

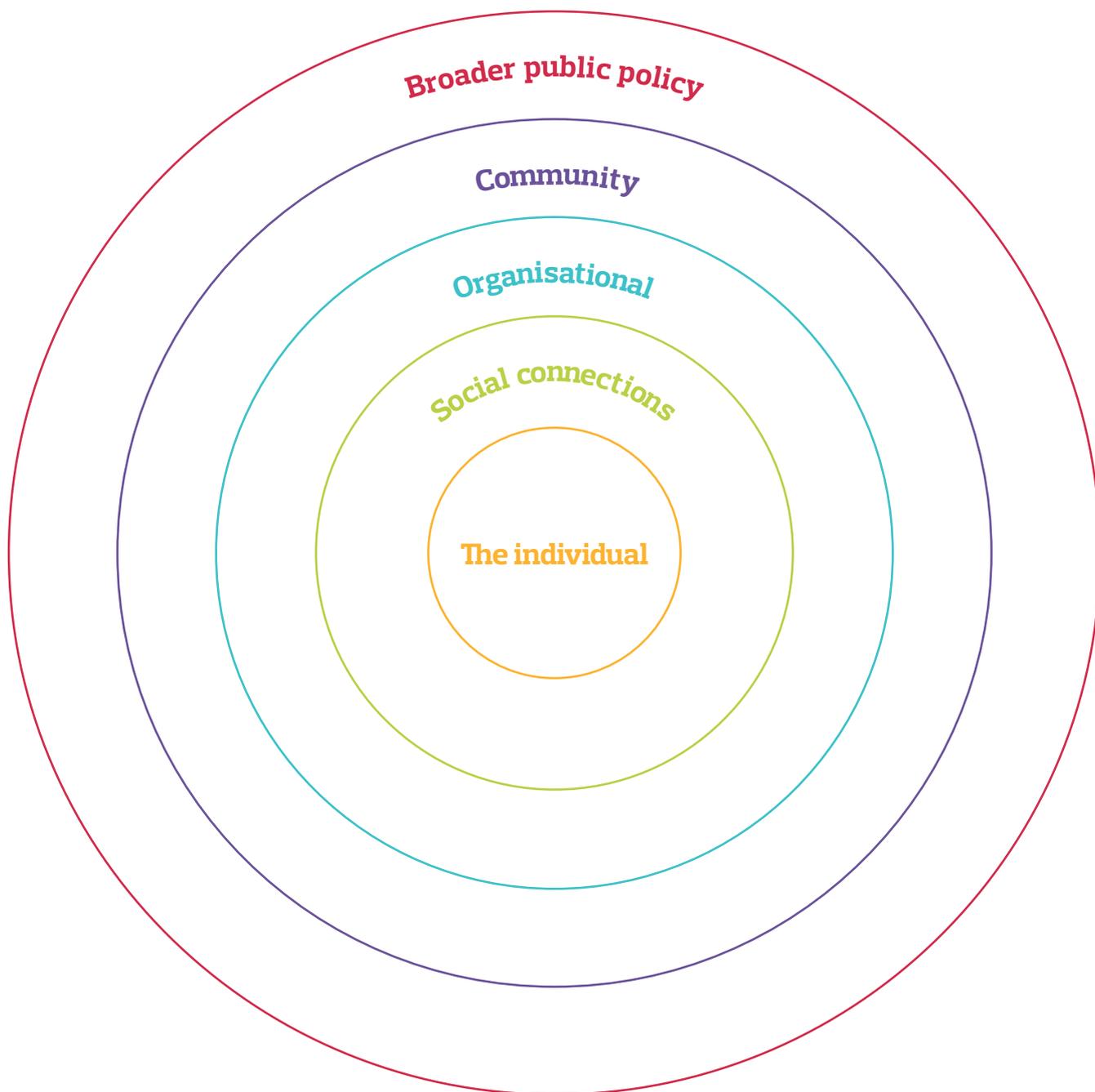


KIDS



Generation Inactive 2

Nothing About Us, Without Us



"As a society, we have a responsibility to ensure that we continually strive to provide the best possible growing conditions for our children by nurturing and developing the individuals that they are, and ultimately helping to shape the individuals they are to become."

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Foreword

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson,
Chair of the Board, ukactive

Anne Longfield, OBE, the Children's
Commissioner for England



We all remember the long hot summers of our childhood: warm days playing outdoors and having fun with our friends until the sun went down. There can be no doubt that for children growing up in 2018 things have changed – a lot.

Today's children are the least active generation ever. Just one in four boys and one in five girls in England do the recommended 60 minutes of activity each day.¹ At the same time, figures from Ofcom tell us that children aged 5-15 spend nearly two hours a day online during the week and nearly three hours a day at the weekend.² Playing outdoors used to be part of every child's day, but children now spend just four hours a week outside.³ This is part of a wider trend. The area around the home where children are allowed to go unsupervised has shrunk by 90% since the 70s.⁴ This is not a matter of an exam driven curriculum crowding out space for anything else – the problem only gets worse during school holidays. Research from uactive suggests that children return to school in September less fit than when they broke up in July, with children from poorer areas most affected.⁵

Multiple factors have conspired to create Generation Inactive. A combination of busy lives, busy roads and fewer safe communal spaces has made what used to be a normal and spontaneous part of everyday life an activity in itself that requires planning, scheduling and adult supervision. We have built a world that suppresses our children's natural instincts to be active, replacing it with sedentary lifestyles and screen addiction. School holidays should be spent playing with friends, but for many children they have become an unhealthy, disengaged and even lonely period of time that can have repercussions on their physical and mental wellbeing.

It is not surprising then that some children feel like they're missing out. We've been speaking to children across the country, and they told us that many of the good clubs and activities were out of their reach

– too expensive or too far away. Others felt that there was little to do locally, with play parks falling into disrepair or being for a different age group. Some children are put off because they don't feel that the public areas and parks are safe. Some would like more adult supervisors in public spaces, more lights and more security measures. It is clear that the concern about public safety is shared by children as well as their parents – something that current headlines about violence in our cities will only add to. Our children are scared.

Against this backdrop, a screen with the capacity to absorb hours of children's time while they're still indoors can seem irresistible. Many children told us how they expected to spend most of the summer playing computer games, while others said that they would be chatting to their friends online. We know that there are serious consequences of this increasingly sedentary childhood. Our children have entertainment, opportunities for skill development, reward and social connection at their fingertips – all of which previous generations might have used "sport" to provide.

To address this, we must make physical activity and play a public health priority for all children and young people, with practical solutions to make activities more accessible and appealing. Play is important for children. Not only is it great fun but it also benefits their health and wellbeing. By playing, children try out new things, test themselves and learn new skills. Play is also a way of developing social and emotional skills; by playing with others children learn to share, take turns, negotiate and make friends – the exact opposite of the kind of worrying behaviour seen in violent gangs where supremacy, provocation and retaliation are all. Play fuels children's imagination, creativity and expression. Play therapists tell us how children explain and process the world around them through play, which is especially important for those children who have experienced serious trauma. Far from being an

inconsequential time-filler, it is clear that play helps children grow into the rounded, sociable and skilled people we all would like them to be.

So how can we turn the tide of inactivity and ensure that play time isn't consigned to the past, taking with it all the benefits we know about? How can we prevent it from being transformed into just screen time, with children connecting and engaging with others only online, with no need for physical activity? Our children's health and wellbeing depends on us finding an answer.

This report has recommendations for national government, local authorities and health trusts, and for parents and children themselves taking an approach which considers the personal, social and environmental factors that influence a child's chances of an active start in life.

Some of these recommendations will require additional funds, but much can be achieved by using resources more creatively and effectively, unlocking creative partnerships and bringing schools, sports clubs, councils and parents together to help children get active. We have the benefits of a vast workforce of coaches, youth workers, activity professionals, play workers, health mentors and community activators – all supported by a strong sector skills Chartered Institute – all of whom can be our army in the fight against childhood inactivity, provided they are pointed in the same direction, receiving greater coordination and support.

There is so much to be gained by enabling children to play and be active. The end goal isn't simply a nation of more active kids, nor is it tackling the growing burden of childhood obesity. It's bigger than that. It's about creating healthy, happy childhoods that enable our children to flourish. To achieve that, it's time for a joined-up approach to supporting children's health and wellbeing, and a recognition that only by working together will we deliver the changes necessary to protect the health of future generations.

¹ <https://files.digital.nhs.uk/publicationimport/pub22xxx/pub22610/hse2015-child-phy-act.pdf>

² https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/108182/children-parents-media-use-attitudes-2017.pdf

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jul/27/children-spend-only-half-the-time-playing-outside-as-their-parents-did>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-17257562>

⁵ http://researchinstitute.uactive.com/downloads/managed/Pre-print_-_Body_Mass_Index_and_Cardiorespiratory_Fitness_in_UK_Primary_...pdf

Introduction

Generation Inactive

In June 2015, ukactive released Generation Inactive, a report which explored the understanding of children's physical activity in primary schools and investigated the measures used to track the activity and fitness levels of pupils.

This report shed light on the physical inactivity crisis facing Britain's children and included recommendations to help empower government, head teachers and the physical activity sector to tackle children's inactivity.

Since publishing this report we have seen progress – such as in the doubling of the PE and sport premium in primary schools, two government childhood obesity reports and welcome investment from Sport England into family activity. We can't stop here, as the job is far from done.

"Generation Inactive 2: Nothing About Us, Without Us", aims to go beyond the first edition by providing a framework for understanding the multi-faceted and interactive effects of personal, social and environmental factors that influence children's physical activity behaviour. Whilst many organisations have sought to tackle this problem through one single domain, the time is now to take a whole battlefield approach to tackling the war against the challenges faced by future generations.

⁶ Bloom et al. 2004, The Effect of Health on Economic Growth: A Production Function Approach, World Development Vol. 32, No. 1, pp.1-13

⁷ Hopkins SA et al., Exercise training in pregnancy reduces offspring size without changes in maternal insulin sensitivity, Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism, March 2010

⁸ Sigmundsson, H. and B. Hopkins. 2010. Baby swimming: exploring the effects of early intervention on subsequent motor abilities, Child: Care Health and Development. 36:3, 428-430

⁹ de Greeff JW et al. Effects of physical activity on executive functions, attention and academic performance in preadolescent children: a meta-analysis. J Sci Med Sport (2017).

¹⁰ <http://oro.open.ac.uk/35894/2/64CC5394.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/news-and-blogs/press-releases/one-in-four-14-year-old-girls-self-harm>

The importance of children's health to society

Investing finances and resources to help children and young people thrive and reach their full potential is, first and foremost, a moral imperative. There is no greater duty of care than the one that society has to provide children with the very best conditions in which to flourish. But investing in children is also important on practical grounds – it bears enormously positive benefits to economies and societies.

