



**SPORT FOR  
DEVELOPMENT  
COALITION**

**Public Accounts Committee**

**inquiry on grassroots participation in**

**Sport & Physical Activity**

**Response from the Sport for Development Coalition**

**September 2022**

# Introduction to the Coalition

This evidence is submitted by the Sport for Development Coalition, a growing network of more than 250 charities and organisations delivering thousands of projects and programmes *intentionally* using sport and physical activity across the UK to realise positive social outcomes. The Coalition is funded and supported by Sport England (an Arm's Length Body of the Government funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport), Comic Relief and Laureus Sport for Good.

**One of the Coalition's primary objectives is to build evidence at scale to demonstrate how targeted sport and physical activity-based interventions contribute towards national policy priorities.**

We advocate for the role sport and physical activity plays in tackling health and societal inequalities, and levelling up communities, and make the case for ring-fencing investment for sport and physical activity-based interventions from existing funding streams across Government.

We believe that this can help reduce public spending as the Government seeks cost-effective solutions to tackle the cost-of-living crisis which has followed the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Headline recommendations

**1** When being designed, **measures to increase participation in sport and physical activity and reduce inequalities** should always look beyond participation alone and consider the wider benefits of sport-based interventions to society, and the multiple returns on investment which sport for development offers.



**2** When considering **the impact of the pandemic which is still being felt and the increased cost of living**, sport for development should be recognised and championed for the vital and measurable role it can play in Covid recovery since it is predominantly delivering in those communities facing the greatest disadvantage, where inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic are having the greatest impact.

**3** Sport's contribution to society and to policy priorities across Government Departments, as defined by this paper and through the #OpenGoal framework, should become a key metric in **reporting how the success of the grassroots strategy is measured.**

# Overview

## 1. Reason for submitting evidence

**1.1** This evidence is being submitted because the Coalition believes that when considering how grassroots participation has been measured since the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, a stronger emphasis could and should have been placed on measuring the wider societal benefits of sport and physical activity, in order to build the case for investment in it from across Government, including inter alia health, employment and criminal justice.

**1.2** While significant advances have been made in recent years in defining and promoting the benefits of participation to physical and mental wellbeing, there remains a growing and important opportunity to measure and harness the social return on investment in numerous areas of sport for development (particularly in disadvantaged or under-served communities), for example, around targeted sport-based interventions aimed at increasing employability and educational attainment, or reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

**1.3** This collective focus on building the evidence base and making the case for the wider benefits of sport is how the Coalition, through Sport England's '[Uniting The Movement](#)' strategy, can play a key role in harnessing the power of sport in local communities to tackle inequalities and contribute to policy priorities.

## 2. The impact of the pandemic on key health and societal inequalities which the Coalition is tackling

**2.1** The [Covid-19 Marmot Review \(Dec 2020\)](#) details how pre-existing health and societal inequalities in our most disadvantaged and deprived communities have been exacerbated, so it is essential that all societal assets which can help fight inequality and generate positive social outcomes are mobilised. Sport for development is among these and offers multiple returns on investment and public cost savings, as articulated in the Coalition's submission to the [2021 Spending Review](#). It calls for investment to be ring-fenced for targeted sport and physical activity-based interventions as part of funding committed through the [Plan for Health and Social Care](#), [Plan for Jobs and Lifelong Skills Guarantee](#), and [Beating Crime Plan](#).

**2.2** Following our Spending Review submission, and in the wake of the Levelling Up White Paper published by Government in January 2022, the Coalition is focusing on key health and societal inequalities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. We are publishing a series of reports to demonstrate the contribution of sport-based interventions, including:

**i) Mental health and wellbeing:** According to the key findings of the '[Moving for Mental Health](#)' [report \(January 2022\)](#) published by the Coalition in partnership with Mind, Loughborough and Edgehill Universities:

Covid-19 has made the existing mental health crisis worse: Mental health was a serious public health crisis before Covid-19, and now studies suggest Covid-19 has seen people's mental health seriously decline. Evidence from the UK Household longitudinal study suggested prevalence of mental health problems increased from 24.3% in 2019 to 37.8% in April 2020 and remained elevated in both May and June 2020 (Daly, Sutin & Robinson, 2020).

