Creating a sporting habit for life – a new youth strategy
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Overview

Published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) the central aim of the Government’s new Strategy for youth sport is to increase the number of 14-25 year olds playing sport ensuring that participation continues beyond school years into adulthood. This briefing summarises the key points, comments on its policy direction and on the debate over the money available for the strategy. The role of local government in the strategy is discussed in the comment.

The Strategy sets out how over the next five years Sport England, working with national and local partners, will invest at least £1 billion of Lottery and Government funding primarily around establishing networks between schools and sport clubs. This will be achieved through:

Physical Education remaining a compulsory feature of the National Curriculum supported by £150m secured until 2015 and invested through School Games - a framework for competitive school sport.

Establishing at least 6,000 partnerships between schools and local sports clubs by 2017 with every County Sport Partnership provided with a dedicated officer responsible for making links between schools and community sports clubs in their local area.

Sports Governing Bodies will be expected to spend around 60% of their £450 million Government funding between 2013 and 2017 on activities that increase participation within the 14-25 age-group with funding provided on a payment by results basis with sports that fail to deliver putting their public funding at risk.

A further £160m will be spent on new and upgraded sports facilities on top of the £90m already invested via Sport England’s Places, People, Play programme including allowing schools to open up their sports facilities to the public.

Between now and 2017 over £50 million will be made available to “well-run” sport clubs, voluntary groups and others to provide an “exciting and appealing sporting experience”.

Background
The Strategy has been published against the backdrop of continuing concerns about creating a lasting sporting legacy following the 2012 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games - a key pledge that helped to secure the London Games. The last Government had set a target of getting one million more people to participate in sport; however, the latest figures revealed by Sport England last month showed there had been an increase of only 118,000 in the number of people doing sport three times a week for at least 30 minutes.

Across the adult population the number of people playing sport is increasing slightly, but there have been declining participation rates for 16-24 year olds even in major sports including football, tennis and swimming. This is a long-term trend reflecting that participation drops sharply when young people leave school\(^1\). Currently only 51 per cent of children remain active in sports after the age of 16. The cost is significant, not just in terms of health, where one in four adults are now classed as obese, but also in terms of educational attainment and key life skills.

In the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review Sport England, the body responsible for Community Sport saw its funding cut by 33 per cent (and 40 per cent in capital funding) with most of these cuts offset by more cash coming from the National Lottery. This was not the case, however, for the dedicated sports funding coming from the Department for Education which under the last Government had invested in a network of 450 School Sport Partnerships in England for which the dedicated funding, in a controversial move, was withdrawn by the Coalition Government.

Under a compromise deal which involved a refocusing of the policy around intra- and inter-school competitive sports, part of the £162 million annual funding was ring-fenced to provide a national framework of school sport co-ordinators. The new funding package amounted to only around half the original figure (£65 million for 2011/12 and 2012/13) with the Department for Education insisting that any additional money should be found from individual school budgets. In addition the decision to scrap the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme meant that there would be a shortfall in investment in new schools based facilities.

**Briefing in full**

**Building a last legacy of competitive sport in schools**

Operating throughout the school year School Games provide all primary and secondary schools, with the support of School Games Organisers, the opportunity to create a year-round sporting calendar, since September 2011. The programme, led by the Youth Sport Trust, is providing thirty sports specifically designed to encourage young people of all ages, abilities (including those are disabled) and backgrounds to compete at intra-school and inter-school levels culminating in local, regional and national events. The Schools Games National Final will take place in the Olympic Park in May 2012.

Sport England, together with DCMS and the Department for Education are investing £150 million (mixture of lottery and Central Government funding) in Sport Games.

\(^1\) "Sport Participation Figures", Sport England Press Release, 8th December 2011

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Much of this had been previously announced, but now with a further £14 million from the Department of Health and £8 million from Sport England together with a £10 million sponsorship deal with Sainsbury’s will extend funding for School Games organisers from two to four years (up to 2015).

**Improving the links between schools and community sports clubs**

The central part of the Strategy is the establishment of at least 6,000 new school-clubs partnerships with Football promising that 2,000 of their clubs will be linked to secondary schools by 2017, Cricket 1,250, Rugby Union 1,300, Rugby League another 1,000 and Tennis has pledged 1,000. These and other National Governing Bodies working with local partners will create new “satellite clubs” on a school setting, linked to an existing community “hub” club run by professional coaches and volunteers from that “hub” club.

This will mean that every secondary school in England and “many primary schools” will be offered a community sport club on its site which will have a direct link to one or more of the sports’ governing bodies; with the 49 County Sports Partnerships (local networks of local authorities, national governing bodies, clubs, school partnership and Primary Care Trusts) given new resources to create “effective local links between schools and sports in the community building upon existing health investment in Change4Life Cubs.

