



On Tuesday 4 November, 2014, *The Sports Think Tank* hosted a roundtable discussion entitled: *The 2015 Election: What are the sport manifesto priorities?* The outcomes of this discussion will form part of a wider piece of research designed to capture the views and opinions of those working at the forefront of sport on the current 'state of play' in sport in the UK and where the priorities should lie for the next government. The detailed results of this research are forthcoming, but below is an overview of the event, a sample of the topics covered and the strands that emerged from over two hours of in-depth debate and discussion.

Twelve participants representing disparate parts of the sport sector were invited to debate questions on sport policy in a discussion chaired by *Sports Think Tank* founder and director, Andy Reed OBE. The questions at hand included: What has sport policy achieved in the last ten years? What are the future roles of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Department of Health? Are *Sport England* and *UK Sport* fit for purpose? What can be achieved in the next parliament and do we need a 10-year, cross-party strategy for sports policy? What should the sports policy priorities be at the next election? In the process of addressing these questions, the following themes emerged.

Sport: Roles and Definitions

Any policies designed to guide sport must be founded on clear definitions. There was consensus around the table that confusion exists over how sport is defined and what is the purpose of current sport policy. There was much discussion around the lack of clarity among politicians and governmental organisations on whether sport encompasses physical activity, for example, and also for what purpose sport should be defined: to reflect its role in public health? Or to set the boundaries for which activities can be centrally funded with a view to growing participation and winning medals at major events? Based on the role of elite sport and major events as exports and levers of 'soft power', then in many respects the last ten years has been a success, but this is a stark contrast to the promises of 'inspiring a generation' and greater participation for all.

The Sports Landscape

The sports sector has drawn criticism in the past for being too crowded and complicated, with overwhelming numbers of agencies, bodies and organisations competing for recognition. This is a view echoed at this discussion with the main outcome identified as a lack of unity in the sector, leading to the absence of a clear voice on policy that can affect significant influence on politicians and decision-makers.

Who Governs Sport?

The DCMS has only a dozen staff devoted to the entire sport sector. Without a clear definition of sport, how is it decided which department is responsible? DCMS, the Department of Health or the Department for Education? There is concern that departments create barriers within government and that the sector is suffering through the lack of clearly defined roles. The changing role of Sport England was also discussed, and how it impacts on progress and innovation in the sport sector.

Local Government

It was debated how best to guarantee sports provision in every community and the best role for local authorities in achieving this. It was established that the deepest of the local government austerity cuts were still to come, despite the potential for more money to be made available through public health budgets and the increasing onus on local authorities in this area. The question arose as to whether local authorities are currently efficient enough in recognising and monitoring their own resources and facilities. It was agreed that any sports policy needs to be adaptable and take in local needs, while the potential for statutory regulation governing local sports provision was also discussed.

Technology and Innovation

Digital technology and more general innovation in the sector were significant themes in the debate, with initiatives like *Park Run* singled-out for praise in driving the participation in the amount of people running, outside the traditional sphere of *Sport England* and the NGB structure. The role of sport policy in recognising and encouraging innovation like this was discussed, along with how digital technology and data can help break down barriers of communication that currently exist in grassroots sport.

School Sport

School sport and PE was raised as a problem area for the next government. Roundtable participants questioned whether policy needs to be more prescriptive over what 'Two hours Physical Education' actually means in the light of concerns that school PE lessons aren't very physical and reports that an average of only 22 minutes in each hour is spent engaged in physical activity. The need for a clear structure to support physical literacy from pre-school age through to 16 years old was suggested, along with the necessity of specialist PE teachers and clearer, more effective leadership among PE teachers to define their role, and that of physical education itself. There is too much confusion over the boundaries between sport, PE, exercise and play – independent evidence on sport in schools and a flexible approach to policy-making is required.