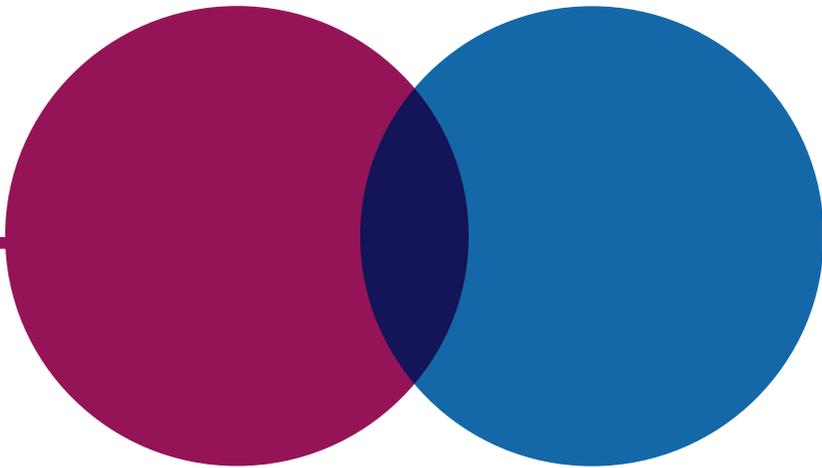




National Audit Office



# Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

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**REPORT**

**by the Comptroller  
and Auditor General**

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**SESSION 2022-23**

**8 JULY 2022**

**HC 72**



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National Audit Office

# Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

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## Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed on 6 July 2022

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of Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act

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**Gareth Davies**  
**Comptroller and Auditor General**  
**National Audit Office**

**30 June 2022**

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## Key facts



**10 years**

since the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, which promised a decade-long legacy, including for sports participation



**£85.5bn**

estimate of the contribution in social and economic benefits from community sport and physical activity in England in 2017-18



**£1.9bn**

amount spent by Sport England since the launch of government's *Sporting Future* strategy in 2015-16



**1.2%**

more of the adult population were active in the year to November 2019 (pre-COVID-19 pandemic) than the year to November 2016



**1.9%**

fewer of the adult population were active in the year to November 2021 than pre-COVID-19 pandemic



**52%**

of people found new ways to be active during the COVID-19 pandemic



**£250m**

amount committed by Sport England to tackling inactivity between 2017 and 2021



**Almost six-fold**

increase in the number of organisations awarded grant funding by Sport England in 2020-21 during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared with 2019-20

# Summary

**1** The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games ran at an overall public cost of £8.8 billion.<sup>1</sup> The government committed to a lasting legacy, including an increase in grassroots sports participation. Successive governments have since adopted strategies to further their objectives for grassroots sport and physical activity. These strategies have highlighted the role of physical activity in supporting the government's wider strategic objectives, such as levelling up and tackling obesity. Community sport and physical activity brought an estimated contribution of £85.5 billion to England in 2017-18 in social and economic benefits (including £9.5 billion from improved physical and mental health), an estimated return of £3.91 for each £1 spent on community sport and physical activity.

**2** The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (the Department) has overall policy responsibility for maximising participation in sport and physical activity. In 2015, it set out its strategic objectives of:

- more people from every background regularly and meaningfully taking part in sport and physical activity, in volunteering and experiencing live sport;
- maximising international and domestic sporting success and the impact of major events; and
- a more productive, sustainable and responsible sport sector.

**3** This study focuses on the Department's efforts to increase participation in sport and physical activity. It directs most of its spending for this objective through Sport England, its arm's length body created in 1996 to develop grassroots sport and get more people active across England. UK Sport, another arm's length body of the Department, was also established in 1996 to lead on elite sport, such as funding for Olympic and Paralympic athletes, but is not a focus of this study.

<sup>1</sup> Anticipated forecast cost of the Olympic and Paralympic programme reported on 16 July 2013 by the then Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media & Sport.

**4** Sport England receives around one-third of its income from the Exchequer, with the remainder from the National Lottery. It has spent an average of £323 million a year in the six years since 2015-16, totalling £1.9 billion, and is accountable to the Department and Parliament for how it spends its funding.<sup>2</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sport England distributed £271 million in pandemic-related financial support, and the Department provided £700 million for organisations affected by the loss of spectator ticket income and for public leisure centres. This pandemic-related funding, however, is not a focus of this study.

**5** The Department and Sport England operate within a wide and complex delivery environment. Multiple other central and local government bodies have a role in encouraging physical activity: for example, the Department for Transport delivers walking and cycling infrastructure and measures to encourage active travel, and local authorities manage public sector sport and leisure facilities. There are also a range of stakeholders across the third and private sectors, including facility providers, grassroots sports clubs and National Governing Bodies (NGBs) such as the Football Association.

**6** This report examines how far the Department and Sport England have achieved value for money in their spending on grassroots sport and physical activity amongst those aged 16 and over, and have supported value for money in the system-wide spending across government. We examine this by considering achievement of intended objectives; monitoring and evaluating impacts of spending; promoting equality and diversity; and effectiveness of oversight and collaboration. We focus on the roles of the Department and Sport England within the wider sporting sector and government landscape. We consider the decade since the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, with a particular focus on the period since 2015, when government launched its *Sporting Future* strategy. This covers the decade since we last reported on this area in our 2012 report, *The London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games: post-Games review*, and revisits the themes of our 2010 report *Increasing participation in sport*.<sup>3</sup> We also consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the constraints it has presented for the Department and Sport England in achieving their objectives. We examine the following:

- Developing approaches to participation in sport and physical activity (Part One).
- Progress in achieving objectives (Part Two).
- Adopting an approach for the future (Part Three).

<sup>2</sup> These data include additional spending in 2020-21 related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Excluding 2020-21, Sport England's average spend in the five years from 2015-16 to 2019-20 was £278 million, totalling £1.4 billion.

<sup>3</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *The London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games: post-Games review*, Session 2012-13, HC 794, National Audit Office, December 2012. Comptroller and Auditor General, *Increasing participation in sport*, Session 2010-11, HC 22, National Audit Office, May 2010.

## Key findings

Developing approaches to participation in sport and physical activity

**7 The proportion of adults participating in sport declined in the three years following the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and government attention to legacy had waned by 2016.** The 2005 bid for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games committed to “deliver a lasting sporting legacy”. In 2008 Sport England aimed to increase the number of adults participating in sport three times a week by one million by 2013. By October 2013, 0.9 million more adults were participating in sport by this measure against the baseline set in December 2008. This was 1.4 million more than in 2006, the earliest data available. Following the Games, the government committed to deliver a 10-year legacy and set up an Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Cabinet Committee in 2012 to oversee delivery across government. Increasing participation in sport was a core element of the legacy, which the government aimed to deliver through several initiatives, including Sport England’s £135 million programme for improving local facilities, training local sports leaders and encouraging adults to try Olympic and Paralympic sports. However, the proportion of adults participating in sport at least once a week (Sport England’s new progress measure) fell in the three years after the Games. The Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Cabinet Committee was disbanded in 2015 and the Department published what was to be its last legacy monitoring report in 2016. The Department did not complete a promised evaluation of the long-term impact of the Games in 2020 and so does not know the full extent of any sporting legacy delivered from the £8.8 billion that the government spent on the Games (paragraphs 1.5 to 1.9).

**8 In 2015 the government shifted its strategic approach to focus on the outcomes from sport and physical activity.** It published a new cross-government sporting strategy, *Sporting Future*, in 2015. This strategy stated that future funding decisions would be based on achieving five key outcomes:

- Physical well-being.
- Mental well-being.
- Individual development.
- Social and community development.
- Economic development.

The strategy promised to target funding at less active groups of the population, believing this would deliver the biggest gains for public spending. At the same time, the government expanded Sport England's remit to include not only sport but also certain kinds of physical activity such as walking. Sport England reflected these changes in its 2016-2021 strategy, *Towards an Active Nation*. It aimed to understand and address the barriers to activity for the least active by working with a broader range of partners than the NGBs of traditional sports, and by encouraging local collaboration. Its new interventions included allocating £100 million over the three years from 2018 to 12 community pilots with local partners to tackle inactivity and inequalities (paragraphs 1.10 to 1.14 and 2.14).

**9 Leadership and collaboration across government to increase activity has been inconsistent.** The Department has overall policy responsibility for maximising participation in sport and physical activity, which also contributes to a range of other departments' strategic priorities, such as levelling up and tackling obesity. The 2015 *Sporting Future* strategy committed departments to work more closely together on delivery and funding. While this led to some increased collaboration, the government's actions to deliver its objectives were not sustained. For example, the government established an Inter-Ministerial Group on Healthy Living in 2018 to facilitate joint working. This stopped meeting in 2019, removing one of the Department's key influencing and oversight mechanisms. Some stakeholders told us that the Department by itself lacks the levers, budget and influence necessary to have a sustained impact on the rest of government. Collaboration between departments has focused on specific strategies and initiatives – for example, policy discussions related to active travel. There are signs of increasing collaboration following the COVID-19 pandemic (paragraphs 1.2, 1.15 to 1.18 and 3.9).

Progress in achieving objectives

**10 National participation rates increased modestly between 2016 and 2019, but progress with specific less active groups was mixed despite being a strategic focus.**

At population level, the percentage of active adults increased by 1.2 percentage points between November 2016 and November 2019, from 62.1% to 63.3%, more than double Sport England's target. Sport England also set itself activity targets for the four years to 2020 for two specific less active groups, lower socio-economic groups and women aged 16–60. Its interventions included, for example, *This Girl Can*, a campaign aiming to address lower activity rates among women. Immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic, with around a year remaining of the four-year target period, progress was mixed. The number of people from lower socio-economic groups increasing their activity levels through involvement in Sport England funded projects and programmes was on track at 83% of the target level. But, among women aged 16–60 the rise was only 18% of the target. Among less active groups that did not have targets, the over-75s and disabled people experienced statistically significant increases in activity levels before the pandemic, but there was no such increase in Black or Asian ethnicity groups (paragraphs 2.3, 2.5, 2.8 to 2.13).

**11 The COVID-19 pandemic was a highly disruptive force for sports and physical activity, and the Department is exploring what long-term learning it can take from the experience.**

Government measures to control the pandemic restricted people's opportunities to use sports facilities but, at the same time physical activity such as walking was one of the few reasons people were allowed outside during lockdowns. The percentage of adults who were active fell to 61.4% in the year to November 2021, a 1.9 percentage point fall on the year to November 2019, the last full year before the pandemic. These falls have exacerbated inequalities in activity for the least affluent, Asian people and disabled people. However, there have also been large rises in walking for leisure and innovation in the provision of online physical activity offers, and 52% of people have found new ways to be active since the pandemic started. The Department is exploring what long-term learning it can take from the pandemic – for example, whether the increase in walking included previously inactive people (paragraphs 2.15 to 2.18).

**12 Sport England sought to rebalance its grant funding towards the inactive, in line with the government's new strategic approach.**

Sport England pledged £250 million, or 25% of its budget, over the four years from 2017 to encourage the inactive to be active, with lower socio-economic groups one of the areas of focus. It distributed £1.5 billion in grants during the five years starting in 2016-17, of which £450 million can be traced to specific local authorities. Of this £450 million, the most deprived local authorities received, on average, 23% more funding per head of population than the least deprived. Overall, however, the share of local grants awarded to the most deprived local authorities was less in the five years from 2016-17 than in the previous five years. In 2020, Sport England commissioned research on under-representation of lower socio-economic groups in sport and physical activity. This found that applications for funding can be complicated and unconsciously biased against those from lower socio-economic groups. Sport England is now taking steps to overcome this by simplifying its application process and working with partners to reach those organisations at risk of being disadvantaged in applications (paragraphs 2.5 and 2.24 to 2.25).

**13 Sport England sought to expand the range of organisations it relied on to deliver its participation objectives, but its overall network of grant recipients did not increase significantly until during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

As part of its 2016 strategy, Sport England sought to expand its supply chain, but it did not define explicitly what was meant by this proposed expansion. Sport England reduced its funding to NGBs, awarding them 33% less in 2017-2021 than in the previous four years. It also told us that the number of what it terms its 'funded partners' – those that typically play a connecting, influencing or governing role in the sector – increased from 107 in 2015-16 to 134 in 2020-21. Our analysis of the available data on organisations awarded grant funding by Sport England shows no expansion before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the number of organisations awarded grant funding increased almost six-fold in 2020-21 during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared with 2019-20 (paragraphs 2.5, 2.20 to 2.23 and 3.11).