In addition, 150 further education colleges will benefit from a full-time sports professional responsible for delivering new sporting opportunities with the aim that three-quarters of students aged 18-24 get the chance to take up a new sport or continue to play sports.

**Working with Sports Governing Bodies**

The transition from school to community clubs and increasing sporting participation of those aged between 14 and 25 year olds will be central to the funding agreements (“Whole Sport Plans”) between Sport England and the 46 National Governing Bodies for Sport (NGBs) such as the Football Association, the Rugby Football Union and the England & Wales Cricket Board. Under the current agreements and over the four-year period football gets more than £25 million, tennis more than £26 million, cricket more than £38 million, badminton more than £20 million, rugby union more than £31 million and rugby league more than £29 million.

The second round of these agreements, which will be worth £450 million and which will run from 2013 and 2017, will shift in focus to support the new Strategy through:

- Tasking NGBs with delivery of increase participation for young people from the age of 14 for the first time;
Targeting at least 60 per cent of the funding governed by these plans at the 14-25 year old age group with the remaining 40 per cent aimed at the rest of the population.

A new performance management regime based on payment by results with sports that fail to deliver putting their public funding at risk and access to additional funding for those delivering well.

**Investing in facilities**

As part of a £135 million *Places, People, Play*, which will deliver an Olympic legacy of increased sports participation for all ages, Sport England has already committed £50 million of Lottery funding to upgrade thousands of local sports clubs and facilities as well as £30 million to new regionally significant large scale multi-sport facilities and £10 million to provide renewed protection of playing fields.

The Strategy now provides a further £160 million of Lottery funding into building or improving facilities and local clubs, where promises to fully utilise existing facilities where they are under-used. In the same vein, recognising that three-quarters of sport halls and artificial pitches and a third of swimming pools in England are located in schools, Sport England will make £10 million of Lottery funding available to schools to enable them to open up these and other sporting facilities for use by local communities, for example, during holidays or in the evening.

**Opening up provision and investing in communities**

In addition to schools, further education institutions and NGBs the Government says that it wants “to encourage local authorities, those clubs not associated with an NGB, voluntary groups and others to provide an exciting and appealing sporting experience”.

Sport England will be establishing a dedicated bidding fund for “local community clubs”, building upon the Inspired Facilities Programme, for “non-profit making community groups or organisations” with a track record of working effectively with young people and in increasing participation. Winning bids will offer value for money in reaching as many young people as possible with bidders expected to be “well connected to their local communities” with proposals developed in consultation with those they will be working with.

Sport England will also be working with StreetGames, among other partners, to extend the reach of their *Door Step Sport* Programme by creating 1,000 “sustainable” Door Step Clubs and with the Dame Kelly Holmes Legacy Trust to expand their *Get on Track* programme placing at least 2,000 young people “on the margins of our society” into sports projects that also teach them vital life skills.
Comment

The Government hopes the Strategy will encourage “sport as a habit” by focusing more investment in the 14 to 24 year old age group and by creating a pathway from compulsory sport within the school environment through to further education and onto early adulthood by strengthening the interaction between local public, community and private facilities. In all, it is aimed at addressing what has been described as the “missing link” of the current system - the cliff edge drop in participation as children leave school.

The Strategy marks or indeed confirms some distinct policy in policy under the Coalition Government. For example, the prime funding source for youth sport now comes from DCMS, and not DfE with that funding sourced principally through the National Lottery with only £200 million of the £1 billion coming from exchequer funding.

The presentation of the funding through the Strategy, Ministerial Statement to Parliament and the related press notices provides for a confusing picture which we have sought to clarify:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programmes</th>
<th>£m</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DfE Schools Sport’s Budget</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Games</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sainsbury’s Sponsorship of Schools Games</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places, People, Play Programme (existing funding). This includes:</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>− £50m Inspired Communities upgrading of local facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>− £30m Iconic multi-sports facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>− £10m protecting playing fields</td>
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<tr>
<td>Places, People, Play Programme (new funds). This includes:</td>
<td>160</td>
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<td>− Communities and the voluntary sector - £40m</td>
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<td>− Opening up School Facilities to the community - £10m</td>
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<tr>
<td>− Facilities at Further Education Colleges and Universities -£50m</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Governing Bodies (Whole Sports Plans) i.e. 60% of the £450m</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>£810m</td>
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Though, what has been announced seems to fall short of the £1 billion claimed, this we suspect is because the whole of the £450 million NGBs funding has been included despite only 60 per cent will be dedicated to the age group covered by the Strategy (with the remaining 40 per cent being spent on the rest of the population). It
is also not entirely clear in the way in which the Strategy is drafted that local authorities will be allowed to bid for £40 million fund for upgrading community facilities. Though, both the DCMS and Sport England’s Press Notices clearly anticipate that these funds concern local authority facilities.

