**Sport policy and community sport in England in the twenty-first century**: changes, challenges and key themes

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1. Introduction

Why is community involvement in sport important? In England, as in Japan, there is strong belief that widespread participation in sport brings great benefits in terms of health, improved self-esteem, enjoyment and well-being right across English society. Indeed it is generally accepted that community identity and community belonging are a non-tangible benefit of participation in sport (Collins & Kay, 2003). Australian studies have found that sporting activities at the grassroots level have the potential to motivate, inspire and forge a community spirit in the face of social ills (Cairnduff, 2001). Sport can assist community development, social connections and social inclusion (Vail, 2007). Coalter (2007) has suggested that involvement in sport clubs and volunteer sports work assists what sociologists call ‘social capital’ – the network of more of less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition, which helped people gain economically, or educationally or to participate better in communities. He argued that this encouraged inclusion and built positive levels of trust and reciprocity amongst members of a community through supportive relationships, education, training and employment (paid or voluntary).
2. The major English challenge - driving up participation.

Sport participation rates, club membership and young people’s drop-out rates from sport after leaving school are all poor even in European terms. England has an aging population and growing obesity levels. As Sport England (2004) emphasised, driving up participation rates has been ‘the [major] challenge for sport’. Over the last thirty years participation rates had remained ‘stubbornly static’ as had inequities between different social groups (Collins, 2003). As Collins and Kay (2003) pointed out in a detailed analysis of sport and the deep-rooted and complex facets of ‘social exclusion’, key excluded groups in England included the elderly, ethnic minorities, the disabled and people living in rural communities, and poverty excluded many young people and others from sport. People with poor health, skills, education, housing and income are ‘multiply constrained’ (Collins and Kay, 2003). Participation is significantly skewed towards the professional groups though more women now take part, as do those between 60 and 69. Inequalities between different social groups, genders and ethnic groups still create much ‘sporting invisibility’ despite the rhetoric of ‘sport for all’. This is despite the way that at local level, most, if not all, local authorities have had policies to widen participation and make inroads into social inequity through their own provision of community sports facilities. These have often been backed up by concessionary schemes targeted at certain social groups and have invariably required substantial subsidies from the public purse, but again participation is skewed.

Unfortunately too, sports clubs in England are not making the contribution to widening and sustaining participation that their potential suggests. They generally do not ‘measure up’ to their European counterparts. Many clubs are elitist, and try to be exclusive. In the period up to 2004 various Sports England surveys showed that participation in sports clubs in England significantly over-represented white, professional males and underrepresented women (4% compared with 13%). Semi and unskilled manual social class groups had low involvement (3.5% Unskilled Manual compared with 16% Professional). Asians, Black Caribbean, and the disabled were underrepresented (e.g. 47% of young people are members of a club compared with 13% of young people with a disability) (Collins, 2003; Sport England, 2000; Sports England 2003).

Age also impacted on participation. In 2003 47% of secondary aged young people were members of a ‘sports club’ but this dropped to 17% amongst 16 to 19 year olds. It continued to decrease as people get older. Older people were not encouraged to participate in sport. Indeed, John Long (Sport England, 2004) argued that while sport is important for an aging population they particularly suffer from ‘sporting invisibility’. Even in 2007, despite a variety of policy initiatives, participation rates, club membership and post school drop-out rates were poor compared to most other European countries (EU Sports Office Survey, September 2007). By 2008 it was clear that three major challenges facing community sport were not being met effectively. The challenges were those of increasing participation, tackling drop out, especially in the teenage years, and developing talent.

Sport England figures briefly suggested that half a million more people were playing sport between 2005 and 2008. Thereafter the figures flattened out again. Between 2009 and 2012 the figures for those doing sport three times a week rose only from 6.82 to 6.92 million. Though four sports had increases, another nineteen sports recorded decreases. Sport England’s most recent survey (Sport England, 2012) found that only 15.3m people, 35.7% of the population, participated in at least 30 minutes of moderately intensive sport once a week, the recommended minimum. Department of Health guidelines for people to be ‘active’, which include brisk walking for at least half an hour five times a week, were met by only 37% of British adults (Lee et al., 2012).

