

A COMMUNITY SPORTING CHALLENGE TO GORDON BROWN



The Government's record card for sport reads in the positive over the last ten years, but more could and should be done for sport under a Brown premiership. The time is right for Government innovation and investment in community sport to hit broad policy targets, argues **Andy Reed**, MP for Loughborough.

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In 2001, Tony Blair challenged his new Sports Minister that “sport is a great asset that is under-utilised”. Across Whitehall community sport is now a significant contributor to Government policies over a broad range of areas: from tackling anti-social behaviour and youth crime, through providing positive activities for young people; to addressing health problems such as obesity; and from raising educational attainment to strengthening community cohesion. The sporting world is delighted to be able to play its part in society. Acknowledging the clear benefits that sport can provide for communities and young people in particular, we challenge the new Government to back up its engagement with sport by redoubling its investment and trusting in sport’s ability to deliver.

1. Leadership and Coordination

Sport has always been represented by a messy jumble of acronyms, each fighting its own corner for recognition and a share of a limited pot of resources. Changes made last year to the structure of the sporting landscape have helped to provide a clear sense of where responsibility lies and how resources should be appropriately allocated. The sporting triumvirate of the Youth Sports Trust, Sport England and UK Sport now provides a more definitive pathway from school and junior sport (YST), through mainstream participation (Sport England) to elite performance (UK Sport). This structure and pathway needs continued clarification and support but does not need to be recast. Instead it needs help and a soft guiding hand to ensure that there is full coordination at the critical cross-over points in responsibility, particularly between school sport and adult participation at 16.

Can International Comparisons help?

Much has been made of the role that the Australian Sports Commission plays in coordinating cross-Government buy-in to sport and its suitability as a model for this country. However, such a Commission could only serve to muddy the slowly clearing sporting waters. Curiously, although the UK has been able to learn a great deal from Australia in developing models for elite success, “the success of Australian sport” has not extended to community participation. They share the UK’s malaise of static or falling participation levels at grassroots coupled with rising obesity levels. There are helpful international lessons to be learnt but perhaps Canada provides a better model:

- 1% of the annual health budget is committed to sport and physical activity – in the UK this would represent over £800m;
- As part of preparation for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, an independent body has been set up with responsibility to coordinate legacy – a UK equivalent to Vancouver 2010 would be a significant step towards ensuring that London 2012 generates the greatest possible soft legacy

Sport challenges the new Prime Minister:

- **To bolster the role of DCMS in Government as the champion for sport**, perhaps working with a dedicated sport and physical activity team within other relevant Departments. The Home Office, Health, Education, Communities and Local Government, Transport, and Trade and Industry Departments and Treasury all draw discernible benefits from sport. Indeed such is the magnitude of the Olympic project and the contribution that sport makes that both should be material considerations in the work of every Government department. Cross-Government coordination could be led by a Cabinet Committee on Sport, chaired by a senior member of the Cabinet;
- **To take an active hand in promoting to local authorities the importance of sport** and its role across different policy areas – local authorities have no statutory requirement to provide sport and recreation and yet are the biggest providers of facilities for it in the country. Central Government should play a major role in both contributing and encouraging the further major capital investment and engagement with sport that is required at local level. Thriving community sport can deliver against Local Area Agreement targets. Local Authorities could therefore develop their role as strategic commissioners of services within the framework of a national facilities planning strategy;
- **To ensure that there is coordination across the sporting landscape** so that investment in sport for young people of school age results in sustained participation, particularly when they leave school. In this endeavour it is important to build on both community provision and the resources in Further Education;
- **To lead on developing in partnership with LOCOG** a unifying banner for building grassroots sporting legacy – there are many excellent but isolated sporting programmes already taking place and there is a need for central leadership, coordination and support to ensure that the UK as a whole benefits. This may involve setting up an independent legacy organisation for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics;
- **To replicate for sport the Government's strategic leadership on tourism** – notably in relation to 2012 legacy but also on guidance on the use of the planning system to support it. A National Planning Policy on Health and the Built Environment could address the importance of the planning system for encouraging formal and informal sport and recreation. Such a Policy could result in a linked set of PSA targets, owned by a variety of Whitehall departments;
- **To lead on sport's behalf the fight against illegal ticket touting**, to safeguard sporting revenues and protect the countless fans of this sports-mad nation;
- **To lead on promoting the role of sport in development work around the world**, not least the ability of sport to bring people together and assist in global education and health projects.