## Adopting an approach for the future

**14 Sport England's new strategy for grassroots sport and physical activity takes a more localised and collaborative approach, in line with lessons learned and feedback from stakeholders.** Sport England evaluates the impact of its programmes such as national campaigns and local delivery pilots. It does not seek to compare the effectiveness of the different types of programmes it has funded, but it has taken account of the lessons learned from evaluations in its January 2021 strategy, *Uniting the Movement*. This strategy continues the focus on encouraging activity among the inactive and, within that focus, it gives greater prominence to addressing inequalities in participation between groups. Sport England's evaluation of its local delivery pilots confirmed that inactivity reduced at a faster rate before the COVID-19 pandemic in local delivery pilot areas than in areas without the pilots, and the strategy commits to expanding place-based working. Sport England also identified that it needed a more collaborative approach to influence and connect the sector more widely. Some NGBs we spoke to agreed that Sport England could do more to share learning and support collaboration across the sector (paragraphs 2.14 and 3.2 to 3.5).

**15 The Department intends to work in a more collaborative and joined-up way with the sector in the future.** It plans to publish a new strategy in summer 2022 to replace its 2015 strategy. According to the Department, one of its new priorities will be to work across government to ensure greater joining up between the sector and government departments. There are signs that system-wide collaboration may be increasing following the COVID-19 pandemic as the importance of physical activity has been increasingly recognised across government. For example, in March 2022, the government signalled that the cross-government Health Promotion Taskforce would discuss physical activity at its next meeting. The Department has also set up two new stakeholder forums. It told us that it is working on a cross-sector strategy to tackle the challenges of the current ageing leisure estate. The government provided £100 million in financial support during the pandemic to publicly owned leisure centres and gyms. But as of June 2022, the Department had not finalised its plans for working with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities to improve public facilities (paragraphs 3.9 and 3.12 to 3.14).

**16 The Department and Sport England recognise that they need to improve the way they measure success under their new strategies, but have yet to finalise an approach.** In its January 2021 strategy, Sport England set out the principles by which it will measure the strategy's success. It also intends to improve its approach to monitoring and evaluation. Previously, it focused largely on meeting three participation rate targets agreed with the Department. It now intends to capture not only the specific impacts of its programmes, interventions, partnerships and influence, but also how its work adds up to national-level change. For the first year of its strategy Sport England reported internally to the Department on an agreed set of key performance indicators. As at June 2022, Sport England was still working with the Department on developing published performance indicators to measure its strategy's success. The Department told us this delay is so that it can ensure that the new indicators align with its own new strategy due in summer 2022. The Department itself has not evaluated whether its 2015 *Sporting Future* strategy achieved its objectives but told us that it expects to include within its new strategy its approach for measuring success (paragraphs 3.7 to 3.10).

**17 The Department has applied some lessons from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to its approach to the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games, but others have been missed.** Based on lessons from the 2012 Games, the Department focused its legacy ambitions for the Commonwealth Games on the most inactive and under-represented groups. It set out from 2019 its intention for the Games to bring health and well-being benefits, but it did not ringfence any funding for legacy in the £778 million public Games budget. Funding has been committed by a partnership of organisations to support legacy ambitions first set out in a March 2021 Legacy Plan. For example, Sport England is spending £35 million on a range of national and local legacy programmes. The Department told us it considers that the £778 million public expenditure itself, notably the assets created such as the Sandwell Aquatics Centre, is the central legacy of the Games (paragraphs 3.16 to 3.17).

## **Conclusion on value for money**

**18** The Department has made mixed progress towards its objectives of increasing participation, tackling inactivity and reducing inequalities in activity levels since it changed its strategy in 2015. Achieving this kind of behaviour change at a national level contributes to a range of social and economic benefits, including from improved physical and mental health, but it takes time. The Department has shifted its approach since 2015 to build on lessons learned, including targeting spending towards the inactive, trialling more localised approaches, and running behaviour change campaigns to tackle barriers to activity. The proportion of active adults saw a modest increase nationally before the COVID-19 pandemic, with mixed results in less active groups. Activity rates fell during the pandemic, exacerbating some of the existing inequalities. The Department now faces the challenge of recovering its previous gains, from a lower base, and tackling persistent inequalities in participation.

**19** While highly disruptive for sports and physical activity, the pandemic has also prompted positive change, increasing the Department's collaboration with the sector and focusing the government's attention on the health benefits of exercise. This, together with the launch of the Department's and Sport England's new strategies, which are building on past lessons learned, presents an opportunity for renewed progress. However, as at June 2022 the Department and Sport England have yet to produce a robust plan for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their approaches for the future. There is also a lack of effective leadership and collaboration across government. The Department must address these issues to capitalise on the present opportunities and promote long-term value for money gains across government.

## **Recommendations**

**20** The Department should:

- a** **Set out how it will lead delivery of the objectives and outcomes for sport and physical activity that it shares with other departments.** The Department should clarify its plans for leading and influencing cross-government efforts designed to sustain its objectives and ensure better whole-system working. This should include, for example, establishing with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities how to tackle the challenges facing public sector facilities.
- b** **Set out how it will measure the success of its forthcoming strategy.** Elements should include: the measures and milestones by which the Department will track progress and its social and economic return, plans for regular monitoring of delivery against these at programme and strategic level, and a comparison of different programmes to identify their relative effectiveness and the lessons for long-term impact. Sport England should publish a similar framework for its 2021 *Uniting the Movement* strategy.

- c Clarify whether and how major sporting events will deliver increased participation in sport and physical activity when bidding to host such events.** If no such legacy is planned, the Department should articulate clearly the other benefits it expects such events to deliver. Any expectations the Department sets to deliver a physical activity and sporting legacy should be matched by proper arrangements for funding, monitoring and evaluating progress after the event.
- 21** Sport England should:
- d Check that its distribution of funding supports its objective to target lower socio-economic groups.** Given Sport England's aim to reach lower socio-economic groups as part of its objective to tackle inactivity, it should review whether its mechanisms for allocation and distribution of funding fully support this aim.
- e Exploit its networks to identify and share findings, themes and learning from its work that could accelerate greater collaboration across the sector.** Sport England should use its insight from its research and evaluation, including its learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, to highlight common challenges whereby organisations it funds can learn from each other, such as approaches to reaching deprived communities and tackling inequality.
- f Set out how it will reach organisations it has not previously funded to support its objectives.** Sport England expanded its reach during the COVID-19 pandemic to fund new organisations. It should apply what it has learned from this to ensure that awareness of its activities and associated funding are accessible to organisations it may not previously have reached.

# Part One

## Developing approaches to participation in sport and physical activity

**1.1** This part of the report sets out the responsibilities for sport and physical activity across government. It sets out the government's efforts to deliver a participation legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and its shift in strategic approach following the Games. It also sets out the extent of cross-government collaboration on sport and physical activity.

### **Responsibilities for participation in sport and physical activity across government**

**1.2** The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (the Department) has overall policy responsibility for maximising participation in sport and physical activity. It channels most of its funding to support this objective through an arm's length body established in 1996, Sport England. Among other things, Sport England is responsible for growing grassroots sport and getting more people active across England. It receives around one-third of its income from the Exchequer, with the remainder from the National Lottery. It receives 12.4% of all returns to good causes (around £215 million a year).<sup>4</sup> Sport England must distribute its National Lottery funding in line with the principles of additionality, meaning it must fund projects that the government is unlikely to fund and which bring additional value to community sport.

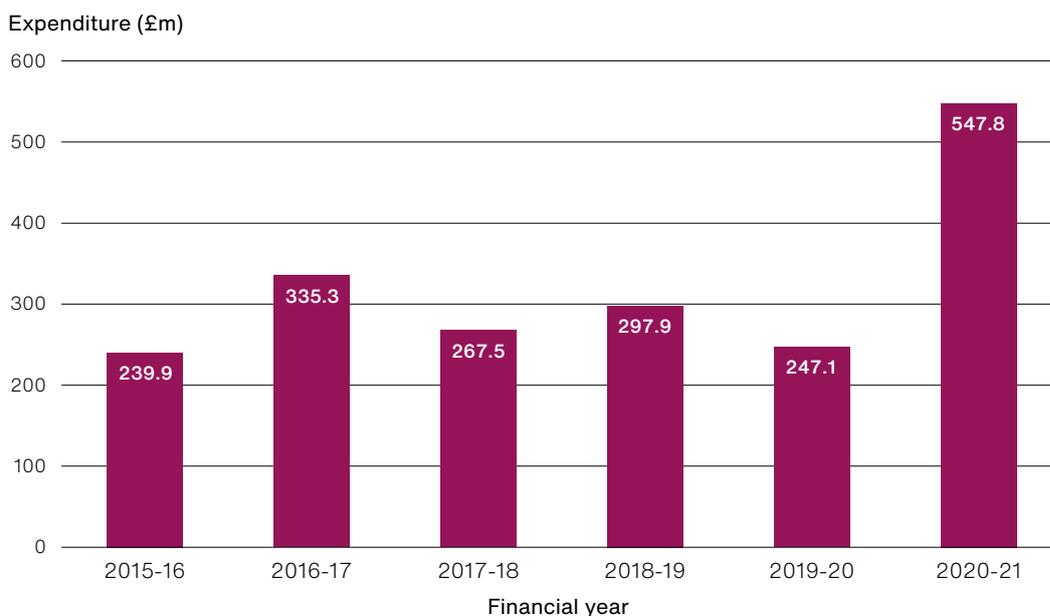
**1.3** Sport England spent an average of £323 million a year in the six years since 2015-16, totalling £1.9 billion (**Figure 1**).<sup>5</sup> This encompasses all its expenditure, including that to increase participation in sport and physical activity and to support the sports sector. Its spending covers a variety of interventions, including distributing grants, building partnerships, leading research and delivering campaigns. It is accountable to the Department and Parliament for how it spends its funding.

<sup>4</sup> Average over the six years between 2015-16 and 2020-21.

<sup>5</sup> These data include additional spending in 2020-21 related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Excluding 2020-21, Sport England's average spend in the five years from 2015-16 to 2019-20 was £278 million, totalling £1.4 billion.

**Figure 1**

Sport England's total expenditure in England between 2015-16 and 2020-21

**Sport England spent £1.9 billion between 2015-16 and 2020-21****Notes**

- 1 Total expenditure is as reported in Sport England's Annual Report and Accounts and includes spending of Exchequer and Lottery funds.
- 2 Grant commitments are higher at the start of a strategic cycle. Expenditure is, therefore, higher in 2016-17 because this includes Sport England's commitments of four years of funding of £99.4 million to National Governing Bodies for the period of 2017-2021.
- 3 Expenditure increased in 2020-21 because of additional spend on COVID-19 support.
- 4 Expenditure is not adjusted for inflation.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Sport England's annual report and accounts, 2015-16 to 2020-21

**1.4** The Department and Sport England operate within a wide and complex delivery environment. While the Department is the lead department responsible for sport and physical activity, other government departments have a role in encouraging physical activity (**Figure 2** overleaf). Local authorities also have a significant role: in total, they spend over £1 billion per year on sport and leisure. Although there is no statutory requirement for them to spend on sport facilities, they do so because they contribute to a range of outcomes such as improved health and a stronger local economy. Private and third sector stakeholders include facility providers, grassroots sports clubs and National Governing Bodies (NGBs) such as The Football Association, England Netball and Rugby Football Union.

**Figure 2**  
Governmental responsibilities related to sport and physical activity in England  
Multiple bodies across central and local government have a role in supporting sport and physical activity



**Notes**

- 1 Additional government departments also hold other more minor roles.
- 2 The Department for Education's role in facilitating sport and physical activity for young people is not within the scope of this report.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental strategies, outcome delivery plans and Accounting Officer system statements

## The participation legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

**1.5** The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games bid in 2005 committed to “deliver a lasting sporting legacy” from the games. In 2008, as part of its legacy planning, the Department set a target to increase the number of adults participating in three or more sessions a week of at least moderate-intensity activity by two million by 2012.<sup>6</sup> To support this, it set Sport England the target of increasing the number of adults participating in three 30-minute sessions of moderate-intensity sport a week by one million by March 2013. This was measured by Sport England’s Active People survey. While the first of these targets was no longer adopted by the new government in 2010, Sport England continued to work toward its target. By October 2013, 7.8 million adults participated in sport at least three times a week, an increase of 0.9 million against the baseline level set in December 2008. This was 1.4 million more than in October 2006, when data were first available in the Active People survey.