Physical activity, sport and sport for development can make a difference: There's strong evidence for the mental health benefits of physical activity (including exercise). For example, the European Psychiatric Association says there's clear evidence of the benefits of physical activity for preventing and treating mild to moderate mental health problems (Stubbs et al. 2018). Mental health benefits of physical activity include: Improved social cognition, functional capacity and quality of life. Increased social interaction, shared experiences, optimism and life satisfaction. Reduced stress, worries, cognitive decline and loneliness. Improved self-esteem, increases in perceived social support and a sense of belonging. Reduction in depressive symptoms (including low mood and energy). (Shvedko et al. 2018; Vancampfort et al. 2017.)

**ii) Employability and skills:** A report from the University of Bath has been commissioned by the Coalition and is due to be published in November 2022. It will feature more than 50 submissions of evidence and learning from organisations across the network, and states:

While issues of youth unemployment have existed for several decades, the circumstances surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic has

exacerbated the employment challenges faced by young people. Uppermost the data revealed that the pandemic, and in particular restrictions on social connectivity and the necessity for education and training to be conducted 'online', caused **significant impacts on mental health**. Respondents reported a significant increase in mental health concerns, such as a lack of motivation to work and/or study and the loss of social structures.

The report will consider the barriers facing young people in the wake of the pandemic, and the role that sport can play in alleviating or moving past them. It will consider how sport and physical activity can be used as the 'hook' to re-engage with young people not in education, employment and training, and the life skills that can be delivered through sport-based interventions, and sport itself, for example resilience and teamwork. It will also consider how Coalition members are providing training opportunities, placements and apprenticeships in sport and through sport with a wide variety of partner organisations.

Looking to 2023 and beyond, further partnerships and research are being co-ordinated to help make the case around other health and societal inequalities, as highlighted by the Coalition's [#OpenGoal framework](#). These include:

**iii) Criminal justice:** The economic and social cost of crime in England and Wales was estimated to be £59billion in 2018. Across the Coalition network, numerous sport-based early intervention initiatives consistently report more than 70% of participants have reduced offending and anti-social behaviour.

**iv) Education and development:** According to a Coalition member, Youth Sport Trust, almost three quarters (73%) of school leaders reported children returning to school with poor levels of physical fitness, following Covid-19 restrictions. 3.8 million children do less than the Chief Medical Officer's recommended 60 minutes per day of physical activity. In response, the Youth Sport Trust reported that 73% of young people across

all their programmes said being involved had increased their levels of physical activity. 85% of young people reported an improvement in their communication skills. 90% of young people said their teamworking skills had improved.

**v) Social cohesion:** Perceptions of division between certain groups (wealthier versus poorer, younger vs older, Leavers vs Remainers - all rose sharply between May 2020 (42%) and October 2020 (60%). A Coalition member, Peace Players (based in Belfast), reports that 84% of 2,000 participants felt they would never have met youth from other religious backgrounds without the programme. 93% of participants felt confident in their ability to be a leader among their family, friends and peers.

The Coalition will continue to work with experts across the network such as the Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice, the Youth Sport Trust and Belong – the Cohesion and Integration Network, to help lead collective Coalition responses around their respective specialist areas. These will be co-designed by organisations across the Coalition and beyond, demonstrating the value of collective action, shared data and impact at scale to tackling the key health and societal challenges that the UK is facing today.

**2.3** Community sport and sport for development itself has been [significantly impacted by the pandemic](#), but the collective evidence and policy reports published through #OpenGoal will underscore how ring-fenced investment in the sector can simultaneously help to:

- reinvigorate grassroots and community sport
- support national recovery efforts from Covid-19 and,
- provide public cost savings at a time when they are desperately needed.

### 3. An ‘open goal’ for Government: Tackling health and societal inequalities while saving public costs and levelling up communities

**3.1** To highlight the health and societal inequalities that it is tackling (listed in section 2), in April 2022 the Coalition launched its [#OpenGoal](#) campaign and framework showcasing the contribution of sport to building a fairer, more equitable and sustainable future.



