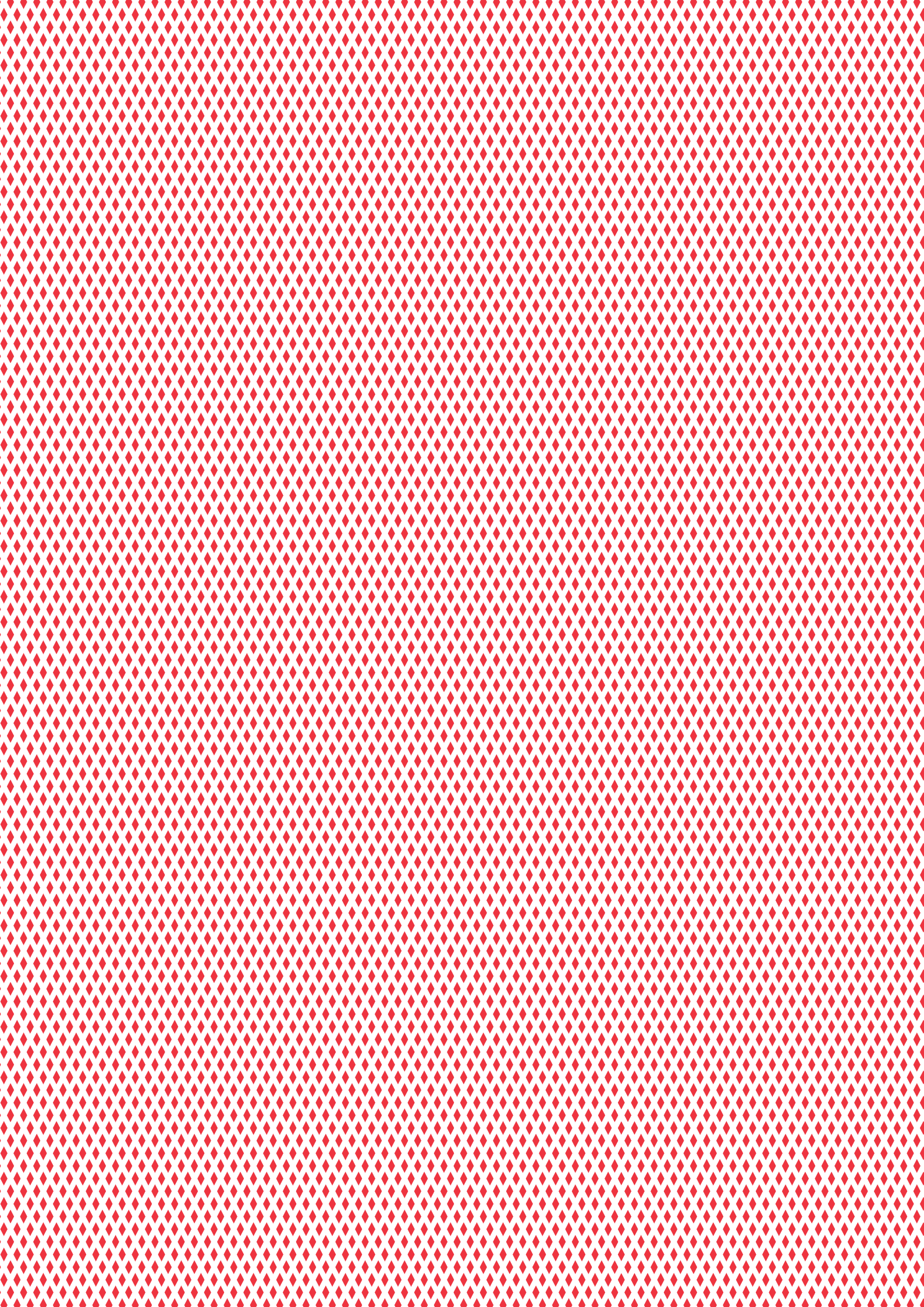


MOVE IT

Increasing young people's participation in sport

Lauren Kahn & Will Norman





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FOREWORD

The human body was designed to move. When we move, good things happen; when we don't, good things *don't happen*. It really is as simple as that. But in a very short period of time, we have become dangerously inactive as a global population.

As economies develop, technology and other modern conveniences enable us to move less, making physical activity *optional*. Participation in sports and active play has never been more crucial than it is today. But access is limited and the importance is undervalued. Youth are not experiencing the enormous spectrum of benefits that sport and active play bring. As a result, childhood obesity, preventable diabetes and a whole host of other emotional and physical health disorders have never been more prevalent. Like never before in history, their potential is stifled due to the absence of something so fundamentally human: Moving. Something needs to change, and it needs to happen now.

In the wake of an enormously successful 2012 Olympics, the UK is in a unique position to elevate and lead a dialogue on the urgency of the issue, the consequences and the opportunities.

Underpinning the London Games was a commitment to 'Inspire a Generation.' While elite and professional sport can inspire and encourage young people, it cannot increase participation levels and access on its own. While funding is critical, effective change will require unprecedented collaboration and action from governments, communities, corporations and civil society. It will be necessary to focus on the

needs and preferences of our youth. Parents, teachers, coaches and mentors need to stand united to demand and provide opportunities like never before.

This report could not come at a more important time. It provides an assessment of the facts, a review of current funding and policy landscape within the UK, and lays out a set of recommendations to create real impact and necessary change. The human and economic costs of physical inactivity are unsustainable, and participation in sports and other forms of active play should not be limited to a privileged few. The happiness, health, and potential of our children are all at stake.

I want to thank the Young Foundation for their extraordinary leadership in this work. We share the same passion to create a brighter future for our children and look forward to leveraging this report with others to move the agenda and action forward.

Lisa MacCallum Carter

Managing Director
Access to Sport, Nike, Inc.

1. INTRODUCTION

Summer 2012 was the UK's summer of sport. Millions watched the European football championships, followed by Wimbledon, the test match cricket with the West Indies and South Africa and, of course, the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Our enthusiasm for watching sport seems to know no bounds. The problem is that we sit at home watching it, rather than participating ourselves. Levels of physical activity in the UK are in decline and sedentary lifestyles are increasingly becoming the norm. We face an epidemic of inactivity that is costing a fortune and threatens the health and wellbeing of millions.

Inactivity constitutes a major public health threat, increasing the risks of chronic disease and disability. This not only causes serious and unnecessary suffering and impairs quality of life, but also comes at a significant economic cost. The direct costs to the NHS and indirect costs to society as a result of inactivity total more than £8 billion each year (see Figure 1).

In a time of budget cuts, investing in physical activity is smart public policy. Raising levels of activity and participation in sports not only improves health outcomes and reduces costs to the NHS and the wider economy, but can also contribute to a range of positive social outcomes including crime reduction, improved levels of wellbeing and mental health, increased educational attainment and more cohesive communities.¹

This report looks at participation in sport and physical activity in England, focusing particularly

on young people. We look at the reasons why levels of participation are low and provide a four-point action plan to get more people active. We draw from extensive secondary research, 30 telephone interviews with relevant experts, and three focus groups with 25 (London-based) young people, aged 14 to 19. We are enormously grateful for all of those who took part in the research.

In January 2012, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) launched Sport England's new strategy, *'Creating a sporting habit for life: A new youth sport strategy'*.³ This outlined a number of important changes to sports policy, including a focus on young people (14 to 25-year-olds), a transitions programme to sustain participation into adulthood, a performance regime for the National Governing Bodies (who have failed to significantly increase participation rates) and increased funding to open up existing facilities, such as secondary schools, for community use.

The new emphasis on young people is encouraging, but we believe that the strategy fails to address some of the core structural and policy problems. The philosophy of sports policy remains embedded in supporting elite and competitive sports. It does nothing to change the overly complex way sport is organised and will continue to fund the organisations that have failed to increase levels of participation in the past. In order to achieve lasting change we propose some more radical solutions outlined below and expanded upon in Chapter 3.

Figure 1: Inactivity as a major public health threat²

	Misusing alcohol	Smoking	Obesity	Inactivity
% English adults affected	6-9%	20%	24%	61-70%
Estimated annual cost to NHS (£bn)	£2.7bn	£2.7bn	£4.2bn	£1-1.8bn
Estimated annual cost to the economy (£bn)	£20.0bn	£5.2bn	£15.8bn	£8.2bn

Insight #1: Investment and policy focus on elite and competitive sport

Public policy and investment in sport in England is heavily weighted towards elite and professional sport. Support for elite sports is highly visible and impact is easy to measure through success in the medals tables. Community sport investment tends to focus on competitive team sports. Our discussions with young people found this emphasis on competition to be at odds with their motivations and preference for individual sports and lifestyle sports, rather than the traditional team sports being espoused by the governing elites.