3. Changing government policies towards English community sport

Throughout the twentieth century, for both Labour and Conservative governments, sport lay at the margin of their field of vision. It was a policy area that was ‘resource rich’ ie expensive and ‘politically heavy’. It was an area of disagreement with no political consensus between parties (Houlihan and White, 2002).

Since then for political parties from both left and right of the political spectrum, English sports policy has been inconsistent and confused about its focus. The left of centre Labour government (1997 to 2010) and the Conservative/Liberal Coalition government (2010–present) both attempted to influence community sport in very different but sophisticated and socially relevant ways. Rising expectations have been coupled
with increasingly reduced direct funding. This has meant constant new initiatives by both governments. Both governments shifted from developing sport in the community to developing communities through sport. They moved too from notions of sport for all to sport for the good of the public.

In the 1980s, under Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government community sport was always ‘an area of concern’ (Jeffreys, 2012). It was confined to the margins, with disinterest within Cabinets. Its undistinguished under-secretaries of state had different goals including the enhancement of community, economy, skills and children. Community sport was not a major focus. Under the next Conservative Prime Minister, John Major, sport became a more central part of policy, with a major policy document, *Sport: Raising the Game* issued in 1995. The main focus was on elite, competitive sport. The National Lottery, introduced in 1993, provided an extra revenue stream for capital projects. The global movement towards ‘sport for all’ was picked up too in the same document. (Collins, 2002). Major divided the non-governmental organisation in charge of sport into two. The UK Sport Council took prime responsibility for elite sport, while Sport England took the lead on community sport.

**3a) Labour party policy towards community sport 1997–2010:**

The next years saw a silent revolution in English sport. Tony Blair’s New Labour party were elected in 1997. It introduced a new higher profile ministry of Culture, Media and Sport. It continued to focus on school and elite sport, and the majority of its spending was devoted to elite sport. But its key policy document *A Sporting Future for All: the Government’s Plan for Sport* (DCMS, 2001) showed the rhetoric of ‘sport for all’ was becoming important again, but in new ways. It was followed by *Game Plan, a strategy for delivering Government’s sport and physical activity objectives* (DCMS, 2002). It too was stronger on elite sport. But it had a vision of ‘making England active’, and helping people ‘start, stay and succeed in sport at every level’. It wanted to develop communities through sport. Its model of sport for all was focused on the good of the public, with a much stronger emphasis on trying to end social exclusion. Labour wanted to use community sport to help address wider social problems. These included poor health and high obesity rate, higher crime rate, drug abuse, educational underachievement amongst some social classes and ethnic groups, and lack of social cohesion and community identity. It believed that involvement in sports would generate social capital. That would help to create social regeneration, especially at grass-roots level in urban areas.

Leading experts recognised that the arrival of the Labour government saw the beginnings of a ‘reinvigoration’ of sport at the community level (Houlihan and White, 2002). Labour emphasised the need to tackle social exclusion and showed a willingness to work with local authorities, something the Conservatives had been unwilling to do. But Labour was still concerned about the financial cost. It increasingly tightened up spending on sport. It emphasised ‘best value’ in terms of spending. And it set up in 2002 the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (Coulter, 2007). The Labour government also set up a Social Exclusion Unit in the cabinet office. But its definition remained imprecise (Levitas, 1998). It increased pressure on Sport England, national government bodies and local authorities. It wanted them to show how spending patterns and sporting outcomes contributed to broader policy challenges relating to social exclusion, especially race, gender, disability, age, geography. In response Sport England published a *National Framework for Sport* in 2004. This was followed by nine regional plans, and then whole sport plans for 20 leading sports.