**1.6** Following the Games, the government committed to a 10-year legacy, which was to be delivered by a range of government departments and partners such as the Mayor of London. While each was responsible for its own programmes, the Department was accountable to Parliament for overall coordination and delivery of legacy. In 2012, the government established an Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Cabinet Committee to oversee delivery, and appointed Lord Sebastian Coe as Legacy Ambassador to provide independent advice on the legacy programme.

**1.7** A core element of legacy was the commitment to increase participation in sport. This was supported by a range of initiatives, including Sport England’s £135 million *People Places Play* programme, which aimed to encourage mass sports participation by upgrading local facilities, improving and protecting playing fields from development, training local sports leaders, and encouraging 100,000 adults to try Olympic and Paralympic sports in a charity challenge. Sport England shifted its progress measurement to focus on an individual’s participation in sport at least once a week for 30 minutes, rather than three or more times a week. It told us that this was at the request of the Minister for Sport and that it considered this took better account of an individual’s likely activity patterns. However, despite the spending and a series of other initiatives across government, the proportion of adults participating in sport at least once a week for at least 30 minutes fell by 1.1 percentage points in the three years following the Games, a statistically significant decrease (**Figure 3** overleaf).<sup>7</sup>

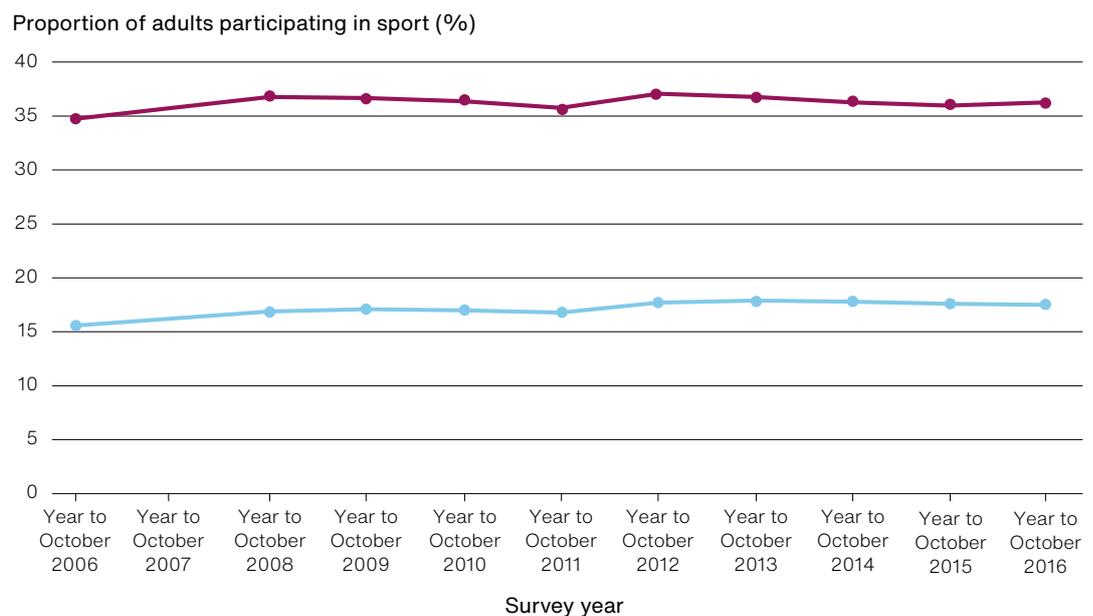
<sup>6</sup> Participating was defined as completing at least 30 minutes of such activity.

<sup>7</sup> This refers to the three years from the year to October 2012 to the year to October 2015. There was no statistically significant change in the proportion of adults participating in sport at least three times a week for at least 30 minutes (the Department’s previous progress measure) in the same period.

**Figure 3**

Adult participation in sport at least once a week and three or more times a week in England between years ending October 2006 and October 2016

Participation by both measures increased in the run-up to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games but participation at least once a week declined in the three years following the Games



● At least once a week (%)

● Three or more times a week (%)

**Notes**

- 1 The Active People survey ran from year ending October 2006 to year ending October 2016. No survey results are available for the year to October 2007.
- 2 Participation is defined as the proportion of adults aged 16+ completing at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity sport.
- 3 The decline in participation in the three years following the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games (between the year to October 2012 and the year to October 2015) was statistically significant for the at least once a week measure but not for the three or more times a week measure.

Source: Sport England Active People survey

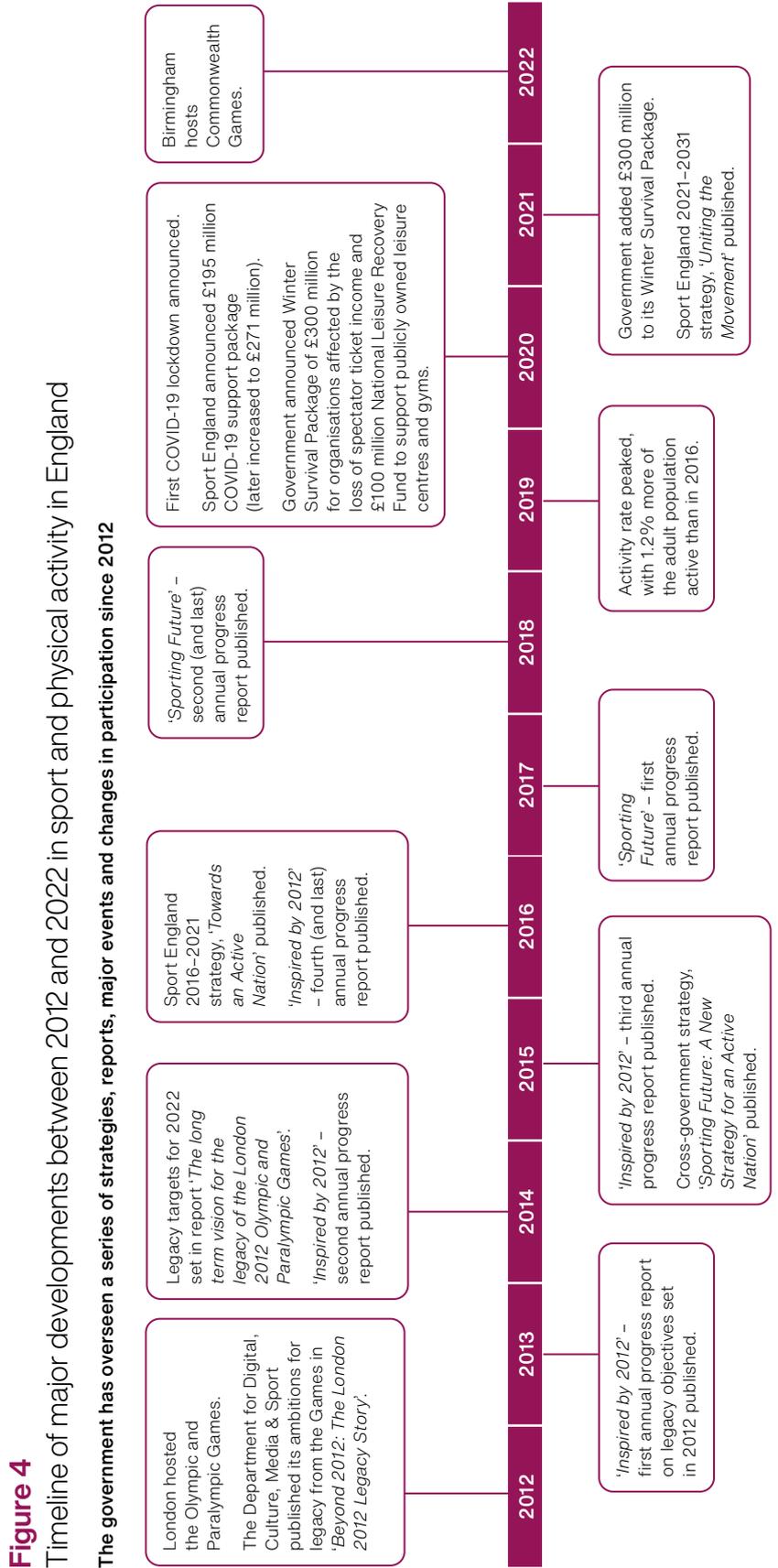
**1.8** By 2015, the Department recognised that its spending had not led to the post 2012 boost in participation it had hoped for and concluded that its approach had exhausted the potential for future growth. Its attention turned instead to a new strategic approach called *Sporting Future* (paragraph 1.10). Moreover, the Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Cabinet Committee was disbanded in 2015. The Department published what was to be its last legacy monitoring report in 2016, by which point most legacy initiatives across government were being taken forward as business as usual and government's attention to legacy objectives had waned.

**1.9** In 2011, the Department had committed to evaluating in 2020 the long-term impact of the Games, but it did not complete this evaluation. As a result, it does not know the full extent of any long-term sporting legacy delivered from the £8.8 billion that the government spent. It evaluated the short-term impact in 2013, concluding that the Games had contributed towards the increases in participation before 2012 by providing opportunities for participation through legacy programmes, investment in infrastructure and facilities, and a motivational effect. In 2021, it commissioned an independent review of existing research, which concluded that little strong evidence exists to show that sporting events can enhance mass sport participation. Where participation does increase, this tends to be among those who were already regularly active.

### **The government's strategic approach since 2015**

**1.10** In 2015, the government published a new cross-government sporting strategy, *Sporting Future*, to address what it described as the flatlining levels of sport participation and high levels of inactivity (**Figure 4** overleaf). The strategy sought to shift the focus from the number of people taking part in sport and physical activity to the social good that this delivers, such as enhancing communities, improving health and tackling crime. It stated that future funding decisions would be based on achieving five key outcomes:

- Physical well-being.
- Mental well-being.
- Individual development.
- Social and community development.
- Economic development.



**Note**  
 1 Activity rates reflect the proportion of adults aged 16+ who complete at least two and a half hours a week of moderate-intensity equivalent exercise, as measured by the Active Lives survey. The activity rate in 2019 represents a peak since the first Active Lives survey in the year to November 2016. Rates before this point are not comparable.

**1.11** The strategy set out the government's objectives in three key areas to deliver these outcomes:

- More people from every background regularly and meaningfully taking part in sport and physical activity, volunteering and experiencing live sport.
- Maximising international and domestic sporting success and the impact of major events.
- A more productive, sustainable and responsible sport sector.

This report focuses on the first of these – the government's efforts to increase participation in sport and physical activity. The government promised to target future funding at those less likely to be active, such as women and those in lower socio-economic groups. This is where it identified the potential for the biggest gains and best value for spending. At the same time, the government expanded Sport England's remit to include not only measuring and supporting sport but also measuring and supporting certain types of physical activity such as walking and dancing. It considered that projects featuring these types of activities could be effective in reaching inactive people who might not consider themselves 'sporty'.

**1.12** Sport England reflected this revised approach in its 2016–2021 strategy, *Towards an Active Nation*. This strategy focused on achieving the five key outcomes by encouraging more people from every background to regularly and meaningfully engage in sport and physical activity, and by supporting a more productive, sustainable and responsible sport sector. The strategy built on the expansion of Sport England's remit in *Sporting Future* (paragraph 1.11). It noted that supporting activities with a wide appeal, such as walking, presented a good opportunity to reach a broader range of individuals particularly in under-represented groups and to deliver on the five *Sporting Future* outcomes. It brought a new focus on tackling inactivity, particularly among groups that Sport England's research showed tended to be less active, such as women, disabled people and those in lower socio-economic groups. It also aimed to support improved governance and diversity in leadership in the sport sector.

**1.13** Sport England intended to increase activity among the less active by understanding their practical and emotional barriers to activity and by using insights into behaviour change to tackle these. For example, it identified that some women face a fear of judgement, whereas some college students face a tight budget, timetable and memories of bad experiences in school sport. It sought to tackle these barriers by working with a broader range of partners, including those who understand under-represented groups best and organisations with a mass appeal such as parkrun. It intended to use national level campaigning such as the *This Girl Can* campaign to nudge people into more sustainable habits. It also sought to use local delivery and place-based approaches to address the barriers to activity within specific communities (**Figure 5** overleaf). For example, it allocated £100 million over three years from 2018 into 12 pilots with local partners to tackle inactivity and inequalities within communities.