#OpenGoal is a shared advocacy framework which members of the Coalition have co-designed in order to showcase their collective impact against a series of specific health and societal outcomes. These principally focus on:

- Improved health and wellbeing
- Closing the gap in education and development
- Increased employability and skills
- Reduced crime and anti-social behaviour
- Stronger communities and social cohesion



**3.2** #OpenGoal also focuses on important cross-sector themes such as levelling up communities, tackling inequalities and the contribution of sport for development to climate action. A campaign around the framework was launched on April 6<sup>th</sup> which each year marks the UN-backed International Day of Sport for Development and Peace (IDSDP). It is called Open Goal because:

- it is open and any organisation that intentionally uses sport and physical activity to achieve positive outcomes is welcome to join the Movement by signing [the Coalition Charter](#);
- despite this open approach, the outcomes achieved must be targeted and measurable against common data standards. It should also underpin and align with other existing frameworks such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals or the 12 Missions listed in the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda;
- it can help to save public money by simultaneously delivering multiple returns on investment (across the different outcomes defined by the framework), and therefore should be viewed as an obvious solution or 'open goal' for policy-makers. This is why the Coalition is calling for investment from existing funds for jobs, health and tackling crime to be ring-fenced for targeted sport-based interventions.

To further support #OpenGoal, the Coalition is running a series of [‘Town Hall’ sessions](#) across the UK which look at key issues across sport for development. On November 8<sup>th</sup> in Birmingham, the next Town Hall session will consider the role of sport for development and sport-based interventions within under-served communities

in [building the ‘legacy’ and social impact of major sporting events](#). The session will take place exactly three months after the close of the Commonwealth Games which were hosted in Birmingham and the Black Country.

## 4. Building a more effective grassroots strategy by capitalising on the potential of sport for development

**4.1** In 2020, Sport England commissioned the Sport Industry Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University to calculate [the social impact and the economic importance of sport and physical activity in England](#). They found that, when measured against costs of engagement and providing opportunities, for every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity, a return on investment (ROI) of £3.91 was created for individuals and society. Furthermore, the combined economic and social value (SROI) of taking part in community sport and physical activity in England in 2017/2018 was £85.5 billion.

**4.2** However, when comparing community sport and physical activity more generally with sport for development programmes, it is noticeable the latter predominantly supports communities and individuals facing the greatest levels of deprivation and disadvantage, who have been [impacted most](#) by health and societal inequalities exacerbated by Covid-19. [Analysis](#) of almost 35,000 beneficiaries across eight leading sport for development interventions across the network showed 64% of participants were from the 30% most deprived areas of the country.

**4.3** Green Book guidance, published by HM Treasury in [2020](#), emphasises that place-based interventions in these deprived communities – such as those delivered by Coalition members – deliver additional value and returns, with distributional analysis highlighting the costs and benefits of interventions for different population groups. Comparative analysis underscores the greater economic value of targeted sport for development interventions in deprived communities compared to the broader benefits of participation in sport across the population as a whole, where outcomes are not necessarily intended or defined.

**4.4** Estimates vary on the greater return provided by sport for development but, in March 2020, the charity [Made By Sport](#), a partner of the Coalition, published research reporting that it was £6 for every £1, compared to £4 for every £1 for community sport and physical activity.

## 5. Summary of recommendations

In summary, the Sport for Development Coalition recommends that:

**5.1** When being designed, **measures to increase participation in sport and physical activity and reduce inequalities** should always look *beyond participation alone* and consider the wider benefits of sport-based interventions to society, and the multiple returns on investment which sport for development offers.

**5.2** When considering **the impact of the pandemic which is still being felt and the increased cost of living**, sport for development should be recognised and championed for the vital and measurable role it can play in Covid

recovery since it is predominantly delivering in those communities facing the greatest disadvantage, where inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic are having the greatest impact.

**5.3** Sport's contribution to society and to policy priorities across Government Departments, as defined by this paper and through the #OpenGoal framework, should become a key metric in **reporting how the success of the grassroots strategy is measured.**

### Contact us



07736 162839



[coalition@sportfordevelopmentcoalition.org](mailto:coalition@sportfordevelopmentcoalition.org)



Holborn Tower, 137-145 High Holborn,  
London, WC1V 6PL