Labour claimed to want to make the various national sporting organisations more ‘responsible’, and to introduce ‘modernisation’ to make them deliver high quality efficient public services. But in effect both meant compliance with prevailing governmental thinking, and this regularly changed (Green and Houlihan, 2006). That led to confusion. The government wanted to introduce a far more systematic, coordinated and integrated approach, with far more administrative rationalisation. This would get firmer control over government departments, local public services, sport’s non-governing bodies and the governing bodies of sport. So it provided them with a range of targets.

Labour governmental rhetoric, still strong on elite sport, also focused on two grand community sports projects. The first was that of national renewal to create a fit, healthy and active population. The second was the hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games and its community legacy.

The rhetoric was not matched by financial...
commitment. Even in 2005 the Department of Culture, Media and Sport spent only 8.3 per cent of its budget on sport, and of all public money about £21 per capita, compared with £110 in France and £51 in Australia. English funding on sport historically has always been low, and Labour spent little more in relative terms. Indeed by 2006 lottery funding on community sport was dropping in real terms. And the rapid change over of ministers in the department continued, with a continued lack of emphasis on community sport. Coalter (2007) suggested that by then Labour had two main two community sports policy ideas. The first was to increase social/sports participation via geographically targeted programs in socially deprived areas. The second was to emphasise the contribution which sports volunteering can make to active citizenship.

By then data gathering had been put on a more effective basis with major new surveys. Sport England invested over £5 million in an Active People sampling survey. It began on an annual basis in 2005-6. It assessed participation in sport and active recreation in England. It made a major contribution towards establishing an evidence-based policy towards sport. It was hoped it would impact on strategic planning, performance frameworks and social marketing strategies. The survey set out to determine how participation varied from place to place, between different groups and the proportion of adults involved in sports volunteering on a weekly basis. It also had data on club membership, receipt of coaching, and overall satisfaction with local community sporting provision.

Alongside this The Department of Culture Media and Sport began a continuous face to face survey, Taking Part, in July 2005. It contributed to the evidence base across a wide range of topics including participation in culture and sport, satisfaction and enjoyment with culture and sport, social capital, volunteering and barriers to participation.

So by 2006 the chief non-governmental agency charged with developing community sport, Sport England, was expected to focus on three policies. These were raising levels of participation; increasing volunteering opportunities; and providing greater opportunities for easy access to a range of quality sports facilities (Institute of Sport and Recreation Management, 2006). By 2008 the latest figures showed an apparent decline in active sports participation in England. So Sport England’s policy shifted again, Now it aimed at creating ‘a seamless pathway from school to community to elite’, which would involve a ‘world leading community sports system’, with ‘more frontline coaching’, the maximisation of ‘the particularly English passion for volunteering’, ‘a modern network of sports clubs’, to maximise ‘opportunity for all’ by reducing ‘bureaucracy’ and releasing ‘more money for frontline delivery’.

Although Labour did pay more attention to sport there were still problems. In place of any consistent strategy to address sports development, each new Secretary for State in charge of sport produced what seemed like an endless stream of new initiatives. Initially little evidence underpinned their effectiveness. As Purnell, one Secretary of State, admitted in 2007, much more needed to be done ‘to create a world-class community sports system’ (Jeffreys, 2012). Purnell largely abandoned working through the nine regional boards of Sport England. He preferred working through the various sports governing bodies, some of whom had little experience in encouraging participation. Money for community sport remained heartbreakingly small in comparison to the money spent on the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. Some money for communities was linked to Olympic legacy, such as the Places People Play initiative, which offered limited funding for sports facilities to be modernised, extend or modified. But the economic downturn from c.2007/8 soon had a major impact.