Better health can improve individual productivity. Healthy individuals are more likely to be efficient at assimilating knowledge, have stronger mental and physical capabilities and, in consequence, obtain higher productivity levels and higher incomes. Better health can also enhance educational achievement, both through school attendance and performance. In terms of macroeconomic benefits, life expectancy (a proxy for the health status of a country) is found to be significantly associated with GDP per capita growth. One notable study finds that a one-year improvement in a population's life expectancy could be associated with a 4% increase in output.⁶

"The science exists for all to see; invest in the health of children and make a huge difference to their health in later life and hence to their economic productivity. For example, four-fifths of obese children will remain obese as adults and this will result in them losing between 10–20 years of healthy life." Dr Nina Modi (Former President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health)

Physical activity as a public health priority

Physical activity is vital to the development and wellbeing of children and young people. From the very start of life, engaging in physical activity contributes to our physical, social, and emotional development needs.

Physical activity has a beneficial effect from the womb forward. Regular exercise during pregnancy has shown a beneficial effect on babies' weight, which may correlate with an infant's obesity risk later on in life. Studies show that babies born to mothers who do not exercise weigh significantly more than babies born to active mothers.⁷

From birth, regular physical activity strengthens bones, builds muscle and boosts immune systems; it also improves motor skills, coordination, agility and balance, and increases cardiovascular fitness. Research has shown swimming for babies as a particular benefit for health, with baby swimmers having better balance and fine motor skills than non-swimmers.⁸

Beyond the benefits to health, it is the additional, wider benefits of engaging in positive and meaningful physical activity that positions it as a public health necessity. Children that participate and engage in regular physical activity show higher levels of confidence and self-esteem, have improved sleep, and show reduced feelings of anxiety and stress, tension, and depression.

There is also strong evidence for increased academic performance; enhanced cognitive ability and executive functioning; and improved behavior and attention.⁹ All are associated with increases in physical activity. Put simply, active kids do better.

Physical activity experiences and environments also have the potential to bring communities together, provide platforms for social integration and community cohesion, and offer hope to those feeling isolated or lonely. Play aids socialisation and provides environments where children become active and competent participants in one or more communities. Socialisation can affect how children behave, think and communicate whilst interacting with other people.¹⁰

Positive and meaningful physical activity experiences have the potential to support children's holistic needs in the face of life's trials and tribulations and should be used in response to challenges faced by children and young people from the early years to young adulthood. Building the resilience of our children has to be a national priority when it has been recognised that they have never felt under more strain, with recent reports highlighting, for instance, that one in four teenagers self-harm.¹¹

The issue

The benefits of physical activity to children are wide-ranging and unquestionable. Meaningful physical activity experiences have the potential to support every domain of a child's development, yet only 23% of boys and 20% of girls currently meet the Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) recommendation of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day.

Furthermore, our national discourse on the importance of activity for children is fixated on the impact it can have on the size of children's waists – a myopic view of its true value to children, families and society as a whole.

Our consultation has clearly highlighted the need to dig deeper into these statistics and search for the reasons why groups of children and young people are less active. This involves a consideration of the barriers and challenges to participation for these groups as well as an exploration of the opportunities across society.

What we find are three striking forces at play:

Age and sex: Worryingly, physical activity levels amongst children and young people across the UK decline sharply as they enter and progress through adolescence, with girls being less active at all ages compared to boys.¹²

Background: Physical activity levels drop further for disabled children and young people, those with learning difficulties, children from ethnic minorities, and for those growing up in deprived communities. If we are to address this issue, then we need to consider physical activity as a public health priority.

Affluence: Health inequalities must be urgently addressed. Our research has highlighted the stark disparities in cardiovascular fitness levels between children growing up in different socio-economic backgrounds, with the poorest children losing up to 80% of their fitness levels over the six-week school summer holidays. At the same time, BMI levels in the poorest children are on the rise, contributing to a health crisis of the highest order.¹³

Our consultation

The ukactive Research Institute conducted a socio-ecological, data-driven approach in order to build the evidence base surrounding the understanding of children's physical activity participation.

This section summarises the approach and methodology used to explore and understand the influence of organisations and institutions, as well as the impact of social and physical environments on children's participation and engagement with activity. A socio-ecological data-driven approach was taken with two levels of research selected:

- **Survey research in the form of an open-ended question online consultation.**
- **Interview research in the form of focus groups and telephone/video conferences.**

Both forms of qualitative research, these were selected because of their ability to explore in-depth current opinions, thoughts and experiences¹⁴ on the topic. The cumulative impact is that this report is informed by the broadest ever consultation exercise into the future of our children's health.

The online consultation process ran from 12 March – 4 June 2018. Individuals, organisations and groups working within children's physical activity were invited to comment and submit evidence on how organisations/institutions, social environments and physical environments influence children's physical activity levels. This consultation group was also encouraged to provide examples of any current challenges, barriers, and successes.

Initial thematic analysis¹⁵ of the online consultation was used to draw out common themes, which were used to inform the

delivery of subsequent focus groups. The most prevalent themes were used to guide discussions with children, teachers, academics, health professionals, activity providers and policymakers through a parliamentary focus group, with the aim of gaining a multi-level understanding of the factors influencing children's physical activity levels.

Prior to the parliamentary focus group, data from the completed focus groups and online consultation was collated and analysed to inform development of an initial set of policy recommendations. These recommendations formed the basis of the final parliamentary focus group, which adopted a solution-driven approach to help finalise the data collection.

During our consultation we received over 100 written submissions and recorded over 10 hours of focus group input. We heard moving evidence from children about their love of having fun with their family, teenagers expressing their worries about judgement and self-confidence and teachers voicing their concerns about exam pressures and diminished value of physical activity in the curriculum. We also heard insightful evidence from psychologists and academics about promising behaviour-change interventions and from public health professionals about the need to change how physical activity is communicated to children and families.

We heard a clear call-to-action – a passionate and unified message to do more and work collectively to encourage more children to be more active, more often.

¹² <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/girls-active>

¹³ http://researchinstitute.ukactive.com/downloads/managed/Pre-print_-_Body_Mass_Index_and_Cardiorespiratory_Fitness_in_UK_Primary_....pdf

¹⁴ Rabiee, F. (2004). Focus-group interview and data analysis. *Proceedings of the nutrition society*, 63(4), 655-660.

¹⁵ A process which systematically identifies, analyses and reports patterns (themes within a data set). For more informative please see – Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Executive summary

It is about creating healthy, happy childhoods that enable our children to flourish

This report aims to provide the reader with a solution-driven approach to tackling the barriers to physical activity participation for children and young people, and to lay out a blueprint for exploring and challenging the issues across the different environments they interact with daily.

The public consultation has provided us with a platform to progress practice, inform areas for research and shape policy development. And importantly, we can take hope from a clear groundswell of enthusiasm about helping the children and young people of Great Britain to enjoy and consistently participate in physical activity.

This report explores the social, organisational, physical and policy environments that have an influence on children's physical activity behaviours, identifying key areas for development that will have a positive impact on a child's interaction with each environmental domain.

There is no silver bullet, no single intervention that can turn the tide of inactivity, tackle childhood obesity and close the health gap for children and young people. It will take a collective effort and a monumental one at that. This will require commitment from the very top of government and across every part of society. We will need to tackle the entire range of challenges and not seek to confront one issue in isolation, which would blinker our view of the totality of issues that are collectively causing the crisis in child health and wellbeing we see today.

There's so much to be gained by enabling children to play and be active. The end goal isn't simply a nation of more active kids, nor is it tackling the growing burden of childhood obesity. It's bigger than that. It's about creating healthy, happy childhoods that enable our children to flourish. To achieve that, it's time for a joined-up approach to supporting children's health and wellbeing, and a recognition that only by working together will we deliver the changes necessary to protect the health of future generations.



Key recommendations

The individual

– taking place or existing in the mind

- 1 Children and young people should be supported to flourish in life with a national effort to create the best conditions for them to do so, built upon the principles of physical literacy.

Social connections

– relating to relationships, communication and connections between family, friends and acquaintances

- 2 The NHS and public health agencies from the four home nations should provide practical support and guidance for parents to improve engagement in their children's health and physical activity levels from birth and collaborate with a broad range of partners where this adds value.
- 3 Government should fund out-of-school activities and holiday engagement programmes in disadvantaged areas by enabling HM Treasury underspend on tax-free childcare to be invested in supporting parents to cope with the holiday hell of affordably keeping children active, well-fed and engaged during long school holidays. This would particularly help the most disadvantaged, hard-to-reach children and parents access out-of-school and holiday childcare and engagement.
- 4 As part of the NHS 10-year plan, NHS Digital should ring-fence funds focussing on preventative digital technologies – engaging children and young people in healthy behaviours and leveraging the power of the world's largest technology companies in support.

Organisational

– the rules and regulations of organisations

- 5 Take the opportunity presented by the current review to create an Ofsted Inspection Framework that places pupil's physical health and development, mental health and development and wellbeing at the heart of each section of its evaluation schedule.
- 6 For the Department for Education to commit to a health and physical activity action plan for schools that;
 - a Ensures that we have a scientifically valid baseline against which to measure progress, through the routine and systematic collection of data on children's levels of cardio respiratory fitness.
 - b Enables governors, head teachers and school leaders to plan for the long term, based on a government commitment to maintain a ringfenced PE, sport and physical activity premium as part of a whole-school approach to children's health and physical activity until at least 2030.
 - c Establishes physical education as a core subject on the national curriculum – underpinned by physical literacy outcomes.
 - d Reviews the current PE and sport premium to: target the least active children, support the most disadvantaged children (inside and outside of term time), increase accountability measures for spending and impact and rebrand it to clearly support a 'whole-school approach' to activity.
 - e Expand the use of the premium to be inclusive of early years settings for children in nursery and reception classes.
- 7 Government should re-visit the recommendations from the All-Party Commission on Physical Activity (2014) and commission a children and young person-focussed review to identify and build an evidence base for what works in local physical activity interventions.
- 8 Funding should be made available for the specific training of early years practitioners in physical activity and early childhood physical development.

Community – community resources that create social norms

- 9** Empower schools, parents and children to identify and connect to safer, more enjoyable journeys to and from educational settings to increase active travel during term time.
- 10** Government to ring-fence funding from the Civil Society Strategy: building a future that works for everyone; to invest in making parks, playgrounds and other public open spaces safe, family-friendly places to spend time in.
- 11** Develop outward-facing and sustainable schools-as-community hub models with integrated health, education and social care provision for children and family engagement.
- 12** A strategic alliance between ukactive, its members and local government to:
 - a** Enhance the connection between schools and local community leisure operators for in and out-of-school facility access, particularly to support the 1,000 schools not providing swimming lessons.
 - b** Replace outdated guidance that prevents the use of gyms by teenagers on health and safety grounds.
 - c** Develop adolescent-specific engagement programmes, incorporating the use of existing leisure and community recreation facilities.