**Figure 5**

## Sport England's interventions in England since 2016

Sport England has adopted a variety of interventions to increase participation in sport and physical activity

<p><b>Research and insight</b></p> 	<p>Sport England runs the Active Lives adult survey to measure adult activity levels across England and collates data on the sporting facilities across England in its Active Places dataset. It also conducts behaviour change research to understand why individuals may not be active and how to tackle this.</p>
<p><b>Grant giving</b></p> 	<p>Sport England awarded £1.5 billion in grants in the five years from 2016-17. Recipients range from National Governing Bodies to local community sports clubs.</p>
<p><b>Local delivery pilots</b></p> 	<p>In 2018, Sport England launched 12 local pilots to take a place-based approach to tackling inactivity and inequalities. It partnered with local groups and organisations to understand and address the barriers to activity within each community.</p>
<p><b>Campaigns</b></p> 	<p>Sport England develops and funds campaigns to help people to become and stay physically active. These use a combination of marketing, such as adverts, and collaboration with partners to promote messages locally. Examples include <i>This Girl Can</i>, aimed at women, and <i>We are Undefeatable</i>, aimed at those with long-term health conditions.</p>
<p><b>Partnerships</b></p> 	<p>Sport England provides advice and support to a range of organisations including schools, charities and private leisure sector providers. This includes sharing research and ensuring good governance is implemented throughout the sector.</p>

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Sport England's published and internal sources

**1.14** This marked a change in approach from Sport England's previous strategy. That had focused on traditional sport and relied predominantly on funding NGBs through a payment-by-results model to increase participation against mandatory growth targets. Sport England told us it had learned that this payment model had created a lack of trust with NGBs because it had made them accountable for participation rates over which they had only limited control. It also noted that its focus on traditional sport ignored other ways in which people might be active. The NGBs we spoke to said that their relationship with Sport England has since developed from a transactional relationship before 2016 towards a more trusting partnership.

## Cross-government collaboration

**1.15** Sport and physical activity policy contributes to a range of government departments' strategic priorities, such as levelling up and tackling obesity. The *Sporting Future* strategy emphasised the importance of cross-government collaboration and committed government departments to working more closely together on delivery and funding. An effective whole-system approach requires the alignment of objectives, funding, governance and accountability. This supports good value for the Exchequer as a whole and avoids gaps in accountability.<sup>8</sup> The *Sporting Future* strategy intended to support a whole-system approach by establishing shared objectives, key performance indicators and a cross-government ministerial group to drive implementation and report annually to Parliament on progress.

**1.16** Actions to support this collaborative approach, however, were slow to be implemented and not sustained. The Department only published two progress reports, in 2017 and 2018, which monitored and held departments to account for their progress against the cross-government objectives. A cross-government Inter-Ministerial Group on Healthy Living met for the first time in 2018 to facilitate joint working, co-chaired by the secretaries of state for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and Health & Social Care. However, it only met four times because of a lack of ministerial availability, and it did not meet after June 2019 following a change of ministers and government. This removed one of the Department's key influencing and oversight mechanisms. Some stakeholders we spoke to told us that the Department by itself lacks the levers, budget and influence necessary to have a sustained impact on the rest of government. There are signs that cross-government collaboration may be increasing again following the COVID-19 pandemic (paragraph 3.9).

**1.17** The Department and Sport England work with a range of government departments on specific initiatives and strategies. The Department seeks to collaborate at a strategic level – for example meeting with the Department for Transport to discuss active travel policy. Meanwhile, Sport England collaborates across government at a more working level. For example, it has worked with Public Health England since 2017 and, more recently, with the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities on the Moving Health Professionals programme. This supports healthcare professionals to promote physical activity to their patients to help prevent and manage ill health. Both the Department and Sport England collaborated with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) during the COVID-19 pandemic on the £100 million National Leisure Recovery Fund. This provided support to publicly owned leisure centres and gyms.

<sup>8</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Improving operational delivery in government: A good practice guide for senior leaders*, National Audit Office, March 2021.

**1.18** Despite these examples of collaboration, there are signs that the approach across government is not joined up. Some stakeholders have reported inconsistencies in the language and approaches to physical activity between departments. Local government stakeholders we spoke with had experienced effective collaboration with Sport England. However they had found a lack of clarity between the Department and DLUHC over responsibility for leisure services. They told us this had led to a lack of leadership in this area during the COVID-19 pandemic, with delayed and patchy support for leisure providers.

## Part Two

### Progress in achieving objectives

**2.1** This part of the report sets out the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (the Department) and Sport England’s objectives for sport and physical activity and their expenditure plans, trends in adult participation and the distribution of Sport England funding.

#### **Objectives for participation and expenditure plans**

**2.2** Following publication of *Sporting Future* in 2015, Sport England and the Department aimed to broaden their methods to measure progress on participation in grassroots sport and physical activity. After *Sporting Future*, population-level reporting was based on Sport England’s Active Lives survey, which measures the proportion of the population who are active, fairly active and inactive. “Active” is defined using the UK Chief Medical Officer’s Physical Activity guidelines as a person who does at least two and a half hours a week of moderate-intensity equivalent exercise.<sup>9</sup> This includes activities such as walking and so is a broader measure than participation in sport.

**2.3** In response to the *Sporting Future* strategy, in May 2018, Sport England agreed with the Department three targets to:

- increase the total number of active adults by 500,000 in the four years to 2020 (paragraph 2.8);
- increase the number of active people in lower socio-economic groups in targeted communities by 100,000 in the four years to 2020 (paragraph 2.10);<sup>10</sup> and
- increase the number of active women aged 16-60 by 250,000 in the four years to 2020 (paragraph 2.11).

<sup>9</sup> As per the Active Lives survey, these categories are based on the number of minutes per week of moderate-intensity equivalent exercise. Each minute of moderate activity counts as one minute, and each minute of vigorous activity counts as two moderate minutes. Active equates to at least 150 minutes, fairly active is 30-149 minutes, and inactive is less than 30 minutes.

<sup>10</sup> Lower socio-economic groups are defined as individuals in the National Statistics Socio-economic classification groups 6 (Semi-routine occupations), 7 (Routine occupations) and 8 (Never worked and long-term unemployed).

**2.4** Population-level reporting does not identify any causation between Sport England's spending and any changes in activity levels. Therefore, Sport England also set out a range of other priorities, such as decreasing inactivity, which it measured progress against through impact evaluation. Its board reporting, however, shows that its organisational focus was on achieving the three numeric activity targets.

**2.5** Sport England sought to expand the supply chain of organisations it relied on to deliver its participation objectives (paragraphs 2.20-2.23). Reflecting *Sporting Future's* focus on the least active (and a belief that this would act as a stepping stone to achieving major increases in population-wide activity), Sport England also pledged 25% of its budget between 2017 and 2021, equivalent to approximately £250 million, to encourage inactive people to become active (paragraph 2.24).

### **Progress against the government's five outcomes**

**2.6** In its 2015 *Sporting Future* strategy, the Department said it would complete more work where needed to understand and evidence the impact that sport and physical activity could have on its five key outcomes. It also committed to measure progress against them. Sport England commissioned research, published in 2017, to support this first objective. This concluded that the evidence base for the contribution of community sport and physical activity on physical and mental well-being and individual development was well, or at least fairly well, established. However, further research was needed on social and community and economic development. Sport England commissioned additional research, published in 2020, which estimated that community sport and physical activity brought an estimated contribution of £85.5 billion to England in 2017-18 in social and economic benefits (an estimated return of £3.91 for every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity). This included an estimated £42 billion in improved mental well-being, £20 billion in social and community development, and £9.5 billion from improved physical and mental health.<sup>11</sup>

**2.7** The Department only published two annual update reports to monitor progress against the five outcomes, noting in the latter of the two that it was still too early to identify trends in the data. The Active Lives survey measures an individual's physical activity, life satisfaction, self-efficacy and positive levels of social trust, thereby providing measurement against the first four of the key outcomes.<sup>12</sup> The latest survey results from the year to November 2021 show positive association between activity levels and these outcomes.

<sup>11</sup> Sport England, *Measuring the social and economic impact of sport in England summary: Social and economic value of community sport and physical activity in England*, August 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Self-efficacy is measured by whether an individual feels that they can achieve most of the goals they set themselves.

## Trends in activity rates before the COVID-19 pandemic

**2.8** In the year to November 2019, 1.2% more of the adult population were active compared with the year to November 2016, a statistically significant increase (**Figure 9** on page 32). The 500,000 target for increased population-level activity had also been met by November 2019, with the number of active adults up by 1.1 million against the baseline of year to November 2016.

**2.9** The activity with the biggest percentage point increase in participation over that period was walking for leisure (**Figure 6**).<sup>13</sup> According to Sport England, neither it nor its partners have a major influence over walking for leisure in terms of direct spending. Under its 2016 strategy, however, it intended to 'nudge' people into walking, such as by promoting walkways in new housing developments. Sport England attributes part of the popularity of walking to its flexibility and accessibility.

### Figure 6

Adult participation levels in England by activity group between the year to November 2016 and the year to November 2019 (the last full year before the COVID-19 pandemic)

Walking for leisure was the activity with the biggest percentage point increase in participation over the period

Activity group	Year to November 2016 (%)	Year to November 2019 (%)	Percentage point change
Walking for leisure	41.2	44.9	↑ 3.7
Adventure sports	5.1	7.7	↑ 2.6
Walking for travel	31.6	33.8	↑ 2.2
Cycling for travel	7.2	6.7	↓ 0.5
Running, athletics or multi-sports	15.6	14.7	↓ 0.9
Racket sports	5.5	4.5	↓ 1.0
Team sports	7.8	6.7	↓ 1.1

#### Notes

- 1 Percentages shown are the proportion of adults aged 16+ who had taken part in that physical activity at least twice in the last 28 days.
- 2 Activity groups shown are those where participation levels were at least 5% in the year to November 2016.

Source: Sport England Active Lives survey

<sup>13</sup> Participation is the proportion of adults aged 16+ who have taken part in that activity at least twice in the last 28 days.

**2.10** For lower socio-economic groups, one of the two less active groups for which Sport England set targets, Sport England measured changes in activity levels in the places and projects where it allocated specific funds to this group. In this way, it found that 83,000 more people from lower socio-economic groups in these areas were active, 83% of the target level, with less than one year of the four-year target period remaining. However, among lower socio-economic groups as a whole, there was no statistically significant change in national activity levels before the COVID-19 pandemic.

**2.11** There was a statistically significant increase in activity levels among women before the COVID-19 pandemic although progress varied considerably by age. The number of active women over 60 increased by 529,000 between the year to November 2016 and the year to November 2019. However, for women aged between 16 and 60, the group targeted by Sport England, activity levels increased by nearly 44,000 over the same period, only 18% of the 250,000 target level, with a year of the four-year target period remaining. The figure of 44,000 was a fall in the result recorded in the year to May 2019, which showed that activity levels among women aged between 16 and 60 had risen by nearly 122,000 compared with the baseline, 49% of the target level.

**2.12** Sport England did not set activity targets for other less active groups such as disabled people or Black or Asian ethnicity groups. It still intended to influence them through its strategic objective to tackle inactivity, and considered that its targeting of lower socio-economic groups would also disproportionately benefit Black and Asian ethnicity groups. However, there was no statistically significant improvement in activity levels for Black or Asian ethnicity groups between the year to November 2016 and the year to November 2019. In addition, while evaluation of *This Girl Can* found that one-third of women who were aware of the campaign reported being more active as a result, women from Black and Asian backgrounds were less engaged (**Figure 7**). In 2021, Sport England, in collaboration with other sporting bodies, commissioned a survey of over 300 ethnically diverse people to understand their lived experience of participating in sport and physical activity. Unrepresentative leadership was identified as a key issue, with participants observing that this leads to decision-making that is unlikely to be in the interests of Black and Asian communities.<sup>14</sup>

14 To progress the diversity aims in the 2015 *Sporting Future* strategy, in 2016, UK Sport and Sport England established a joint Code of Governance. This required their partners receiving significant funding (over £1 million for a continuing activity over multiple years) to adopt a target to have at least 30% of each gender on their boards and to take actions to support it. It also required them to demonstrate a strong and public commitment to greater diversity generally on their boards. A 2020 survey of board members of funded partners found that 44% of respondents were female. Following this review, the Code was updated to require partners receiving significant funding to develop and publish diversity and inclusion action plans to achieve greater diversity across all senior leadership teams, including board members.

