



# CLUBS PLAN

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# CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	OUR VISION FOR CLUBS	5
3	THE CURRENT STATUS OF CLUBS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	6
4	HOW CLUBS ACCESS SUPPORT	10
5	OUR PRIORITIES	11
6	OUR ACTION PLAN	12
	ANNEX A	14



# 1: INTRODUCTION

This plan sets out the approach to supporting clubs and community groups across England in the delivery of sport and physical activity, in a way that contributes to the achievement of their own objectives as well as those of Sport England.



# 2: OUR VISION FOR CLUBS

Our vision is for clubs and community groups to provide great experiences for their participants and their workforce, in high quality, safe and sustainable environments.

The ambitions that underlie this vision are:

- to support existing clubs, groups and organisations in providing their participants with an excellent experience
- to support new and emerging organisations catering for newly-active participants, in establishing customer-focused practices and well-managed environments and structures.

These ambitions directly support the five strategic outcomes identified in *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation*.

This Plan demonstrates how clubs and community groups offering sport and physical activity can impact upon physical and mental wellbeing, social and community development, in particular.

The community sports club sector has, in recent years, become increasingly diverse as the way in which people ‘consume’ and engage with sport and physical activity has changed.

While the ‘traditional’ sports clubs affiliated to national governing bodies [NGBs] still exist in their thousands, for many more clubs and groups, membership of a national governing body of sport is not necessary or relevant (although they may be affiliated to other bodies). There is a growing number of less formal activity groups and instructor-led activities. And mass participation activities like parkrun have redefined further how we think about group participation in sport and physical activity.

Our challenge is to ensure that our own activities engage successfully with all ‘segments’ of this evolving sport and physical activity landscape.



# 3: THE CURRENT STATUS OF CLUBS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## 3.1 MEMBERS OF CLUBS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE ACTIVE

Some 11.1 million adults in England, or 25% of the population, are members of a sports club or activity group, excluding gym membership. When gym or fitness club membership is included, these figures rise to 16.2 million and 36% respectively.<sup>1</sup>

The physical activities that attract the greatest numbers of participants are walking, running, cycling and swimming.<sup>2</sup> However, comparatively few participants undertake these activities as part of a club.<sup>3</sup>

Of people who undertake 150 minutes or more of physical activity each week, almost half are members of a sports club and 82% of all club members undertake this level of physical activity, compared with 53% of people who are not a member of a club.<sup>4</sup>

## 3.2 YOUNGER AND MORE AFFLUENT PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO JOIN A CLUB

Men are more likely than women to be a member of a sports club. In total, 39% of men in England are members of a sports club, a gym or a fitness club, while only 33% of women are. Furthermore, younger people are more likely to be club members than older people. Some 45% of 16-34-year-olds are members of a sports club, while only 23% of those aged 75+ can say the same.<sup>5</sup>

People in managerial and professional occupations are more likely to be members of a club than people in intermediate or lower occupations, or who are unemployed. And people with a disability are significantly less likely to be a member of a club than people who do not have a disability.<sup>6</sup>

When intersectional demographics are taken into account, the difference between members and non-members becomes even more accentuated. For example, just 17% of women in lower occupations, or who are unemployed, are members of a sports club – while among men in managerial or professional occupations this figure rises to 46%.<sup>7</sup>

1 Sport England (2018) Active Lives Survey 2017/18

2 Sport England (2018) Active Lives Survey 2017/18

3 SHU/SIRC (2017) Measuring the Affiliated Sports Club Market

4 Sport England (2018) Active Lives Survey 2017/18

5 Sport England (2018) Active Lives Survey 2017/18

6 Sport England (2018) Active Lives Survey 2017/18

7 Sport England (2018) Active Lives Survey 2017/18



### 3.3 PEOPLE IN POORER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY HAVE FEWER SPORTING OPPORTUNITIES

Urban areas tend to have more sports clubs than rural areas, though when population density is taken into account this provision is reasonably evenly distributed. The areas with the fewest absolute numbers of clubs are remote, rural parts of England and smaller suburban boroughs.<sup>8</sup>

There is however, a significant degree of disparity as to the numbers of clubs in different parts of England when relative deprivation is taken into account.<sup>9</sup>

In general, there are more sports clubs in areas of low relative deprivation. This disparity in club distribution mirrors the levels of participation across socio-economic groups i.e. those in higher socio-economic groups have higher levels of participation/activity.

We also see a similarity in the pattern of club distribution and that of talented athletes; with significantly more athletes in England Talent Pathways emanating from areas of low relative deprivation.

This uneven distribution of clubs is particularly the case for some sports, such as cricket, tennis, equestrian, golf, angling, archery, rowing and hockey. Other sports having a more even distribution of clubs include football, gymnastics and karate.

A small number of sports, notably boxing and swimming, have proportionally more clubs in areas of high relative deprivation.