3b) Conservative policy 2010–present:
In 2010, with the global economic recession biting, the Conservatives, under David Cameron, came to power. The huge spending for the Olympics, a total of £9.3 billion pounds, was safeguarded. But there were substantial cutbacks to sport elsewhere, even though the Conservatives were aware that no previous Games had ever achieved a sustained increase in mass participation. The efforts to use sport to achieve community and welfare goals which were showing results between 1997 and c. 2009 began to fall back. The Conservative approach, in a difficult economic climate, was different. However their pre-election policy document Extending Opportunities: A Conservative Policy Paper on Sport 2009 had similar objectives to the Labour party. It was aimed at "extending the opportunities available through sport to the maximum number of people at grassroots level. It also believed in sport 'both as an end in itself..."
and a means to achieve a better society’. It claimed that ‘young people who play sport tend to be happier, healthier, more socially cohesive and perform better academically’. Where it differed was in its recommended approaches. The Conservative right was negative about the welfare state, public bodies and public funding for sport. Once the Conservatives came to power the £162m funding of school sport partnerships, which had encouraged sporting events and competitions in their communities, was cut by the education secretary, Michael Gove, which received much criticism in the context of increasing participation. The formerly free swimming for those under sixteen and over-sixty, and Labour’s target to get another million people doing more physical activity and another million doing sport three times each week were both cut. The government also demanded that local authorities cut back their budgets. In Sheffield, home of the Olympic gold medal-winning heptathlete Jessica Ennis, the local authority cut back its swimming pool, leisure centre and sports facilities budget by 20 per cent, and drastically reduced its maintenance of playing fields and parks. Sport England figures showed that between January and December 2010, over half (53.1%) of adults had done active sport in the last four weeks. This was almost unchanged since 2005/06 (53.7%).

The sports minister, Hugh Robertson, decided that the drive towards improvement was to be delivered largely through the National Sports Governing Bodies, and Sport England, the grant-giving agency was promised £1bn to invest mainly with them over four years from 2013–17, much of which would come through National Lottery funding. After a decade of changing priorities Sport England was to fund national sport governing bodies. In part this was to develop links between community sports clubs and schools. It introduced new web initiatives such as ‘Community Sport, In It for the Long Ru’, to help local authorities plan community sport, including guidance on planning, commissioning, maximizing efficiency and measuring outcomes. An ‘Active Places’ website was designed to help the public find sports facilities anywhere in England.

The Conservatives introduced a rather vague and undefined target of one million people doing ‘more’ sport by 2012–13. Local communities were to be ‘encouraged’ to develop their own initiatives. The new Conservative and Sport England strategy would be that ‘volunteers’ would make a far more major contribution to sustaining and extending people’s involvement in community sport. Private investment rather than public sector finance was to be stressed. Initiatives rewarding individual enterprise and endeavour were favoured. These included the Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASC), scheme to encourage the growing and sustaining of participation in community sports clubs nationwide. It had registered 6202 clubs by June 2012; it had financial benefits particularly in terms of rate relief and Gift Aid. Sports England was to focus its spending on three areas, largely relating to young people. Money would be spent on national governing bodies to help encourage young people to move from school to club sport. It would also be spent on funding for new build and improvements for mid-range sporting facilities. Finally there would be money to provide new sporting opportunities for young people in disadvantaged areas.

The Conservative policy recognised that sports coaches were important, especially in terms of numbers and training. They were central to the improvement of grassroots sport provision. The Conservatives claimed to be keen to work with Sports Coach UK and the national governing bodies to deliver a world class coaching system. They also wanted to keep schools open after hours ‘to develop club/school links and help local communities’. They also decided to merge Sport England and UK Sport into one (supposedly arms-length) body by 2013.

The Conservatives have followed Labour in producing a stream of initiatives but still no clear, integrated strategy for the development of sport. Driving up participation has proved difficult. Major advance is unlikely to come quickly. Jeffreys (2012) sums up the position by arguing that ‘more so than in many … industrialised nations, sport in Britain remained susceptible to political whim and the vicissitudes of the economy’. Any Olympic legacy in terms of community sport remains unclear.