Recommendation #1: A youth-centred public policy

With a successful Olympics behind us, it is time to shift sports policy away from winning more medals and a focus on elite sports towards a more inclusive approach that aims to get the least active people in society moving. The overriding emphasis on competitive sports is at odds with the motivations and drivers of many of the young people who are currently inactive. Sports policy should not just provide for young people, but should put them at the centre of the process. Sports policy makers need to better understand the needs, interests and motivations of young people and structure delivery around these.

- Place young people at the centre of policy making
- Re-balance elite and community sport funding
- Leverage digital platforms to help drive behavioural change

Insight #2: Fragmented organisation and delivery of sport

The organisation and administration of sport in England⁴ is overly complicated and is not fit for purpose. It is not always clear who is responsible for what, with the remit for sport and physical activity split between multiple government departments including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department of Health and the Department for Education. This highly fragmented and siloed landscape makes collaboration and effective partnerships challenging, and makes it difficult for new resources (such as from the private sector) to reach grassroots and community sports in a co-ordinated way.

Recommendation #2: Co-ordinated delivery of sport

The Sport England 2012–2017 strategy emphasises the importance of partnerships and aims to improve

the links between school sports and wider community activities. However, this does little to simplify the confused landscape of stakeholders and agencies that operate in the sports arena. There needs to be better policy coordination and integration between key partners – in sport, health, transport and education – at both national and local levels.

- Cross-departmental physical activity strategy
- Re-prioritise physical activity in schools
- Co-ordinate and open up delivery and provision at the local level

Insight #3: Public spending cuts

Dig into any area of public policy at the moment and spending cuts are never far below the surface. Sport is no exception. The youth sports sector is under particular pressure and affected by cuts from central and local government as well education reforms. School sport funding is no longer ring-fenced and therefore the provision of school sport is at the discretion of each school. As schools face increasing pressure to deliver against academic targets, and as school sport and physical education (PE) are particularly expensive to provide,⁵ it is not surprising that sport slips down the list of priorities.

Recommendation #3: Leverage current funding streams and align new ones

Public spending cuts and the removal of ring-fencing around dedicated funds means investment in physical activity – from sport, health, education and local government bodies – is at risk. Interest in this agenda, however, is growing and new and non-traditional funding sources are available. It is essential in this time of austerity to maximise current funding streams but also to seek and align new ones.

- Align current investments
- Maximise corporate investment
- Unlock informal resources
- Build a better business case for investment in physical activity

Insight #4: Data and accountability gaps

Physical activity levels across the population, and over time, are not being measured adequately. The monitoring of physical activity surveillance in England is characterised by a number of weaknesses. Although there are numerous surveys, these are not as well co-ordinated as they could be, and inconsistent approaches to measurement (within and across

surveys) mean that results are not always comparable and it is difficult to assess trends over time.

Recommendation #4: Data tracking and accountability to make sport count

Tracking and reporting population physical activity levels is a critical investment, and an accurate picture of physical activity rates and inputs is critical to make a robust case for further investment in the sport and physical activity sector. Accurate tracking of outcomes is also going to be critical in retaining accountability, in the absence of national systems and targets that previously held key agencies to account.

- Consolidate existing measurement systems
- Recognise physical activity as an outcome
- Install mechanisms for monitoring and accountability

There is an urgent need to address growing levels of inactivity in our society. We cannot afford to allow levels of sedentary behaviour to continue to rise. Reversing the current trends requires a fundamental rethink of how community sports are conceived of and delivered. New actors will need to be involved; new partnerships will need to be formed; and none of this will be easy. However, this country has a strong history of leadership and innovation in sport and we are confident that the necessary changes can be made to ensure that we are a more active, healthier and happier nation in the future.

2. FALLING LEVELS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

2.1 What is physical activity?

Physical activity is a broad term used to describe any movement of the body that uses energy, and can refer to anything from doing the housework, walking or cycling to work, taking part in dance classes or kicking a ball around the park, to engaging in a formally organised competitive sport. These different activities can be plotted along a spectrum of motivation ranging from the physical activities undertaken as part of active living (such as the housework) to those we do for fun (such as the recreational activities and sports).

Increasing activity at any point of this spectrum is desirable as research shows that the more active a population is, the healthier and happier it tends to be. Different ends of the spectrum, however, require different approaches, include different stakeholders and involve different motivations. In this report we predominately focus on the recreation and sport end of the spectrum – those physical activities that people choose for enjoyment in their leisure time including organised sport, but also unstructured physical play.

2.2 Levels of physical activity

Physical activity in England is low⁶ with only one in 20 adults meeting government recommended levels.⁷ The UK population has become 20 per cent less physically active over the last 60 years and without a large scale intervention this figure will drop by a further 35 per cent by 2030.⁸ The UK is not alone, with developed countries the world over experiencing a sharp decline in physical activity in work, leisure, the home, and transportation.⁹

The proportion of people meeting the weekly recommendations for physical activity declines with age (see Figure 3) with decreases associated with significant life transitions including moving from primary school to secondary, the onset of adolescence, leaving school, having children, children leaving home, retirement and losing a spouse. All of these have been identified as crucial points where reductions in participation in physical activity are most likely.¹⁰ The most significant drops occur during the teenage years, reflected in the data for organised sports and physical education in Figures 4 and 5 below. The drop-off

Figure 2. The physical activity spectrum

Physical activity is a broad term to describe 'movement of the body that uses energy'. There is a wide spectrum of activity included within the concept of physical activity from active living – including housework and occupational activities – through to structured, competitive sporting activity.



Living

Moderate to vigorous housework, gardening or DIY.

Occupational activities, manual work etc.

Lifestyle, healthcare Programmes, cardiac rehab, weight management.

Travel

Active transport, walking, cycling, using the stairs, school travel plans etc.

Recreation

Exercise, active play, dance, walking or cycling as leisure pursuits, open green space

Sport

Informal sport: Unstructured activities e.g. street sports casual badminton or squash; kick-abouts, shooting hoops etc.

Organised sports: Organised participation; structured, competitive activity; talent development programmes

starts earlier in girls, at around 10 years old, and is more dramatic than in boys. This gender imbalance continues throughout life and by 15, half as many girls as boys are doing the recommended level of physical activity.

“In the future, sports provision will need to respond to an ever-more diverse and ‘muddled demand,’ associated with an increasingly multi-cultural society”

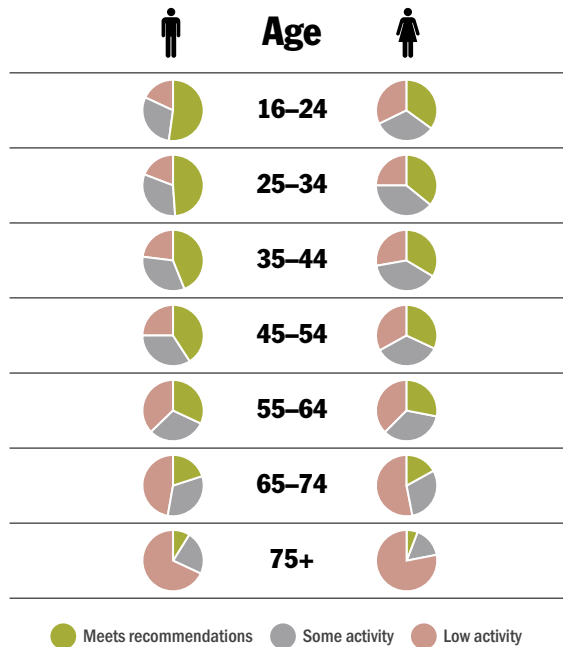
Participation rates differ between socio-economic groups, with the well-off more likely to participate in organised sport, within and outside of school, than their contemporaries in the lower income brackets. Almost twice as many young adults in the lowest household income bracket do no sport compared with those in the highest income bracket.¹¹ Schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals have lower levels of participation in

physical education and school sport. Reflecting other measures of inequality, schools with high proportions of black and minority ethnic (BME) pupils or disabled pupils are less likely to meet the previous government’s targets for physical education and school sport.¹² Young people in the lowest household income bracket are less likely to receive sports tuition, show lower rates of sports club membership and show lower rates of sports volunteering than those in the top income bracket.¹³

Cultural factors also present barriers to participation among certain groups of young people. For example, concepts of sport based on Western values can be at odds to cultural values espoused by South Asian and Muslim communities.¹⁴ In this context, “sport will need to be more sensitive to the barriers that impact on these groups and provide the types of activities that appeal to them within environments that are accessible and welcoming.”¹⁵ In the future, sports provision will need to respond to an ever-more diverse and “muddled demand,” associated with an increasingly multi-cultural society.¹⁶