**Figure 7**Sport England's work on tackling inequalities in activity – case study:  
*This Girl Can* behavioural change campaign

The *This Girl Can* campaign aimed to address lower activity rates among women

<p><b>Aim of campaign</b></p> 	<p>To increase the number of women participating in exercise and sport, because they were persistently less active than men.</p>
<p><b>Insights</b></p> 	<p>While women saw the benefits of exercising, they faced barriers including a fear of being judged on their appearance, ability or priorities.</p>
<p><b>How the campaign was run</b></p> 	<p>The campaign ran in four phases from 2015. It aimed to change the way women feel and think about exercise, using TV and cinema adverts, a national media campaign and social media. Women were encouraged to 'self-identify' with exercise through sharing photos or using #ThisGirlCan, based on Sport England's understanding that making a public statement increased the likelihood of cementing habits.</p>
<p><b>Cost</b></p> 	<p>Around £28 million over eight years.</p>
<p><b>Results</b></p> 	<p>Almost three million women aged 14–40 were more active as a result of seeing the early phases of the campaign – for example, by trying a new type of exercise. However, women with lower incomes and from some specific ethnic groups were less engaged. Sport England amended the third phase of the campaign from 2018 to tackle inequalities in activity levels. But, compared with phase two of the campaign, there was no shift in action reported among women from less affluent and Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Sport England attribute this in part to a lower media spend in phase three compared with phases one and two. It has learned that campaigning alone is not enough to target under-represented groups which also requires more localised support on the ground for women.</p>

Source: National Audit Office review of Sport England documents

**2.13** The over-75s and disabled people, comparatively inactive groups, both experienced statistically significant increases in activity levels between the year to November 2016 and the year to November 2019, by 7.1 and 3.6 percentage points respectively. The Activity Alliance, the national charity for disabled people in sport and activity, told us that the shift in government strategy towards the benefits of being active, such as making friends and getting healthier, helped participation among disabled people.

**2.14** Sport England used impact evaluations to monitor progress against its priority to tackle inactivity although it recognised the difficulties in identifying the long-term outcomes from these. Interventions included the *We are Undefeatable* campaign, which aimed to reduce inactivity among people with health conditions, and local delivery pilots, which aimed to tackle inactivity and inequalities within communities (paragraph 1.13). Evaluation of the first phase of *We are Undefeatable* before the COVID-19 pandemic found that 44% of targeted individuals who saw the campaign took some action as a result (such as restarting activity, increasing activity or gathering information). These results could not, however, be extrapolated to a national level. Sport England's monitoring of its local delivery pilots found that inactivity reduced at a faster rate before the pandemic in local delivery pilot areas than in areas without the pilots.

### **Trends in activity during the COVID-19 pandemic**

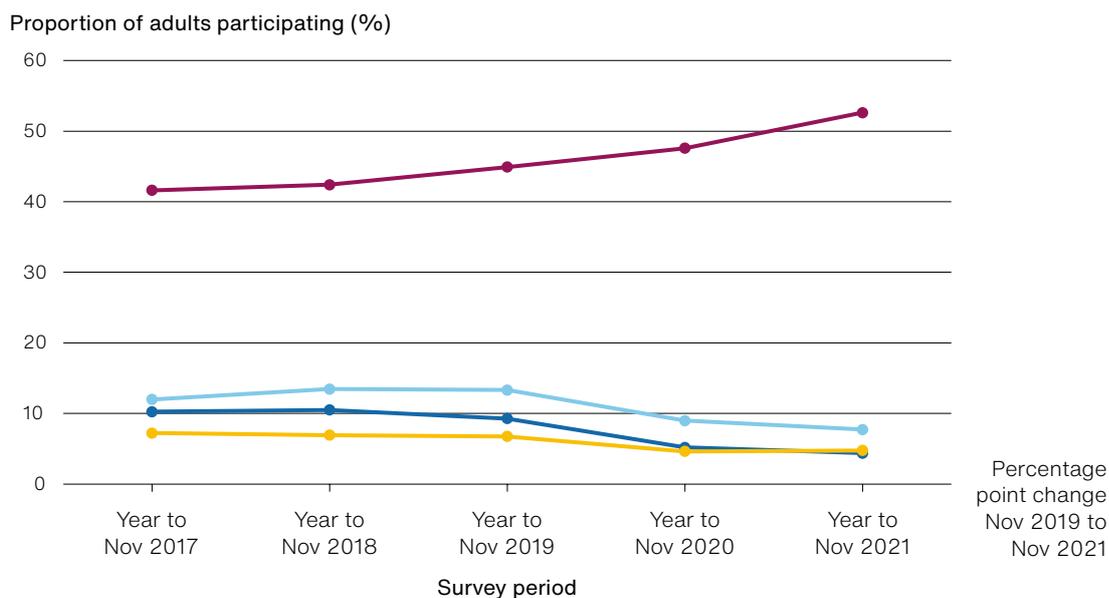
**2.15** The COVID-19 pandemic was a highly disruptive force for sports and physical activity. Government measures to control the spread of the virus restricted people's opportunities to play sports and use sports facilities because they included mandatory closures of indoor gyms and leisure centres and restrictions on the number of people who could meet outdoors. In the year to November 2021, participation in associated activities such as swimming, gym sessions and team sports were all down by 2.0 percentage points or more compared with the pre-pandemic levels in the year to November 2019. In contrast, walking for leisure, which the government advocated as a safe exercising option during lockdowns, saw a 7.7 percentage point increase in participation over the same period (**Figure 8**).

**2.16** The gains in activity levels between 2016 and 2019 were lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. The latest set of Active Lives results, covering the year to November 2021, show activity levels at 61.4% for the second year in a row, the lowest point on record for the year to November surveys. This is also 1.9 percentage points lower than in the year to November 2019, the last full year of data before the pandemic, and 0.7 percentage points lower than the position at the start of the strategy in the year to November 2016 (Figure 9 on page 32).

**Figure 8**

Percentage of adults in England between the year to November 2017 and the year to November 2021 who took part in: walking for leisure, gym sessions, swimming or team sports

**Participation in swimming, gym sessions and team sports declined during the COVID-19 pandemic whereas participation in walking for leisure increased**



	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	
● Walking for leisure	41.6	42.4	44.9	47.6	52.6	↑ 7.7
● Gym sessions	12.0	13.5	13.3	9.0	7.7	↓ 5.6
● Swimming	10.2	10.5	9.3	5.2	4.4	↓ 4.9
● Team sports	7.2	6.9	6.7	4.6	4.8	↓ 2.0

**Notes**

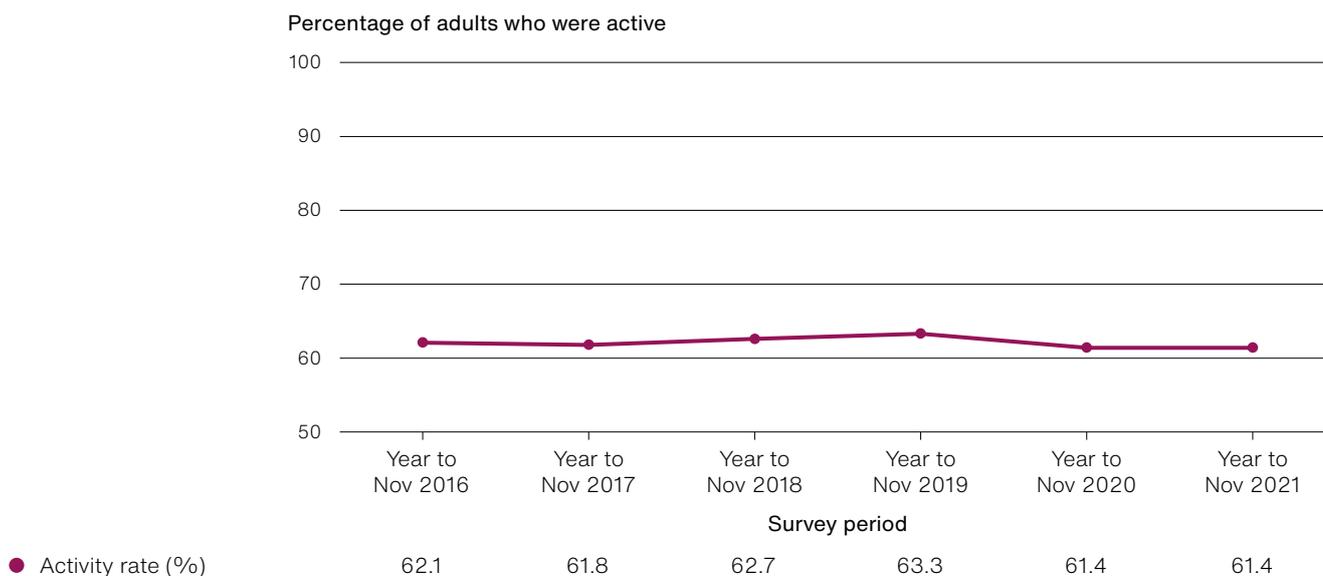
- 1 Percentages are for adults aged 16+ who have taken part in that activity at least twice in the last 28 days.
- 2 Chart begins in the year to November 2017 because this is the first year to November survey for which participation data are available for gym sessions.
- 3 The year to November 2019 is the last full year's data before the COVID-19 pandemic and year to November 2021 is the latest data available. The final column in the table therefore shows the impact of the pandemic.

Source: Sport England Active Lives survey

**Figure 9**

Percentage of adults in England who were active between the year to November 2016 and the year to November 2021

**Gains in activity levels between 2016 and 2019 went into reverse during the COVID-19 pandemic**

**Note**

1 The percentage of adults who were active represents the percentage of adults aged 16+ who complete at least two and a half hours a week of moderate-intensity equivalent exercise. Each minute of vigorous activity counts as two moderate minutes.

Source: Sport England Active Lives survey

**2.17** These falls in activity have exacerbated inequalities in activity for the least affluent, Asian and disabled people. For example, the most recent Active Lives data for the year to November 2021 show that activity levels were down by 4.4% for people living in the most deprived areas compared with pre-COVID-19 pandemic, whereas the fall was 1.2% in the least deprived areas. While some groups, such as the over-75s, have now recovered to their pre-pandemic position, there has been no recovery among disabled people or those with a long-term health condition.

**2.18** Sport England considers that, since the COVID-19 pandemic began, physical activity offers are increasingly moving online. However, it recognises that this may create new barriers for those without internet access, digital skills or suitable space at home. Research commissioned by Sport England has found that 52% of people have discovered new ways to be active since the pandemic started. The Department is exploring what long-term lessons it can learn from the pandemic – for example, it will assess whether the increase in walking included previously inactive people (Figure 8).

## Distribution of Sport England funding

**2.19** Sport England awarded £1.7 billion in grants in the six years from 2015-16. These supported a range of organisations across England from National Governing Bodies (NGBs) to local community sports clubs. At least three-quarters of the individual grants each year were worth £100,000 or less (**Figure 10**).<sup>15</sup>

**2.20** From 2016 Sport England aimed to expand the supply chain of organisations it relied on to deliver its participation objectives. Its strategy did not, however, define explicitly what was meant by this proposed expansion. Sport England reduced its funding to NGBs, awarding them 33% less in the period from 2017 to 2021 compared with the previous four years. It also told us that the number of what it terms ‘funded partners’ – those that typically play a connecting, influencing or governing role in the sector – had increased from 107 in 2015-16 to 134 in 2020-21.

### Figure 10

Value of grants awarded by Sport England to organisations in England, 2015-16 to 2020-21

At least three-quarters of grants awarded were £100,000 or less

Financial year	Total value of grants awarded	Percentage of grants awarded by size					
		<£5,000	£5,000 to £10,000	£10,000 to £100,000	£100,000 to £500,000	£500,000 to £1 million	£1 million+
	(£)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
2015-16	<b>245,614,323</b>	14	26	41	14	2	3
2016-17	<b>177,600,688</b>	14	31	39	12	2	2
2017-18	<b>300,409,932</b>	9	28	39	17	3	4
2018-19	<b>262,158,020</b>	8	24	43	17	5	3
2019-20	<b>243,596,569</b>	13	32	38	13	2	2
2020-21	<b>471,305,928</b>	58	22	13	5	1	1

#### Note

1 The table starts in 2015-16 because this is the last year before Sport England’s *Towards an Active Nation* strategy.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Sport England grants data

<sup>15</sup> The Football Foundation was the organisation awarded the most funding in this period, which included predetermined levels of funding from the Department, awarded via Sport England, for it to distribute in support of the National Football Facilities Strategy.

**2.21** The available data on organisations awarded grants by Sport England during the first four years of its strategy (2016-17 to 2019-20), before the COVID-19 pandemic, show the following (**Figure 11**):

- The number of organisations awarded grants reduced from 1,251 in 2016-17 to 1,190 in 2018-19 and then increased to 1,666 in 2019-20.
- There was no downward trend in the share of awards by volume (the number of awards) or value given to organisations that also had received a grant in the previous year.
- There was a high degree of concentration in the money awarded. For example, the share of Sport England's grant funding awarded to the top 20 organisations in each of the four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20 ranged from 40% to 48%.<sup>16</sup> The top two organisations themselves distribute Sport England funding to a range of recipients but Sport England does not hold complete data on these onward awards.<sup>17</sup>

**2.22** Some stakeholders suggested that organisations that are less entrenched in the system can find it difficult to break in. In reply, Sport England pointed to the difference between volume and value of awards: while 76% of awards by value in 2019-20 went to organisations that had also received an award in the previous year, by volume it was only 15%.

