



**SPORT
ENGLAND**



Shaping our Future

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[sportengland.org](https://www.sportengland.org)



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Introduction from our CEO



For over nine months now, Sport England has been considering our current strategy and how it might

need updating and adapting for the decade ahead. We have been talking with a wide community of people who care about physical activity and sport. We have gathered thousands of perspectives on what really matters about what we do and how we do it.

We have been reflecting on the life of our organisation so far; our previous choices, what we have learnt from experience, and what it means for our next steps.

Given all this, we began to form a good idea of where we were and where we wanted to go in the future. We were on track for publishing this in early autumn.

Then – with the outbreak of a global pandemic – our world quickly changed in ways that did not seem plausible even a few weeks before. In the crisis of the outbreak, and the social and economic shock of the measures needed to control it, we have significantly changed our approach

– focusing solely on supporting the network of people and organisations who are the fabric of activity and sport and on helping the nation to stay active.

We know there is much more work to do and it will continue to be challenging. We are all trying to protect what we love and value, whilst coping with fear and loss, and finding ways to adapt to the situation that is unfolding. Every day we face more uncertainty than we are used to or were prepared for.

But there are reasons to be hopeful. Within the struggle, we are seeing signs that new foundations are emerging for the rebuilding of sport, physical activity, leisure and fitness. There is hope that we might emerge from lockdown as a nation of people who recognise that movement matters.

We are changing our national values around activity. Exercise is being redefined as a necessity, rather than a recreational choice or luxury. We are repeatedly hearing that exercise is a priority for the nation. The government has deemed it essential, along with food and medicine.

This seems to be shaping mindsets. Most adults are now telling us that they think being active is more important than before and are using physical activity to stay physically and mentally healthy.

The changes in our everyday lives have clearly been a massive disruption to our habits. In the midst of coping with our changing circumstances, many people are doing more activity, and experiencing different activities than usual. These could be the beginnings of new choices for people. But we may also be placing more value on the types of activities that we did before the outbreak; most of us say that we miss what we used to do.

But we cannot be remotely complacent because, alongside this, many others are doing less. We can already see that older people, those who are on low incomes, are living in urban areas, or are living alone, and disabled people, are finding it harder to be active during the outbreak. There is a real risk that, despite our best efforts and good intentions, the inequalities in activity get even bigger.

These are just some of the big shifts that we are starting to see. And, whilst we will continue to focus on what is needed today, we recognise that we are also part of shaping the role that physical activity and sport will play as we all emerge from this crisis.

This is a moment to set new ambitions for how we work – within Sport England and with our partners – to make sure that we are all part of the solution. Yet we know that this is not a time for creating concrete plans or projecting too far into the future. Fast-changing conditions can quickly make any plans obsolete. What seems to be the solution today is unlikely to be in two months' time.

“ There is a real risk that, despite our best efforts and good intentions, the inequalities in activity get even bigger”

Like many others, we have needed to take fast action in the past few weeks. In the most urgent moments, we have found ourselves guided by the things people have told us about what matters most. We have realised that – amid uncertainty – there are some things that remain resolutely important. These are the things that enable us to navigate uncharted territory; a sense of purpose, our core values, and a network of trusting relationships.

This is a more adaptive sort of strategy, a way to stay focused in our work and make good decisions and choices in the context of complexity and uncertainty.

That is the purpose of this document. As we highlight in more detail on the next page, it is both a signal of the direction that we want to go towards with our future strategy, and a way for us to navigate the coming days, weeks and months. As we change and adapt, this is what we will reform around.

Tim Hollingsworth
Chief executive



What's this document for?

We've talked with hundreds of partners, contacts and colleagues about how our strategy could evolve.

We deliberately set out to ask questions and gather different perspectives about what matters most to people about our next strategy. These voices have played a huge part in shaping our thinking.

We originally created this document to test what we've heard so far, and the direction that we're going in, to shape our next strategy. In recent weeks, it's not only remained relevant but taken on new significance as a framework to guide our choices and actions through an uncertain time.

This represents a very different approach for us – to share some emerging direction whilst it's partially formed – and with the intention of shaping it further with others.