Broader public policy – physical activity as the golden thread

- 13** Government should elevate the focus of play and physical activity in response to other social and environmental challenges faced by children, ensuring that play and physical activity is embedded into all areas of children's policy.
- 14** In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12, government should enhance guidance and hold departments accountable for actively involving the views and opinions of children and young people in strategic health decision and policy-making.
- 15** Central and devolved governments should appoint their respective Commissioner for Children and Young People to undertake an analysis of each Comprehensive Spending Review to identify the economic and social impact of spending decisions on children and young people.
- 16** Invest in children and family play strategies as part of each area's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, developing local 'Play Networks' and utilising existing venues, facilities and open spaces i.e. schools, parks or community leisure centres.
- 17** For all major political parties UK-wide to commit to a 20-year public health campaign which will move Generation Inactive to Generation Active by 2038.

The individual – taking place or existing within the mind



Recommendation Areas

- 1 Children and young people should be supported to flourish in life with a national effort to create the best conditions for them to do so, built upon the principles of physical literacy.

Question:

"How does being physically active make you feel?"

Answer:

"It's a fun distraction from school and work; it takes my mind off other things in life"

– **Aasma, 14 years old**

"I like to play football because it helps me forget about everything that's happened in the day. Even if I'm tired or stressed, when I go it's fun, it's for me"

– **Brody, 15 years old**

Putting children and young people at the heart of this movement

Throughout this consultation and report we have attempted to place the needs, thoughts, feelings and desires of children and young people at the heart of our thinking and recommendations. It is imperative that we start with the child and examine their current relationship with physical activity.

A child's relationship with physical activity is better compared visually to the ever-changing shape of a flock of birds rather than to a line on a graph. The relationship is multifaceted, dictated by a child's feelings of confidence, connection, ability and understanding of the activity and the environment they're in. Whether it's a child picking herself back up from a missed penalty in a school football match, a teenage boy's fear of failure and judgement in a PE class or children living in a deprived community too afraid to use the park playground, we have a collective responsibility to ensure that each child has the opportunity, access and self-assurance to engage and participate in fun, meaningful physical activity – regardless of gender, sex, age, ability, ethnicity, faith and socio-economic status.

Nothing about us, without us

Throughout this report we have used key insight from children and young people and have applied their direct feedback from the consultation into our areas of recommendation. Central to this report is the belief that policy must be shaped by those affected by it.

What do we want for our children? We want them to flourish!

When asking 'what do we want for our children?', a common denominator in response is the desire to see them go on to flourish in their lives.¹⁶ This is perhaps not a surprising response, but a more important question for us as a society is whether we are providing the necessary environments, opportunities and experiences required to enable our children to flourish. As a society, we do have a responsibility to ensure that we continually strive to provide the best possible growing conditions for our children by nurturing and developing the individuals that they are, and ultimately helping to shape the individuals they are to become. How can we encourage our children to flourish in the environments we place them in, through the opportunities we give them and in the experiences they collect, when so many factors threaten to stunt our progress?

¹⁶ De Ruyter, D. J. (2004) Pottering in the Garden? On Human Flourishing and Education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 52(4), 377–389. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.

Elizabeth Durden-Myers, Senior Lecturer, Liverpool John Moores University

'Physical activity has a tremendous value and role to play in promoting flourishing by contributing to children's health and wellbeing, and by providing meaningful experiences that help them to understand themselves and the world around them.'

The individual – taking place or existing within the mind

How can we encourage our children to flourish? One mission, One team!

The key to answering this question lies with the word 'we'. Only by marshaling the full collective capacity of all interested parties do we stand a chance of success.

Our children need a holistic and collaborative approach between the home, school and community in order to maximise their potential to flourish. Therefore parents, grandparents, siblings, guardians, headteachers, teachers, lunch-time supervisors, play leaders, sports coaches, Brownie and Scout leaders: everyone who interacts with children must work together in their best interests as a complete individual. Collectively we must provide supportive and nurturing environments, rich and varied opportunities, and create positive and meaningful experiences for our children in order to encourage them to flourish and reach their full potential.

Supportive and nurturing environments

Through creating supportive and nurturing environments, we can develop the conditions for children to flourish.

Flourishing is a term used to describe a disposition whereby individuals are considered to be thriving or living optimally. Living optimally can be considered as a disposition that simultaneously connotes generativity, growth and resilience.¹⁷ Therefore, the environments we place our children in must also support and nurture generativity, growth and resilience. This can be achieved by ensuring that children are in a safe environment physically, socially and emotionally, surrounded by people who help to nurture them holistically.

Rich and varied opportunities

Every progression to the next level on a computer game provides a new opportunity to test skills in a different way.

Life must be no different. In order for children to develop and be nurtured holistically it is important that they are exposed to a range of rich and varied opportunities. These opportunities provide conditions where children can develop their generativity, growth and resilience by being exposed to new and challenging situations. In order to flourish, children as well as adults need the inner resource to be able to cope and respond to challenging situations. Providing a range of rich and varied opportunities helps to develop this inner resource, enabling children to reach their full potential and flourish.

Positive and meaningful experiences

Flourishing can be fostered by creating positive and meaningful experiences.

Experiences are encountered through our bodily perceptions, movements, emotions and feelings, and through these perceptions, meaning becomes possible.¹⁸ The attribution of meaning is completely unique to the individual child, but it is important that children develop a range of positive experiences in order to shape their future outlook and perspective on life. Central to this is the notion that we as humans create ourselves as we live and interact with the world around us (Merleau-Ponty, 1996). These interactions or experiences ultimately shape who we become. Therefore, positive and meaningful experiences from the perspective of the individual child are essential in order to help them develop into an adult who is able to interact productively with the world around them.

Children's health and wellbeing

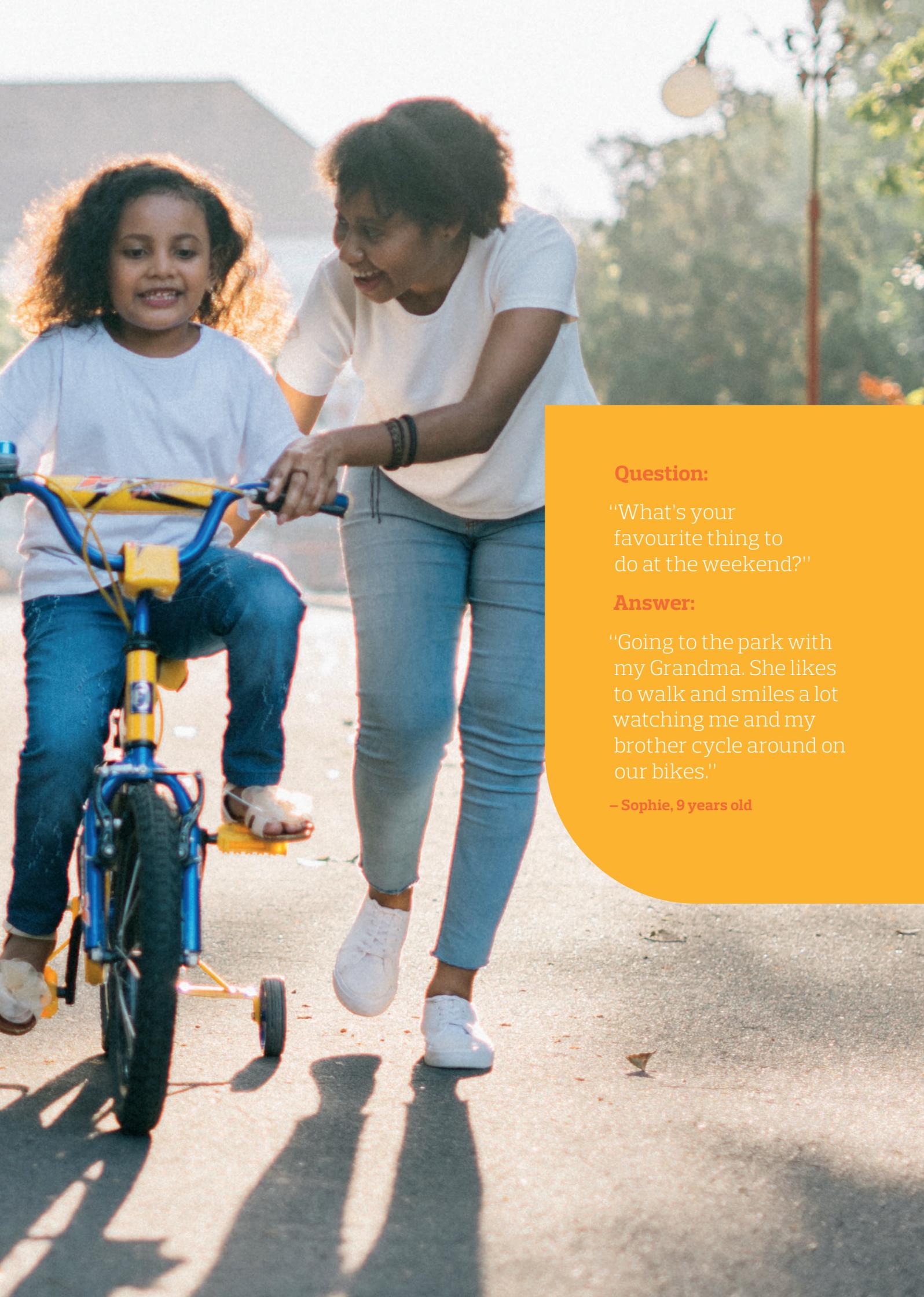
Regular physical activity is crucial to good health and wellbeing – which is in turn at the heart of what it means to flourish. Physical activity has a dual purpose in facilitating flourishing.

Firstly, regular engagement in physical activity has numerous health and wellbeing benefits that help to provide a foundation from which children and adults can flourish. Secondly, physical activity itself can provide positive and meaningful experiences whereby individuals can develop their generativity, growth and resilience or, in other words, have partial realisations of flourishing through physical activity. Therefore, promoting regular engagement in physical activity is a key element in helping individuals to live optimally, thrive and go on to flourish. However, physical activity levels are in decline across both the adult and child population of the UK.¹⁹ Building an underpinning level of physical literacy serves to reverse this trend by facilitating a more holistic, realistic, sustainable and appropriate approach to physical activity promotion.

¹⁷ Fredrickson, B. L., & Losada, M. F. (2005) Positive emotions and the complex dynamics of human flourishing. *American Psychologist*, 60, 678–686.

