

April 2011

Department for Education: Consultation on the National Curriculum Sport and Recreation Alliance Response

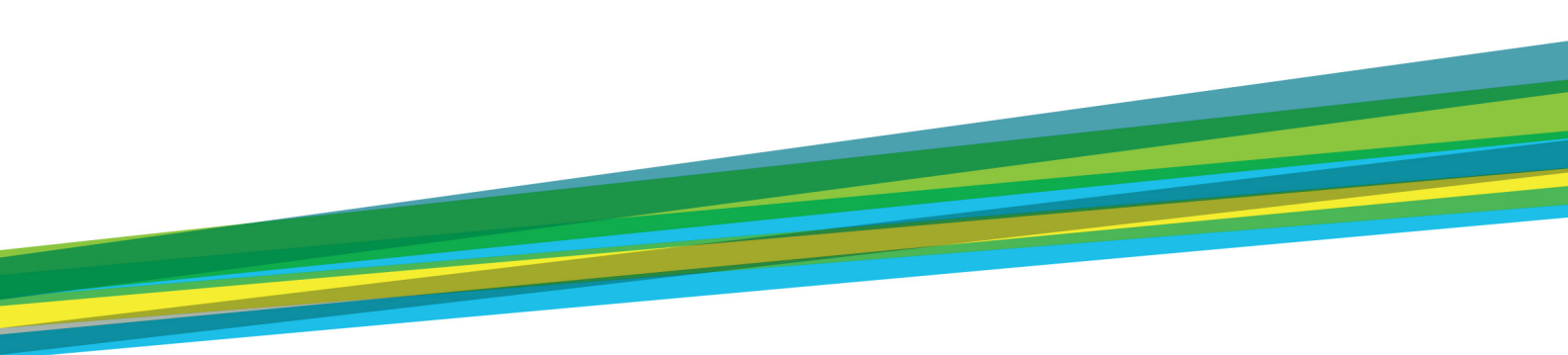
Introduction

The Sport and Recreation Alliance is the national independent voice for sport and recreation, representing over 320 member organisations including the national governing bodies of sport. Our members account for 150,000 sports clubs catering for some 13 million participants, and the Alliance exists to protect and promote the role of sport and recreation in healthy and active lifestyles.

Physical Education in the Curriculum

The Sport and Recreation Alliance welcomes the government's decision that Physical Education will remain a compulsory part of the National Curriculum at all four key stages. The myriad benefits of physical activity for individuals and communities are well documented, and it is vital that children develop basic sports skills such as coordination, agility, dynamic movement, core movement and awareness before they start secondary school.

Physical Education (P.E.) is essential for the development and health of young children and teenagers and there is clear evidence to show that high academic performance and physical activity are related. Exercise aids healthy brain development, supporting learning, decision making and memory functions, and research has shown that increased levels of fitness among pupils boosts academic achievement.^{1,2,3} Participation in physical activity also boosts self-esteem, helping young people to develop motivation and determination. There is also evidence to suggest that physical activity can play a role in re-engaging disaffected young people and improve attendance, behaviour and attitude at school.⁴