### 3.4 PEOPLE JOIN AND LEAVE CLUBS FOR A BROAD RANGE OF REASONS

Enjoyment of the sport and the desire for social contact are a significant driver for those who join sports clubs and activity groups. Key reasons given by club members for their decision to join a club include to enjoy the sport or activity, to train or to take part competitively, to engage in a social activity with friends, to try out a new activity and to keep fit.<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, those who leave their club do so for a range of reasons. Nearly two thirds leave because of a change in their personal circumstances, while other reasons given include a lack of time, family commitments, work commitments and – in a small proportion of cases – the cost of membership and/or participation.<sup>12</sup>

Many different types of clubs, groups or societies are needed to meet the differing needs and motivations of individuals, particularly those from under-represented groups. It's important to recognise that club development is not about getting all community organisations involved in sport to look and operate in the same way. We want to empower all individuals to experience sport and physical activity positively, and in a way that suits them.

8 SHU/SIRC (2017) Measuring the Affiliated Sports Club Market

9 SHU/SIRC (2017) Measuring the Affiliated Sports Club Market

10 SHU/SIRC (2017) Measuring the Affiliated Sports Club Market

11 Sport & Recreation Alliance (2018) Sports Club Survey Report 2017/18

12 Sport England (2018) Sports Club Survey Report 2017/18

### 3.5 THE TRADITIONAL SPORTS CLUB ENVIRONMENT DOES NOT APPEAL ENOUGH TO WOMEN AND GIRLS

Women who are members of sports clubs are motivated by the type of benefits a club is perceived to offer, such as structured training and development and the opportunity to compete in events.

Women who are not currently club members perceive sports clubs to be elitist and exclusive. They do not perceive that sports clubs are for 'people like them' or that they cater for women of differing levels of ability.

Negative perceptions of clubs are a fundamental barrier to entry for women. They simply do not perceive that sports clubs are for them, but rather for people who are 'skilled' or more serious about sport.

Women are engaged with the people in their club rather than with the club as an institution. One of the strongest motivations for joining a club is the opportunity to meet and socialise with like-minded women. The relationships and atmosphere in a club have a fundamental impact on the enjoyment women get from their favourite sport.

Sports clubs are perceived to operate with rigid rules and structures. A flexible offer is important to women, who expect to be able to customise their sporting experience to fit their needs. This includes not just how they participate but for how long, what they wear, how and when they pay, and whether they are treated as an individual.

An ideal sports club for women marries both formal and informal elements. It can be informal enough to offer a flexible approach to participation, with a variety of activities on offer in a friendly, relaxed environment, but with the formality and reliability of activities taking place on time and run by professional, qualified leaders.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.6 CLUBS RELY ON VOLUNTEERS BUT STRUGGLE TO RECRUIT AND TO RETAIN THEM

Some 6.3 million people, or 14% of adults in England, take part in a volunteering role to support sport and physical activity with 75% of this volunteering done in a club environment. Such roles include providing transport, acting as a coach or instructor, undertaking an administrative or committee role, stewarding or marshalling at an event, or acting as a referee, umpire or match official.<sup>14</sup>

Volunteers take on their roles for a range of reasons, such as because they are enthusiastic about the sport, because they want to give something back to the club or the community, to remain involved after they have ceased active participation in the sport, or because they are the parent or guardian of an active participant.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2011) The ideal sports club for women

<sup>14</sup> Sport England (2018) Active Lives Survey 2017/18

<sup>15</sup> Sport & Recreation Alliance (2018) Sports Club Survey Report 2017/18

<sup>16</sup> Sport England (2018) Active Lives Survey 2017/18

<sup>17</sup> Sport England (2018) Active Lives Survey 2017/18

<sup>18</sup> Sport England (2018) Sports Club Survey Report 2017/18



There are, however, noticeable inequalities when it comes to those who undertake volunteering roles. Men are more likely to volunteer than women, with 59% of volunteers being male and 41% female. Volunteers are disproportionately in the 16-24 and 45-54 age brackets, working in higher or medium-level occupations and without a disability or long-term health condition.<sup>16</sup> Drawing parallels to participation within clubs, those from a low socio-economic background (NS-SEC 6-8) are significantly underrepresented in volunteering, with just one in 10 of all sports volunteers coming from this group.<sup>16</sup>

Clubs nevertheless face a range of challenges when recruiting, retaining and supporting volunteers. There is a distinct lack of diversity in the volunteering population.<sup>17</sup> Clubs find it difficult to retain volunteers and to engage in effective succession planning, with the principal reason for volunteers leaving their role being that they do not have the time to undertake it.<sup>18</sup>

### **3.7 COACHES ARE VALUED BUT MANY LACK FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS**

The role of the coach is to improve a person's experience of sport and physical activity by providing specialised support and guidance aligned to that person's individual needs and aspirations.<sup>19</sup>

Some 3.1 million adults in England coach sport or physical activity each year, and 6.2 million adults and 3.3 million children receive coaching in their sport or activity. Coaches provide an estimated 7.6 million coach-led participation experiences each week, of which 66% are delivered in sports clubs.<sup>20</sup>

Participants in sport do not generally consider it important that their coach is like them (e.g. gender, age or background) but rather value their coach's experience, people skills and reputation within the sporting community.<sup>21</sup>

Almost three quarters of coaches undertake their roles in a voluntary capacity. And 42% of active coaches within club settings do not have any formal coaching qualification.<sup>22</sup>

### **3.8 PROFESSIONAL INTERMEDIARIES PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN SUPPORTING CLUBS**

In addition to those who run and participate in individual clubs and activities, there is a broad range of professional 'intermediaries' across the sports development sector, who provide support and guidance to clubs and other organisations that deliver opportunities for sport and physical activity.