Figure 3. Physical activity

Proportion meeting weekly recommendations for physical activity, by age

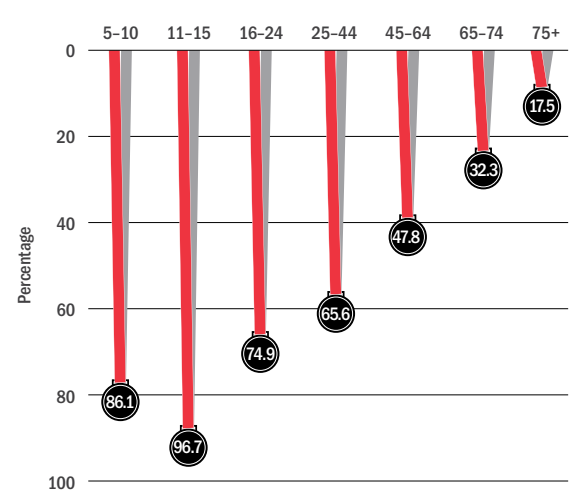


The proportion of people meeting weekly recommendations for physical activity declines with age for both sexes: 53% and 35% of men and women aged 16-25; 41% and 32% of men and women aged 45-54; and 20% and 17% of men and women aged 65-74.

Source: Department of Health, Health Survey for England 2008

Figure 4. Organised sport

Proportion of children and adults who have participated in active sport, by age

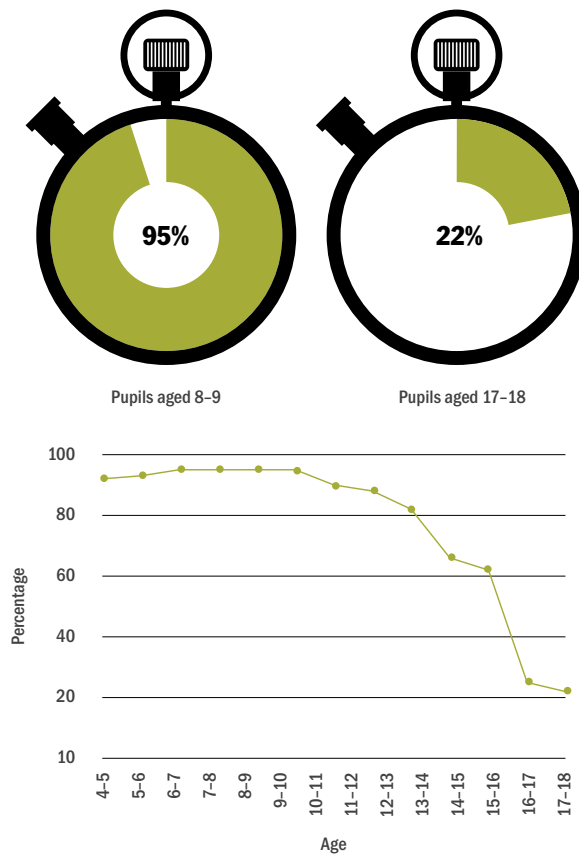


The proportion of people participating in active sports declines with age, with children far more likely than adults to engage in sport. The biggest drop-off happens between ages 11-15 and 16-24, dropping from 97% to 75%, and is most likely a result of leaving school.

Source: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Taking Part Survey 2009/10

Figure 5. Physical education and school sport

Proportion of pupils participating in at least 120 minutes or more of curriculum PE per week, by age



The proportion of pupils participating in 120 minutes or more curriculum PE per week decreases as pupils get older. 95% participation rates are documented at amongst 7-8 year olds, dropping to 66% amongst 14-15 year olds, and falling to 22% of 17-18 year olds.

Source: Department for Education, Annual PE and School Sport Survey 2009/10

2.3 Physical activity and a changing society

Modern living has resulted in people being less physically active and, as economies grow, we have essentially designed movement out of daily life. In the UK and in other developed (and increasing developing) countries, the following changes have greatly affected physical activity levels.

Technology: Young people growing up in the 21st century have an unprecedented range of opportunities to avoid boredom without breaking into a sweat, with computers, online gaming, social networks, mobile phones, music and television dominating young people's lives. These largely sedentary activities prevent people from maintaining healthy levels of physical activity.¹⁷ A recent survey found that five to 16-year olds in Britain spend on average nearly six hours per day in front of screens.¹⁸

Transport: The increase in motorised transport has also reduced levels of physical activity related to travel. One recent study found that male teenagers cycle half the distance than they did 20 years ago.¹⁹ Another shows that over the past five decades the proportion of children regularly walking to primary school has fallen from 92 per cent to only 49 per cent.²⁰

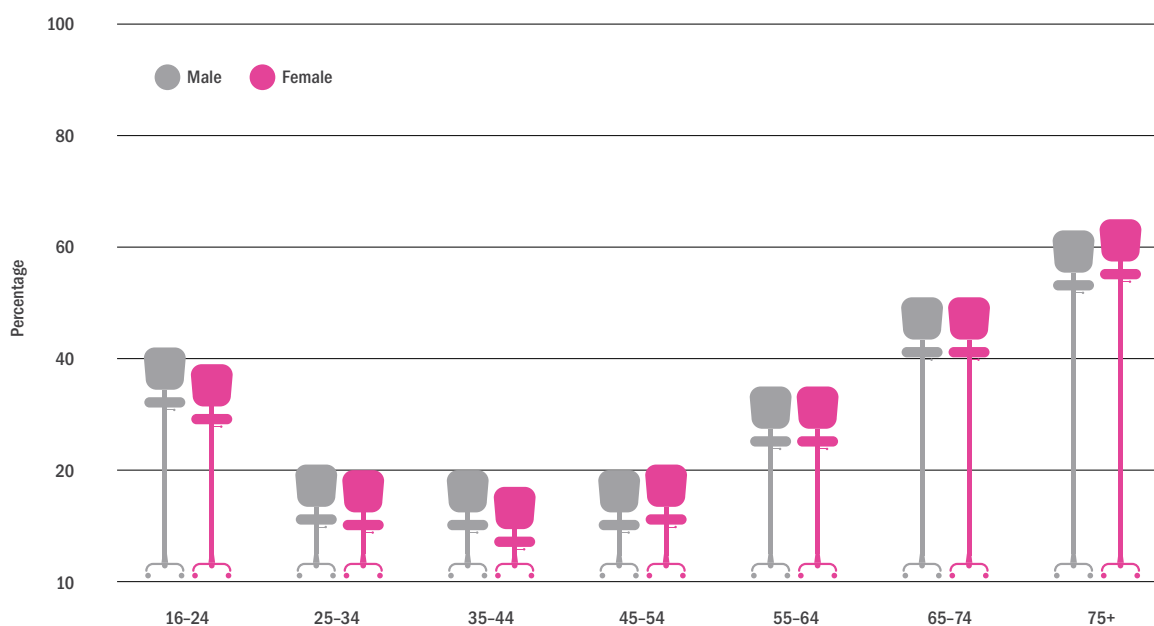
Academic pressure: A burgeoning number of exams and academic pressure influence time available for sport. Our discussions with young people suggest that, as young people reach secondary school level, educational pressures – self-imposed, as well as from teachers and parents – can lead them to cut back on time spent in sport and physical activity. Young people often framed academic achievement and physical activity as an either-or 'choice', and tended to put their academic studies first.

Safety: Increasing traffic volumes, fear of street crime and high profile cases of child abuse are leading to rising safety concerns. One study shows that a sizable majority of parents agree or strongly agree that they worry about their children when they are out because of the danger of cars and traffic (72 per cent) or because of concern that their children will be targeted by paedophiles (68 per cent).²¹ It is not just the levels of physical activity that have changed, but also the way we undertake physical activity. In keeping with broader societal trends towards individualism, there has been a shift away from community-based voluntary sports clubs, towards activities that are more likely to be undertaken alone. Club membership dropped notably in the 1980s with the number of young people falling by 25 per cent (or by up to 40 per cent in inner cities).²² At the same time, a whole host of other sport, leisure and consumer opportunities emerged, vying for people's attention. More individuals sought to become consumers of public and commercial pay-as-you-play venues serviced by professional staff rather than choosing to become club members expected to put time and effort back into the organisation.

