



Tackling Physical Inactivity— A Coordinated Approach

**ALL-PARTY COMMISSION
ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**





The UK faces an epidemic of physical inactivity. Over the last half century we have simply stopped moving—in our schools, our work places, our towns, cities—and how we get between them. In all human history, we have never been so inactive. But the human body was designed to move, and this slow down in activity has seen significant consequences to our health and economy.

This is the first of two reports from the All-Party Parliamentary Commission on Physical Activity, which was set up in 2013. Here we set out the scale and scope of the problem, mapping out the specific areas in which we need to work for change. In the second report we will make some tangible suggestions on how we can begin to tackle this epidemic.

We are not starting from zero. The legacy of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games provides a platform and momentum to make critical progress and the 2014 Commonwealth Games will give further impetus this summer.

But the facts are daunting: Over half of adults in the UK do not meet the guidelines for daily physical activity. And an even smaller percentage of children reach the guideline levels set for young people. Physical inactivity leads to around 37,000 premature deaths a year – A number that is more than all deaths from murder, suicide and accidents combined. Lack of physical activity is estimated to double the rate of absenteeism at work, and is estimated to cost the UK economy billions every year.

The solution is in our hands – all of our hands. We can turn back this toxic tide of inactivity but only if everyone plays a role; from teachers to medics, town planners to transport chiefs, big business to charities, national to local politicians, parents to children to grandparents – you and me. Only a collaborative approach can bring about the scale of change required.

Encouragingly, The All-Party Commission on Physical Activity received a substantial response to our call for ideas and evidence. We heard oral evidence from 49 witnesses from national and local government as well as the private and third sectors and from fields as diverse as transport, health, education, and sport. We've also had an impressive number of written submissions, including many from members of the public with a passion for sharing ideas and seeing real change.

This is the first step. Our second report will further draw upon the enormous amount of evidence we gained to detail more actions we can take to get the UK moving again – because the facts show that the current status-quo is simply no longer an option.

Let's get moving...

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This Commission would also not have been possible without the valuable support of our Commissioners who brought their expertise and enthusiasm to this process: Gerry Sutcliffe MP, John Woodcock MP and Greg Mulholland MP. We extend our thanks to them.



SUMMARY

The wealth of evidence submitted to the commission highlighted five vital areas for action.



A NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION

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1. **Have a plan:** Establish an over-arching National Plan of Action to tackle declining levels of physical activity, to be reviewed annually and progress reassessed every 5 years against its goals.
2. **Cross-party agreement:** Ensure a cross-political party commitment from leaders to supporting the development and implementation of the National Plan of Action within Government, Parliament and beyond.
3. **Cross-sector agreement:** Create a cross-sectoral, cross-government departmental drive to construct and implement a framework for the measurement and increase of Physical Activity across the board. This can ensure a collaborative approach to funding, commissioning, delivering investments, policies and interventions, with a specific focus on the first 15 years of life.
4. **Oversight and Accountability:** Establish an independent body to have oversight and ensure accountability for progress on both development and implementation of the National Plan of Action at both a national and local level.

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

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1. **Breaking new ground:** An innovative strategic communications strategy that goes beyond the traditional Public Health campaigns.
2. **Reaching the people:** A population-wide approach, but with a focus on motivating key audiences: young people, parents and community role models, health and social care professionals, and education professionals.
3. **Working together:** The campaign to be delivered and supported by a coalition of organisations from the public, private and third sectors.

DESIGNING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BACK IN TO OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

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1. **Transport:** Re-focus transport strategy over time, to provide long-term continuity of resources to incentivise and facilitate walking and cycling as regular daily transport.
2. **Our world:** Existing and planned new developments and infrastructure to be 'health-checked' to ensure that walking, cycling, active recreation and other forms of physical activity are prioritised.
3. **Our work:** Active workplaces: Employers are encouraged to support their employees, suppliers and visitors to be active while at work, or travelling to or from it.

MAKING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY A LIFELONG HABIT

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1. **Active schools:** A whole school approach is needed across the breadth of the school day.
2. **Ofsted Activity:** The quality of physical activity provision in schools to be formally evaluated.
3. **Involve Activity:** Actively seek the advantages sport and activity providers can play in delivering high quality, accessible educational, health and social interventions, as well as positive sports experiences for all.

