

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
10 Downing St
Westminster
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13 May 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to request your support, and for you to personally intervene, to ensure that thousands of gyms, pools, and leisure centres are able to stay open and continue to support communities across our country.

In 2020, we welcomed your pledge to ensure Britain built back fitter and happier from Covid-19. And just this week, we were pleased to see the Queen's Speech set out the Government's priority to deliver a national recovery from the pandemic that makes the UK stronger, healthier and more prosperous than before. We welcome the intention to level up opportunities across all parts of the nation, to support businesses and to address the impact of the pandemic on public services.

However, while recognising this ambition, it concerns me deeply to see a gap between the ambition and the reality which sees a continued lack of financial support for facilities that will be integral to improving the nation's health.

Last month's Active Lives Survey from Sport England documented a worrying increase in the number of inactive people in our society, charting a period heavily influenced by the necessary restrictions required to combat Covid-19. In order for us to turn this tide of inactivity, we must ensure that the infrastructure of the sport and physical activity sector is able to survive and recover from the long periods of closure they have faced.

Reopening the sector at the earliest opportunity within your roadmap is a major positive, allowing millions of people to return to much-loved activity, and allowing facilities to operate again, albeit with restricted capacity. However, this only provides a partial solution, and our sector's ability to survive and then develop to play its fullest role depends on its financial viability. The level of bespoke financial support has, to date, fallen short.

In March, ukactive proposed to your Government two interventions that would go a long way to addressing the serious concerns that exist over the long-term financial viability of the sector.

- Extending the VAT reduction provided to hospitality and retail sectors.
- Providing phase 2 of the National Leisure Recovery Fund.

ukactive judged both measures as essential given the closure period of January to April 2021, a period that has historically been the sector's most popular period.

I would now ask you to intervene and reconsider both these proposals for implementation.

My grave fear is that failure to do so will contribute to a worsening of our health inequalities, with inactivity levels continuing to climb. This fear is driven by projections that more than 50% of public leisure facilities are at risk of closing in the next six months.

Furthermore, we know facilities, whilst now open, are faced with the need to reduce essential services in order to keep expenditure down. These include community services that are relied upon

by the NHS such as GP or exercise referral and social prescribing programmes, alongside activities for specific populations such as cancer groups, cardiac rehabilitation, dementia initiatives, and activities for disabled people, plus crèches which many people rely on to look after children while they exercise.

With nearly a year of no income, the impact has been particularly severe for small and medium-sized businesses which cover the length and breadth of the country, providing physical activity services to millions and jobs to tens of thousands of people. Without supporting facilities of all sizes in providing vital services, there will be permanent closures across the country.

If the Government is to deliver on the aims of the Queen's Speech, and "create a stronger, healthier, and more prosperous society", it cannot allow hundreds of facilities to close across the country. If this ambition is to be realised, financial support for the physical activity sector must be provided immediately.

I firmly believe your ambition to address and improve the health of the nation following the Covid-19 crisis. However, the financial survival and recovery of gyms, pools, and leisure centres is completely interwoven with this ambition, and will ultimately determine its success. I urge you to work with your Government team to ensure that millions of people across every age and background are not faced with the loss of essential services in their communities. I applauded the energy and urgency of the Government response to the proposed European Super League, and feel that this agenda – the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of millions of people – merits the same robust response.

Yours sincerely



Tanni, Baroness Grey-Thompson