We really want to hear the views of the people who share our ambitions.

We welcome feedback on this framework. We especially recognise that the collective sense of what matters most may well be changing. Please see the ['What comes next'](#) and ['How can I respond now'](#) sections for ways to tell us what you think.

The purpose that drives us

A strong theme of our strategy conversations so far has been a call for us to join up efforts across interests and organisations, to combine forces and become more than the sum of our parts.

At the heart of this is the very practical sense that working together well requires shared purpose: clarity on what really matters and how we each play our part in contributing to that.

We've all seen the power of shared purpose recently: through the lens of the crisis that has been caused by the outbreak of Covid-19.

Our colleagues, partners and potential partners have indicated in feedback so far that they're not currently clear enough about what we're really trying to achieve, or what we think our role is.

In response, we've created a new clear statement of our purpose – a vision for the future that drives us. You'll find our purpose statement on the [next page](#).

We believe that we share our vision of the future with others. It's much bigger than Sport England. We won't be able to achieve this alone – it will take the organisations who share this ambition to work together to succeed.

But we know that we have a unique and important contribution to make. Our next strategy will be an explanation of the role we plan to play, and how we plan to do it.



Our purpose



When we move, we are stronger.

**That's true for each of us.
And it's true for our nation.**

Movement makes us happier and healthier. It opens up opportunities and brings communities together. It's essential for our wellbeing and has the power to make life better and fairer for everyone. And that's why Sport England is here.

If we can help everyone move more – by enabling people to find and enjoy the activities and sports they choose – we can play our part in creating:

- **More integrated and resilient communities**, actively involved in shaping the places they want to live in.
- **A stronger economy** – boosted by the huge cost benefits of people with better mental and physical health, living in less divided communities: from relieving pressure on our National Health Service to reducing prison populations.
- **A society where physical activity is the norm** – powered by thriving grassroots groups and clubs up and down the country.

Some people will succeed on the national and international stage – becoming positive role models to millions and giving us a shared sense of pride. But above all, we want to create an environment where every single child has the chance to reach their full potential.

That's what 'winning' looks like for us.

We can't do it alone. We can only succeed if we realise that this isn't an individual pursuit. We're part of a much bigger team. And that's why we'll work with organisations, locally and nationally, who share our ambitions – whatever their sector or industry.

Sometimes we'll lead. Sometimes we'll listen. We won't have all the answers, but we can share valuable knowledge and bring together expert voices.

We're here to champion the role of sport and activity, so all of us can enjoy the benefits of being active. That means our ambition is for everyone – and the life-changing difference that we can make together.

We are Sport England.

Our values

Our values are the ways that we'll enshrine our purpose in our everyday choices and behaviours. We're determined to not just say them, but to live them.

We want to work with people who want to work in this way – and we want people to call us out when we're falling short.



We are collaborative

One team, committed to delivering together and working with others to make a difference to people's lives.



We are inclusive

Harnessing our collective strengths and respecting difference to create the conditions for everyone to engage and excel.



We are ambitious

Determined in pursuit of our goals, prioritising work and partnerships that will most advance our mission, help us to succeed and make a positive impact on the nation.



We are innovative

Curious, optimistic and relentless, we question established ways of working and learn from each other and from our experiences.

What we'll do

What we've heard:

- **Be unashamed in channelling the most resource where it's most needed** – focus on the people who need the most help to live active lives.
- **Support the backbone of sport and activity** – guard against a pendulum swing. Make sure there's support for those who are currently active, and those who are talented, and don't take them for granted.
- **Step up on the big issues** – there are some major systemic issues that require Sport England to lead a joined-up response.
- **Deliver the basics brilliantly** – simplify your processes, make it easy to find information, make it clear what support is available, to who, when and how.

What this means for our next strategy:

Channel resources where they're most needed

We – and many of our partners – believe that the people who need the most help to be active, and would benefit the most from it, should get the most support.

We'll maintain universal support for people across the country, but the scale and intensity of that support will be greater where the need is greatest. We plan to prioritise our resources around the people and the places that need it the most – especially those facing disadvantage or additional barriers, who have not had equal access to opportunities.