PROVING SUCCESS

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1. **Measure:** We need to develop standardised measures of physical activity.
2. **Evaluate:** We need to develop standardised evaluations of physical activity interventions.

MAKING THE CASE

Physical inactivity poses a serious and growing danger to our society – it damages our health, economy and environment, and limits the educational attainment and futures of our children.

Declining levels of physical activity have been highlighted by numerous recent reports such as *Moving More*, *Living More* and *Turning the Tide of Inactivity*. In England only 61% of adults meet the CMO guidelines of daily physical activity, even more shockingly 22.5% of adults fail to achieve even 30 mins of activity over seven days.¹ The picture is similar across the whole of the UK. Even fewer children, just 51%, reach the daily target for young people.²

Inactivity costs the UK economy approximately £20 billion every year.³ Direct costs from physical inactivity lead to more money being spent to treat diabetes, cancer, and heart disease. Indirect costs include numerous lost working days through sickness and subsequent lower productivity levels.

The World Health Organisation defines physical activity as:

Any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure. Regular moderate intensity physical activity – such as walking, cycling, or participating in sports – has significant benefits for health.

How much physical activity should we be doing?

The four UK Chief Medical Officers recommend at least:

150 minutes per week of moderate physical activity in bouts of 10 minutes or more

All children and young people should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes and up to several hours every day.

Physical inactivity leads to 37,000 premature deaths in England alone⁴ every year. This is more than are killed by murder, suicide, and accidents combined.

We need urgent action to reverse this trend. In comparison to 1961 levels, we are now 24% less active. If we don't act now, we will be 35% less active by 2030.⁵ This number is significant and we should expect even greater consequences than we are facing today if we do not act.





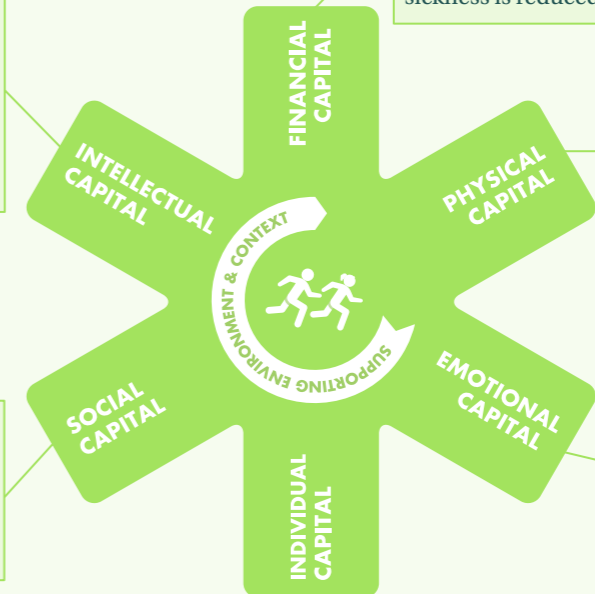
The discussion of physical activity is often framed in terms of the dangers of its absence. Instead we need to acknowledge and focus on the evidence on the benefits of physical activity, which is unambiguous and resounding.

An independent and comprehensive review of over 500 pieces of evidence found that the benefits from physical activity are felt in all areas of life:

The Human Capital Model⁶

Developing our mental capacity such as through better memory, concentration or academic ability—our intellectual capital.

Promoting better interpersonal relationships and stronger social bonds—our social capital.



Physical activity also has financial benefits for the individual through increased performance and job prospects, and for the wider economy as employees are more productive and the burden of sickness is reduced—our financial capital.

Improvements in physical and mental wellbeing—our physical and emotional capital.

Improving important life and social skills such as teamwork—our individual capital.

The Human Capital Model, illustrated here, summarises this. The 'capital' is the benefits we accrue as individuals.

In short, the evidence tells us that:

- **Active children do better.** Physical activity is essential for healthy growth and development, it increases cognitive outcomes and school attainment, and improves social interaction and confidence.⁷
- **Active people do better.** Physical activity reduces the risk of all cause mortality by 30%, of heart disease by 20-35%, of diabetes by 35-50% and of dementia by 40-45%.⁸

- **Active workplaces do better.** Physical activity programmes in the workplace have resulted in reductions of absenteeism between 30% and 50%.⁹ Active workers are also happier, cited as better team players and are visibly more productive.¹⁰

- **An active population drives a stronger economy.** UK Active estimates that just a 1% reduction in the rates of inactivity each year for five years would save the UK around £1.2 billion.^{11, 12}

A long-term vision

Our vision of the future is one in which we design our villages, towns and cities so that more people walk and cycle to school or work. A country in which our children achieve their potential in a school environment that integrates physical activity into their daily routines, both inside and outside of the classroom, ensuring positive experiences in a variety of sports and physical activities. Family time means moving and playing together, because it's fun,

accessible, affordable, and easy to do. Our economy is thriving, built on a generation who build activity breaks into their day, maximising their productivity, innovation, and efficiency. As a nation, we are happier, healthier, and stronger.