2. Innovation

Sustainable participation and the post-16 drop-off

With only 21% of the population taking part in sport or active recreation three times a week the UK faces a real challenge to increase participation. This challenge is two pronged: attracting people into sport; and sustaining their participation in the long-term. Government and sport are both working hard to achieve the 1% year on year increase but some key issues must be addressed if there is to be lasting success.

Putting in place the right infrastructure in terms of people and places for sport is vital to capture the inevitable bounce in sporting enthusiasm that the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics will generate. China is already experiencing the frustrations of a growth in enthusiasm without the local infrastructure to capture it and improve grassroots sport. In the UK we have 5 years to put that right. Moreover, the growth in enthusiasm for “big participation events” such as marathons and triathlons is positive, but if 2 million more are going to take part in such events by 2012 then there needs to be mechanisms in place to hold them in sport after the buzz of the finishing line has died away. National Governing Bodies of Sport recognise the importance of sustainable investment and can direct funding in the most effective way.

Despite successes in school sport, the UK still has a dramatic fall off in participation at 16. The School Sport Club Links Programme offers an excellent concept for how this can be reversed, but not if the only driver for the link continues to be the enthusiasm of individual parents and teachers. The links need to be embedded and this can come from a more widespread sharing of both facility and coaching resources – at the moment such sharing is limited by tax laws. Finally, we should not be averse to learning from private operators in this sector, whose bottom line is ultimately reliant on increasing and sustaining participation.

The Government has fittingly focussed on getting particularly school sport right for under 16s - the majority of investment in sports facilities in recent times has been in school facilities, through Building Schools for the Future (BSF), the New Opportunities Fund for PE and School Sport and the extended schools programme. This accounted for 74% of new facility development in 2004. It is important to note therefore that where major investment has been made in PE and School Sport, the PSA participation target has been met. However, the imbalance in funding has meant that in community sport, where significant capital investment has not materialised, participation levels are currently static. As only an estimated 5% of adult participation takes place in an educational or dual use setting, there is a great danger that excellent progress in youth participation will ultimately not be sustainable, unless community sport receives significant investment.

Sport challenges the new Prime Minister:

- **To amend the VAT laws to make possible increased community use of school facilities** – if changes made in Budget 2007 for Academies were extended to all facilities funded through BSF this would have a significant impact. With the massive investment in school facilities currently being undertaken, it is a travesty that the sporting facilities are not open to all outside school-hours. Focussing community sport clubs on such facilities would help to provide the strong links required to keep young people in sport when they leave school;
- **To re-examine the use of PSA targets for participation in sport**, to ensure that the needs of minority sports and particularly Olympic minority sports are not overlooked because of their small number of participants. Meeting the challenge to engage young people particularly is reliant on providing as broad a range of sporting opportunity and experience as possible. Understanding of the 1% growth in participation must be increasingly localised to reflect the complex nuances involved;
- **To incentivise participation** by exploring the potential of relationships used in the private sector, for example between Cannons and PruHealth – health insurance premiums are reduced through the annual award of “vitality points”, gained from making sustained positive lifestyle changes (e.g. exercise and diet);
- **To reassess the Government’s funding package for particularly community sport** in line with the ideas presented below.

3. Investment

Funding sport directly and through the tax system

Over the past decade, the Government has increased investment in sport, particularly in school sport (£1.5bn) and elite performance (for example the additional £200m in Budget 2006). Capital funding has also been available through projects such as the Community Club Development Programme and limited PFI credits but this has not scratched the surface of community capital requirements.

Since 1997, the Government and lottery distribution bodies have invested more than £3 billion in physical activity and sport, whilst local authorities will invest around £1 billion (including contributions from the Lottery) in sports services, facilities and development in the next three years. By the end of 2006, the Government and the national lottery distributing bodies had committed more than £1 billion to facilities alone since 2001 through targeted initiatives to develop new and refurbish existing sports facilities. Sport has welcomed this investment but significant challenges remain, not least the parlous state of the local authority stock of facilities, the average age of which is 25 years, despite an average economic life of just 21 years. Sporting facilities can be expensive to run and therefore need sustainable ongoing investment in management and running costs not just one-off refurbishment funding. New facilities will have greatest impact if they are built within the framework of a national facilities strategy.