**2.23** During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the number of organisations to which Sport England awarded grant funding increased significantly, with an almost six-fold increase in 2020-21. This reflects the one-off support it provided to help the sector survive the pandemic, including the National Leisure Recovery Fund and Community Emergency Fund. This meant that, in 2020-21, 38% of Sport England's grants by value went to organisations that had not received funding in the previous year, compared with 24% in 2019-20. Sport England seeks to build on the opportunities from this shift (paragraph 3.11).

<sup>16</sup> Half the top 20 organisations awarded funding in the five years to 2020-21 were National Governing Bodies. The remaining organisations were largely a mix of charitable and public bodies. The top organisation awarded funding was the Football Foundation, which accounted for 20% of the funding awarded to the top 20 organisations in the five years to 2020-21.

<sup>17</sup> Excluding the top two organisations awarded grant funding, which themselves distributed Sport England funding to a range of recipients, the share of Sport England's grant funding awarded to the next top 20 organisations in each of the four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20 ranged from 34% to 46%.

**Figure 11**

Number of organisations in England awarded grants by Sport England and share of grant funding, 2015-16 to 2020-21<sup>1</sup>

**Sport England aimed to increase its supply chain of organisations it relied on to deliver its participation objectives from 2016, but the data on grant awards show no noticeable shift in this direction before the COVID-19 pandemic**

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Number of organisations awarded a grant	1,444	1,251	1,222	1,190	1,666	9,538
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Share of grant funding awarded to top 20 organisations in each year <sup>2</sup>	39	42	48	40	48	34
Share of grant awards <b>by value</b> that went to organisations that also received a grant in the previous year	74	68	65	75	76	62
Share of grant awards <b>by volume</b> that went to organisations that also received a grant in the previous year	23	22	16	22	15	6

**Notes**

- 1 The table starts in 2015-16 because this is the last year before Sport England's *Towards an Active Nation* strategy.
- 2 The top two organisations awarded grant funding between 2015-16 and 2020-21 themselves distribute Sport England funding to a range of recipients. Excluding these two organisations, the share of Sport England's grant funding awarded to the next top 20 organisations during this period ranged from 46% in 2017-18 to 30% in 2020-21.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Sport England grants data

**2.24** Although Sport England aims to target its spending at less active groups, such as women and lower socio-economic groups, its spending data are not sufficiently granular to track this fully. While it can identify programme-specific spend, it cannot identify how funds it has issued to national organisations are distributed geographically across the country. Using data on grants issued by Sport England at local level only (approximately £450 million of the £1.5 billion awarded in grants in the five years from 2016-17), we analysed the distribution of this spend to understand how successful Sport England has been in targeting the less active, including lower socio-economic groups. Spending is on average 23% higher per head of population in the most deprived local authorities than in the least deprived, but the share of grants received by the most deprived group of local authorities fell from 40% in the five years before the 2016 strategy to 34% in the five years afterwards (**Figure 12**). In general, there was no meaningful correlation between activity levels in a local authority and the level of local grant funding per head of population in that local authority (**Figure 13** on page 38).

**2.25** In 2020, Sport England commissioned research on under-representation of lower socio-economic groups in sport and physical activity. This found that applications for funding can be complicated and unconsciously biased against those from lower socio-economic groups. Sport England is now taking steps to overcome this, including simplifying the process and working with partners, such as the Richmond Group of Charities and their members, who may be better placed to reach these communities at risk of being disadvantaged in applications.

**Figure 12**

Local authorities in England by deprivation level: comparison of Sport England grant funding and activity indicators, 2011-12 to 2020-21

The most deprived local authorities received, on average, 23% higher funding per head of population than the least deprived local authorities in local grants but their share of these grants declined following Sport England's 2016 strategy. The adults in the most deprived local authorities were also less active

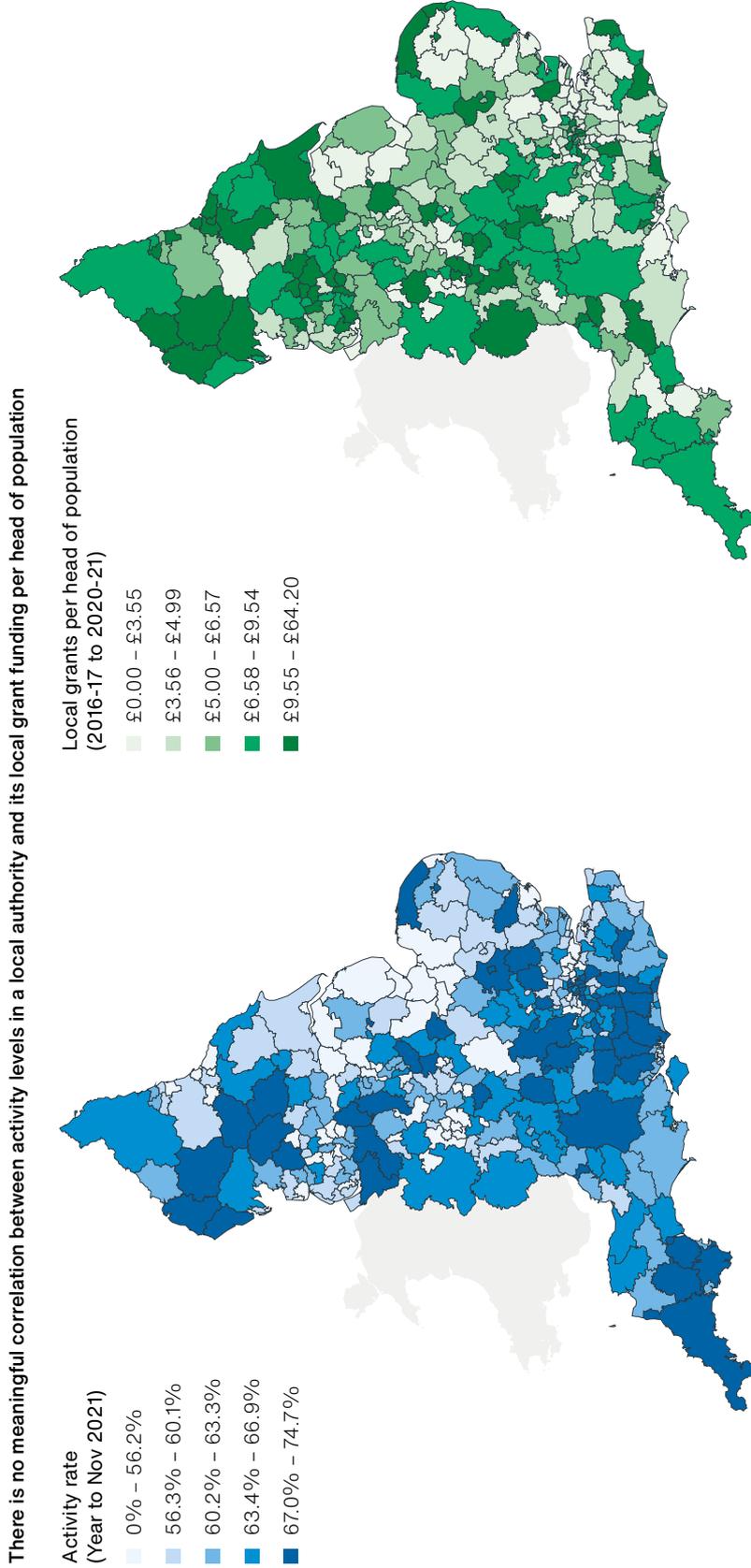
Local authority quintile by deprivation level	Sport England local grant funding per head of population (2016-17 to 2020-21) <sup>2</sup>	Share of local grants in five years before the 2016 strategy (2011-12 to 2015-16)	Share of local grants in five years after the 2016 strategy (2016-17 to 2020-21)	Proportion of adults who are active (year to Nov 2021) <sup>2</sup>
	(£)	(%)	(%)	(%)
First quintile – least deprived 20% of local authorities	5.33	12	15	67
Second quintile	5.02	12	15	62
Third quintile	5.35	15	15	62
Fourth quintile	6.29	21	21	59
Fifth quintile – most deprived 20% of local authorities	6.56	40	34	57

**Notes**

- 1 We split local authorities into five equally sized groups (same number of local authorities in each group) according to their Index of Multiple Deprivation, sourced from the English indices of deprivation 2019. We used the Index of Multiple Deprivation average scores from the local authority district summaries.
- 2 Values shown are the median value for the local authorities within that quintile.
- 3 The City of London and Isles of Scilly are excluded from the analysis.
- 4 Local grants are those grants that Sport England can trace to specific local authorities. These represent £450 million out of the total £1.5 billion in grants awarded in the period from 2016-17 to 2020-21 and £440 million out of the total £1.4 billion in grants awarded in the period from 2011-12 to 2015-16.
- 5 We calculated local grant funding per head data by dividing by the mid-2020 population estimates.
- 6 The percentage of adults who are active represents the percentage of adults aged 16+ who complete at least two and a half hours a week of moderate-intensity equivalent exercise. Each minute of vigorous activity counts as two moderate minutes. Activity levels shown are for the year to November 2021.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the following organisations: Sport England; Office for National Statistics; Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

**Figure 13** Local authorities in England: comparison of activity levels in the year to November 2021 with Sport England local grants per head of population in the five years to 2020-21



**Notes**

- 1 The activity levels shown are for the year to November 2021. Grants per head are calculated based on five years of funding following the *Towards an Active Nation strategy (2016-17 to 2020-21)*.
- 2 We tested the correlation between activity and local grant funding using standard statistical methods and found no meaningful correlation (correlation coefficient of 0.05). The City of London and Isles of Scilly were excluded from the analysis.
- 3 The activity rate represents the percentage of adults aged 16+ who completed at least two and a half hours a week of moderate-intensity equivalent exercise. Each minute of vigorous activity counts as two moderate minutes.
- 4 Local grants are those grants that Sport England can trace to specific local authorities. These represent £450 million out of the total £1.5 billion in grants awarded in the period from 2016-17 to 2020-21.
- 5 We calculated local grant funding per head data by dividing by the mid-2020 population estimates.
- 6 Data have been aggregated to 2020-21 local authority boundaries.
- 7 The legend key for each map splits the local authorities into five equally sized groups (same number of local authorities in each group).

Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from Sport England and Office for National Statistics

## Part Three

### Adopting an approach for the future

**3.1** This part of the report examines: the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (the Department) and Sport England's approach to monitoring and evaluation; their current and future plans for grassroots sport and physical activity, and how these reflected lessons learned from past approaches; the opportunities available for implementing these plans; some of the key challenges that may have an impact on the delivery of these plans; and the revised approach to the participation legacies of major sporting events.

#### **Lessons learned and future plans**

**3.2** In 2017, Sport England developed guidance for itself and for those in receipt of its grants on how to monitor and evaluate spending. It has also regularly evaluated its own individual programmes, such as local delivery pilots and national campaigns, and different funding streams to identify lessons learned.

**3.3** Sport England does not seek to compare the outcomes of its different types of spending – for example comparing national campaigns to local delivery pilots. It told us that this is because these have different objectives and delivery models, and because of complexities in how interventions interact in different places. There has also been a lack of consistency in the format and content of some of Sport England's evaluations, meaning that it has been unable to compare the effectiveness of its different interventions. In response to recommendations made by its Internal Audit team, in November 2021, Sport England published a new approach to evaluation and, as at June 2022, it was working on an action plan to implement it.