Cultural changes and shifts in values are also reflected in the decline in popularity of team sports, which are often perceived as regimented, hierarchical, gendered and exclusive.²³ Alongside this, informal rather than institutionalised, and spontaneous rather than organised sports have grown in appeal, particularly among young people.²⁴ Many growth sports including swimming and cycling and more recently 'new' sports like skateboarding, kite surfing and parkour (free running) share a number of these characteristics. Notably, these can be undertaken

Figure 6. Sedentary time

Proportion spending 6 or more hours sedentary time on a weekday, by age



The proportion of people meeting weekly recommendations for physical activity declines with age for both sexes: 53% and 35% of men and women aged 16-25; 41% and 32% of men and women aged 45-54; and 20% and 17% of men and women aged 65-74.

Source: Department of Health, Health Survey for England 2008

individually, and the timing of participation is flexible and based on intrinsic motivation.²⁵

The growth of these sports reflects a number of other societal trends. The individual nature of these responds to growing ‘time squeezes’ on modern life. Additionally, many of these sports and activities have a risk-taking element, offering young people an opportunity to experience risk and adventure in a relatively safe way. This is particularly important in a world where young people lead increasingly “bubble-wrapped lives”, with fewer chances to take risks and challenge themselves.²⁶

Informal sports are becoming increasingly important to young people, both in terms of physical activity and cultural lifestyles. They are attracting a wider range of young people than might normally take part in physical activity, particularly young people who are disengaged from competitive team sports and underachieving in physical education. Given evidence of the inclusivity of informal sports over traditional team sports, their role is coming to be seen as key in increasing participation levels among the groups that will provide the highest health benefits from participation.²⁷

2.4 A new way forward

The rising levels of physical inactivity have led to a crisis we can’t afford to ignore. Estimates for the annual costs to the NHS as a result of physical inactivity are between £1 billion and £1.8 billion, with the costs of lost productivity to the wider economy estimated at around £5.5 billion from sickness absence and £1 billion from premature death of people of working age. Taken together, the costs of inactivity total approximately £8.3 billion every year.²⁸ According to the current trends, these problems are only likely to increase.

Raising levels of activity and participation in sport will not only reduce economic costs, but can also result in a range of social and community benefits, including reducing anti-social behaviour, improving educational attainment and building community cohesion.²⁹ There is an urgent need for action. We need to raise levels of participation in sport and get more people to be more active. The subsequent chapter explains in detail the steps that government, community and corporate leaders as well as individuals can take to achieve this ambitious goal.

3. GETTING PEOPLE MOVING: INSIGHTS AND ACTIONS

There is widespread agreement that we need to increase the number of people who regularly participate in sport. Successive governments have agreed targets to get more people to take part in sporting activities with limited success.³⁰ Sport England's 2008 strategy made a commitment to get one million people taking part in more sport by 2012/13. By April 2012 the number of people playing sport three times a week had only increased by about 500,000, with the main increase occurring mainly among adult men. The current approach appears to fail to engage those who are less likely to participate as the numbers of women, young people, those over 55 and the poorest adults all fell in the period 2008 to 2010–11.³¹ The one million target has now been dropped in favour of a less specific commitment to achieve “a year-on-year increase in the proportion of people who play sport once a week for at least 30 minutes.”³²

Raising levels of participation in sport is not an easy task, but the problem is compounded by the way that sports policy and delivery are organised in this country. Sports policy has been overly focused on elite and competitive sports and this has done little to encourage the least active to participate more. This problem has been compounded by the complex and confusing way that sport has been administered, structured and funded.

Significant changes are required to England's sporting infrastructure to increase the numbers of people, and particularly young people, participating in sporting activity. The time to act is now, and although we welcome Sport England's 2012–17 strategy, far more radical change needs to happen to change policy, funding and the organisation of sport in order to reverse the growing levels of inactivity among young people. The following section presents key insights into the root of England's problem, and proposes a four-pronged action plan to get young people moving.

3.1 Insight: Investment and policy focus on elite and competitive sports

Sports policy in the UK is not designed to increase mass participation. Instead, investment in sport is heavily weighted towards elite sports and athletes, with roughly £100 million of public funds invested every year, via UK Sport, in just 1,200 elite athletes.³³ In the run up to the Olympic Games this funding was increased in order for UK Sport to fulfil its goal of fourth place in the overall Olympic medal table and second in the Paralympic medal table.³⁴ Sport England, on the other hand, had just over £200 million of public money to invest in 2011/12.³⁵ Investment in National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) represents more than half this sum. NGBs, however, cater to the already active base and are not delivering on participation targets more broadly (more detail on this issue is included in 3.2). Overall, underrepresented groups (for example girls and ethnic minorities) receive less funding than those who are well-represented within sport, perpetuating and compounding inequities.

Although many millions of people derive great enjoyment from watching athletes perform and international success in sport is a key part of national identity, investment in elite sports is the easy option. It is much cheaper and simpler to measure achievements in elite sport, where success equates to winning medals and cups. These are far more visible to the nation, the media and politicians, and there is better chance of hitting targets than the more challenging issue of increasing mass participation.³⁶

The philosophy of supporting elite sport has been carried over into community sports policies. Sport England's 2008–2011 strategy, *Playing to win*, outlined a rapid shift from a ‘sport for good’ ethos to ‘sport for sport's sake’ philosophy with a far narrower agenda oriented around growing traditional, competitive team sports.³⁷ This policy shift displaced the focus on physical activity, which had dominated earlier approaches. The bodies tasked to drive

forward participation reflect traditional mechanisms of sports teams and sports clubs focused on developing successful teams and individual athletes, and not necessarily on increasing and sustaining overall inclusivity, participation and activity for the population.³⁸ Although some initiatives are still focused on getting more people involved in physical activity, the better funded and well-established organisations, particularly those that have their own facilities, tend to adopt a more traditional sport model.³⁹ At this time, responsibility for the physical activity agenda shifted from Sport England to the Department of Health, with Sport England charged exclusively with the delivery of sport.⁴⁰

The focus on orthodox, competitive sport is particularly apparent in the reworking of school sport, which, with the establishment of the School Games Competition, now centres solely on the delivery of competitive sports. Our interviews showed that the emphasis on traditional, competitive team-based sports is out of line with the way many young people want to participate. As one of our interviewees noted, “Provision of sport tends to be designed by adults, in terms of an adult mind-set of how sport should be organised and what people should do when they’re participating in sport, which doesn’t always fit with the way that young people want to participate in activities.”⁴¹ The impact is that current programmes can be particularly alienating to groups who are currently underrepresented in sport such as women, girls, BME groups and individuals who are not oriented towards competitive sports.

Recommendation: A youth-centred policy

With a successful Olympics behind us, it is time to dramatically shift sports policy away from winning more medals and supporting elite sports towards a more inclusive approach that aims to get the least active people in society moving. The overriding emphasis on competitive sports is at odds with the motivations and drivers of many of the young people who are currently inactive. Sports policy should not just provide for young people, but should put them at the centre of the process. Sports policy makers need to better understand the needs and motivations of young people and structure delivery around these.

Put young people at the centre of policy making

Increasing youth physical activity rates and sustaining this into adult life will only be realised if the drivers and experiences of young people are at the centre of the approach. In order to increase and sustain the numbers of young people taking part, **sports policy should be rooted in an understanding of**

the motivations, interests, needs and lifestyles of young people (see Figure 7 below). This requires co-designing policy and delivery mechanisms with a wide range of young people, including those who are currently inactive. In doing this, it is vitally important that policy makers and the delivery organisations recognise that competitive sport does not meet the needs of all young people and be more inclusive and innovative in their definition of physical activity.⁴²

Figure 7. Re-designing sports policy and provision to engage the least active

Opportunities designed to engage more young people in sport will need to be:

Flexible and informal

Young people should be allowed to play in casual gear, have music playing in the background, and be able to drop in and out of sessions. Taster sessions allow young people to try out different sports flexibly, and at low cost, and provide opportunities which cater to novices of all ages. Some NGBs are starting to bring these options in, such as No Strings Badminton, and the FA MARS Just Play programme.

Fashionable

Tailor opportunities to make sport cool and correspond with current fads and fashions. Non-conventional sport and physical activities such as cheerleading, Frisbee, roller-skating and zumba are just a few examples of new trends in provision in schools and community programmes, aimed at responding to trends in wider popular culture, and some schools have experimented with re-branding after-school clubs, to give them a distinct brand that is “separate from the school.”⁴³

Community-focused

Despite a shift towards individualisation in sport, young people consulted for this report focused on the social aspect of participation, rather than competitive or health-related aspects. Despite a need to de-formalise sport, and shift away from rigid team structures, young people still value the ‘club’ dynamic that sport provides.