Despite welcome central Government increases (30% rise in sport investment since the last Spending Review, including the injection of £200m for elite athletes), investment in community sport still predominately comes from the Lottery (New Opportunities Fund, Sport England) rather than the Exchequer. Given that sport is delivering against a central Government PSA target on participation this imbalance needs consideration. It should not be enough for Government to rely on lottery support for community sport, especially as for all the investment in sport, Government has still been a net beneficiary from it. Since 1997, the Treasury profit from sport has exceeded £20bn (excluding gambling revenue). Given sport's manifold contribution to a broad policy agenda it would not seem unreasonable for there to be greater parity between Government investment and receipt from sport. Levels of lottery revenue are never guaranteed (£268m for sport in 1997/97 had dropped to £170m by 2005/06) and hosting the Olympics will inevitably squeeze funding for all of the beneficiaries from the lottery – notably arts, heritage and sport. Although all three are given the same lottery-take (16.6%), sport receives less than half the budget for the arts through DCMS. This is despite playing just as large a role in people's lives and arguably a bigger one. The Comprehensive Spending Review later this year offers a fantastic opportunity to address this historical inequity.

Investment in sport needs to develop people as well as places to have the necessary impact. There are 1.2 million sports coaches in the UK, of which 81% are volunteers, whilst volunteering in sport makes up 26% of all voluntary work in the country. Not only is sport reliant on volunteers therefore but it is also a significant contributor to building voluntarism into UK society. However, three-quarters of the coaching population are over 25 and many volunteers already have a level 2 qualification so voluntary activity skills training is not always fundable. Such training is crucial to improve the quality of the sporting workforce and encourage participation of more volunteers. This would be positive for communities and positive for young people - interestingly, amongst 18-24 year olds who volunteer, 44% volunteer in sport.

Sport challenges the new Prime Minister:

- To set up a Taskforce **to explore ways of benefiting sport through the tax system** as a means of enhancing the Exchequer contribution – the CASC scheme has greatly helped sport and there are many more innovative possibilities for incentivising positive public engagement and making a real investment in sport at minimum Treasury cost:
 - Allow Gift Aid on junior subscriptions to CASCs;
 - Encourage employee physical activity by removing sports and health club membership from the list of taxable benefits in kind;
 - Develop a Community Sport Development Allowance on the basis of the Research and Development credit system to generate increased investment in sporting infrastructure;
 - Encourage volunteering, the lifeblood of sport, by developing a tax credit for employers who allow employees time off to volunteer;
 - Exempt National Governing Bodies of sport from Corporation Tax;
 - With a growing expectation of the contribution of commercial sponsorship to sport (£100m for elite athletes, £750m for LOCOG, £35m for NSF), investigate how the tax system can encourage business investment at particularly grass-roots level;
 - Exempt athlete lottery awards from income tax.
- **To allocate more PFI credits for sport and leisure projects** and lower the minimum threshold – despite questions being asked about the use of PFI in some sectors, for leisure it has been a resounding success. Yet only £130m of credits were made available for sports and culture for 2005-07. Leisure PFI credits could be worked in conjunction with BSF investment and tax changes to bring about community educational and sporting hubs, fulfilling both extended school needs and those of the community sporting world. Public Private Partnership schemes could also allow local authorities to begin to replace outdated facilities with new 25 year facilities suiting modern activities for £1.5m per year. Local Authorities should be encouraged to engage with these funding options;
- **To tailor funding for training to better suit the sports and recreation sectors:**
 - **To provide guaranteed funding for training for sporting volunteers**, even those already with level 2 training in another area, and to link funding for a skilled workforce in sport to participation, through the needs of sport not targets;
 - **To redress the balance of focus on funding through Train to Gain** to take into account the importance to sport and leisure of people over 19 choosing the teaching of activity as a second career or as women returning to work. It is widely accepted that older coaches and instructors will be more effective at sustaining physical activity amongst the growing senior demographic;
- **To mainstream funding programmes for grassroots community sport** into Exchequer funding as part of the CSR, ensuring an appropriate level of investment and acknowledging the responsibility of Government to fund efforts to meet its PSA targets fully. This would mean guaranteeing the current funding from the lottery whilst realigning the balance of contributions so that Exchequer funding is greater. Lottery funding could then be perceived as truly additional;
- **To reinvest, pound for pound, the Treasury receipt from sport-related activities**, excluding sports gambling.