

MOVE IT

Increasing young people's participation in sport

Lauren Kahn & Will Norman

Executive Summary



ABOUT THE YOUNG FOUNDATION

We are The Young Foundation and we are determined to make positive social change happen. We pioneered the field of social innovation with The Open University, UpRising and Studio Schools. We work closely with individuals, communities and partners building relationships to ensure that our thinking does something, our actions matter and the changes we make together will continue to grow.

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

This report looks at participation in sport and physical activity among young people in England. It sets out the reasons why participation rates are low and provides a four-point plan to get more people active. We would like to thank all the young people and experts who contributed to the research, as well as Nike, Inc. who funded the project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

The 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 section three.

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 coordinated 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.

NOTES

1. See for example CSJ Sport Working Group (2011) *More than a game: Harnessing the power of sport to transform the lives of disadvantaged young people* London: The Centre for Social Justice; and Nevill, C & Van Poortvliet, M (2011) *Teenage kicks: The value of sport in tackling youth crime* London: Laureus Sport for Good Foundation
2. Chief Medical Officer (2010) *Annual Report for 2009* London: Department of Health (p. 22). Available online: www.shca.info/PDF%20files/CMO%20annual%20report%202009.pdf
3. Sport England (2012) *Sport England Strategy 2012–17* London: Sport England
4. This report focuses mainly on England, as responsibility for sport is devolved to the national government in Scotland and national assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland. However, some of the data sources we use refer to the whole of the UK. These are noted in the text.
5. Telephone interviews, May–July 2011

FURTHER INFORMATION

A full version of “Move It: Increasing young people’s participation in sport” is available to download from youngfoundation.org

For further information on the project please contact Will Norman,
Director of Research. will.norman@youngfoundation.org