¹⁸ Johnson, M. (1999) *The Meaning of the Body*. USA: The University of Chicago Press.

¹⁹ British Heart Foundation. (2015) *Physical activity statistics, 2015*. British Heart Foundation.



Question:

"What's your favourite thing to do at the weekend?"

Answer:

"Going to the park with my Grandma. She likes to walk and smiles a lot watching me and my brother cycle around on our bikes."

– Sophie, 9 years old

A long-term chance to flourish: a physical literacy approach

A lifelong love and enjoyment of physical activity requires an underpinning foundation of physical literacy, an enlightened state of being that sets children up to flourish in life.

Physical literacy is described as a disposition whereby individuals have the “motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activity for life.”²⁰

Central to the concept of physical literacy are strong philosophical foundations that are built on:

- **Holistic approaches:** embracing the holistic development of an individual;
- **Positive and meaningful physical activity experiences:** approaches that consider the fact that individuals are unique according to their life experiences and interactions with their environment;
- **Activity experiences that are inclusive and person-centred:** on account of these unique interactions, each individual will view the world differently.

A focus on physical literacy for children and young people prioritises a more rounded view on the goal of each and every physical activity opportunity.

The priority is an outcome of long-term, sustained enjoyment of activity and an understanding of the benefits it brings, rather than system-driven objectives of perfecting a particular technique in a particular sport.

The widespread adoption of such an approach would require a systematic shift in how children currently participate in sport and physical activity whilst growing up.

Holistic

Physical literacy adopts a holistic approach that views the body and mind as inseparable, interconnected and entwined.

This approach places equal value on both physical and psychological health and wellbeing. A holistic approach equally values the elements of motivation, confidence, knowledge, physical competence and understanding – all key when it comes to defining what physical literacy is. Equally valuing these elements maximises the chances of promoting sustained engagement in physical activity. Without one of these elements, a barrier to participation may take its place.

Positive and meaningful physical activity experiences

Touched upon in the previous section, physical literacy aims to promote and foster positive, meaningful physical activity experiences.

These experiences must be culturally and socially relevant as well as rich and varied to provide a strong foundation from which a lifetime of physical activity may develop. Positive experiences are more likely to engender a positive disposition and attitude towards physical activity engagement, with the converse also being true for negative experiences. Therefore whenever and wherever possible, positive physical activity experiences should be facilitated.

Inclusive and person-centred

Physical literacy takes an inclusive and personalised approach to physical activity promotion, embracing the idea that all individuals are on their own unique physical literacy journey.

Regardless of endowment, physical activity is accessible for all and is an integral part of being human. Therefore, physical activity promotion needs to be fully inclusive and person-centred to ensure that their own unique physical literacy journey is nurtured.

²⁰ <https://www.physical-literacy.org.uk/>

²¹ Rasmussen, D. B. (1999) Human Flourishing and the Appeal to Human Nature. *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 16, pp1–43. DOI:10.1017/S0265052500002235.

Our goal: a shared mission to support our children to flourish

A flourishing life is something that is not necessarily achieved instantaneously, but it is possible to have partial realisations or expressions of it.²

In the home, school and community we must collectively seek to provide the best possible environments, opportunities and experiences for our children so that they can flourish.

One of the key challenges in today's society is the diminishing levels of children's health and wellbeing as a direct result of societal and environmental changes – including poorer diet and nutrition, sedentary behaviour and physical inactivity.

While each of these areas must be addressed, the promotion of sustained engagement in physical activity has a tremendous role to play in the flourishing of a child, by contributing to their health and wellbeing and providing them with meaningful experiences that help them better understand themselves and the world around them.

A physical literacy-focused approach can help to promote engagement in physical activity and could also be the catalytic concept that brings together the home, school and community to work collaboratively.

We can't afford to gamble with our children's futures – we need to act now to ensure that we are indeed providing the best possible growing conditions for them, so that they go on to become happy, healthy individuals who thrive and flourish.

Question:

"Is having fun important to being active?"

Answer:

"Yes, because if it's not fun you won't benefit from it because you won't do it properly. If it's fun you are like, 'YAAAY!'"

– Royan, 9 years old



Social connections

–relating to relationships, communication, and connections between family, friends and acquaintances



Recommendation Areas

- 2 The NHS and public health agencies from the four home nations should provide practical support and guidance for parents to improve engagement in their children's health and physical activity levels from birth, and collaborate with a broad range of partners where this adds value.
- 3 Government should fund out-of-school activities and holiday engagement programmes in disadvantaged areas by enabling HM Treasury underspend on tax-free childcare to be invested in supporting parents to cope with the holiday hell of affordably keeping children active, well-fed and engaged during long school holidays. This would particularly help the most disadvantaged, hard-to-reach children and parents access out-of-school and holiday childcare and engagement.
- 4 As part of the NHS 10-year plan, NHS Digital should ringfence funds focussing on preventative digital technologies – engaging children and young people in healthy behaviours and leveraging the power of the world's largest technology companies in support.

Question:

“What does being physically active mean to you?”

Answer:

“Playing games, having fun and laughing with my family without the TV being on.”

– Royan, 9 years old



See Key Recommendation 2

Support for families

Throughout our consultation, the important role of family and peer influence on children's physical activity levels became clear.

Interestingly, the role and dynamic of these relationships seems to change based on the age of the child; parents and carers' participation is crucial to physical activity levels for children in the early years and remains important for primary school age children, but it becomes less of a dominating factor as children enter and advance through adolescence, where peer influence seems to play more of a role.²² In fact, we heard that during adolescence, parents were more important as a means to get to and from physical activity environments (i.e. driving to 'football training' or to the local 'summer holiday camp') rather than as actual participants themselves.

The benefits of physical activity on child health begins before birth, with evidence showing that an active pregnancy has an impact on reducing birth weight: an indicator of the likelihood of developing obesity in later life. Tackling childhood obesity starts here.

Perhaps the area of children's physical activity policy that receives the least dedicated attention is the early years. The current CMO recommendation for children of pre-school age who are capable of walking unaided is at least 180 minutes (three hours) of daily physical activity spread throughout the day. But only one in ten children aged between two and four meet these guidelines.²³

Younger children are likely to be more active when their parents and caregivers are themselves more active, serving as role models for both active and sedentary behaviour.

Insight from Sport England shows that a parent's lack of confidence in their own physical skills and abilities could be a barrier to parental engagement in their child's physical activity behaviours. When parents are less active, less confident or less interested in sport and activity, children are less likely to value and prioritise being physically active themselves.²⁴ Parents need support to rediscover their own love and enjoyment for play, and have the confidence to pass on genuine enthusiasm to their own children. In this context, innovations such as Public Health England's collaboration with Disney to create 'Train Like a Jedi' should be celebrated, further developed and used to inspire further approaches of this nature which help parents pass on the passion.

If we are to position physical activity as a public health priority, then this must start at the earliest time possible and equip the parents, step-parents and caregivers in a child's life to make a positive impact.

We must have the ability to assess the impact that this makes in a consistent way. As outlined by the Health Select Committee, children are measured at birth by their GP at the six-week rate and measured often throughout their early life. This is now the most measured generation in history, with over one million measurements of child weight taken last year alone. We should do more to ensure that this data is accurately collected in one place and is accessible to parents and GPs so that well-informed decisions can be taken about children's health from the very start of their lives²⁵. We fully support the work of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health in this area. Further, we should broaden our focus from the size of children's waists to the health of their hearts and provide greater surveillance information on the efficacy of the national ambition to cultivate an active generation.

²² Fitzgerald A, et al. Do peers matter? A review of peer and/or friends' influence on physical activity among American adolescents. *J Adolesc.* 2012;35:941-958.

²³ Department of Health & Social Care (2011) < <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-physical-activity-guidelines>

²⁴ <https://www.sportengland.org/media/11794/families-fund-prospectus-supporting-families-to-be-active-together.pdf>

²⁵ Childhood obesity: Time for action', House of Commons Health Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2017-19 (May 2018)

Social connections – relating to relationships, communication, and connections between family, friends and acquaintances



Beyond the school gates

A systematic review by the University of Bristol has shown that physical activity programmes delivered outside of school hours play an important role in the physical activity of children and young people, with after-school clubs offering an opportunity to engage children through varied, inclusive and fun programmes of delivery.²⁶

Many parents struggle to support their children to be active, even where they have the very best intentions. It is clear that those families without the means to get their children to and from activity opportunities, or those not in the financial position to pay for their children to attend clubs, camps and other structured activities are much less likely to offer children opportunities to be active. This is a significant problem given the benefits that extra-curricular clubs and school holiday programmes can have on children's fitness levels, health and wellbeing, and worsens inequalities.

A recent study from the ukactive Research Institute and Premier Education also found that school summer holidays are driving 'a major class divide' in young people's fitness levels, with the poorest children seeing fitness fall 18 times faster than their more affluent counterparts. The fitness levels of the most deprived young people fell significantly during the summer holidays compared to their more affluent peers, meaning they were able to run far shorter distances before exhaustion in September than they could in June, while the fitness levels of the most affluent group dipped slightly but were relatively unaffected.²⁷

Childhood obesity and inactivity are mounting problems and the burden is falling hardest on those children from low-income backgrounds. Children aged 5 and from the poorest income

groups are twice as likely to be obese compared to their most well-off counterparts and by age 11 they are three times as likely.²⁸

The Institute for Public Policy Research also points out that pupils fall behind academically due to the six-week break. Summer learning loss affects all children, but the research shows that the lack of development increases further for children from a poorer background. This is because they do not have the same access to educational material or out of school activities as their more privileged peers. It is estimated that 66% of the achievement gap can be explained by summer learning loss. Furthermore, a report by the Education Policy Institute, claims schoolchildren who have been eligible for free school meals for 80% of their time at school were on average 24.3 months behind their wealthier classmates.²⁹

With leisure spending on 'active sport' for low-income households at approximately £2.55 per week,³⁰ this provides a significant barrier to participation in school holiday engagement initiatives that are typically paid for programmes.

The Government has committed £2 million to support voluntary organisations providing enrichment activities and healthy meals over this year's summer holiday.³¹ Funding alone is not the answer to developing successful engagement programmes, but given the very low take-up of tax-free childcare for school holiday provision to date, 90% lower than initially expected, according to figures released by HMRC in March 2018³² the Treasury should consider enabling this underspend to be invested in supporting children and families that need it most to access out-of-school and holiday programmes.