What we need to do is simple: move more. Everyone has a role to play in making this a reality and now is the moment to take action.



A NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION

Unless we set out a plan to increase levels of physical activity in the UK it seems inevitable that the downward trend of recent years will continue.

We need a strong, forward-looking national plan of action. Tackling this challenge requires the support of all the main political parties and an ambitious goal to halt the decline of physical activity. An issue this important must operate beyond political divides.

The ambition for “a much more physically active nation” set out in the Olympic and Paralympic Legacy plan, *Moving More, Living More*, is one we applaud. In parts, however, the vision does not go far enough. The experience of countries such as Finland also shows what can be achieved (see box on page 7).

A piecemeal approach to tackling physical inactivity is, at best, limited in impact. The experience of Change4Life has shown that a far more holistic approach is needed to create genuine behaviour change. Promising initiatives are all too often stifled by a lack of long term cross-sector working and funding.

The successful delivery of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the subsequent commitment to the Legacy Plan, are a testament to how much can be achieved through cross-party, cross-departmental working when the political will is present. The 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow look set to repeat this success. A similar effort is urgently required to place the physical activity agenda at the heart of national and local government priorities.

The success of the 2012 Games also hinged on close collaboration between public, private, third sector organisations, and private citizens. This too must be replicated, drawing on the knowledge and skills of academics and expert practitioners already working to tackle physical inactivity. The inspiration and commitment of citizens must also be mobilised.

The Games also provide a model for how an independent body can ensure accountability and drive progress. For a National Plan to be a success, there needs to be independent oversight. This is not about the creation of another Government body but needs to draw together experts from across the public sector, professional bodies and grassroots organisations to ensure the objectives of the plan are met.

Only a strategic approach that has cross-party, multi-sector support can bring about the realignment of investment and change in policy and practice needed to tackle this issue. This urgent need also comes at a time of austerity and fiscal constraint. While we recognise that some of the recommendations

in this report will have budgetary implications, we also believe that much can be achieved through the reallocation of existing budgets and that in time, the savings which will accrue will pay for the initial investment in bringing about this change. Part of the role of the independent body will be to oversee this smarter working between budgets and partners.

A National Plan would provide a strong, evidence-based framework for action. It should set out a clear vision, measurable targets and actionable recommendations as a roadmap to achieving it. By doing so, we will be a nation at the forefront of efforts to tackle physical inactivity, learning from successes in the UK and of early pioneers such as Finland¹³ and The Netherlands.

The Commission recommends:

1. A National Action Plan which is reviewed every year and reassessed every 5 years to align against its goals and objectives.
2. The leaders of the main political parties commit to supporting the development and implementation of the National Action Plan to tackle declining levels of physical activity. There is no quick fix and commitment to the plan must extend beyond the next parliamentary cycle.
3. A cross-sectoral, cross-departmental approach is needed to create and implement a framework for the

measurement of Physical Activity with a specific focus on the first 15 years of life. Furthermore, a collaborative approach to funding, commissioning and delivering investments, policies and interventions is essential.

4. An independent body is needed, to have oversight and ensure accountability for progress on development and implementation of the National Plan at both a national and local level.

LEARNING FROM FINLAND

In the 1970s, Finland had the highest rate of heart disease in the world. Since then, the numbers dying from heart disease and lung cancer have dropped by around two-thirds, and life expectancy has risen by 6-7 years. From the 1970's Finland experimented in North Karelia with a variety of innovative methods to increase levels of physical activity. Mass campaigns, competitions between towns to cut cholesterol, and changes in legislation were tested in this region with success.