We think that this is the way to create a more level playing field when it comes to access,

quality of experience, and outcomes. For more people to take part and have meaningful experiences, we need to change the rules of the game.

The way that we plan to do this is by establishing collaborations between a variety of partners who are well-placed to reach:

- **People** – we'll want to work with partners who can help us really understand and reach the people that we're not currently reaching.
- **Places** – we increasingly understand that the things that influence activity levels the most are in the places where we live. The things that shape how much activity we do are our families, friends, the streets and parks around us, the opportunities that are provided to us and the obstacles that get in our way. We'll want to work with partners in the places where we see the biggest inequalities.

Support the backbone of sport and activity

At the beginning of 2020, around 28 million adults and 3 million children were living active lives through combinations of different activities. For most, this involved lifestyle choices like walking or cycling to get somewhere. Around half took part in fitness (in leisure centres, gyms, parks and at home) and played sports, either competitively or informally. We know that people choose different combinations of things to stay active, and that these choices change as their lives and needs change. We've seen people adapting what they do to stay active considerably in 2020 due to the restrictions introduced by the government as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

We've also seen that, for many people, sport plays a role in their lives that goes beyond a way to be active and healthy. The absence of national and international sport events in 2020 has highlighted what our nation values about it. Sport can be a unifier, especially in difficult times – a vehicle for people and communities to come together, to celebrate who they are and what they represent.

We're proud of our support for the sport sector and the organisations who govern sport and talent pathways at all levels and safeguard the people who take part.

The experiences they provide are often some of the first experiences that children have of activity, and it's crucial that these are designed to be as meaningful and enjoyable as possible.

We want to work to not only maintain but enhance the core infrastructure of sport and activity – the network of facilities, spaces and clubs that provide places to play.

We want to support the vital workforce of instructors, coaches, and volunteers that support people day-in-day-out to take part in activity and sport.

We'd like to work more closely with those providing leisure and fitness experiences, to collaborate around cross-sector challenges and opportunities.

Step up on the big issues

The things that impact on people's ability to be active, and on the organisations who support activity, are often outside of what we'd consider to be the 'sport sector' or 'leisure sector.' They're contextual issues, that are going on around us, and are often well beyond the control of any person or organisation. This has never been more evident than it is now.

We've heard that there's a desire for us to lead a joined-up response to some of these issues, bringing the relevant organisations together to experiment with solutions. This guided us in our response to the crisis caused by coronavirus.



Brilliant basics

We plan to make the things that underpin all our work simpler and easier – for our colleagues and our partners. Across all our relationships and investments, some of our systems, platforms and processes can cause frustration and delays for us and our partners. We plan to invest so that the basic information, guidance and support feels brilliantly simple to give and receive.

It's important that our ways of working are easy and accessible to all, and that we're consciously removing the barriers in our processes that could reinforce unequal access to support and funding.

The big issues

The big issues that people suggest we should play a role in are:

- **Tackling inequalities** – for a long time, it's been evident that the way sport and activity experiences are designed and delivered typically meets the needs of some people more than others. Partners are clear that some people need more support to get active and stay active than others, and that it will take a determined and co-ordinated effort to tackle inequalities in sport and physical activity.
- **Climate emergency** – partners have told us that this represents some tangible threats, as well as opportunities to be part of the solution.
- **Connecting with health and wellbeing** – a sense of unlocked potential, especially around social prescribing into sport and activity.
- **Digital and data** – concern that sport and leisure has fallen behind other sectors in terms of the digital experience and needs to catch up.
- **Workforce** – how we can sustain, grow, develop and diversify the professional workforce and volunteers.
- **Active environments** – creating the spaces and places for people to be more active and planning to make it more joined-up for people.
- **Diminishing local resources and capacity** – fears about ongoing reductions in local government spending on activity, sport and leisure. A sense that places are losing capacity and capability to make strategic long-term decisions.
- **School experiences** – often the first and most equal opportunities that children and young people have access to – which shape their relationship with movement for the rest of their lives – are felt to be low priority for many schools.

