

**SPORT+
RECREATION
ALLIANCE**

WHY ARE WE FAILING OUR CHILDREN?



FOREWORD

When the Alliance wrote its new strategy, *The Heart of An Active Nation*, in 2017, the desire to identify a strand of work around children and young people's experience of sport and recreation was particularly strong.

This was driven by all of our members recognising, irrespective of size and focus, the importance of all

young people having a good experience in their early years so that sport and recreation can be a positive influence throughout their life.

To guide our work in this area and make sure that our starting point was informed, we wanted to begin by analysing what has happened in recent years. As the first stage of this, we

have conducted a foundation research exercise to establish the extent to which the current system, historic initiatives, public policy and investment have contributed to present outcomes.

In 1977 the Alliance, then the CCPR, published a report *Sport and Young People: The Need for Action Now* which highlights many of the issues that would, depressingly, feel very familiar today. Progress has been made in some of the areas highlighted in that report, and we know from the work of our members that there are many fantastic programmes which engage children and young people and give them a great experience.

Yet, as this report shows, activity levels have at best stayed the same, and at worst declined significantly. So, despite the huge efforts of many, and some considerable investment, we cannot continue on the same path and just hope things will get better.

We believe children and young people have a fundamental right to be active but that the system and our society are failing to deliver this. We all need to take responsibility for this – the responsibility does not lie just with government or schools, sports organisations or the media, or parents, carers and young people themselves. The system is complex – and the first thing we must do is recognise that we can all play a part in improving the opportunities for more children and young people to be engaged.

So, from this point onwards, we will be working to build a campaign to establish the fundamental right of the child to be active. We believe this is just as important as any other fundamental right and that this should be the single, unifying purpose for a revitalised system.

We look forward to working with our members and others who share our commitment.

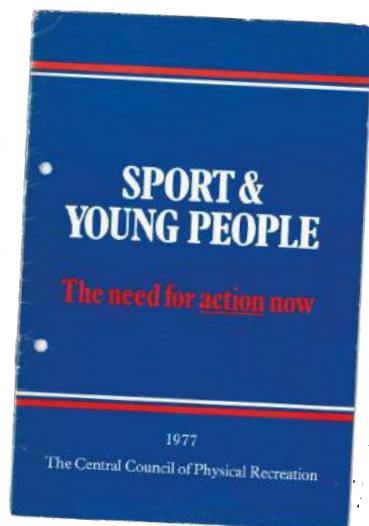
Emma Boggis
Chief Executive,
Sport and Recreation Alliance
July 2018

FOUNDATION REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

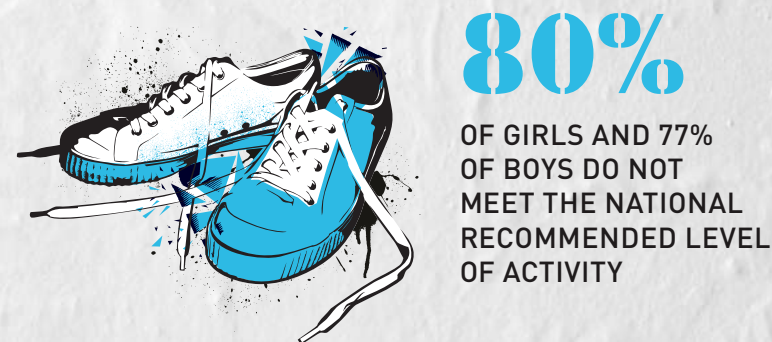
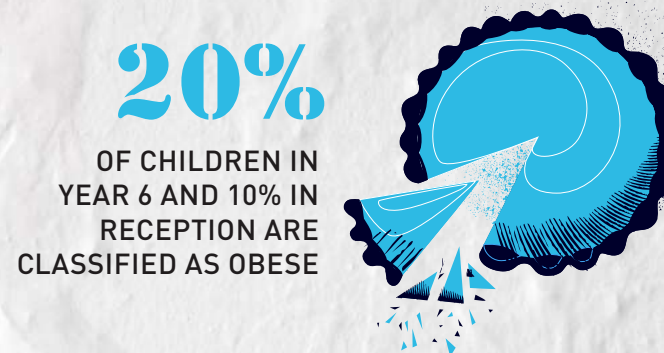
The Sport and Recreation Alliance conducted this research project to reflect on how the domestic sport and recreation system around children and young people has operated in the recent political landscape.