The learning from this pilot was incorporated into the introduction in 1980 of the 'Sports Act' which placed

heavy emphasis on 'sports for all for fitness and health'. This Act has since been revised and further policies launched which promote a wide range of activity opportunities and funding for the construction and maintenance of an urban and rural environment which encourages active travel and leisure. A 2002 Government resolution also required a commitment from all ministries to promote physical activity and align all aspects of physical activity policy. The plan is steered and monitored by an advisory committee.



GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

At its heart, tackling the declining levels of physical activity is a question of both cultural and individual behavioural change. This will only be achieved if each and every person who is currently leading a sedentary lifestyle comes to appreciate the importance of moving more, and becomes motivated to do so.

It is unrealistic to expect significant change unless each and every one of us has a greater understanding of:

- Why physical activity is important, the consequences of inactivity, and what the expansive personal benefits are of a more active lifestyle. This includes increasing understanding of the proven links between physical inactivity and a wide range of diseases, including the risk of cancer, diabetes, heart disease and stroke, as well as the impacts on mental wellbeing.
- The minimum level of physical activity a person should be aiming for in daily life.
- How reaching the physical activity target can be achieved in ways which are easy, fun and affordable.

A priority has to be reaching those of us who are currently least active, as that is the part of the population where most gains are to be had. The relationship between physical activity and health benefits is not linear, small increases in activity for the inactive will produce significantly more benefits than a similar level of increase in activity for the active.¹⁴ We need to address perceived barriers to action head-on, with a recognition of the specific needs for disability groups.

An innovative approach to behaviour change is necessary. Simply focusing on public health messages alone will not be sufficient to change the cultural and behavioural norms that have developed around physical activity. This cannot be left just to government, everyone has a distinctive role to play.

Involving front-line professionals, national public health bodies, as well as the third and private sectors will ensure the message reaches the right audiences.

The Commission recommends:

An innovative strategic communications strategy that goes beyond the traditional Public Health campaign.

A population-wide approach, but with a focus on key audiences:

- Young people, parents and community role models
- Health and social care professionals
- Education professionals

Supported and delivered by:

- Government and national Public Health bodies are ideally placed to lead mass media campaigns aimed at rising awareness among the widest possible cross-section of society, with supplementary communications targeting the most inactive groups.
- Health and social care professionals and education professionals are all trusted and well placed to provide information, advice and encouragement, particularly at 'teachable moments'. These are moments such as the birth of a child, transition from primary to secondary school, transition from school to work, the diagnosis of an illness, or at retirement, when people are most receptive to new ideas or changes in habit.
- Royal Colleges, Unions, academic institutions, and other professional bodies who can provide education, training, ongoing Continuing Professional Development and support to front-line professionals.
- Commissioners in health, social care and education who can promote and fund initiatives such as social prescribing of physical activity.
- Private and third sector organisations who can use the power of their brands to lead by example through embedding the principles of active lifestyles and early positive experiences in product and service delivery as well as in communications.



DESIGNING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BACK IN TO OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

The world in which we live no longer prioritises physical activity. Physical activity is part of life, not an add-on which requires us to find more time or money. Yet our transport system is dominated by private transport, retail areas have moved ‘out of town’, it is often easier to find the lift or escalator than the stairs, and the majority of people spend their working lives behind a desk. Young children today are increasingly driven to school and learning means being sedentary at a desk. Fewer than ever are able to play freely in the streets, parks or open spaces where they live.

Most sustainable physical activity occurs during everyday activities within the built environment, rather than exclusively for leisure.¹⁵ Walking or cycling are low-cost, accessible forms of activity which can be encouraged by designing our towns, cities and green spaces to be safer and more attractive.¹⁶

It is clear that we need to design physical activity back in to our daily lives. This requires public services and the private sector working together to plan and build places that encourage physical activity and cultures that will sustain it.

Streets and parks designed to be safer and more attractive were the most common changes people reported which would encourage them to walk more.

– RIBA, 2014

The Commission recommends:

1. ACTIVE TOWNS AND CITIES

Reallocation of transport investment, providing long-term continuity of dedicated funding for walking and cycling as regular daily transport.

Government spending on transport is skewed towards road building. Active transport, including walking, cycling, and public transport is essential to instilling physical activity back into our daily lives.

The Chief Medical Officer for England called for a doubling of walking and an eight-fold increase in cycling. A study by public health economists found that within 20 years this increase would lead to savings of roughly £17 billion (in 2010 prices) for the NHS in England and Wales.¹⁷

Reallocating transport investment to focus on active travel would increase the health of the nation and produce significant economic benefits. The 2013 Welsh Active Travel Bill demonstrates how this can become national policy. The recommendations from the *Get Britain Cycling* report offer a more detailed road map to encouraging active transport.