Re-balance elite and community sport funding

International evidence suggests that investment in ‘sport for all’ activities as compared with elite sport is linked with better overall participation rates as well as success in high performance sport.⁴⁴ **Accordingly, a proportion of spending on elite sport should be re-directed towards youth and community sport participation. Additionally, Sport England needs to open up public investment opportunities in community sport to more new providers who are not focused on competitive sport.**

Focus on the drop-off points

We need to focus on critical transitions in young people's lives when drop-off rates are high. The 2012–17 Sport England strategy focuses on the 14 to 25-year-old group, and emphasises the need to support young people to continue to participate in sport during a range of life transitions from youth to adult. However, the strategy ignores the vital transition from primary to secondary education and data that suggests falls in participation rates start as early as 10 years old. **To be successful in truly 'creating a sporting habit for life,' the strategy should expand its focus to prioritise a much younger age group.**

Leverage digital platforms

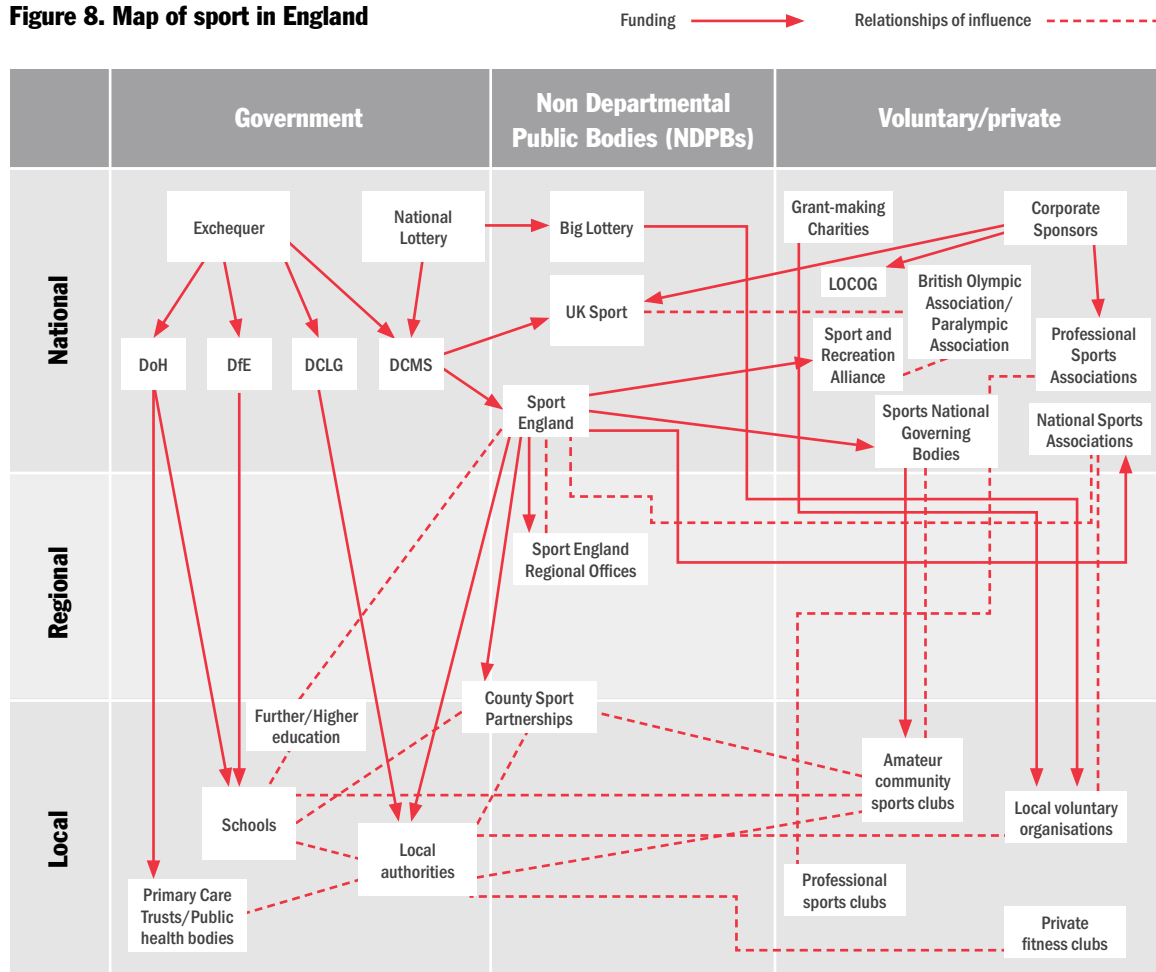
The modern sporting landscape now includes interactive television, computer gaming as well as a host of online tools and websites. **Better use of digital platforms will be an important part of driving the change from passive consumption to active participation.** For example, EA Sports' FIFA is one of the most popular games in the country

among young boys, yet does little to encourage active participation in football. Additionally, social media has the potential to shift young people's consumption of sport into participation. Online platforms and mobile phone applications that allow people to monitor activity and progress, as well as allowing them to compare their activity with friends and peers, have been successful in changing behaviour in other fields such as weight loss and healthy eating⁴⁵ and could be effective tools in increasing physical activity.

3.2 Insight: Fragmented organisation and delivery of sport

The organisation of sport in England is extremely complicated, and the stakeholder landscape is fragmented. While this problem has been acknowledged for some time, little has been done to streamline or simplify arrangements. In fact, there has been a tendency to add layers of complexity rather than strip them back. Many lines of tension and role divisions are at play: adult versus youth sport; community versus elite sport; physical activity versus competitive sport.

Figure 8. Map of sport in England



A number of serious consequences arise as a direct result of this fragmented and confused stakeholder landscape. Those working in the sport and physical activity sector often lack a shared sense of identity and there is a tendency towards siloed working. Although isolated examples of partnership exist, local projects and schemes tend to operate in isolation without the benefit of collaboration, meaning that resources are not always maximised.

“... grassroots and community sports bodies are often so focused on the administration of programmes that they struggle to find the time and resources they need to identify and engage the most suitable commercial partners”

Rapid changes in the stakeholder landscape, notably reforms in health and education, further enhance the complexity. Confusion of roles among those on the ‘inside’ of the system leads to confusion among the general public – those who the system is supposed to serve – and among young people in particular. When coupled with an already muddled demand, this compounds the challenge of driving up participation.

Countries that have been successful in raising levels of participation generally, in combination with other factors, have co-ordinated policies. Finland, for example, comparative to other Western countries, has achieved high levels of participation across the physical activity spectrum, from informal physical activity to formal, organised sport.⁴⁶ In the 1970s Finland had high rates of heart disease, and was struggling with problems of sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy diet. The country achieved massive transformation over a 30-year period by setting up a sustained and co-ordinated set of policies, including legislation on anti-smoking, healthy eating and

exercise, and devolution of some central spending to local authorities, infrastructural and environmental policies, advocacy in healthcare and private sector support.⁴⁷

The complexity of the landscape makes it difficult for new potential actors, with new resources (finance, human resources, social capital and so on), to enter the field. Leveraging private sector investment is a case in point. Private companies spend huge amounts supporting and sponsoring sport in the UK. However, the vast majority of this money goes to elite and professional sports. When the corporate sector has invested in community sports, it has tended to be in isolation from other actors and initiatives as the complexities of the landscape make it difficult to engage in co-ordinated efforts. The end result is that funding goes into one-off sporting events, rather than sustained, joined-up lasting solutions. On the other side of the equation, grassroots and community sports bodies are often so focused on the administration of programmes that they struggle to find the time and resources they need to identify and engage the most suitable commercial partners.

In addition to a highly complex and fragmented stakeholder landscape, there are problems with the way in which sports strategy and spending is co-ordinated across key stakeholders. The reliance on NGBs to deliver government targets has proved ineffective in increasing participation levels. Results from Sport England’s Active People Survey show that 19 sports have seen a statistically significant decrease in weekly participation rates between 2007–08 and 2010–11. Only four sports (athletics, boxing, table tennis and mountaineering) have seen a statistically significant increase in participation rates.⁴⁸

NGBs have limited experience marketing to and engaging large numbers of inexperienced novice players. This is compounded by competition for funding, which further drives a fairly narrow interest in the talented and those who are already participating. While legitimate, it needs to be acknowledged that this competition does not yield

Figure 9. Sport’s National Governing Body growth targets, performance and funding⁴⁹

Governing Body	‘Grow’ Target over 2009–13 (increase in participants) ⁵⁰	Performance as of AP 4, Dec 2010 (increase in participants) ⁵¹	Funding 2009–2013 (in £s) ⁵²
England and Wales Cricket Board	72,459	-32,900	>38m
Rugby Union	141,312	-30,100	>31m
Rugby League	51,000	-29,700	>29m
Lawn Tennis Association	150,000	-50,000	>26m
Football Association	150,000	-54,700	>25m

the desirable social and participation outcomes. Consequently, public investment has ended up subsidising an already-committed customer base – the NGB and existing committed club members – rather than supporting new forums that could potentially tap into new audiences and participants.