4. Four case studies.

Case Study 1: Sport Leeds, and its Community Sports Network, which created a local Lead Strategy for Sport and Active Recreation 2006–2012. It was innovative and successful in changing community involvement. It helped influence government policy. Its follow up was Active Leeds: A Healthy City: Physical Activity Stragegy for 2008–2012. A series of Sport Development plans for different sports were
created. The plans were the responsibility of various community bodies across Leeds and also involved support from regional and national partners, and adopted a partnership approach.

Case Study 2: Local Authority, Public and Private Partnership Elmbridge 2003-2012. Rebuilding swimming pool and leisure centre and rebuilding related football pitches with £1 million grant from Football Foundation.

Case Study 3: 2010 Local Authority and Health Care partnership Blackburn and Darwen – northern industrial area with low sport and physical education participation rates, high tobacco smoking levels and low life expectancy develops partnership with local health organisations and the primary health care trust.

Case Study 4: Facilities for community sport in 2010 – Case study of a northern industrial town

5. Key challenges.

5a) Governmental attitudes:
There are still perennial tensions between governmental support for elite and wider mass participation/community sport, and between different types of funding, from National Lottery to private investment. Funding is a political issue. England has had the welfare state ethos of the recent Labour/socialist government, who used Lottery funding, or encouraged local authority initiatives, followed by more recent Conservative antipathy to public expenditure and local government. Direct public subsidy and sponsorship has been either through the state-supported lottery, which is beginning to lose support, or commercial sources. Funding has often been unbalanced. In Labour’s first term of office, the New Sport Action zones in GB varied in size from 1,000 in South Leicester to 852,000 in South Yorkshire, each getting similar relatively modest funding, and with one professional manager (Collins, 2003).

Because sport is now higher on the political agenda, the constant changes of minister, each wanting new initiatives, distinctive policies to make a difference, has led to what Michael Collins (2003) called ‘initiative overload’. More recently, in 2009 Hugh Robertson, the Conservative minister described this as ‘initiativeitis’ as Sport England, schools, local authorities and national governing bodies struggled to keep up with constant change of policy and political pressure for key figures in sports organisations to resign. This led to a lack of ‘sustainability’. Both Labour and Conservative governments have been guilty of this.

The sports industry itself is composed of diverse stakeholders, which can lead to ad hoc, piecemeal and inconsistent initiatives. As Houlihan and Green (2009) pointed out one of the constant themes in sport policy discussions has been the fragmentation, fractiousness and perceived ineffectiveness of organizations within the sport policy area, with constant governmental criticism of governing bodies of sport, local authorities and others professionally involved in sport, and simultaneous criticism of governments.

5b) Problems in targeting specific groups:
One seemingly intractable problem is presented by British South Asian communities, those of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage (Snape and Binks, 2008). The Health Survey for England (National Health Service, 2005), for example, showed differing rates of participation within these groups. Participation by those of Indian origin was higher than that of Pakistanis. Participation by Bangladeshis was the lowest of the three. All had significantly lower rates than the general population. There had been no significant improvement since the Sport England (2000) survey of ethnic minority participation in sport. Research on Moslem Pakistani groups suggests a mode of delivery grounded in physical activity and personal health is likely to be more successful than one based on sport and competition. But other cultural factors also need to be addressed (Snape and Binks, 2008), including attitudes within government. Detailed studies of Leicester and Birmingham, both areas with substantial numbers of Muslim residents, show continued resistance by policy makers to target provision at faith groups (Mahfoud Amara and I P Henry, 2010).