Existing and planned new developments and infrastructure should be ‘health-checked’ to ensure that walking, cycling, active recreation and other forms of physical activity are prioritised.

The choice to walk and cycle is strongly influenced by the urban setting, for example in terms of available infrastructure, aesthetics and perceived safety. Developers should be challenged to innovate and demonstrate consideration for, and the integration of, physical activity into their plans, for example through the existing Design and Access Statement. We need a National Planning Framework that reflects the importance of physical activity.

Local authorities have an important role to play in elevating the importance of physical activity within plans which are approved, especially in maximising the promotion of free or low cost facilities in their area. Design features which encourage active travel and recreational physical activity should be core components of all neighbourhoods to ensure the whole population is given equal opportunity to be physically active.

The evidence we received and best practice from the WHO,¹⁸ suggests that the best designs will:

- increase the local availability of recreational infrastructure
- reduce traffic density and speed and increase provision for pedestrians and cyclists
- increase street connectivity and create pleasant street environments so people linger longer, particularly in town centres
- design neighbourhoods for mixed land use, with walking routes between residential areas and essential public services and retail areas.

Examples of best practice should be celebrated and shared. A form of ‘kite mark’ or ‘Active City’ accreditation may provide a strong vehicle for recognising places which prioritise physical activity in their environment.

2. ACTIVE WORKPLACES

Employers should be encouraged to support their employees, suppliers and visitors to be active while at work, or travelling to or from it.

The incentive for employers to create more active workplaces is clear. 16 million work days a year are lost due to obesity and obesity related illness and more are lost due to other health conditions associated with physical inactivity.¹⁹ The potential gains for

increased productivity and for reduced absence are immense.

In a typical working week, people spend on average 5 hours and 41 minutes per day sitting at their desk.²⁰ Many workplaces are currently not conducive to encouraging opportunities to be physically active. Sedentary behaviour is not only bad for your physical health but is also associated with a decrease in mental wellbeing and those who sit for longer at work are more likely to sit outside of work.²¹

Current prevailing work patterns are increasing these risks and decreasing productivity, therefore, creating a healthy, active workplace environment needs to be a key priority for employers. We need to create a culture in which employers understand the benefits of encouraging employees to be more physically active during the day. Innovative ways of incentivising employers, for example through Private Medical Insurance schemes, or awards and kite marks, should be explored.

The government needs to engage industry leaders in the formation of the National Action Plan to ensure their support to making the workplace conducive to an active society.

IDEAS FOR CREATING AN ‘ACTIVE WORKPLACE’

1. Develop an organisation-wide policy to encourage and support physical activity
2. Incentivise active travel to work e.g. encourage cycle-to-work schemes etc. and provide appropriate facilities
3. Interventions to reduce/break-up extended periods of job-related sitting
4. Workplace health and safety assessments to include a physical activity component.
5. Enable employees to volunteer with community projects that encourage physical activity (e.g. active youth groups etc.)



MAKING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY A LIFELONG HABIT

Active children perform better in school and in later life. Fundamental physical literacy must be developed from a young age and consolidated through positive experiences in childhood. We know that children who enjoy physical activity and develop those basic skills early in life are more likely to continue being active in later life.

That same foundation of basic skills, knowledge, and experiences also makes it easier to support people to maintain levels of physical activity, or return to physical activity, as they pass through various transition points in life. The importance of young people being active and the critical need for these experiences to be positive was highlighted to the Commission by experts from every sector.

Alongside making sure that our young people have those early positive experiences, we must ensure that people are able to remain active into later life. This is essential as our population ages. Addressing

inequalities in gender participation is also vital to ensuring that physical activity is a lifelong habit. By age seven, the gap is already evident, with 63% of boys in the UK reaching the recommended daily target compared to just 38% of girls.²²

Helping people to transition into life beyond education while maintaining their levels of physical activity is also important. Shifting to a culture of active ageing can help reduce the burden of disease associated with many later life chronic health conditions.

The Commission recommends:

1. ACTIVE SCHOOLS

'Active schools' should be the norm.