²⁶ Jago R, Macdonald- Wallis C, Solomon-Moore E, et al. Associations between participation in organised physical activity in the school or community outside school hours and neighbourhood play with child physical activity and sedentary time: a cross-sectional analysis of primary school-aged children from the UK. *BMJ Open* 2017;7:e017588. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2017-017588

²⁷ http://researchinstitute.ukactive.com/downloads/managed/Pre-print_-_Body_Mass_Index_and_Cardiorespiratory_Fitness_in_UK_Primary_....pdf

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action>

²⁹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/england-disadvantaged-pupils-richer-poorer-education-attainment-gap-equality-schools-study-a7873651.html>

³⁰ <https://www.streetgames.org/sites/default/files/Leisure%20Spending.pdf>

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/free-holiday-activities-and-meals-for-disadvantaged-families>

³² <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/treasury/Memorandum-HMRC-Supplementary-Estimate.pdf>

Social connections – relating to relationships, communication, and connections between family, friends and acquaintances

Embracing technology

Throughout our conversations with young people, the role of technology, social media and gaming became apparent as a prominent factor in their daily lives, with digital technology expressed as the go-to way to communicate with friends away from school.

Of the children we spoke to, those that were in year 5 (9-10 years old) and above indicated that social media and the use of technology were prominent in their daily lives. Younger children cited 'computer games' as a big barrier to them being physically active and older children (12-16 years old) highlighted their use of social media as an important way to communicate with each other.

Figures from Ofcom show that children between the ages of 5 and 15 spend nearly 2 hours a day online during the week and nearly 3 hours a day at the weekend.³³

We received clear feedback about why young people spent so much time on games and social media. A big factor was that both social media and gaming is social with instant reward for doing something 'good' i.e. a 'like' or the completion of a game level. Gaming came across as very accessible, able to do at home, and seemingly very inclusive and enjoyable by all children and young people, regardless of physical ability and seemingly not biased toward any sex, gender, ethnicity or belief. Gaming provides challenge, rapid feedback, opportunity for skill development and a chance to connect with the wider world – all without physical effort. We were also told that both gaming and social media gave young people choice over how they represented themselves and autonomy over how they wanted to be seen and perceived. As a result, we have seen the phenomenon of e-sports and a generation as likely to gain enjoyment watching others simulate playing sport rather than actively participating themselves.

It would seem that gaming may just tick all of the boxes that every physical activity programme is desperately trying to achieve – a meaningful, inclusive and person-centred experience that drives sustained engagement. Physical activity sector take note.

Question:

"Do you see technology as a good or bad thing in regards to your health and wellbeing?"

Answer:

"Bit of both. You can easily speak to your mates which is good, you can talk to more people but then it's a bit of a problem because it makes you want to go out less and you think why would I want to go meet them in the park when I can just speak to them here on my phone?"

– Jamel, 14 years old



Promoting healthy behaviours through social media

A recent paper by the Wellcome Trust and Birmingham University identifies the impact of social media on young people's health and wellbeing,³⁴ identifying key findings such as:

- 53% of young people use social media to access health information on food intake, sleep, exercise or body image from SnapChat, Instagram or YouTube.
- Nearly all young people reported seeing inappropriate content related to diet/nutrition, exercise and body image.
- Young people experience a level of peer pressure to change their behaviours from viewing health-related material shared by peers, including selfies.

There is little doubt that social media represents a clear and present danger to the mental health and wellbeing of young people, their perceptions of self-worth and reality. As a result, there is a fundamental requirement for the major technology companies to show their responsibility in addressing some of the more challenging consequences on their success.

Promisingly, there is a clear opportunity here to harness the power and influence of social media to positively engage young people in healthy behaviours.

The EACH-B (Engaging Adolescents in Changing Behaviour) programme is attempting just this by combining science modules at school, peer support and interactive social technology to sustain engagement in healthy behaviours³⁵.

Harnessing the power of technology for positive change

It is clear that existing technologies, let alone what is to come, play a central role in the interaction of children and young people with the wider world.

In recent times, leading technology companies such as Apple, Google and Facebook have shown their interest in protecting wellbeing by introducing new features and policies designed to counter the potential negative effects that their services could deliver.

This should be celebrated and encouraged. Together with the sofa suffocation provider Netflix, these technology providers have immense reach and influence in modern lives.

Through our launchpad for digital innovation in physical activity, ActiveLab³⁶ ukactive firmly supports the need to design health interventions for young people using digital technology and social media.

The potential positive role of leading technology companies should be urgently examined, and they should be challenged to deliver a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

This should include supporting the further development of augmented reality technology, to explore how it can enhance the physical activity experiences of children and young people by bringing their imaginations to life.

³³ https://www.ofcom.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/108182/children-parents-media-use-attitudes-2017.pdf

³⁴ [http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/3070/1/The_Impact_of_Social_Media_on_Young_People's_Health_and_Wellbeing_\(FINAL_15TH_JAN\).pdf](http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/3070/1/The_Impact_of_Social_Media_on_Young_People's_Health_and_Wellbeing_(FINAL_15TH_JAN).pdf)

³⁵ <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/lifelab/research/each-b.page>

³⁶ <https://www.ukactive.com/activelab>

See Key Recommendation 4

Organisational

– the rules and regulations of organisations



Recommendation Areas

- 5 Take the opportunity presented by the current review to create an Ofsted Inspection Framework that places pupil's physical health and development, mental health and development and wellbeing at the heart of each section of its evaluation schedule.
- 6 For the Department for Education to commit to a Health and Physical Activity Action Plan for schools that;
 - a Ensures that we have a scientifically valid baseline against which to measure progress, through the routine and systematic collection of data on children's levels of cardio respiratory fitness.
 - b Enables governors, head teachers and school leaders to plan for the long term, based on a government commitment to maintain a ring-fenced PE, Sport and Physical Activity Premium as part of a whole-school approach to children's health and physical activity until at least 2030.
 - c Establishes physical education as a core subject on the national curriculum – underpinned by physical literacy outcomes.
 - d Reviews the current PE and Sport Premium to: target the least active children, support the most disadvantaged children (inside and outside of term time), increase accountability measures for spending and impact and rebrand it to clearly support a 'whole-school approach' to activity.
 - e Expand the use of the premium to be inclusive of early years settings for children in nursery and reception classes.
- 7 Government should re-visit the recommendations from the All-Party commission on Physical Activity (2014) and commission a Children and young person-focused review to identify and build an evidence base for what works in local physical activity interventions.
- 8 Funding should be made available for the specific training of Early Years practitioners in physical activity and early years physical development.

Question:

"How does playing with your friends at school make you feel?"

Answer:

"I feel energised and I want to do more. It makes me feel happy and ready to try new things"

– Fazon, 10 years old

Question:

"What are the biggest challenges for physical activity in schools – resource or priority?"

Answer:

"Lack of priority. I have produced resources for all class teachers, provided evidence and research base for senior management team but it still comes down to 'it's time for Maths and English now'"

– Primary School teacher, West Midlands

Physical activity and sport in schools

Educational settings featured centrally as the dominant theme in our exploration into the organisations and institutions that impact children and young people's lives.

Schools, teachers and other school staff are not and should not be solely accountable for the physical activity, mental health and weight levels of children. Nonetheless, they are crucial to creating an environment that enables our children to flourish. Children (primary and secondary age) spend approximately 56% of their days a year attending school – a significant amount of time to promote and support healthy habits and behaviours.

Importantly not a single teacher, child, parent and/or other key stakeholder that we spoke to throughout our consultation disagreed that schools should be facilitating physical activity opportunities; instead, it appears to be the system that is preventing it from happening at scale. We have an ability, as a nation, to do something about that if we wish.

For much of the last decade, activity within the school environment has been generally measured simplistically in terms of hours of PE, while out-of-school activity has often been viewed through the narrow lens of sport participation – with the concept of a paltry two hours of high-quality PE and school sport as the full extent of a national ambition.³⁷

We are lucky that the ambition is set so low. It should be a source of national shame that the system is not set up to succeed even at that point.

For primary school teachers, much of the difficulty for maintaining high-quality PE and school sport is levelled at Initial Teacher Training – which provides approximately just 12 hours of PE subject knowledge. This falls far short of the level of training time trainee teachers receive in other areas such as numeracy or literacy and is labelled a factor in failing to make teachers feel confident or safe delivering PE.³⁸

The situation doesn't fare much better in secondary schools, with claims that PE is being deprioritised, with research from the Youth Sport Trust suggesting that 38% of secondary schools have cut timetabled PE for 14-16 year olds since 2012³⁹ and that PE and school sport are often only supporting children already engaged or physically confident.⁴⁰

This highlights a failure to recognise the numerous fun and accessible activities outside the realms of competitive sport and PE that can bring the benefits of physical activity to the most disengaged children.

While there is an overreliance on PE and school sport to get an inactive generation moving more, it cannot be understated how important this element of a child's daily physical activity can be – if utilised in the correct way.

³⁷ Generation Inactive, ukactive (2015)

³⁸ Generation Inactive, ukactive (2015)

³⁹ <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/news/research-finds-whistle-being-blown-secondary-pe>

⁴⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-43258500>

Dr Russ Jago, Professor of Paediatric Physical Activity and Public Health, University of Bristol

'Schools are critical settings for helping children to be as active as possible, as they provide infrastructure, content and staff who are experts in the facilitation of learning.'

The challenge is to use these facilities and the collective expertise to maximise the physical activity offer and provide as many opportunities as possible for children to be active at the school site before, during and after school. Diversification is key, as there is insufficient time within the curriculum to meet the physical activity guidelines. Facilitating change in and outside of the curriculum such as via enhanced extra-curricular physical activity provision is therefore critical for helping children to meet physical activity guidelines.

Changing mindsets, changing priorities

Evidence has shown that physical activity programmes benefit multiple facets of nonexecutive, executive, and metacognitive functions and skills in children and adolescents⁴¹. Furthermore, a study by Leeds Beckett University and Tagiv8 has shown children who take part in school lessons which include physical activity show an increase in health-enhancing physical activity and academic performance.⁴²

Additionally, physical activity interventions have shown to improve in-class behaviour and concentration, children are less impulsive and 'fidgety' and sustain their attention longer – Simply put, active children do better!

With the current review of the Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education) inspection framework for schools, there is now an opportunity for more focus and priority to be given to physical activity as part of an enriched curriculum, including art, music, sport and drama – allowing children to be physically active in and out of the classroom, to express themselves in positive environments that promote peer-to-peer interaction, and to use movement as a way to learn and break up sedentary time.

A focus on all-round quality of education can provide an environment that places a much greater emphasis on the overall holistic wellbeing of the child, and better equip our children to flourish.



The role of PE in modern times

There is also a need to readjust our national outlook on PE – viewing it as a vehicle to achieve more holistic outcomes and improved academic performance rather than as just a technical or tactical education in sports.