5c) The organisation and administrative framework of community sport:
As Houlihan and Green point out, the organisation and administration of sports policy in England has been bedevilled by the lack of a coherent voice to represent sport, and constant internal friction. Sport England has been the major non-governmental organisation in charge of running community sport. It is overly bureaucratic and complex, especially in relation to the accessing of its lottery funding funds; and incoherent due to overlapping responsibilities, the lack of strategic clarity and the generation of an
excess of, often short-term, initiatives. Sport England has had a miserable experience over the past ten years with constant political interference and changes of direction, and rapid changes of personnel as ministers or governments change. During the Labour period it was organised into nine regions, with active and well-funded Regional Sports Boards. Under the Conservatives these were disbanded and their funding cut.

The National Sporting Governing bodies are differently regarded by Sport England. Only about twenty are seen as high priority for development at local, regional and national levels: some like athletics, swimming and cycling, right across the United Kingdom. Others such as cricket, rugby, football or golf, are English priorities. A further dozen or so were seen as development sports. Yet others are encouraged for active lifestyle reasons.

Below this Sport action zones, local and regional organisations, community sports networks, local authorities, and voluntary sports club organisations. These differ in their composition, strength and influence across England.

Local authorities spend approximately £1 million a year on sport and leisure. Local authority sporting facilities, largely built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by private philanthropists, or by local authorities in the 1970s, now urgently need updating. Rebuilding would cost about £4.5 billion.

5d) Problems of developing partnership – its nature, benefits, problems and possibilities:

Both Conservative and Labour governments emphasised the notion of ‘partnership’, between the government (who made policy), Sport England, regional and local authorities, national sporting bodies, and the other stakeholders and commercial providers in the local economy. This supposedly was developed through three functional mechanisms: co-operation (which was the dominant model), emergence and innovation. A good example of successful, more bottom-up partnership is Street League, the charity changing lives through football (http://www.streetleague.co.uk). It draws on a particularly wide range of partners. Some provided financial support and the provision of office space, others organised volunteers. In London alone it had partnerships with over 40 referral agencies and delivery partners, and relationships with over 50 corporate partners as well as more traditional funding agencies including the London Development Agency, Sport England, the Football Foundation and the Newham Borough Council. Part of its philosophy is involving businesses in their communities to achieve sustainability. Other partnership models used by Street League include: twinning businesses to Street League teams, buddying a Street League player to provide mentoring and coaching support in a professional and sometimes emotional capacity, work experience and employment, sponsorships and in-kind resource provision.

Partnership had potential gains. It gained by pooling resources, eliminating duplication, maximising staff resources and sporting expertise. It can pool influence, develop personal links, enables better use of political power and makes the lobbying of key contacts and gatekeepers easier. But creating successful partnerships takes for time and effort, and faces obstacles such as differing organisational priorities, cultures and philosophies, the potential of political obstruction and individual overload.

5e) Is community sport better developed top down or bottom up?:

The most recent community sport policy, that of the Conservatives, wanted to channel sports money not through Sport England, which was seen as a tool of the earlier Labour government, but top down through the various governing bodies of sport, re-imposing a ‘sport for sport’s sake’ agenda using National Governing Bodies of Sport as the agents of management and delivery. There have been a number of objections to this approach. Firstly, this model has not proved successful at all in the past. The national governing bodies of sport vary in their ability to respond. Some, such as the Amateur Swimming Association, Rugby Union and the England and Wales Cricket Board, had good communication with their member clubs and were prepared to take on work in the community. Some were underprepared. Some, such as England Hockey, the English Netball Association and British Cycling, were more focused on running competitions and clubs, and were certainly not equipped to raise broader community participation levels. Nearly all are under-resourced. Secondly the Conservatives were highly resistant to the more radical, sustainable and successful local-area based outreach approaches which actually engaged and inspired the local communities. , such as Positive Futures and Street League, or the London-
based Leyton Orient Community Sports Programme, all of which developed organically over time by responding to local need. Street League, for example, has worked with 16-25 year olds in London and Glasgow not in education, employment or training, often offenders, asylum seekers and substance users. Using structured but fun involvement in its football, basketball and multi-fit programmes, it builds their confidence, improves their life skills and helps them gain qualifications that will help with getting work or further training. Seventy five per cent of those involved get into jobs or college (See Skinner et al, 2008). Success has also been achieved with grass-root projects which worked with people trained in partnership building, using community development approaches, working with non-traditional partners and local leaders, who understand local needs, rather than those in the recognised sports system (Vail, 2007). Recruiting volunteer coaches, organisers, managers and administrators from the local residents, using their skills and enhancing them, rather than bringing in outsiders can also be effective in sustaining sports involvement over time (Charlton, 2010).