Increasingly, the evidence shows that active children have higher test scores²³ and are more likely to progress beyond compulsory education.²⁴ The Education Endowment Foundation has also recently invested in a study to look in more detail at the links between physical activity and academic performance.

At the same time, schools are ideally placed to ensure physical activity becomes a lifelong habit. It is essential that physical activity in schools, whether in organised school sports, PE or active break times leaves a lasting, positive impression on our children. Schools have the most positive influence when they work as a whole to encourage participation.²⁵

'Active kids are not just investing in their future health but have healthier and happier lives today. Physical activity in childhood has a range of benefits during childhood, including healthy growth and development, maintenance of energy balance, psychological well-being and social interaction.'

– Chief Medical Officer, 2004

"A study found that children in Year 8 use more calories walking to and from school for a week than in two hours of PE and games."

– Mackett & Paskins, 2008

A whole school approach is needed across the breadth of the school day.

Schools need to plan how to incorporate physical activity into the school day. Active school plans must cover activities across the school day:

- Before and after school – active travel; active pre- and post- sports and clubs;
- During the day – High quality PE; active lessons across the curriculum and activity breaks;
- Developing physical literacy should be integral to the curriculum.

Physical activity in schools needs to be regular, of good quality and appropriate to the age and abilities of the students.

More time needs to be allocated to physical activity and PE within the school day, but quantity alone is not enough. Quality of provision is important to help drive long term, sustained engagement.²⁶ Support from teaching unions and professional bodies, including the nascent College of Teaching.

Fundamental to achieving this are:

- **Improvements in teacher training, particularly at primary level:** high quality education requires high quality delivery. It is already widely recognised that the current number of hours trainee primary teachers spend on physical activity is inadequate.²⁷ The training given to the new Primary PE Specialists is also a welcome addition. However, initial teacher training of all primary school teachers needs to include more on physical education, to provide teachers with greater confidence to deliver high quality and inspiring sessions, which meets the needs of all pupils including those with a disability.
- **A more diverse and inclusive offer:** the current focus on competitive sport in PE should be complemented by a broader range of activities to meet the needs of a wider group of children. Competitive sports can have the effect of deterring some young people from participating in sport and physical activity.

Inspiring and interesting competitive and non-competitive sporting opportunities should be provided to pupils.

The quality of physical activity provision in schools should be evaluated.

Physical activity and the inculcation of physical literacy from a young age is core to the work of schools. The simplest way of achieving this would be for Ofsted to place greater emphasis on inspecting and reporting on the time the school allows for PE and the quality of provision. Ofsted is ideally placed to underscore the importance of embedding physical activity in all areas of school life, and to highlight and celebrate examples of best practice.

This would help to elevate the importance of physical activity in the curriculum, provide a balance to an emphasis on academic results and therefore help to begin a cultural and normative shift towards the expectation that physical activity is an integral and essential part of a child's development.

2. SPORT

More should be done to take advantage of the role that sport providers can play in delivering high quality accessible and positive sports experiences for all.

Sport is an important piece of the physical activity jigsaw. Young people are introduced to an increasingly wide range of sports though the school curriculum, and many after-school activities revolve around physical activity and sports.

To ensure that early involvement in sport is a positive experience for young people, there needs to be a commitment to a common framework for what 'good' looks like for youth sport delivery by all sport National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and an increased emphasis on early years. We heard lots of evidence which suggests that a good place to start may be in looking at a number of key factors:

- **Universal access** – Ensuring that all young people are able to participate, regardless of their needs or abilities;

- **Age appropriate** – Opportunities for participation should be tailored to their level of development and interests;
- **Make it fun** – Active play is as important as organised sport and there is potential to make all experiences of physical activity enjoyable;
- **Understand what motivates and incentivises children** – we need to look at the things young people enjoy and learn from other sectors such as social media and gaming to encourage sustained participation;
- **Provide high quality coaching and inspiring mentors and role models** – local heroes and peers can be just as influential, if not more so, as elite athletes and global stars. These individuals also have an important role to play in providing positive and constructive feedback to maintain engagement;
- **Ensuring children meet the daily guidelines for the time and intensity of physical activity.**

Sport National Governing Bodies also have an important role to play in enabling people to remain involved with sport in adulthood. Schemes like Back to Netball and Cardio Tennis have offered fun and accessible routes to participation and encouraged lapsed players to return to the game. The success of projects such as Park Run, outside of the NGB framework, also provide inspirational examples of what can be achieved.