How we'll work

What we've heard:

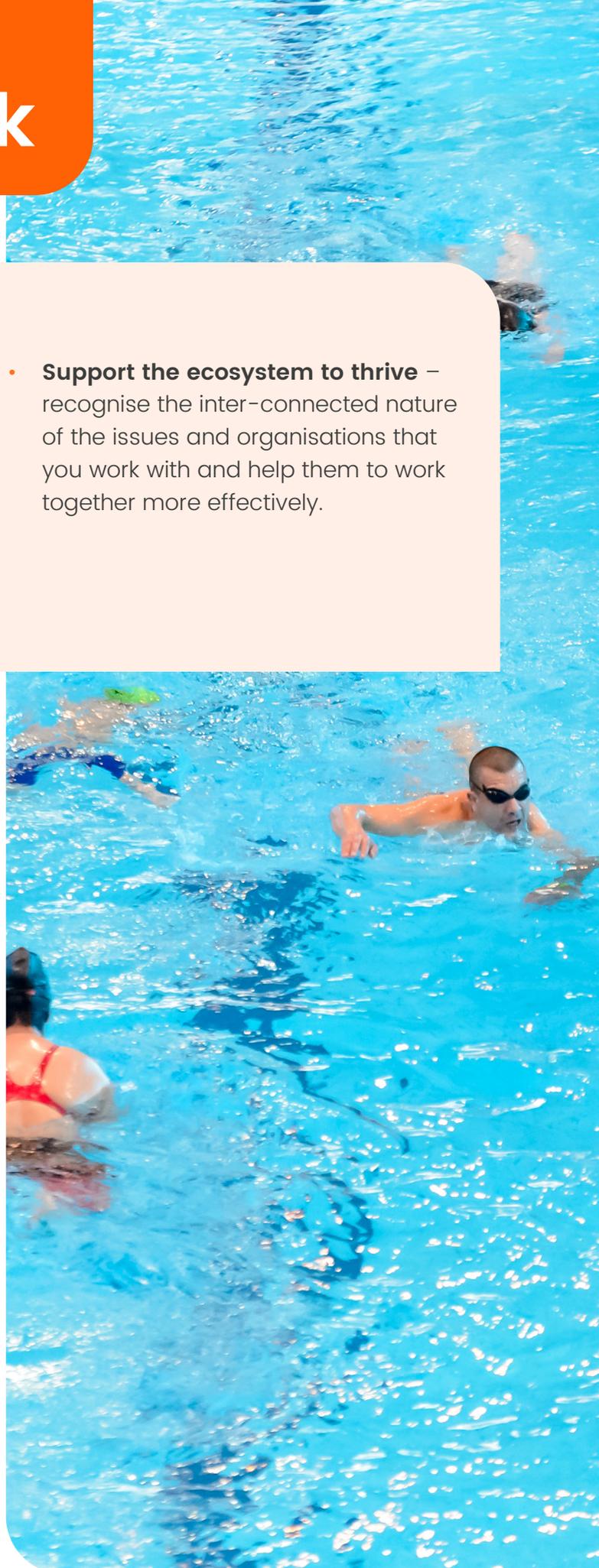
- **Be bolder and more visionary** – create a strategy for a long-term paradigm shift, to meet the scale of the challenge and opportunity.
- **Work on relationships** – some are about getting a job done, others are about long-term strategic goals. Be clear about what you want.
- **Support the ecosystem to thrive** – recognise the inter-connected nature of the issues and organisations that you work with and help them to work together more effectively.

What this means for our next strategy:

Longer-term strategy

Historically, we've created four or five-year visions and strategies linked to government funding cycles. We've found that these cycles do not present realistic timings for generational change on a national scale. We now plan to focus on a long-term strategy of at least 10 years. This will not be an action plan, or a list of programmes, rather a vision of the central role that sport and physical activity can play in this country, and the ways in which we believe we must all adapt and work together to achieve it.

A strategy that's relevant for the long term needs to have a balance of commitment and flexibility. When we publish our strategy, we'll commit to the things that will guide our choices over the long term. These are the things that define us and our ambitions and are the things that we don't expect to change.