Over 40 years on from the Central Council of Physical Recreation's 1977 report *Sport and Young People: The Need for Action Now*, this research considers the same debate – are we achieving positive outcomes for children and young people through sport and recreation?



To read the full report, visit
www.sportandrecreation.org.uk

Since 1977 we have witnessed political turbulence and societal change, alongside significant activity, investment and a huge effort to get children and young people active. That being said, using government statistics, current data shows that:



THE ALLIANCE'S OWN
RESEARCH SHOWS THAT:

30%

OF ADULTS REPORT
HAVING A NEGATIVE
OR VERY NEGATIVE
EXPERIENCE OF SPORT
AND RECREATION AT
SCHOOL

40%

SAY THIS EXPERIENCE
DIRECTLY
INFLUENCES THEIR
CURRENT HABITS

MORE POSITIVELY,
WE KNOW:

93%

OF ALL CHILDREN SAID
THEY LIKED BEING
ACTIVE

With so many children enjoying being active there should be cause for hope, but by recognising the more concerning statistics, we must first acknowledge that the system is preventing them from getting active.

In 40 years' time, we don't want to be reporting a similar lack of progress, and after identifying a series of core objectives, this research actively targeted the focus of our analysis on particular sections of the debate. Namely, we sought to:

- **Define the sporting system for children and young people;**
- **Consider the role of central government and parliament;**
- **Draw comparisons to international case studies of best practice.**

The research was based upon an archival document framework, considering 63 publicly accessible documents authored by government or parliamentary outlets between 1988 and 2018. Following collation, the evaluation

team deployed a process of discourse analysis to focus on the applied definitions of children and young people, the roles and responsibilities of various bodies and a series of international comparisons.

The foundation research also identified the strong presence of a small number of organisations and individuals who have dominated the system as well as a significant under-representation of the voices of children and young people throughout our decision making and delivery.

While the overall indicators are very disappointing, this is not a critique of successful initiatives and organisations but rather the result of a lack of co-ordination, consistency, and political leadership. The evidence from this research supports concerns that progress across the recent political landscape has not been good enough and presents a challenging view that the current system is failing our children.

CHILDHOOD OBESITY:

THE EMERGENCE OF A CRISIS

INFLUENCING FACTORS:

Economic
Sport and Recreation
Children and Young People

%
OF CHILDREN
CLASSED AS
OVERWEIGHT
OR OBESE

LABOUR

CALLAGHAN - 1976-79

1976 Britain borrows money from IMF

1978/79 Winter of Discontent

1974
13%

CONSERVATIVE

THATCHER - 1979-90

1982 High unemployment
and economic recession

1984 The miners' strike

1986 Major national
industries are privatised

1988 Education Reform Act (physical
education becomes a foundation
subject)

1989 Children Act

1990 Poll tax riots

1984
11%

2016
28%

CONSERVATIVE

CAMERON 2010-16

2012 London Olympics/Paralympics

2016 Brexit Referendum

2012
28%

LABOUR

BROWN 2007-10

2007/8 Start of global
financial crisis

2010 Start of 'age of austerity'
programme

2008
30%

LABOUR

BLAIR - 1997-2007

2000 Dotcom bubble burst

2002 Establishment of OFSTED

2004 Children Act (establishment of
Children's Commissioner)

2004
34%

2000
27%

1996
26%

CONSERVATIVE

MAJOR - 1990-97

1992 'Black Wednesday'
exchange rate crisis

1993 National Lottery Act

1997 Sport England and
UK Sport established

1994
16%

Data is taken from the National Study of Health and Growth in 1974, 1984 and 1994, and the Health Survey for England annually from 1995 to 2016. In part, the increase from 1994 to 1996 is a result of the integration of children aged 11-15 in the Health Survey for England data

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

The research has recognised some of the key failings of the existing system.

There has been a significant level of investment and a huge range of initiatives and programmes over the period since 1977, but the research finds that wider issues of political turbulence and a lack of consistency or long-term strategy have combined to deliver disappointing results overall.

This report also marks an acknowledgement from the Alliance that our own role within this debate has not been

active or consistent enough over a long period. Our priority now is to look to the future and to make sure we take decisive action, with an appropriate long-term vision for enhanced outcomes.