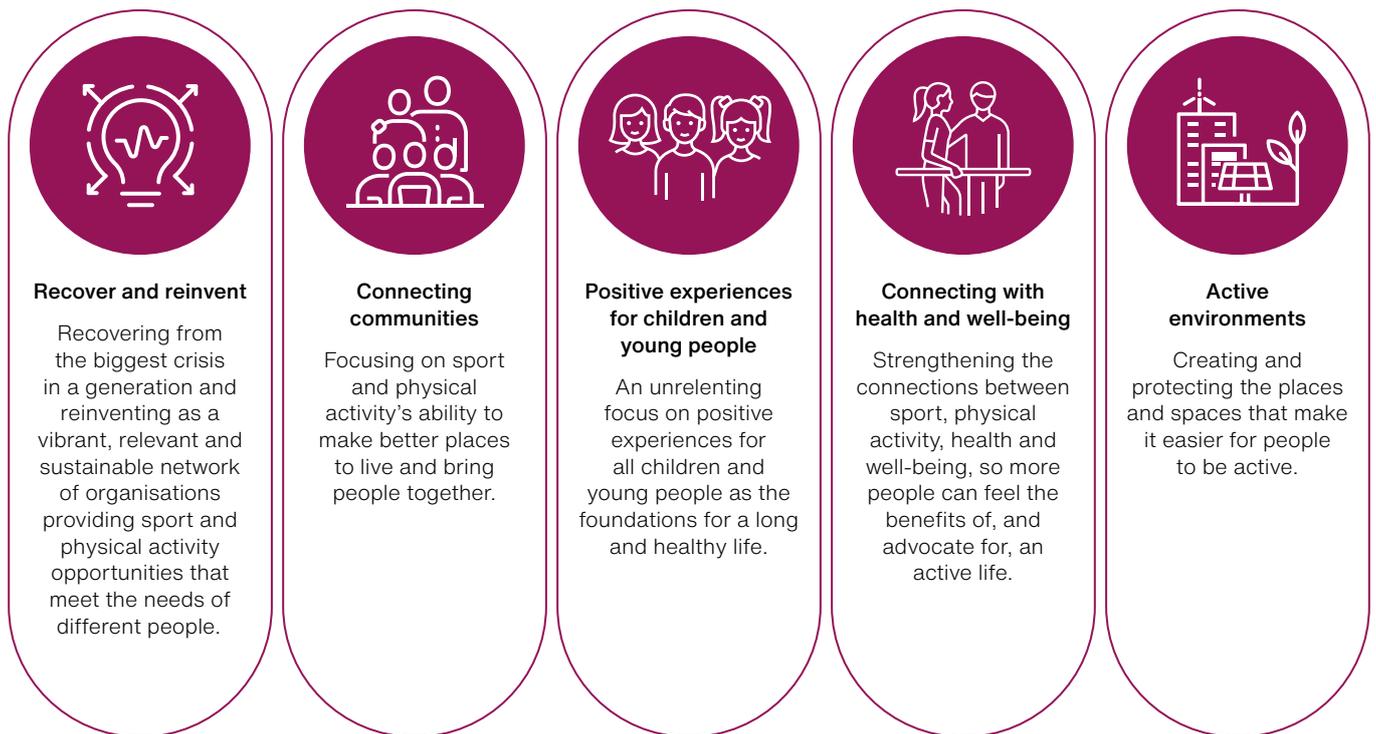
**3.4** In January 2021, Sport England launched a new strategy, *Uniting the Movement*, which builds on its 2016 strategy by continuing the focus on encouraging activity among the inactive (**Figure 14**). The new strategy also reflects some lessons learned: it gives greater prominence to addressing inequalities in participation, reflecting the previous mixed performance in addressing these (paragraphs 2.10 to 2.13); and it commits to expanding its place-based working based on the positive evaluation results of its local delivery pilots (paragraph 2.14). Sport England expects to invest around 25% of its funding between 2022 and 2025 into 'places', including local delivery and capital investment.

**Figure 14**

Sport England's *Uniting the Movement* strategy for England for 2021–2031

According to Sport England's *Uniting the Movement* strategy, its mission is to invest in sport and physical activity to make it a normal part of life for everyone in England, regardless of who they are, and to tackle existing inequalities in accessing such activity

Sport England aims to join forces with all relevant organisations to address five issues:



Source: Sport England's *Uniting the Movement* strategy, January 2021

**3.5** The strategy also commits to a more collaborative approach to influence and connect the sector, recognising that Sport England's role goes beyond providing funding. It intends to find new ways of sharing data and insight to help identify opportunities and encourage learning and sharing within the sector. This builds on its recent progress in collaborating with partners – for example, working with local authorities to share data on facilities usage during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some National Governing Bodies (NGBs) we spoke to said that Sport England could do more to share learning and support collaboration across the sector.

**3.6** Stakeholders' reaction since the publication of the strategy has been broadly positive. For example, some stakeholders we spoke to welcomed the emphasis on a system-wide approach. But one stakeholder cautioned us that delivery of the strategy would be difficult without a significant increase in funding or change in approach across government.

**3.7** In its strategy, Sport England sets out the principles by which it will measure success. It aims to go beyond measuring performance using national participation targets because this approach does not identify any causation between its spending and participation levels (paragraph 2.4). Instead, it intends to capture not only the specific impacts of its programmes, interventions, partnerships and influence, but also how its work adds up to national-level change. It has therefore committed to developing key performance indicators for each specific area of work that can allow progress to be monitored, and lessons to be identified and implemented.

**3.8** Sport England reported internally to the Department in 2021-22 on performance indicators agreed for the first year of its strategy. As at June 2022, it was still working with the Department on developing published performance indicators to measure its strategy's success. The Department told us this delay is so that it can ensure that the indicators align with its own new strategy due in summer 2022. While supportive of Sport England's new approach to measuring success, some NGBs we spoke to pointed out that the shift towards more qualitative, outcome-focused performance measurement had so far made it more difficult for them to identify Sport England's expectations for their funding.

**3.9** The Department plans to publish a new strategy in summer 2022 to replace 2015's *Sporting Future*. According to the Department, one of its new priorities will be to work across government to ensure greater joining up between the sector and government departments. There are signs that system-wide collaboration on sport and physical activity may be increasing following the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in March 2022, the government signalled that the Health Promotion Taskforce, a cabinet committee to drive cross-government efforts to improve the nation's health, supporting economic recovery and levelling up, would discuss physical activity at its next meeting. The Department is also seeking to build on its increased collaboration with the sector during the pandemic, which some stakeholders commented positively on, through two new stakeholder forums.

**3.10** The Department has not evaluated whether its 2015 *Sporting Future* strategy achieved its objectives. It told us that it expects to set out within its new strategy how it will measure success, and that this will involve more quantitative and qualitative evidence than activity surveys alone. However, it was still working on how it would collect such evidence. As at June 2022, the extent to which this new strategy and Sport England's 2021 strategy were aligned was unclear.

### **Opportunities and challenges**

**3.11** The launch of new strategies by the Department and Sport England provides an opportunity to draw on lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. Sport England gave out extra funding to support organisations during the pandemic, including to groups it had not previously funded. For example, it worked with partners to distribute funding from its Tackling Inequalities Fund to community organisations, over 80% of which had never received Sport England funding before. Sport England said it had reached many organisations that might not have previously applied for funding and which were well placed to communicate directly with its intended audiences. It aims to continue improving its understanding of how to reach and work with these organisations. For example, it is developing a portfolio of 'system partners', which will receive around half of its funding between 2022 and 2025. The portfolio will include new and existing partners including those not traditionally considered sports organisations.

**3.12** The Department and Sport England recognise the opportunity to build on the above developments in their future approach, although the sector faces challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. England's sports facilities are delivered through a mix of public and private provision, and both types were hit by enforced closures during the pandemic.<sup>18</sup> Commercial providers used reserves to stay afloat, while the Local Government Association reported in November 2021 that district councils, unitary councils and metropolitan boroughs faced a £600 million revenue deficit in the sport and leisure sector. The Department and Sport England distributed £100 million through the National Leisure Recovery Fund to local authorities to support the recovery of publicly owned leisure centres and gyms. In January 2022, membership had not returned to pre-pandemic levels at some facilities, being as low as 40% of pre-pandemic levels in some places.

<sup>18</sup> The Local Government Association (LGA) told us that public leisure services contribute to communities by providing affordable and accessible provision for all, stepping in where private provision cannot afford to operate, such as in rural and more deprived areas. According to the LGA, these facilities have a key outreach role in engaging the less active, such as in offering discounts to disabled people.

**3.13** In this financial climate, some leisure providers are converting their facilities from team sports towards more commercially viable activities such as gyms. The Department is concerned about the impact of this on inactive groups as the use of gyms by lower socio-economic groups is reducing. More generally, our analysis of facilities in England shows that these are shared by more people in the most deprived local authorities (**Figure 15**). According to Sport England, people living in disadvantaged or less affluent areas are also less likely to have access to safe walking routes or quality open green spaces.

### Figure 15

Local authorities in England by deprivation level: comparison of average number of people sharing each sporting facility in 2022

**Facilities are shared by more people in the most deprived local authorities**

Local authority quintile by deprivation level	People per sporting facility
First quintile – least deprived 20% of local authorities	428
Second quintile	499
Third quintile	553
Fourth quintile	682
Fifth quintile – most deprived 20% of local authorities	752

#### Notes

- 1 We split local authorities into five equally sized groups (same number of local authorities in each group) according to their Index of Multiple Deprivation, sourced from the English indices of deprivation 2019. We have used the Index of Multiple Deprivation average scores from the local authority district summaries. The City of London and Isles of Scilly were excluded from the analysis.
- 2 Figures shown are the facilities position as of 1 February 2022 and are the median level in the quintile of local authorities. People per sporting facility in each local authority was calculated by dividing its population as per mid-2020 population estimates by its total number of sporting facilities.
- 3 Facilities are all private or public facilities of the following type: golf courses and driving ranges, grass pitches, ski slopes, indoor bowls, squash courts, sports hall, outdoor tennis courts, swimming pool, athletics venues, ice rinks, indoor tennis centre, health and fitness gym, cycling venues, fitness or cycling studio, artificial grass pitch.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from Sport England, Office for National Statistics and Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

**3.14** Sport England recognises that much of the existing facilities stock is old and that this is contributing to user dissatisfaction (**Figure 16**). However, the Department rejected a call from the Local Government Association for a one-off £1 billion capital investment into the leisure estate to bring it up to modern design and environmental standards.<sup>19</sup> The Department told us that a more nuanced approach was required to identify the funds needed by reviewing the provision of facilities at a local level according to community needs. It is working on a cross-sector strategy to tackle the challenges. But, as at June 2022, it had not finalised its plans for working with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities to improve the condition of public facilities. Sport England told us that its main role here is to provide advice and guidance to leisure centres – it sees itself as only a small funder of facilities through its Strategic Facilities Fund.

### **The new approach to major event legacies**

**3.15** The Department’s understanding of the impact of major events on participation has shifted since 2012. In 2018, the Department and UK Sport published a revised framework that set out how they would support the bidding and staging of major sporting events in the UK. It set out the importance of early legacy planning, noting that the five outcomes from *Sporting Future* should be at the forefront of such planning. The Department told us that the framework has guided its preparations for subsequent major sporting events. For example, the government contributed £15 million for local community cycling facilities to support the legacy from the 2019 cycling UCI Road World Championships and £10 million for local clubs and community projects for the 2021 Rugby League World Cup legacy programme.<sup>20</sup>

**3.16** The Department’s legacy plans for the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games reflect its learning that major events tend to have an impact on already active people (paragraph 1.9), and it has therefore shifted towards a more targeted approach to tackling inactivity. Instead of aiming to achieve nationwide increases in participation, the Department initially aimed to “inspire and offer targeted opportunities for the people of the West Midlands to improve and sustain levels of physical activity”, with a particular focus on the most inactive and under-represented groups. Programmes to support this include Sport England spending £3.1 million in four communities in the West Midlands to tackle inequalities and inactivity. The Department later sought to expand the reach outside the West Midlands to align with major national events in 2022. This led to programmes such as Sport England awarding £6.5 million to NGBs to tackle inequalities within their sport. In total, Sport England is spending £35 million on national and local legacy programmes.