Physical education should be the subject that every child looks forward to on their school timetable. Whether a child is the captain of her school football team or simply likes to play tag games with his friends at lunchtime, PE should appeal to every child, no matter their ability or activity preference. PE – when delivered well – can transform a school culture, incorporating the joys of learning to move and moving to learn.

Unfortunately, PE delivered poorly can also have the opposite effect. Instead of engaging and inclusive delivery, PE can become exclusive, disengaging and alienating for those children that don't enjoy more traditional team sports or don't thrive in competitive environments.

The negative results can be instantaneous but also lifelong. Levels of participation in physical activity drop off through adolescence, particularly amongst teenage girls who become ostracized by the culture and experience of poorly delivered PE. The results are long-lasting. Research from the University of Middlesex has also shown that negative experiences of PE at school can put people off

exercise, sport and physical activity for life, suggesting that this may also result in adults choosing sedentary jobs and inactive hobbies.⁴³

A high-quality physical education programme should create opportunities for students to identify areas that they are good at and enjoy and help to develop those areas in which they are less able. This relates not only to their physical competence but also their motivation, confidence, knowledge and understanding. This can be achieved through the development of physically literate individuals who have the physical and creative skills, knowledge and motivation to become physically active throughout their life-course.⁴⁴ PE should be inclusive and holistic by nature, supporting and celebrating physical, mental, and social wellbeing – matched by an equally rich and rewarding whole-school curriculum.

Despite the need to radically improve the PE experience, given that PE represents – at best – two hours in 168 hours of a child's weekly life, we require a shift in the mindset that looks at the way the entire force of the education system can be used towards our goal of creating healthy happy childhoods that enable children to flourish. This requires a much more strategic approach, and one that supports schools to maximise their impact across a whole-school approach.

⁴¹ Alvarez-Bueno et al. (2017), The Effect of Physical Activity Interventions on Children's Cognition and Metacognition: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

⁴² <http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/news/0517-tagtiv8-research/>

⁴³ <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/22163/1/AElliott%20thesis.pdf>

⁴⁴ <https://www.physical-literacy.org.uk/physical-literacy-secondary-physical-education/>

A whole-school approach

Physical activity should be treated as a normal part of children's daily school routines in order to provide a platform for lifelong participation – from the commute to and from school, to active breaks and weaving in activity into classroom lesson plans. To achieve this, it is important that government provides more support for teachers to be trained to equip them with the right knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver activities in and outside of scheduled PE time.

The Association for Physical Education (afPE) and the Youth Sport Trust (YST) are two organisations that have promoted the importance of PE for decades, and have continued to champion the need to support the professional development of the nation's skilled and capable primary school teachers in the physical activity arena. For example, the YST outlined the ambition to see every primary school teacher professionally developed to help teach physical literacy with the same skill and passion as language literacy and numeracy by 2020.⁴⁵ We wholeheartedly support this recommendation and the YST's work in this area.

However, if we are to truly drive whole-school approaches to raising physical activity levels, then schools need the confidence to look outside of the school gates for help and support. Piloting a new approach to wellbeing in schools and building on a 2014 research report with social enterprise 2020health, Nuffield Health experts have been working with secondary schools to develop a comprehensive programme of relevant interventions and initiatives aimed at both students and staff – covering healthy eating, physical activity, positive mental wellbeing, sleep quality and risky behaviours. Findings from the pilot have shown significant increases in both staff and student wellbeing. Drawing on the lessons learned from the pilot, Nuffield Health has developed a young person wellbeing programme by working with schools and providing education and wellbeing activities, both in school and by connecting schools and their students to local Nuffield facilities.

ukactive's members currently work with over 4000 schools across the UK on a daily basis, providing a range of support including: training and CPD for teachers in delivering high-quality physical education, delivering inclusive and varied extra-curricular

programmes, young leadership and mentoring initiatives, providing innovative technology to help physically activate school classrooms, and supporting competition schedules and school sport fixtures. Schools and teachers alone cannot solve the childhood inactivity and obesity crisis, but by collaborating with their local community we all stand a much better chance

Perhaps the most significant investment into children's physical activity in recent years has been the Primary PE and Sport Premium (PESP). Introduced in 2013, it saw the government allocate funding directly to primary school headteachers in order for them to decide how to best use it to provide PE and sporting activities for pupils. The £150million-a-year scheme led to a typical primary school with 250 pupils receiving around £9,000 in funding for each academic year,⁴⁶ with the funding used on a variety of initiatives; from increasing the range and quality of PE and sports equipment⁴⁷ to promoting links with local sports clubs.⁴⁸ Whilst much of this was positive, the Premium has faced criticism for a lack of accountability, insufficient guidance on its use and a lack of understanding of the effectiveness of interventions used.

Budget 2016 signaled plans to double the PESP from £160million per year to £320million per year using funds from a levy on sugary drinks manufacturers.⁴⁹ With a significant increase in public investment into the PESP, there would be more attention and scrutiny than ever before on this funding – recently highlighted by a welcome announcement that government would review how the PESP is being used to help ensure that this investment contributes towards helping all children to lead active lives.⁵⁰

From the outset, there has been a lack of clarity about when the funding would be allocated, how much each school would get and how long the funding would last – leaving headteachers and school leaders unable to plan ahead.⁵¹ While many of these questions have been answered over time, schools are currently only left with assurances that the funding will last until 2020.⁵² It is important for government to support schools to plan for sustainability beyond 2020 – moving away from year by year commitment to longer term planning.

⁴⁵ Youth Sport Trust (October, 2017)<https://www.youthsporttrust.org/news/primary-school-pe-could-be-%E2%80%98transformed-generation%E2%80%99-new-funding>

⁴⁶ Department for Education (2014) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/150-million-to-boost-primary-school-sport>> [accessed 21.08.2018]

⁴⁷ Department for Education, PE and sport premium: an investigation in primary schools (2014)

⁴⁸ Ofsted, The PE and sport premium for primary schools: Good practice to maximise effective use of the funding (2014)

⁴⁹ Department for Education (2017) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pe-and-sports-premium-doubles-to-320-million>> [accessed 21.08.2018]

⁵⁰ Childhood obesity: a plan for action, chapter 2 GOV.UK (June, 2018)

⁵¹ Schoolsweek(2017)<<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/sports-premium-to-double-but-too-late-for-many-schools-budgets/>> [accessed 21.08.2018]

⁵² Ibid

Expanding the team: Early Years

There have been some positive physical activity policy developments across the early years landscape in recent years. The Childhood Obesity Plan highlighted that government would launch a campaign to raise awareness of the CMO guidelines among both early years practitioners and parents in conjunction with updating the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework to make specific reference to the guidelines.⁵³ This was a major step forward, as up to this point the pre-school curriculum did not specifically mandate which and how much physical activity a child should be doing.

Chapter two of the Childhood Obesity plan expanded the scope of the conversation to include early years practitioners. It announced that Ofsted will undertake research into what a curriculum that supports good physical development in the early years looks like.⁵⁴

While positive steps have been made to incorporate early years physical activity into national policy, there is still an opportunity to take things further and throughout our consultation, calls for an increased emphasis of physical activity across the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum have been loud and clear.

The Health Select Committee report 'Childhood obesity: time for action' also recommended training and equipping the early years workforce in both the voluntary and statutory sector to effectively support parents and families to promote healthy eating and activity in their children.⁵⁵ Such targeted intervention would take things further than simply including the CMO guidelines in the Early Years Foundation Stage – despite the significance of this as a first step in the process.

⁵³ Childhood obesity: a plan for action, GOV.UK (August, 2016)

⁵⁴ Childhood obesity: a plan for action, chapter 2 GOV.UK (June, 2018)

⁵⁵ 'Childhood obesity: Time for action', House of Commons Health Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2017–19 (May 2018)



See Key Recommendation 8

Community

– community resources
that create social norms



Recommendation Areas

- 9 Government to ring-fence funding from the Civil Society Strategy; building a future that works for everyone; to invest in making parks, playgrounds and other public open spaces safe, child and family-friendly places to spend time in.
- 10 Empower schools, parents and children to identify and connect to safer, more enjoyable journeys to and from educational settings to increase active travel during term time.
- 11 Develop outward-facing and sustainable schools-as-community hub models with integrated health, education and social care provision for children and family engagement.
- 12 A strategic alliance between ukactive, its members and local government to:
 - a Enhance the connection between schools and local community leisure operators for in and out-of-school facility access, particularly to support the 1,000 schools not providing swimming lessons
 - b Replace outdated guidance that prevents the use of gyms by teenagers on health and safety grounds.
 - b Develop adolescent-specific engagement programmes, incorporating the use of existing leisure and community recreation facilities.

In the Social connections section of this report we identified the challenges, barriers and opportunities surrounding social media and digital technology usage, particularly amongst the adolescent population. We identified the attractiveness of digital technology use to young people and why it was such a big part of their daily behaviour.

Children told us that they often used social media as a preferred communication method over actually meeting up with friends, of the reluctance to step into the park after school – instead rushing home to speak to the same friends that they just left at school via SnapChat or online gaming platforms. It became obvious that the offer of the 'outdoor world' just wasn't appealing enough and we were frequently told by children of varying ages that they just didn't feel safe, whether it was cycling on their local roads, visiting the local park after school or quite simply that 'there is nothing to do in the park when we get there'.

Our local community infrastructure is not keeping up with the experience provided to children by the digital world – we need to support children and their families to reclaim their local communities and unlock the physical activity opportunities around them.

Question:

"How do you think we could encourage more children to ride their bikes to school?"

Answer:

"Easy, ban cars. If cars were banned, we would feel safer. Plus, we would be saving the planet with less pollution"

– Joel, 10 years old

Family-friendly active networks

Families often lack the confidence and understanding of how to change their children's physical activity behaviours and have a perceived lack of necessary resources. Urging parents and families to make healthier lifestyle choices because it's good for their children's health has previously been met with limited success. A major challenge is to overcome the practicalities of everyday life, to enable activity to become a regular occurrence. For parents' lack of time, energy or long working hours, as well as juggling multiple schedules, is a huge barrier. We were told that focusing on barriers like time or money in physical activity messaging was ineffective, instead promote that opportunities are on the 'doorstep' and 'for the whole family'.

The importance of families and children accessing outdoor spaces and local leisure provision is key. Low socio-economic status families are less likely to have a garden, which is important given that families perceive that their neighbourhoods are unsafe, and lack suitable parks/green space or recreational facilities for their children to play in. We need to change misconceptions around the safety of outdoor play and empower family activity within the local environment. There is evidence to suggest proximity to green space can positively impact a range of factors, from the affluence of an area through to its health outcomes. We need to ensure these benefits reach the next generation, and our children grow up with a connection to their local community.