Concern has also been expressed that Sport England's definition of community sport is too narrow and exclusive (giving primary focus to NGBs and community amateur sports clubs as partners and funding channels), with certain sectors and actors feeling that their contributions and role within the community sport landscape have been marginalised. Greater recognition needs to be given to other sports bodies and sectors, such as local authorities, professional sports bodies, corporates and voluntary organisations working in the 'sport for development' space.

Recommendation: Co-ordinated delivery of sport

The Sport England 2012–2017 strategy, *Creating a sporting habit for life*, emphasises the importance of partnerships and aims to improve the links between school sports and activities that are happening in the community. However, this does little to simplify the confused landscape of stakeholders and agencies that operate in the sports arena. There needs to be better policy coordination and integration between key partners – in sport, health, transport and education – at both national and local levels.

Cross-departmental physical activity strategy

Sport and physical activity policy should be better co-ordinated across different government departments, particularly sport, transport, health and education.⁵³ There is a need for **an explicit cross-departmental sport and physical activity strategy** to bring the multitude of agencies and partners in this space together, align resources and partnerships to best effect, and to ensure policy priority and collective leadership, cross-departmental buy-in and policy co-ordination. This would include better alignment between Sport England and the Department of Health to ensure that physical activity is more prominent in health policy. Cross-party agreement on prioritising increasing levels of physical activity would help avoid destructive swings in philosophy underpinning sports policy, such as the shift from 'sport for good' to 'sport for sport's sake'.

Sport and schools

Targeting young people involves working with schools. The Sport England 2012–17 strategy outlines plans to expand the School Games programme so

that every child has the chance to compete. However, opportunity does not always yield participation. Sports and activities which are not overtly competitive have to be offered to encourage the least active to participate more, as competitive sports do not appeal to all young people, least of all those who are currently inactive. **Physical education needs to be framed as a priority akin to academic education.** School efforts should be closely linked to other community-based providers to ensure continuity as people leave school. This is particularly critical in light of the dissolution of School Sport Partnerships that previously supported these links between schools and community initiatives.

Co-ordinate and open up delivery and provision at the local level

At the local level, there is a need for **highly localised networks to co-ordinate activities, unite and mobilise key stakeholders, and ensure clear pathways into participation across sport, education, health and transport agencies and authorities.** Emphasis and funding should be placed with County Sport Partnerships which have been an important mechanism for translating national policy down to the local level, and bring together a wide range of local stakeholders working in support of community sport and physical activity participation.

Resources also need to be channelled into networks which are able to draw non-traditional delivery agents and partners into the sport and physical activity space. Local authorities, professional sports bodies, corporates and voluntary organisations working in the 'sport for development' space, need to be drawn upon more and explicitly acknowledged within DCMS/Sport England community sport strategy, and focus placed on how to co-ordinate and join-up provision among these sectors. For example, organisations such as Sported and the Sport for Social Change Network are both doing innovative work linking the corporate sector with the sport for development sector. Funders can play a greater role in ensuring cooperation between agencies. While funding is often conditional on partnership working, the true costs entailed in strategic coordination between agencies is not being paid for.

3.3 Insight: Public spending cuts influencing effective delivery

Dig into any area of public policy at the moment and spending cuts are never far below the surface. Sport is no exception. The youth sports sector is under particular pressure as it is affected by cuts from central government, local government, as well

as reforms to the education system. The Localism Bill presents a new opportunity to tailor provision to local need, without the red tape and regulations imposed from above. However, those working on the ground currently lack the infrastructure to realise government's vision of the 'Big Society' in practice. Major pieces of infrastructure which previously brought together councils and local partners – including local area agreements and local strategic partnerships – have been dismantled or scaled back. Despite localism's push for integration and inter-agency collaboration, pressure to make budget and staffing cuts is working against cooperation and coordination. The effect of recent policy reforms and spending review in terms of key departments implicated in the funding and delivery of youth and community sport are outlined below.⁵⁴

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has a budget of £1.6 billion of which around £160 million goes directly to sport. The Comprehensive Spending Review in 2010 saw a 25 per cent cut to DCMS and its sponsored bodies over the following five years to 2014/15, with administrative cuts of 41 per cent. DCMS itself will halve in size, with budget cuts of around one third for UK Sport and Sport England.

As part of cost-cutting measures, UK Sport and Sport England will merge by 1 April 2013. Sport England will have to absorb cuts of 33 per cent by 2014/15 and reduce its administration costs by 50 per cent over the same period. Revenue funding for NGBs will be protected until March 2013. However, Sport England will also have to absorb a cut of 40 per cent to its capital budget, which will affect NGBs more immediately. These cuts will be partially offset by the return of the National Lottery to its original pillars whereby Sport England receives a 20 per cent share or roughly £50 million a year.

In the wake of these cuts, in January 2012, DCMS launched Sport England's new strategy, '*Creating a sporting habit for life: A new youth sport strategy*'.⁵⁵ It contains a number of key funding shifts, including a focus on increasing participation and funding at the 14 to 25 age range; a tougher performance regime for NGBs with funding awarded on a payment-by-results basis; and increased funding for new or improved facilities and the opening up of existing facilities, such as secondary schools, for community use.

School sport and physical education

In the last decade, schools and further education colleges were the primary vehicles for delivering

increased participation among young people. The last Labour government invested heavily in youth sport and, to some extent, physical activity, primarily through the PE and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP),⁵⁶ spending over £1 billion over 10 years. This strategy, in which the Youth Sport Trust played a primary co-ordinating role, saw the establishment of Specialist Sport Colleges as well as school sport partnerships, which provided young people with a pathway from school/further education sport into community sport programmes. Targets were tracked through the PE and School Sport Survey, which showed a significant rise in proportions of young people participating in physical education from 44 per cent of pupils in Year 1 to 11 participating in at least 120 minutes of curriculum physical education in 2003/04 to the current level of 84 per cent.⁵⁷

The Coalition government's shift away from national, centrally-driven programmes has seen the discontinuation of the national PESSYP strategy (and, accordingly, the loss of Specialist Sport Colleges and School Sport Partnerships), a reduction in power and influence of the Youth Sport Trust (and diminished support for the central oversight role it had previously), and the termination of the annual PE and School Sport Survey. Ring-fencing of £162 million for school sport partnerships, previously target-driven by government via the Youth Sport Trust, will cease, and all 400 Specialist Sport Colleges will lose their specialist status as well as targeted funding for sport, worth £130,000 per school (or £129 per child). Following the termination of the School Sports Partnership scheme, government has allocated £65 million in 2012–13 to ensure one physical education teacher per secondary school is available to organise competitive sports, embed good practice and train primary teachers.

General funding for schools and teachers was protected in the cuts. However, the historic £125–130 million that was ring-fencing for sport has been removed, and individual schools will be expected to fund sport from their ordinary budgets. While this gives autonomy to schools to use funds in the best way to meet the needs of individual communities, the ability for schools to continue with their previous offering will depend on them being able and willing to find the shortfall out of their own budgets. This is unlikely to happen, given that sport and physical education are expensive to deliver, with facilities costing more than academic subjects and only a few "well-heeled" schools with reserves will be likely to sustain the levels seen over the last 10 years.⁵⁸ The pressure to meet English language, maths and science targets (on which school league tables are based) will

likely result in sport and physical education budgets and programmes taking a hit.

What physical activity is funded will likely centre around competitive sport due to additional funding from the Department of Health and the Big Lottery Fund as well as corporate support from Sainsbury's and Adidas (supplying sports kit) for the School Games Competition which will run up until the end of 2015. Physical activity in schools will now be measured by the number of schools and students participating in the Games as opposed to the PE and School Sport Survey which among other things specifically measured the time spent in physical education.

Department of Health

Health spending has been protected, and the public health budget has been ring-fenced. Within the new budget arrangements, however, the flow of money will change so that money will be allocated from the NHS budget and ring-fenced for public health. Part of this will be used by Public Health England for population-wide issues, and another part will provide a ring-fenced budget to local authorities. This is encouraging, given the role that sport can play in tackling major public health issues including obesity and inactivity.