The Government has also confirmed its commitment to bring back a culture of competitive school sports; with fewer than four in ten pupils competing regularly against classmates and only two in ten competing regularly against those in other schools the Government believes this lack of competition “may” contribute to the drop off in participation when young people leave school.

Significantly, although not referred to in the Strategy, Ministers have also confirmed that they have dropped the Olympic legacy target. It was, as many acknowledged, at the outset an ambitious target, though not a surprising development as signs have been around for a long time that DCMS have already relegated the importance of the participation legacy and the target, in particular, as plans began to drift in recent years. Indeed Ministers, when in Opposition and when they entered Government, acknowledged that a top-down, target driven approach was not going to work and was unachievable. With most commentators arguing the opportunity to create a lasting legacy may in any case have been lost.

It is notable that Ministers have been reported as defining a “sporting habit” among young people as participation at 16, 18 and 24, once a week - whereas the 2008 target specified participation as three times a week (for at least 30 minutes) with ministerial expectations pitched at increasing “significantly” participation of 24 year olds who play sport, once a week, which is currently 51 per cent.

Instead of the target-driven approach, the new focus is on building links between schools and local sports clubs and in providing financial incentives to the National (Sports) Governing Bodies to increase participation. However, school-club links had also formed part of the previous Government’s Physical Education & Schools Sport Strategy and, since 2008 had been using payment by results model through the first (and current) round of Whole Sports Plans between Sport England and the NGBs. Though for the first time NGB investment will be starting at age 14.

Current and past performance of the NGBs on participation does not bode well as under these existing agreements 17 sports have recorded a decline in the number of people playing sport once a week since 2007/08 and only four mountaineering, athletics, netball and table tennis have recoded statistically significant increase.

Indeed the performance of Sport England’s approach to Whole Sport Plans has come under recent criticism from the former Sports Minister, Richard Carbon. With others including the Local Government Association arguing that NGBs have to date lacked the capacity to engage with County Sports Partnerships and through them local authorities. Some of the same organisations have also come in for criticism, including from Ministers, over their governance.
While at a local level, some high profile figures in the sector have commented that to succeed there have to be a fundamental overhaul in the way sports clubs are organised and move to professionalised coaching. In response, Sport England has blamed the governing bodies and warned them that funding could be cut if their participation figures do not improve. While in theory withholding money from sports governing bodies unless they deliver on participatory targets might concentrate minds, some, including both codes of rugby, golf, cricket and basketball, have already seen their existing awards cut. So whether or not this really will be different may in the first instance come down to the details of these new funding agreements.

Nonetheless, the Strategy has received support particularly the focus on reversing the drop in participation rates in sport among young people above the age of 14 and in the steps to encourage schools to open their facilities to the whole community. There have also been criticism that while the Government is increasing links to schools and local sports clubs while cuts have been made prior to and during the Comprehensive Spending review to the dedicated Schools Sport budget which has impacted on the work of School Sports Partnership Co-ordinators, whose job very much chimes with the aims of the strategy. The investment through the Strategy goes some way, though does not completely fill that funding gap.

Indeed, despite the concerns over legacy issues and the recent increased expenditure for the Olympic Games, apart from the sponsorship from Sainsbury’s, there is no new money being provided. The £450 million allocated to sports governing bodies from 2013-17 under the Strategy is broadly the same as that given to these bodies between 2009 and 2013. What is different is the refocusing of the available resources away from adults, who have seen an increase in participation since London won the right to stage the Games in 2005 and towards targeting 60 per cent of NGB funding to teenagers and young people. Though not knowing the distribution age profile of current expenditure makes it difficult to assess just how significant this move is.

While the extra resources for County Sport Partnerships and potential access to £40 million bidding fund will be welcomed. The Strategy does not recognise the strategic leadership and delivery role of local authorities and that they spend approximately £1 billion per year on sport and leisure - more than 50 per cent of the total resources available to sport every year.

Indeed, local authorities are barely mentioned. Many in local government will feel that more use of local authorities could be made to realise legacy ambitions and increasing participation. Though, the big missed opportunity through the Strategy was the potential to maximise the impact of this investment through a Community Budget approach for all or part of this funding.

**External Links**

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• Written Ministerial Statement to Parliament
• National Governing Bodies’ Whole Sport Plans
• Sainsbury’s £10m sponsorship of the School Games
• Sport England’s Places, People, Play initiative

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