So, how can we take action to overcome these challenges and build a bold, re-invigorated system delivering meaningful and impactful opportunities for children and young people?



OUR PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION IS:

ESTABLISH THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT OF A CHILD TO BE ACTIVE.

The UN Convention on The Rights of the Child already includes a 'right of the child to rest and leisure and to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child'. We need to go beyond this and make sure that physical activity is explicitly referenced. We also need to recognise that existing rights are sometimes

not lived in practice, and we should remind ourselves that actions speak louder than words. We must break down the fundamental right of a child to be active into a series of wider calls for the Sport and Recreation Alliance, government and the sector to collectively deliver upon.

WE WILL WORK TOGETHER WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

If we want to create meaningful change, we must work with members and partners to make sure children and young people are well represented in the design of policy and programmes which affect them. The Alliance pledges to engage and listen to young people in

the direction of our work, and will work with members and partners to do the same.

We must prioritise a child-centred approach, with young people at the heart of our decision-making structures. Their voices will be heard.

JOINED UP WORKING ACROSS THE WHOLE SYSTEM

The system is excessively complex and confusing. It lacks a clear, overarching purpose, and maintains ineffective systems of accountability. It is essential that there are clearly defined cross-government and departmental mandates around the delivery of sport and recreation and there is greater clarity on the workings of the current system.

Most importantly, there must be a clear consensus and system of responsibility for each policy area, with a real sense of accountability running throughout. We need to carry out an honest assessment of impact to date and collectively identify key learnings for future application.

GOVERNMENT MUST CREATE A LONG-TERM STRATEGY

Government must consider expenditure on children and young people a vital long-term investment for the development of this country's future infrastructure. If we are to optimise economic productivity and ensure the future health and wellbeing of the population, early years interventions must be coordinated effectively to embed appropriate lifestyle foundations in our children's formative years, with physical education formalised as a core subject within the school curriculum.

Collaboration across the sport, youth and education sectors should be reaffirmed and codified if we are to hold

each other to account for how we enable children and young people to be active and enjoy sport, physical activity and recreation.

Meanwhile, within government, it is crucial that we have clarity around each Inter-Ministerial Group's objectives and how they are engaging with their respective sectors, with a sound understanding of how progress will be measured and reported beyond each Group.

As part of this strategy government should commit to a comprehensive review of the 2004 Children's Act, and the wider legislative and regulatory landscape.

THE SECTOR MUST DEVELOP A COMMON VISION AND PURPOSE

There is a lack of clarity around what we mean by 'children and young people'. With very different perceptions of how we define children and young people, we must find common ground and make sure that the sector is working towards the same ultimate objectives, for the same beneficiaries.

Similarly, there is an urgent need for the sector to recognise parents and wider family groups as key stakeholders in our efforts to drive meaningful behavioural change. An active lifestyle begins at home and we must broaden our horizons if we are to support young people in truly developing healthy, happy lives.

WE MUST MAKE SURE NO CHILD IS LEFT BEHIND

There are discrepancies in the quality of experience for children and young people when it comes to sport and recreation, both at school and beyond. We must work collaboratively to better understand the diversity of our children and young people, including their behaviours,

wants and needs. Working in co-ordination with the wider youth sector, we must strive to eradicate negative contact and commit to introducing young people to positive experiences of sport, physical activity and recreation.

WE MUST LEARN FROM OTHERS

We must learn from others and history to identify key learnings. There is an under use of international comparisons. We must be mindful that we do not hold all the answers domestically, with opportunities for us to interrogate successful international case studies, learn from their journeys and apply their learning here in the UK.

We should also recognise that there have been very successful interventions closer to home. We need to learn from what has worked and consider opportunities to work at scale and fully integrate these into a wider systemic approach.

CONCLUSION

We recognise that we don't have all the answers, but we are determined to ask the questions necessary to make sure we don't look back in 40 years' time and see we continued to fail our children.

From today, we will be working to build a campaign to establish the fundamental right of the child to be active. This is just as important as any other fundamental right and should be the single, unifying purpose for a revitalised system.

We look forward to working with others who share our commitment.

Please visit www.sportandrecreation.org.uk to download the full version of *Why are we failing our children?*

To join the conversation around establishing the fundamental right of a child to be active, get involved via social media using our campaign hashtag.


#RightToBeActive



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