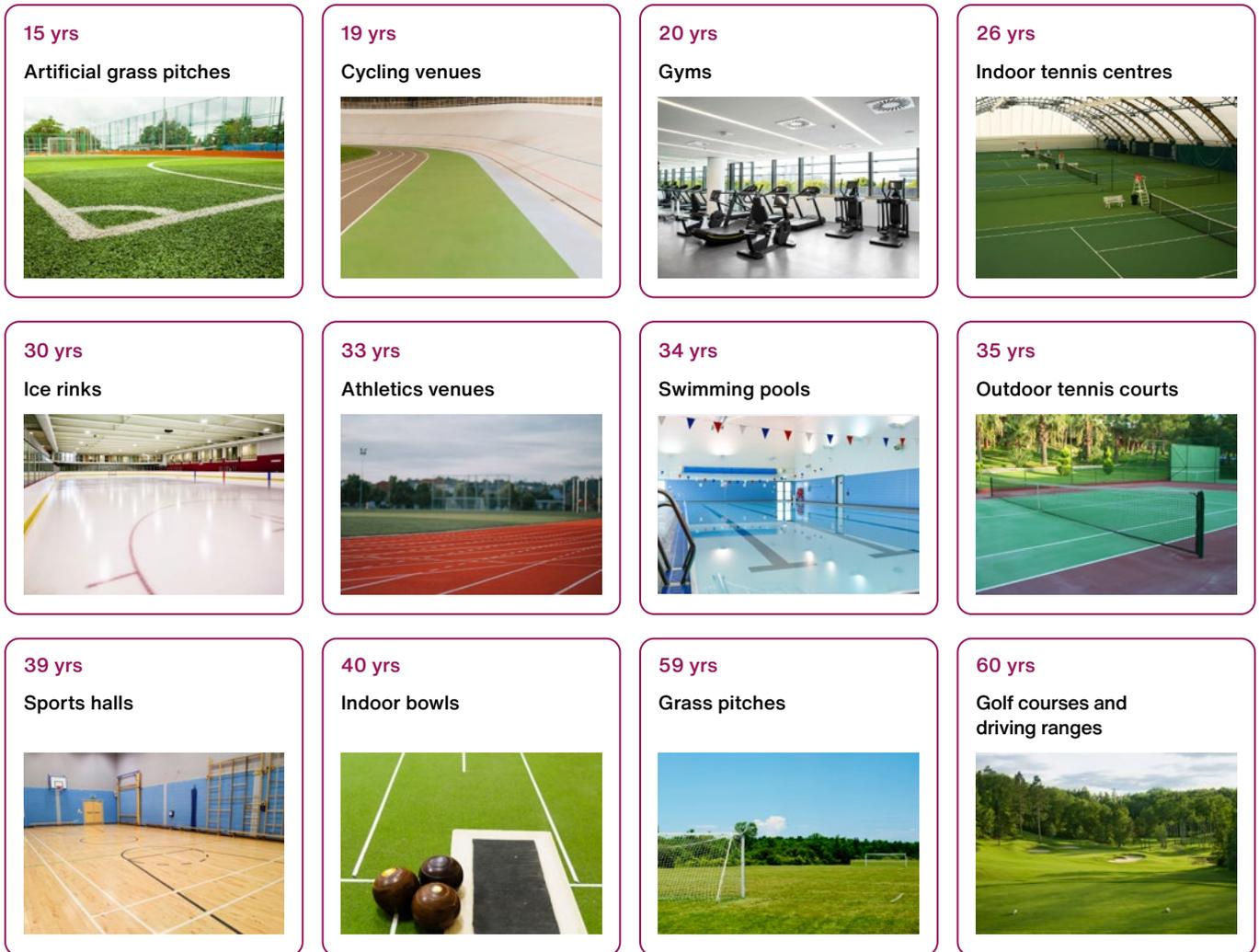
<sup>19</sup> Leisure facilities account for up to 40% of some local authorities’ direct carbon emissions.

<sup>20</sup> The Rugby League World Cup was postponed from 2021 to 2022 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure 16**

Comparison of average age of selected sports facilities in England in 2022, measured from date of construction

Many types of sporting facilities have an average age of more than 30 years



**Note**

1 Age is measured by the number of years from date of first construction to 1 February 2022. Average is calculated as the mean of all ages for the facilities of that type.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Sport England Active Places data

**3.17** There are, however, signs that the Department missed opportunities to apply other lessons learned. The 2013 evaluation of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games (paragraph 1.9) noted the importance of having a clear legacy vision at the outset, and of agreeing objectives and resources early. The Department set out from 2019 its intention for the 2022 Commonwealth Games to bring health and well-being benefits, but it did not ring-fence any funding for legacy in the £778 million public Games budget. Funding has since been committed by a partnership of organisations to support legacy ambitions first set out in a March 2021 *Legacy Plan*. In the plan, Sport England committed £4 million to support the physical activity legacy, which it has since increased to £35 million in line with its and the Department's strategic objectives. The Department recently told the Digital, Culture, Media & Sport Committee that it is "not unusual" for the "more creative elements" of an event to be funded from outside the core games budget.<sup>21</sup> It also told us that it considers the public expenditure of £778 million on the Games, notably the assets created such as the Sandwell Aquatics Centre and redevelopment of the Alexander Stadium, is itself the central legacy.

**3.18** Given the Department considers that the long-term impact of legacy is difficult to measure, it plans for a final Games-wide evaluation report on the 2022 Games one year after the event. It expects this report to indicate the trajectory of anticipated longer-term benefits.

<sup>21</sup> Digital, Culture, Media & Sport Committee, *Major cultural and sporting events*, Ninth Report of Session 2021–22, HC 259, 16 March 2022, oral evidence question 321.

# Appendix One

## Our evidence base

**1** Our independent conclusions were reached following our analysis of evidence collected between October 2021 and April 2022. We examined value for money by considering achievement of intended objectives; monitoring and evaluating impacts of spending; promoting equality and diversity; and effectiveness of oversight and collaboration (paragraph 6).

### **Qualitative analysis**

#### Interviews with government departments and arm's-length bodies

**2** We held 14 interviews with officials from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (the Department) and Sport England about their work since 2012. These meetings covered topics including:

- physical activity legacies from major sporting events;
- strategic approaches over time, considering objectives (including those to promote equality and diversity), progress against these and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- collaboration across government and the wider sector; and
- governance, oversight, evaluation and monitoring of spending.

**3** We also interviewed officials from other government departments and bodies to understand their role within the wider system, and the extent to which they collaborate with the Department and Sport England. These included:

- the Department for Education;
- the Department for Transport;
- the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities;
- UK Sport; and
- the Birmingham Organising Committee for the 2022 Commonwealth Games Limited.

## Stakeholder interviews

**4** We interviewed a broad range of stakeholders to seek external perspectives from across the sector. This included sector representatives and membership bodies representing local government, the commercial leisure sector and sporting bodies. It also included groups representing specific demographics, and individuals and bodies involved in delivering the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic legacy. This was supplemented by stakeholders suggested as relevant by the Department and Sport England, and those whose research we encountered during our fieldwork. We interviewed:

- Active Partnerships;
- Activity Alliance;
- Dr Anna Lowe PhD, Sheffield Hallam University;
- Emma Boggis, former Head of the Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Unit;
- Exeter City Council;
- Local Government Association;
- Lord Sebastian Coe CH KBE, former Legacy Ambassador for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games;
- Matt Rogan, author of *All to Play For - How sport can reboot our future*;
- Parliamentary staff for the National Plan for Sport and Recreation House of Lords Select Committee;
- Spirit of 2012;
- Sport and Recreation Alliance;
- The Association of Directors of Public Health;
- The District Councils' Network;
- The Sports Think Tank;
- Three Rivers District Council; and
- ukactive.

**5** Interviews took place between December 2021 and March 2022 and were carried out both face to face and online. They typically lasted one hour. We explored stakeholders' experiences and perspectives on a range of themes including:

- the challenges and opportunities for grassroots participation in sport and physical activity, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- the government's strategic approaches and interventions;
- the extent of collaboration across government and the wider sector, including experience of working with the Department and Sport England; and
- physical activity legacies from major sporting events.

**6** We also hosted a roundtable discussion in April 2022 with representatives from National Governing Bodies (NGBs). These were selected to provide perspectives from a range of NGBs by sport and funding received from Sport England. During the roundtable we explored the NGBs' perspectives and experiences of their funding from, and relationship with, Sport England. Those who attended or contributed written evidence were:

- England Athletics;
- England Netball;
- Goalball UK;
- Parkour UK;
- The British Mountaineering Council;
- The Football Association; and
- The Rugby Football Union.

**7** We drew out the main findings and commonalities from our interviews and the roundtable discussion. This was used to inform further lines of inquiry that we followed up with the Department and to explore some of the most common themes in our report.

## Document review

**8** We reviewed documents to assist with:

- defining the scope of the audit and deepening our understanding;
- informing further discussion and follow-up with the Department and Sport England; and
- informing our findings and triangulating findings from other sources including interviews and data analysis.

**9** The documents we reviewed included:

- published strategies, reports and policy papers from government departments and bodies and other stakeholders;
- board meeting minutes and papers for the Department and Sport England, including risk registers, internal audit reports and performance monitoring reports;
- Department and Sport England evaluation and research documents; and
- governance documents, including management agreements and Accounting Officer system statements.

**10** Our review was carried out between October 2021 and April 2022. We reviewed each document to understand:

- strategic approaches to participation in sport and physical activity;
- progress in achieving objectives; and
- the approach for the future.

**11** In terms of limitations to the evidence we collected and reviewed in paragraph 1.7 we report that Sport England told us that the change in its measurement focus following the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games was due to a request from the Minister for Sport. Sport England was unable to provide evidence to substantiate this, which it considers is due to this being a decade ago.

## Quantitative analysis

**12** We analysed data, mainly from the Department and Sport England. The key data sources are as follows:

- Sport England's Annual Report and Accounts. We conducted financial analysis of Sport England's income and expenditure between 2015-16 and 2020-21. All financial data are reported in nominal terms (paragraphs 1.2 to 1.3 and Figure 1).
- Sport England's database of all grant awards. We analysed awards between 2011-12 and 2020-21 to understand the trend over time in the volume, value and concentration of grants awarded to organisations in England. Our analysis of the number of organisations funded is based on the organisation's name within the database. Our analysis of the location of grants awarded focuses on a subset of the grant population, which represents the grants that can be traced to specific local authorities. These represent £450 million out of the total £1.5 billion in grants awarded in the period from 2016-17 to 2020-21 and £440 million out of the total £1.4 billion in grants awarded in the period from 2011-12 to 2015-16. We used these data to understand how successful Sport England has been in targeting spending at less active groups, including lower socio-economic groups. We split local authorities into five equally sized groups (same number of local authorities in each group) according to their Index of Multiple Deprivation, sourced from the English indices of deprivation 2019. Given the size of each group, median levels were used instead of averages to reduce risk of skewing. The City of London and Isles of Scilly were excluded from the analysis. These two local authorities can display unusual patterns, thereby skewing local authority level analysis (paragraphs 2.19, 2.21 to 2.24 and Figures 10 to 13).

- Sport England's Active Lives survey for adults aged 16 and over. This reports twice-yearly on activity levels and outcomes in England since November 2015 and polls around 180,000 adults. The data are provided at a population-wide level, as well as at a local authority level. They are also broken down by demographic characteristics, such as age and ethnicity. We analysed the full year results for years ending mid-November 2016 to mid-November 2021, the most recent results available at publication. We used these data to identify trends in activity rates at a national and local authority level, as well as by demographic groups. In comparing survey figures over time, we considered a change in variable as statistically significant if the 95% confidence levels do not overlap. For example, in the year to November 2019, the percentage of adults who were active was between 62.9% and 63.6% with a 95% level of confidence. In the year to November 2016, the percentage of adults who were active was between 61.8% and 62.4% with a 95% level of confidence. These two confidence intervals do not overlap, so we say that there was a statistically significant increase in population activity levels between the year to November 2016 and the year to November 2019. Our reporting of Sport England's progress between 2016 and 2019 against its activity targets for women aged 16–60 and lower socio-economic groups (paragraphs 2.10 and 2.11) is based on data reported to us by Sport England, not on published data from the Active Lives survey. In paragraph 2.17, the most deprived areas are characterised by Sport England as those with an Index of Multiple Deprivation of between 1 and 3, and the least deprived areas as an Index of Multiple Deprivation of between 8 and 10 (paragraphs 2.8 to 2.17 and Figures 6, 8, 9, 12 and 13).
- Sport England's Active People survey. This survey was the predecessor to the Active Lives survey, although the data are not directly comparable because of differences in scope and methodology. We used these data to analyse trends in national activity levels for those aged 16+ between the years ending October 2006 and October 2016. We used the same approach as documented above for the Active Lives survey to calculate whether changes over time were statistically significant (paragraphs 1.5, 1.7 and Figure 3).
- Sport England's Active Places database. We used these data to analyse the age and distribution of facilities across England. These data record all sporting facilities in England of the following type: artificial grass pitches; athletics venues; cycling venues; golf courses and driving ranges; grass pitches; health and fitness gyms; ice rinks; indoor bowls; indoor tennis centres; outdoor tennis courts; ski slopes; sports halls; squash courts; fitness or cycling studios; and swimming pools. Some facilities are not included in the database, such as multi-use games areas or skate parks. For each facility included, the database includes information about characteristics such as ownership type and age. Our analysis is based on facilities with an operational status of operational; under construction; temporarily closed; and temporarily closed COVID. The dataset is updated daily. This report uses data downloaded as at 1 February 2022 (paragraph 3.13 and Figures 15 and 16).

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