There is a need to unlock access to local activities, resources and facilities for children and their families through positive and targeted messaging, matched by high-quality and meaningful experiences. We need to support families in facilitating out of school physical activity together and identify local places and spaces for outdoor play.

Through the ParkLives project in Southampton, a programme that offers free and fun activity sessions in parks and green spaces, Active Nation have been engaging families in non-sport specific

activities with great success. They've designed fun family activities that deliver physical activity by stealth, citing 'Halloween treasure hunts' and 'nerf wars' as successful ways to get families active together 'without knowing it'. Stating "Parents want to find things that they can do with their kids, but when they are not confident in themselves and their abilities to do something, they don't want to show themselves up". They have reached tens of thousands of people with this approach, showing opportunity for substantial scale.

Parks are also being brought to life for families every Saturday through the phenomenon of parkrun which is showing what can be achieved when families are welcomed, included and encouraged to have fun together. A growing number of children and young people can be found within the 845,615 parkrun runners in 2017⁵⁶ a number which will continue to grow as families are welcomed through initiatives such as Junior parkrun.

As part of the Welsh government's commitment to play, Wales has become the first country in the world to legislate for children's play,⁵⁷ calling on Local Authorities to assess for and secure sufficient play opportunities for all children. As part of the Play Sufficiency Assessments, Local Authorities are required to recognise that all open spaces, including those which whilst not owned by them, are accessible to the public within their area, are potentially important areas where children can play or pass through to reach other playable areas or places where they go. Assessing for; play value, distance to travel from where children live without any significant physical barriers, acceptable levels of opportunities for beneficial risk taking, and accessibility and suitability in relation to different ages; abilities; dry and wet weather use.

Making positive connections between children and their families and the open spaces around them and their homes is crucial to increasing activity levels – promoting active play as a normal part of local community life.

⁵⁶ https://issuu.com/parkrun/docs/parkrun_2017_issuu_v41

⁵⁷ <https://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/cyp/141007-wales-a-play-friendly-country-en.pdf>

Safe routes

See Key Recommendation 10

Joel, 10 years old: "...if cars were banned, we would feel safer. Plus, we would be saving the planet with less air pollution."

The number of children in England walking to school is at the lowest figure ever. 70% of primary school children in the 1970s used to walk to school, today less than half (46% 5-10 year olds, 38% 11-16 year olds) do so regularly. This is high in comparison to the numbers of children cycling to and from school with only 2% of school children in England cycling to school, 1.4% in Scotland, and 1% in Wales. Furthermore, research from the University of Bristol shows that girls are less likely to travel to school in active ways than boys.⁵⁸

Active travel (to school) was a common theme across our consultation and a particular favourite topic amongst public health professionals. Less so amongst the children and young people themselves.

Riding bikes was constantly cited by the children and young people that we spoke to, as a 'fun' thing to do, referencing time spent on bikes with family and friends at the weekend. The message received about walking or cycling to school was that it wasn't as fun and that cycling on the roads around their homes and school were not safe during travel times and that their parents would often give them a lift to school to 'make it easier'. In fact, in London, a quarter of weekday morning peak car trips are for school drop-offs.

Providing safe, social and convenient environments for children and young people of all ages and mobility levels to walk or bike for transportation and recreation is one of many important steps needed to encourage more active lifestyles.



Embracing schools as community hubs

See Key Recommendation 11

Throughout our consultation, we heard the notion of a 'school community' referenced frequently. This reference was often not restricted to the teachers and pupils within the school during term time but equally to the parents and families that engage through their children and the community networks that provide local initiatives and support for these children and families.

With Local Authority youth provision budgets continuing to tighten and with 39% of all sports facilities in England sitting behind school gates,⁵⁸ schools, colleges and universities have the potential to be more than just places where people learn during the day.

In a society where collaboration is key, we have the potential to unlock the capacity of schools as an asset to their local community, beyond the school day and term through the creation of 'Schools as Community hubs'. The schools as community hubs model enables and empowers local communities to join-up to support the health and education needs of the children and families living within them.

Schools have the potential to become one-stop shops for children and families with a focus on improving health and wellbeing, challenging social issues such as loneliness and isolation, whilst bringing together diverse communities in safe and supportive environments.

ukactive has recently partnered with leading retailer Sainsbury's and children's activity provider, Premier Education, to launch Sainsbury's Active Kids Holiday Clubs. This trial initiative looks to open up school space and explore the opportunity that schools could present as community hubs during the summer holidays. Throughout July and August 2018, 25 schools across the UK were opened up to invite children from 5 to 15 years old to engage in a broad activity programme, including sports, games and performing arts, to receive healthy snacks and lunches, and to make use of local assets such as volunteers.

Schools sit at the hearts of communities and are often the bedrock of family life. Adopting schools as community hubs has the opportunity to offer an integrated and local health, social care and education provision to children and families year-round in an accessible and community driven way.

⁵⁸ <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/getting-girls-active/>

⁵⁹ <https://www.sportengland.org/our-work/partnering-local-government/scenarios/how-can-we-increase-community-use-of-schools-sports-facilities/>

Adrian Packer CBE, CEO CORE Education Trust

Schools should be vibrant, welcoming hubs of opportunity in and for the communities they serve. An outward-facing ethos inspires children and their families to share positive experiences in common areas of interest such as the arts, crafts, physical activity and exercise.

Our experience has shown us that schools achieve better when they look beyond themselves. Interactivity with the world beyond the school gates creates a more vibrant culture and demonstrates that schools have the potential to positively impact pupils during school hours and the wider communities in which they live. This inevitably contributes favourably to the well-being of society in general.

Community – [community resources that create social norms](#)

Making the link

Whilst school facilities can offer great opportunities to engage children and families in their local communities – whole-school communities can also benefit from greater links to the community leisure networks around them.

Every school has a local leisure operator keen to support them to enable their children to flourish. This often manifests itself in collaborations such as the provision of school swimming lessons. The national Curriculum states a mandatory requirement for all primary school age children to be able to swim 25 metres, use a range of strokes effectively, and perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.

Swimming is a life skill. It is something that children typically retain throughout their life, and it is an activity that can truly save lives. Worryingly, 31% of year 6 pupils leave primary school without the minimum swimming ability and water safety skills⁶⁰ – despite both being stated in the national curriculum. In addition, two-thirds (63 per cent) of parents with Year 6 children fear that their child could not save themselves in water. This means that over 1,000 schools are currently lacking a collaboration with a local leisure operator that could save a child's life. That is something we have to change.





Engaging adolescents

Our conversations with adolescent young people across the consultation centered around reliance on use of technology and social media, not having 'anywhere to go' to be with friends outside of school, and feelings of life pressures as they got older, including exams, peer-influences and body-image. Young people also expressed that school work i.e. exam revision and homework, often prevented them from proactively participating in sport and physical activities.

"As kids get older they think more about their appearance and they might get more insecurities and think more about how they look."

Engaging adolescents in physical activity is an urgent issue. Just 14% of 13-15 year old boys and 8% of 13-15 year old girls in England are meeting the daily recommendations.⁶¹ In addition, a study from the Brigham Young University, USA, shows that the prevalence of loneliness peaks in adolescents and young adults, with 24% of 14 year old girls in the UK reporting symptoms of depression.⁶²

A recent survey conducted by the ukactive Research Institute, British Universities and Colleges Sport, Precor, and Scottish Student Sport, found that promoting physical activity, including sports participation and gym membership, improves student's personal wellbeing, mental wellbeing, social inclusion, and perceived academic attainment and employability.⁶³

Secondary school teachers also told us that they are witnessing a decline in interest amongst their pupils to play extra-curricular sport and in representing school teams, citing the increasing use of computer games, social media and a diminishing 'coolness' of playing for the football team compared to posting a good selfie on Instagram for 'likes'.

Friendships and peer-influence are clearly important factors contributing to adolescent physical activity behaviours, with research from the University of Bristol showing that a

young person's friends can help to promote or discourage physical activity. The research shows that children report being part of friendship groups that have similar activity levels, and that social networks have been found to influence higher-intensity physical activity.⁶⁴ A study targeted specifically at increasing adolescent girls physical activity levels, has shown that it is possible to successfully identify and train socially influential girls to informally promote physical activity among their peers.⁶⁵

One teenager in Birmingham told us that they felt that apart from the park (weather dependent), there was nowhere for him and his friends to go to be active and socialise. We were also told that leisure centres can be too expensive but more of a barrier here was the lack of adolescent targeted activities and programmes: 'the (leisure) centre is for adults, you have to be 16 to use the gym. So you either have to go in one of the 'baby' classes or you don't go. If I could use the gym then I would be more active'

Local leisure operators and gym providers have substantial underutilised spare capacity at times of the day which could be made accessible and available to teenagers to make use of facilities ahead of peak hours. With appropriate resource, this time could be programmed in line with the needs of young people, with supporting campaign assets that engage this audience at a key time of life.

To enable this, there is a need to revisit guidance that currently prevents teenagers from using fitness facilities on health and safety grounds. Far greater risk is created by denying young people access than enabling it.

There is a clear need for the physical activity sector to support the adolescent population and an opportunity to build a viable offer to do so. Programming and facilities that appeal to their social and physical needs are key to engagement.

⁶⁰ <http://www.swimming.org/swimengland/swimming-water-safety-schools/>

⁶¹ <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/publications/statistics/physical-activity-statistics-2015>

⁶² <https://www.nhs.uk/news/mental-health/many-teenagers-reporting-symptoms-depression/>

⁶³ <https://www.ukactive.com/news/physical-activity-holds-key-to-improving-student-mental-health-new-study/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3133642/>

⁶⁵ <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/plan-a/>

See Key Recommendation 12

Broader public policy

– physical activity as the golden thread



Recommendation Areas

- 13 Government should elevate the focus of play and physical activity in response to other social and environmental challenges faced by children, ensuring that play and physical activity is embedded into all areas of children's policy.
- 14 In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12, government should enhance guidance and hold departments accountable for actively involving the views and opinions of children and young people in strategic health decision and policy-making.
- 15 Central and devolved governments should appoint their respective Commissioner for Children and Young People to undertake an analysis of each Comprehensive Spending Review to identify the economic and social impact of spending decisions on children and young people.
- 16 Invest in children and family play strategies as part of each area's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, developing local 'Play Networks' and utilising existing venues, facilities and open spaces i.e. schools, parks, community leisure centres.
- 17 For all major political parties UK-wide to commit to a 20-year public health campaign which will move Generation Inactive to Generation Active by 2038.

Question:

"If you were Prime Minister for a day, what would you do to make it easier for children to be more physically active?"

Answer:

"I would make everything free, so everyone can do sports and activity and everyone can access it."