We think that the things that will guide us over the long term are:

- **Our purpose** – we'll be stubborn on the vision, but flexible on what it takes to get there. We'll work with other organisations who share our ambitions and can tackle the problems from all angles.
- **Our values** – we're determined to not just say them but to live them – we want to work with people who want to work in this way too.

The flexibility will come within shorter-term implementation plans. These will be the tactical choices that we make in order to maximise our impact with the resources that we have.

We plan to redefine what success looks like – to reflect the need to monitor our impact on national behaviour change in the long term, whilst showing more tangible impacts that we're achieving along the way. We plan to work with partners to crack a way of measuring our work together that really shows the value of sport and physical activity and lead a shared approach.



Redefining relationships

We want to work with organisations who share our purpose: those who believe what we believe and see themselves as playing a role in that. They may be within the sport, fitness or activity sectors. Many will not be – they may be local governments, major employers, charities, or commercial businesses.

Different organisations tell us they value different sorts of relationships with us. For some, there's a short term need for some support and they want that to be easy and quick to access. For others, there's more potential for a longer-term relationship, where our organisations agree shared goals, and work creatively and collaboratively to make them happen.

The main message we're hearing is 'one size does not fit all' and that the processes that are involved in partnering with us should be more proportionate to the purpose of the relationship.

At the heart of these different sorts of relationships are different ideas on what people value about working with us. We want to understand a lot more about the things that our partners and potential partners value about working with us, and the sort of relationships that would work best for them.



Support the ecosystem to thrive

The greatest learning from our current strategy is that there's not a silver bullet or a single scalable solution to be found to make the nation more active. We also know that lots of small-scale successful projects, even when well-intentioned and well designed, don't add up to change across whole communities or the nation. The realisation of this is key – because it means that success comes from joining things up around people and places to make being active easier and more enjoyable.

This means starting our thinking and working with the premise of what we want to achieve and then exploring all of the ways we can influence that – and the other people and organisations that would need to be involved – rather than all try to go about things in parallel.

What we really think this means in practice is:

- **Stop working and funding in silos** – join up within Sport England and across government around shared priorities, to create a multiplier effect rather than duplication of efforts.
- **Grow the expertise and capacity to foster collaborative and influential relationships** – locally and nationally.
- **Bring together national and local perspectives and decisions** – spotting opportunities to join things up to be more effective.
- **Sharing important insight and information** – spotting the patterns that are emerging and communicating what we're seeing to shift our collective understanding of the issues and opportunities.
- **Bringing people together** – e.g. around the big challenges and opportunities. Making sure that we bring together multiple perspectives, recognising different roles and contributions (not 'pigeon holing' partners).
- **Learning** – without the ability to pass on innovation and information, new tools don't really get you that far. We need to support the development of capabilities and processes to generate lessons about what's working, and we'll catalyse the spread of learning across the ecosystem.
- **Letting go** – recognising that sometimes there's a need to lead, co-ordinate and administrate, and sometimes the best thing to do is let go and trust the people we work with to do the right things in pursuit of our shared goals.

What comes next?

We know that most of our partners and stakeholders will be in no position to hold discussions about our longer-term future at a time when their focus will be on managing immediate challenges.

We were planning a series of engagement sessions around our future strategy in spring 2020. These have been paused.

At the moment we expect to schedule conversations and events from July 2020, when we and our partners should have more of a picture about the new realities that we'll be working with.

This means that the launch of our strategy will be postponed until early 2021.

These timescales are of course subject to the ongoing situation with the Covid-19 outbreak.



How can I respond now?

If anyone does have feedback now on the emerging direction laid out in this framework, we would love to hear from you. You can get in touch via:

www.sportengland.org/shapingourfuturestrategy



We've really tried to keep this document easy to read and in plain English. In parts we've referred to concepts or programmes that might not mean much to all readers. We've defined these here.

Ecosystem: Organisations who are inter-dependant to common aims – their choices affect each other whether intended or not.

Social prescribing: The prescription of activities by healthcare professionals, and other referral services, to people experiencing anxiety, stress-related symptoms, depression or other mental and physical health problems.



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