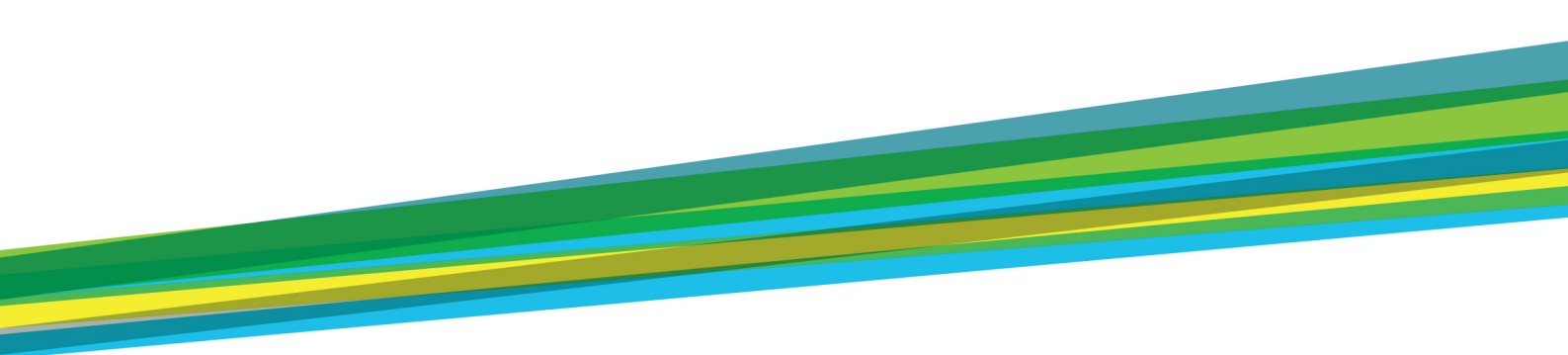
The Sport and Recreation Alliance also welcomes the proposal for a revised curriculum to set out a clearer expectation that all pupils play competitive sport and learn to swim. While all forms of sport and physical activity offer considerable benefits, competitive sport has particular value. Participation in competitive sport offers an important source of stimulation, excitement and social engagement for young people as well as the chance to develop life skills such as leadership, teamwork and persistence. The benefits of physical activity will therefore be felt in the classroom, at home and in the world of work.

Improving Physical Education

Given the considerable benefits of delivering a comprehensive P.E. programme, it is vital that the National Curriculum does not undervalue the subject relative to other academic disciplines. A 2007 European Parliament review ranked the UK as joint 15th in terms of provision of timetabled sport.⁵ The Sport and Recreation Alliance believes, given the benefits of physical activity outlined above, that the UK should be positioned at the top of this table, and that the National Curriculum should reflect a commitment to providing the best levels of P.E. in Europe. At the heart of the Government's strategy should be a commitment to maintaining and increasing investment in school sport and the provision of high quality training for P.E. teachers.

The Government should consolidate this approach through the utilisation of existing networks; P.E. and sport can be delivered more efficiently and productively with the support of national and local organisations with appropriate knowledge and experience. In particular, the Government should recognise the potential for a more effective allocation of resources offered by existing infrastructure organisations such as the Youth Sport Trust (YST) or County Sport Partnerships (CSPs). The YST and CSPs can effectively coordinate the sharing of best practice in terms of the provision of sport opportunities, and are well placed to ensure schools are engaged with the governing bodies of sport and local organisations. Greater engagement with sports clubs and National Governing Bodies will also help to encourage young people to become involved in sport during their leisure time and into their adult lives. Furthermore, competition can be promoted by National Governing Body schemes to bring sports to schools, as demonstrated by the success of the Cricket Foundation's 'Chance to Shine' initiative.

'Chance to Shine' is a £50 million national campaign to provide structured coaching and competition programmes for primary and secondary state schools. The programmes are supported by professional, qualified coaches engaged by one local cricket club (delivering over 78,000 coaching hours so far) and provide equipment and facility development for schools as well as training for teachers and coaches. The initiative – which has received £25 million in funding from the England and Wales Cricket Board – has seen over 384,000 children in 2100 schools take part, resulting in 18,000 boys and girls migrating from schools to clubs.



In promoting the utilisation of existing frameworks the Government should do its utmost to remove the barriers for schools wishing to share sports facilities with the local community, thereby creating new opportunities for sport for young people and reinforcing the Curriculum. Delivery of physical activity in schools can be boosted significantly by the development of mutually beneficial relationships, and as such sports clubs should be encouraged to offer specialised coaching and training to school pupils, which could be offered in exchange for facility use. Schools should therefore be incentivized to create management and business revenue plans to help develop longstanding partnerships with local clubs.

Conclusion

Physical Education is essential for the development of young people and there is clear evidence to show that high academic performance and physical activity are related. The Government should take steps to ensure the UK is ranked as the best in Europe in terms of the quality and quantity of P.E. provision, and should make P.E. more meaningful by extending opportunities to pupils through the development of links with external sport organisations and the utilisation of school facilities.

The Sport and Recreation Alliance welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation, and would be happy to follow up on any issues that arise from this response.

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References

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