5) difficulties in working through clubs:
Researchers have questioned the appropriateness, sensitivity, and feasibility of recent sport policy, particularly the emphasis on voluntary sports clubs as policy implementers (Harris et al. 2009). Where the national sporting bodies work with clubs the challenge is that voluntary sports clubs are very diverse. About 90 per cent are very small in size, especially for some of the sports which are popular but less covered by the media. Netball, for example, is the 13th most popular in England in terms of its participation, but has very small clubs. National sports bodies or Sport England usually work through larger clubs with formal management structures, found more commonly in sports such as rugby or cricket, arguing that this makes the best use of resources, as small, less formal clubs find difficulties in using grant money. But this then neglects some quite popular sports. Nichols and James (2008) argue that the current policy ‘ignores the contribution made by smaller clubs and their distinctive culture’. Putting too much pressure on the small number of clubs keen to be involved may lead to overload. Many volunteers are unclear about policy objectives, or hold out-of-date views. Surveys also show that many have limited confidence and willingness to become delivery agents, and that and the limited power of SE and NGBs to enforce them in a voluntary, opt-in system makes the efficacy of this approach highly questionable (Harris et al., 2009). Grassroots club funding has always been very vulnerable. It depends on the willingness, commitment and ability of the voluntary clubs. Not all can meet the funding conditions laid down by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport or Sport England. Not all are honest. Some clubs comply: others insert changes or are resistant (Garrett, 2004). Some club officials lack the professional competencies to meet government’s increasingly complex administrative demands (Sharpe, 2006).

6. Conclusions
When London gained the 2012 Olympic bid part of its argument was the intention to create a legacy that promoted sports participation across all groups and communities in Britain. This was a highly ambitious aim, not least since to sustain any such change required substantial and well-coordinated action by government, national governing bodies of sport, local authorities and other stakeholders as well as major changes in public behaviour and social relations as well as in the management and organisation of sport. In the current economic climate, there has been insufficient recognition of the rights of different communities and sports so it seems unlikely that any such increased and sustainable sports legacy will be realised. The relationship between the state and the voluntary sector is both complex and challenging.

Both Labour and Conservative parties have ensured that accountability is controlled by government upwards though public service agreements with national governing bodies and sidewise to commercial sponsors. Partnership tends to be upwards but not downwards towards stakeholders, such as clubs and their members, volunteers and officials, or coaching bodies and area associations. This top down approach is favoured by governments, even though successes in terms of increasing community participation and involving the disadvantaged are more likely to be gained by engaging and retaining multiple partners, and supporting delivery of programmes through a range of different mechanisms, making more use of expert advice, efficient funding and delivery and use of referrals. Community sport is struggling in a context of rising expectations and the reality of reduced direct funding. Regular changes in government
policy have meant that many voluntary clubs and their members are muddled, confused or frustrated. The current top down approach targets only clubs who can put together grant or contract applications that meet policy objectives. It has created inefficiency and wastage, since some fail to deliver, and it has taken far too much for granted. More work is needed to clarify, disseminate and promote the new policy objectives and targets for voluntary clubs, which were NOT involved in developing the new policies so they will need far more encouragement to commit. Alternatively the current approach by Sport England, of using a targeting approach might be continued, but with more research into the nature of clubs, an understanding of their diversity, and more encouragement of a bottom-up approach alongside the current model.

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