The Department of Health has become involved in schools as well and is providing funding of up to £6.4 million over two years to secure the future of Change4Life Sports Clubs in secondary schools and has plans to extend this model to primary schools. The programme aims to broaden the range of Olympic and Paralympic sports available to children and young people, and its extension will create further opportunities for those who are least active.

The Department of Health is also providing up to £14 million over the next two years to support levels of participation in the School Games by primary schools, and to create further opportunities for those who are the least active and deliver health benefits associated with physical activity.

In the spirit of the 'Big Society', The Department of Health is reaching out to businesses for support. Through the Public Health Responsibility Deal, the department aims to engage businesses and other influential organisations to improving public health (diet, alcohol, health at work and physical activity). Although more than 390 organisations have signed up to the deal, it has yet to yield tangible results.⁵⁹ One of the problems with the deal is that it brings together too broad a range of public health needs and too many diffuse organisations to make any lasting impact in a specific area. Additionally, the deal has faced poor press for its less than ambitious approach to diet and alcohol consumption.

Local government

Local government reforms and cuts pose the greatest threat to the sport sector. In the UK, councils have previously spent £1.5 billion a year on sport and physical activity infrastructure and programmes, and have been the most significant provider of sport and physical activity opportunities.⁶⁰ The Department for Communities and Local Government received a 28 per cent cut over the four years following the Comprehensive Spending Review, with a possibility of further cuts in year five. If shared evenly across the department, this would mean roughly £500 million less for sport in communities across the country.

However, sport budgets (along with the arts) are likely to take a greater hit than other areas for local spending, given that these are non-statutory services, without ring-fenced budgets (and leading to disproportional squeezing on discretionary spend).⁶¹ Indeed, our consultations indicated that, in the first 18 months, some large authorities in major cities and metropolitan areas are cutting 30 to 35 per cent of their leisure, sport and culture budgets.

The voluntary sector

At the local level, there is an implicit expectation that the voluntary sector will pick up where the public sector no longer provides. However, the voluntary sector has been particularly hard hit by public sector cuts, and cuts in council budgets and spending. Pressures on other local stakeholders such as schools are having a knock-on effect on voluntary sector provision. For example, sports clubs are being negatively impacted in instances where local authorities are scaling back discretionary rate relief, increasing facility hire costs and closing facilities, while the diminishing facilities maintenance role of local authorities is impacting voluntary sector partners more generally.

Recommendation: Leverage current funding streams and align new ones

Public spending cuts and the removal of ring-fencing around dedicated funds means investment in physical activity – by sport, health, education and local government bodies – is at risk. Interest in this agenda, however, is growing and new and non-traditional funding sources are available. It is essential in this time of austerity to maximise current funding streams but also to seek and align new ones.

Align and leverage current investments

Efforts should be directed at promoting and disseminating effective cross-boundary working, and identifying and investing in mechanisms that help

match funding to local need. In the public sector, sport needs to focus on attracting cross-departmental investment and buy-in from health and education. Doing so will require the case for sport's potential to deliver on behalf of a wider range of policy agendas. There is a need to invest resources to explore the feasibility of payment-by-results approaches, which potentially can make more effective use of existing resources and leverage in new sources of financial capital.

Maximise corporate investment

More needs to be done to leverage the current investment from the corporate sector to invest more in grassroots sport, in ways that achieve real impact. Organisations with effective systems in place, and a track record of investing in sustainable initiatives, can play an important role as match-making intermediaries who can align corporate funding to local need, and help corporates optimise the social impact of their investments. We see an opportunity in the Public Health Responsibility Deal to co-ordinate such investments and promote collaborative as opposed to individualised initiatives.

Unlock informal resources

International evidence⁶² suggests that a strong lead from the voluntary sector combined with support from government at all levels can be a powerful mechanism for driving up participation in sport. Efforts will need to be directed not only at growing the existing volunteer base, but also at sustaining and supporting the voluntary sector. Resources need to be invested in strengthening business skills and capacity needed by the voluntary sector to access opportunities and resources independently, and to reduce grant dependency. Government can provide critical support by reducing regulatory and taxation burdens on voluntary sports organisations, in accordance with standard EU practice.⁶³

Build the business case for investment in sport and physical activity

Pressures on public spending are unlikely to ease in the coming years. In the medium to long term, establishing a strong business case for sport, rooted in a robust evidence base, will be essential if those working in this space are to be able to leverage in new resources, and as well as retain, align and make better use of existing resources. At present, the value of physical activity tends to be relegated primarily to health agendas, with little attention to its influence on other social policy agendas. **Further research on the impact of sport on other policy agendas is**

needed to build the business case for investment in sport and physical activity and unlock more resources for sport and physical activity, from both public and private investors.

3.4 Insight: Data and accountability gaps

Physical activity data collection systems are relatively strong for England compared with other European countries. However, there are a number of areas for improvement. The National Obesity Observatory has done an extensive analysis of what is currently being measured, and identifies the following gaps in physical activity surveillance in England.⁶⁴

Although there are numerous surveys, these are not as well co-ordinated as they could be, and inconsistent approaches to measurement (within and across surveys) mean that results are not always comparable and trends are difficult to assess over time.

“There is a need to invest resources to explore the feasibility of payment-by-results approaches, which potentially can make more effective use of existing resources and leverage in new sources of financial capital”

The majority of existing surveys provide only a partial picture of total activity (for example, focusing exclusively on one aspect of physical activity such as physical education or organised sport) and provide little information about the dosage and duration of activity. A number of psychosocial factors – such as self-esteem, knowledge or attitude to sport and exercise – have been found to correlate with physical activity. However, again, there is little systematic work done in this area, and surveys tend to focus narrowly on capturing behaviours. They also mainly capture data on adults at the expense of young people under the age of 16.

Physical activity surveillance also lacks validity, with some surveys over- or under-estimating actual levels of physical activity. For example, some lack the sensitivity to capture small bouts of activity integrated into daily life, or inflate actual levels of physical activity because of a reliance on subjective measures like hours spent in a physical education class where much of the lesson may be inactive.

There is further risk of losing track of physical activity rates and efforts in this space as a result of the termination of nationally-driven programmes, targets and measurement systems. For example, the School Sport Survey has been dropped, as have national

indicators relating to sport and physical activity.

It is therefore becoming increasingly difficult to get an accurate picture of physical activity rates and inputs and to make a robust case for further investment in the sport sector. Additionally, the question remains as to how accountability will be established in future, in the absence of previous systems that held key agencies to account.

Recommendation: Data tracking and accountability to make sport count

Tracking and reporting population physical activity levels is a key investment and an accurate picture of physical activity rates and inputs is essential to make a robust case for further investment in the sport and physical activity sector. Accurate tracking of outcomes is going to be critical in retaining accountability, in the absence of national systems and targets that previously served this role.

Consolidate existing measurement systems

Greater consistency in the measurement of young people's physical activity levels could be achieved by consolidating measurement systems. The Health Survey for England (HSE) represents the most comprehensive approach to measuring physical activity and includes a youth component. However, as the HSE is modular, topics such as physical activity are not included every year, reducing trend data. We recommend that the Health Survey for England include a physical activity module annually, and include, as a new addition, measurement of physical education and school sport with an emphasis on how long and how often youth are physically active, and how strenuous the activity is (to fill the gap left by termination of the PE and School Sport Survey). Collection of data on sport participation should correspond with items on Sport England's Active People Survey to ensure comparability of data. Within this approach, there is a need to focus on improving the sensitivity of the survey, to capture short bouts of activity, and improve validity by investing in a wider use of objective measures, such as accelerometer data.

Recognise physical activity as an outcome

Physical activity should be included as an outcome as part of the forthcoming Public Health Outcomes Framework, to ensure that health improvements in this area are tracked, key agencies held to account, and aid provided to local partnership-working around a common agenda. More generally, trend data should be used as a policy driver for government to create policies

to address the situation and check progress against the goal of increased physical activity. One example of global best practice includes Active Health Kids Canada.⁶⁵ They produce an annual 'Report Card' which allocates 'grades' on various components of physical activity (from active play and leisure, to organised sport) and influences (for example, physical education, availability of physical activity facilities, or government policies). These reveal the amount of physical activity among young people and draw attention to where efforts need to be improved. This data is then used as an advocacy tool to generate awareness, and to influence and co-ordinate key stakeholders to improve opportunities for children and young people to participate in physical activities.