Of course, at the local level, much sports provision is provided by the voluntary sector and grassroots organisations. This extends far beyond after-school and Saturday morning clubs for traditional sports. Organisations like the Scouts and Guides, or youth clubs offering a wide range of activities deliver a huge number of physical activity sessions and opportunities to young people across the UK. They too have a responsibility to ensure that the experiences they offer are providing a high quality and positive foundation for later life. NGBs and other organisations with the resources and expertise, including from the private sector, should support local groups to deliver this.

IDEAS FOR CREATING AN 'ACTIVE SCHOOL'

1. Continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers to understand how to build physical activity into lessons across all areas of the curriculum.
2. Creating school 'active travel' plans to encourage more young people to cycle/walk to school. This could include anything from a walking bus, to cycle training, to inter-school competitions.
3. Encourage the sharing of facilities such as through letting community sports clubs use school facilities to provide after school opportunities for students in schools in the area.
4. Provide allowances to teachers running after school clubs.
5. Breakfast fitness clubs.
6. Short activity breaks between or during lessons.



PROVING SUCCESS

The UK, along with much of the rest of the world, is poor at measuring the quality and quantity of physical activity we undertake.

Our ability to tackle declining levels of physical activity effectively is hampered by a lack of consistent and regular measurement. To track progress and evaluate the success of the National Action Plan and measures we take to tackle inactivity we need to set benchmarks, which in practise means:

- Know how much activity people are doing, and how often;
- What activities people are doing;
- Understand levels of physical literacy,²⁸ particularly among our young people.

The UK also lags behind other countries in evaluating the quality of physical activity interventions. We lack a coherent picture of what 'good' looks like. Which interventions result in the greatest increases in participation in physical activity? Which lead to the most sustained change? Which approaches are best for engaging different groups?

Too often, opportunities to collect good quality data, information and learning are missed and the opportunity to identify best practice (what works) is lost. If we know what good looks like, tackling the declining levels of physical activity will be much easier.

The Commission recommends:

1. We need to develop standardised measures of physical activity.

Currently there are significant limitations to our ability to measure levels of activity. We do not even have directly comparable statistics for the four nations of the UK. Clearly, if we are to make progress, we must address this issue.

The existing national physical activity surveys²⁹ are an important starting point but require significant expansion. The increased availability and capability of digital devices also offers new avenues for exploring how physical activity can be most effectively measured.

We urgently need to devise a standardised way to measure all physical activity, not just sports participation, and measure activity among children as well as adults. These should build on existing reporting mechanisms so as not to add further bureaucracy. More specific data on physical activity levels will enable more targeted use of resources and identification of areas where greater efforts are required.

The World Health Organisation is beginning to investigate the creation of a global measure. By convening a panel of experts the UK can be one of the first countries to devise a strategy for physical activity measurement.

2. We need to develop standardised evaluation of physical activity interventions.

Many of the submissions to the Commission laid out starkly the problems of identifying which approaches and interventions to tackle physical inactivity are most effective. Poor evaluation practices undermine attempts to draw firm conclusions.

Currently it is almost impossible to tell which interventions to increase levels of physical activity have been successful and which have failed as the majority are not objectively assessed or evaluated over a sufficient time-frame. The inconsistency in metrics further compounds the problem.

Progress is dependent on shifting to a position of objective and comprehensive evaluation of all

interventions, using standardised measures of physical activity and literacy. Learnings from 'failed' interventions are as important as 'successful' ones and should be shared as widely. Funders, both statutory and charitable, are in a strong position to drive change.

Evaluation of physical activity interventions cannot be a 'nice to have' and is essential to determine the long term behaviour change impacts. Further to this, we need to agree on a standard evaluation protocol for all grant funded evaluations. This would set out standards of evidence for evaluations, providing guidance on how confident we can be in the impact measured.³⁰ An agreed set of standards would also allow meta-analysis across studies and countries to give greater confidence in the effect of varying interventions.

Funding bodies must ensure that results of evaluations are shared as part of funding agreements.



ENDNOTES

- ¹ Health and Social Care Information Centre (2013) Health Survey for England 2012, Leeds; Health and Social Care Information Centre
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- ³ Designed to Move, (2013), *Designed to Move: A physical activity agenda*, <http://www.designedtomove.org/>
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www.activitycommission.com/

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