– Aamal, 9 years old

Aamal has a good point. If we are to make physical activity a top tier public health priority, then everyone needs to be able to access it.

We might not be able to make everything free but surely we can aim to make safe and enjoyable physical activity opportunities accessible for all children and young people, providing support for those that need it most.

We acknowledge that the report to this point includes a number of public policy recommendations. This section is about the bigger picture; about strong leadership, innovation and accountability that comes from across the political and policy landscape.

Cross-departmental strategies; physical activity as a golden thread

The policy landscape in the UK has a significant impact on children's physical activity and broader health outcomes, irrespective of whether they directly relate to this specific agenda. Decisions taken at central, devolved and local government all play a role in creating an environment conducive to children benefitting from the joys of movement.

A wide range of policy and legislative commitments have been put forward in recent years. There have been changes in responsibilities across government departments and an evolution in focus and priorities. However, it remains clear that more joined-up efforts are required across the policy landscape to support lasting change and reverse the rise of Generation Inactive.

Since the publication of Generation Inactive in 2015, and its call for fundamental shift in our approach as a nation, the national focus around children's activity has begun to move. The cross-departmental Strategy for Sport – 'Sporting Future', released in December 2015 – set out a new approach to sport and physical activity, with a clear focus on engaging the least active and a mission to embed physical activity as a golden thread across government departments and priorities.

There were some progressive measures announced within the first edition of the government's Childhood Obesity Plan (August 2016), such as the introduction of a voluntary healthy rating scheme for schools that would focus on activity and nutrition⁶⁶ (at time of writing, this has yet to be activated), and the introduction of the soft drinks industry levy across the UK.

Chapter two of the plan (June 2018) is more ambitious in its reference to physical activity, highlighting measures such as: a review into how the least active children are being engaged in physical activity in and around the school day;⁶⁷ promoting a national ambition for every primary school to adopt an active mile initiative,⁶⁸ and investing over £1.6million during 2018/19 to support cycling and walking to school.⁶⁹

However, despite these green shoots, much more can and needs to be done here. Intent is clear but has been insufficient in terms of actual impact. It is time now to act on this intent, to bring together organisations in order to realise these strategies and policy areas.

Now is the time for strong government leadership, for advocacy from the highest office and a cross-department commitment to the future of our children's health.

The new Secretary of State for Health (appointed 9th July, 2018), The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, has identified prevention as a top priority for the health and social care system, and this was evident in his inaugural speech in the role: 'Taking pressure off staff and improving patient outcomes is not just about enhancing the way that healthcare is delivered in a hospital. It is also about keeping people out of hospital. So my third early priority is prevention...prevention, like technology, is mission critical to making the health and social care system sustainable.'

The Secretary of State, has an opportunity and a responsibility in his new role to match these words with actions. With two editions of the government's Childhood Obesity plan to use as a roadmap, it is crucial that these are implemented with conviction, a long-term commitment and with real, measurable outcomes.

In response to the second chapter of the government's Childhood Obesity plan in June, 2018, ukactive issued a joint-response,⁷⁰ with our partners, the Youth Sport Trust and the Sport and Recreation Alliance. Our message was simple – more needs to be done.

It must be acknowledged that the first step in winning the battle against childhood inactivity and obesity is to accept a critical truth: the most important intervention is to recognise that there is no magic bullet.

It remains vital to consider that factors that can support the health of a child shouldn't be pitched in competition with each other. This is both divisive and counterproductive to the ambition we share across all sectors: for every child to have the chance to live a happy, healthy life.⁷¹

Obesity is a complex disease, influenced by a multitude of factors. Any strategy, policy call or future manifesto should not view a child's health through the narrow prism of what they eat, but put diet on an equal footing with mental health and physical activity.⁷² An approach that is person-centered and holistic in nature.

This demands an approach which starts to activate the intent set out in the government's Sporting Future strategy,⁷³ making the case for physical activity as a golden thread through cross-government policy priorities.

This isn't just about tackling poor nutrition or childhood inactivity. Our overriding goal should be that of creating healthy and happy childhoods that enable our children to flourish. For this to happen, the voice of children and young people need to be heard more centrally in the policy development process.

⁶⁶ Childhood obesity: a plan for action, GOV.UK (August, 2016)

⁶⁷ Childhood obesity: a plan for action, chapter 2 GOV.UK (June, 2018)

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ <https://www.ukactive.com/news/government-must-grasp-childhood-obesity-big-picture/>

⁷¹ The Guardian (March, 2018) < <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/30/jamie-oliver-childhood-obesity-strategy-ignore-physical-activity-mental-health> > [accessed 21.08.2018]

⁷² The Guardian (March, 2018) < <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/30/jamie-oliver-childhood-obesity-strategy-ignore-physical-activity-mental-health> > [accessed 21.08.2018]

⁷³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sporting-future-a-new-strategy-for-an-active-nation>

How Westminster can learn from devolution

See Key Recommendation 16

Devolution, or the transfer of power to national or administrations, has helped to create conditions that have enabled some of the most innovative campaigns and initiatives within the children's activity space in recent years. It is this type of innovation that Westminster should be learning from – the direction of travel within these areas is positive with strategic and long term commitments to increasing physical activity, reducing obesity and improving wellbeing.

For example, 2018 has seen plans for 'Beelines' – the UK's largest cycling and walking network announced in Greater Manchester, as part of the wider GM Moving strategy. It has been stated that once built, the network will better connect every community in Greater Manchester, benefitting 2.7million people and making walking and cycling a viable alternative to driving. In Greater Manchester less than 2% of children cycle to school – whereas 50% of children do so in the Netherlands. 'Beelines' aims to make walking and cycling a clear and natural choice for short journeys and has clear potential to support family-friendly active travel.⁷⁴

In London, The Mayor of London's new Childhood Obesity taskforce is set to formally launch in 2018 – with a mission to reduce childhood obesity in the capital and close the health inequality gap across the city.⁷⁵

Whilst in the West Midlands the Mayor, Andy Street, has launched a 13 year physical activity strategic framework to increase activity levels and add significant value to priority themes including; transport, community resilience and wellbeing.⁷⁶

2018 has been marked as 'Year of the Young People' in Scotland – an initiative that seeks to empower young people by providing a platform for them to make decisions on issues that affect their lives. One of the key themes – developed by young people themselves – is health and wellbeing. The concept empowers young people to lead healthy, active lives and seek better understanding of the importance of mental health and resilience.

Scottish government's recent 'Active Scotland Delivery Plan' will continue to drive this focus on the physical activity levels of children and young people, committing to the extension of the Play@home parental engagement programme, upskilling coaches, deliverers and volunteers to gain skills in developing physical literacy, and giving young people a stronger voice in sport and physical activity policy making.⁷⁷

The Welsh government has been working closely with Sport Wales to try and achieve targets set out in its ambitious 20-year 'Climbing Higher Strategy' for sport and physical activity in Wales, such as seeing 90% of children taking part in regular and frequent activity by 2020.⁷⁸ In addition, "Wales – a Play Friendly Country" is the statutory guidance for local authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their area, with a legislative drive to ensure that every child has a wide range of challenging and interesting opportunities to play and enjoy their leisure time.

The Northern Ireland Executive was responsible for the release of Sport Matters: The Northern Irish Strategy for

Sport and Physical Recreation 2009–2019, and works with Sport Northern Ireland to deliver the principles and recommendations outlined in the strategy. Sport Northern Ireland has supported the 'Sport Matters'⁷⁹ strategy through campaigns such as 'Activ8', raising awareness amongst children and young people of the importance of taking part in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day and eating a healthy and balanced diet.

Central Government should continue to monitor the impact of campaigns and initiatives that seek to improve young people's health and wellbeing within devolved administrations. Information and evidence should be collected on key learnings – and where applicable government should show willingness to extend the scope of such programmes nationally if they are shown to be making a significant impact. It should also consider the potential for more power and resources to be devolved so that successful projects can deliver long term, sustained change.

Given that Local Authorities are the biggest investor in sport and physical activity in the UK, they have immense capacity to positively influence this agenda. They too face the challenge of bringing all local stakeholders together and directing them towards the same goal. Taking inspiration from the Welsh government's statutory guidance on creating play friendly environments, Local Authorities should utilize the tools at their local disposal to take this nationwide challenge into local action.

Stronger together

Creating the conditions in which our children can flourish will require a collective effort. Turning the tide of childhood inactivity is everyone's business and attempts will only be successful if they are approached with a cooperative and collaborative ethos.

Through, investment, initiatives and strategies it is clear that decision makers across the UK are increasingly recognising physical inactivity as a top-tier public health issue and that tackling it represents a key component in supporting the health of the next generation.

Policymakers and stakeholders alike must continue to recognise that it is now time to look holistically at children's health – placing physical activity alongside nutrition and mental health, engaging the disengaged and continuing to motivate the most engaged children.

Investment that reaches school level must be supported with adequate time and guidance to allow school leaders to plan ahead and implement initiatives effectively and a mechanism to measure and track impact, with opportunities for children and families outside of the school gates given the same priority as initiatives within the school environment.

All of this is achievable with long-term consistent cross-party and cross-sector support and recognition from stakeholders across the board that we all have a role to play in curbing the rise of generation inactive.

Critical to this will be continued cross-departmental and cross-party support for this agenda, seeing the challenge of improving the health and happiness of our children as an apolitical issue. Enabling our children to flourish should be an issue that crosses the political divide, and supported as such.

Effective action to reverse Generation Inactive and reduce disparities in physical activity and health amongst children and young people requires a monumental shift in the way children experience and interact with the social and physical environments around them. Increasing physical activity levels amongst children and young people requires innovation, accountability, and strong leadership from the very top of government to stakeholders across the whole local system.

⁷⁴ Transport for Manchester (2018) <<https://www.tfgm.com/press-release/beelines>> [accessed 21.08.2018]

⁷⁵ London Assembly (2018) <<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/paul-lindley-to-lead-child-obesity-taskforce>> [accessed 21.08.2018]

⁷⁶ <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/1865/wm-on-the-move-strategy.pdf>

⁷⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/2019/06/1945/8>

⁷⁸ Climbing Higher Next Steps, Welsh Assembly Government (July, 2006)

⁷⁹ www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/The-northern-ireland-strategy-for-sport-and-physical-recreation-2009-2019.pdf "Sport Matters, The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport & Physical Recreation 2009–2019, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure & Sport Northern Ireland (March, 2010)





Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the ukactive members, stakeholders and partners who have contributed to this report.

We would also like to thank every individual, organisation and body for contributing to our consultation.

Most importantly, we would like to thank the children and young people that helped us on our journey. Your thoughts, feelings and insight on this matter continue to inspire us in our mission to get more children, more active, more often.



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