Install mechanisms for monitoring and accountability

There is a need to invest in new approaches to effectively track outcomes, breaking from the traditional measurement of inputs and outputs. At present, randomised control trial methodologies dominate the approaches to measuring impact. These are cumbersome, difficult to understand, expensive and hard to scale. **There is a need for methodologies that can be understood at all levels of an organisation (reaching beyond managers to those working at front-line delivery); are useful internally to the individual organisation (in order to motivate people to gather the data, and avoid this being a burden) as well as being useful in informing policy; and aid real-time learning.** Traditional approaches, where data is collected over time and analysed at a later point (often the end of a project), do not inform and improve current projects and practices. In addition to gathering better evidence to make the business case for investment in sport and physical activity, there is a need to tailor this evidence in a clearer and more focused style, to create compelling advocacy.

There are some promising developments under way in this space. For example, the Value of Sport Monitor is being developed by Sport England, UK Sport and the University of Sterling. It provides an online monitoring service of the most up-to-date reference sources and critical reviews of published research evidence on the contribution of sport to a range of broader social issues. It aims to provide the best evidence available in an informative and easy to use format that helps policy makers to make the case and practitioners to deliver what works best. At the grassroots level, Substance has been working with Sported to pilot new data collection models among sport for development projects in England to enable on-going evidence collection, reporting and

validation. They have developed an innovative impact assessment application, designed to:

- identify both the potential and actual impact of an organisation's work
- enable comparisons of the different projects' work across a range of outcomes and policy themes
- identify areas in which delivery could be adjusted to improve performance and impact
- help guide investors to the best prospect.

On a global scale, the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation is developing a package of training and support – a range of tools, training and a software system – that they will offer to their international grantee network in partnership with Streetfootballworld.

4. CONCLUSION

London 2012 presented an opportunity to showcase British sport. Billions of pounds were invested in developing the state-of-the-art facilities in which the world's greatest athletes competed for Olympic glory. Millions of people cheered them on; billions tuned in to watch. However, while the numbers of people watching sport seems to know no bounds, fewer and fewer people are engaging in physical activity themselves. Sedentary behaviour is becoming the new norm.

This epidemic of physical inactivity represents a serious problem to society. Poor health outcomes cost the NHS and the broader economy. Inactivity is estimated to cost the whole economy over £8 billion a year. There is an urgent need to reverse the current trends and start increasing levels of sports and physical activity. All the evidence suggests that raising levels of activity and participation in sports not only improves health outcomes, but has other positive social effects including reducing crime, improving mental health and wellbeing, increasing educational attainment, and can result in more cohesive communities.

Significant changes are required to Britain's sporting infrastructure to increase the numbers of people, and particularly young people, participating in sporting activity, rather than simply watching it. We welcome Sport England's 2012–17 strategy, but believe far more radical change needs to happen to change policy, funding and the organisation of sport in order to reverse the growing levels of inactivity among young people. In this report we have proposed a four-point plan:

1. Youth-centred sports policy

- Place young people at the centre of policy making
- Re-direct funding away from elite and competitive sports
- Leverage digital platforms to help drive behavioural change

2. Co-ordinated delivery of sport

- Cross-departmental physical activity strategy
- Re-prioritise physical activity in schools
- Co-ordinate and open up delivery and provision at the local level

3. Leverage current funding streams and align new ones

- Align current investments
- Maximise corporate investment
- Unlock informal resources
- Build a better business case for investment in physical activity

4. Data tracking and accountability to make sport count

- Consolidate existing measurement systems
 - Recognise physical activity as an outcome
 - Install mechanisms for monitoring and accountability
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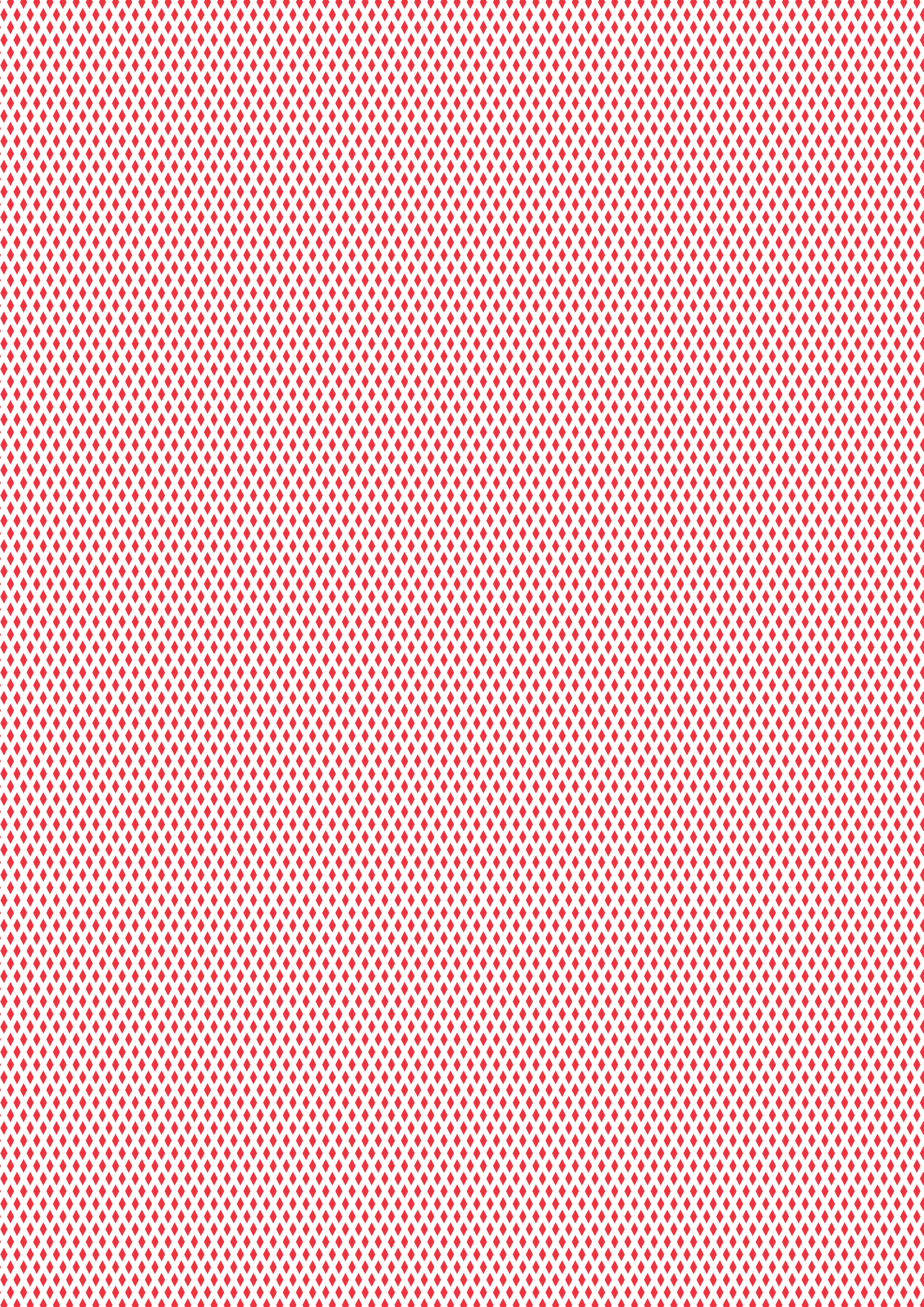
This plan would begin to change behaviour in England. But we are not the only country that would benefit from a new approach. Nearly all developed countries, and many developing ones, are facing the same issues. There are no universal answers. Solutions have to respond to the social, economic, political and cultural context in each country. However, in order to achieve success we need to share and learn from each other's experiences. Physical inactivity is a global challenge and can only be fully addressed if countries act locally, but also co-ordinate efforts, work together and learn from each other.

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Summer 2012 was the UK's summer of sport. Millions watched the European football championships, followed by Wimbledon, the test match cricket with the West Indies and South Africa and, of course, the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Our enthusiasm for watching sport seems to know no bounds. The problem is that we sit at home watching it, rather than participating ourselves.

Levels of physical activity in the UK are in decline and sedentary lifestyles are increasingly becoming the norm. We face an epidemic of inactivity that is costing a fortune and threatens the health and wellbeing of millions. Inactivity constitutes a major public health threat, increasing the risks of chronic disease and disability. This not only causes serious and unnecessary suffering and impairs quality of life, but also comes at a significant economic cost.

This report looks at participation in sport and physical activity in England, focusing particularly on young people. It looks at the reasons why levels of participation are low and provides a four-point action plan to get more people active.

Dr. Will Norman is Director of Research at The Young Foundation and co-founder of the consultancy firm ESRO (Ethnographic Social Research)

Lauren Kahn is a Senior Research Associate at The Young Foundation

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