These professionals range from sport-specific development officers employed by a national governing body, to local community workers employed by local authorities and voluntary sector agencies.

Such individuals possess a variety of skills and experience, regardless of whether they have a sporting background or a particular interest in sport. And they have a critical role to play in providing advice and support that helps clubs to thrive and to better meet the needs of their communities.

19 Sport England (2017) Coaching in an active nation

20 UK Coaching (2017) Coaching in the UK: Participant Survey

21 UK Coaching (2017) Coaching in the UK: Participant Survey

22 UK Coaching (2017) Coaching in the UK: Coach Survey

# 4: HOW CLUBS ACCESS SUPPORT

Although there is wide variety in the nature of the clubs, groups and community organisations that deliver sport and physical activity, they face very similar challenges and issues.<sup>23</sup>

These include:

- attracting and retaining new members or participants
- recruiting and retaining leaders, organisers and coaches
- increased costs, reduced income and the need to generate new income streams
- over-reliance on a single source of funding
- the need to improve or extend facilities
- a high level of dependence on local authority and school facilities at a time of falling budgets
- a heavy reliance on volunteers
- high levels of volunteer turnover, making it difficult to develop and retain knowledge.

Those involved in the management and operation of clubs and activities seek out information and guidance in a range of different ways.

While online and other digital sources of support and guidance are of considerable value to clubs, when it comes to complex issues or those that are fundamental to the way in which a club operates, face-to-face support from a trusted advisor can be more effective. Furthermore, not all club officials and volunteers are proficient in the accessing of online materials.

The ways in which clubs and activities access support can also be influenced by a range of other factors. We set out a summary of these factors, together with their implications for our work, in Annex A.

<sup>23</sup> Insight in this section is derived from a range of sources, including Street Games Community Organisers research, Bridging the Gap, Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, Sports Club Survey, Satellite Clubs evaluation and others.



# 5: OUR PRIORITIES

In light of our vision and of the current status of clubs, and bearing in mind the support required by clubs and the ways in which they access it, our priorities for the provision of support to sports clubs and activities are as follows:

- **Helping clubs support participants to develop more resilient habits**, including sustaining levels of sport and activity, ensuring that the needs of participants are met, providing participants with a safe and enjoyable experience, understanding and responding to the needs of their local communities, and providing an offering that is consistent with new and potential participants' needs and motivations.
- **Increasing the number and diversity of volunteers**, including through better volunteer recruitment, retention and succession planning, providing a better experience for volunteers, and addressing the under-representation of women and those from lower socio-economic groups in volunteering roles at all levels.
- **Increasing levels of sport and physical activity among women**, including by addressing the existing inequality in traditional sport participation and by developing a more attractive offering for women and girls.
- **Increasing levels of sport and physical activity within lower socio-economic groups**, including by addressing disparities in the geographic distribution of clubs and by combating actual and perceived barriers to participation among these groups – including developing the potential of talented young athletes.

- **Ensuring that everyone taking part in sport and physical activity is safeguarded physically and mentally**, including by helping clubs to improve their welfare and safeguarding practices, by promoting robust standards of welfare and facilitating informed participant and parental choice when engaging with clubs or activities.
- **Ensuring that the physical environment provides the conditions for people to be more active**, including by helping clubs to have access to suitable facilities, to drive improvement to existing community facilities, and to achieve secure tenure of their facilities.

To achieve these priorities, we will focus on:

- Broadening the range of stakeholders and partners we engage with in respect of club and community organisation development.
- Providing guidance and support targeted at intermediaries/support workers as well as clubs, groups and community organisations.
- Providing better connectivity to support resources provided by others.
- Developing and implementing a more targeted, customer-focused approach to the topics and areas of support that we provide.
- Reviewing our approach to club accreditation and club support for welfare and duty of care.



# 6: OUR ACTION PLAN

We set out here the specific actions that we will take to further the achievement of our priorities and to help to achieve our desired outcomes.



## 1 INSIGHT

- 1.1 Develop better insight into young people's club participation, attitudes etc.
- 1.2 Develop insight into attitudes among individuals from lower socio-economic groups towards clubs and group activities, to gain a better understanding of non-members and what the challenges and barriers might be for them.
- 1.3 Maintain and develop relationships with national governing bodies to better understand and guide how they approach and support clubs to be more customer-focused and to engage more widely across their community, in order to develop a broader understanding of who their customers might be.
- 1.4 Building on the Club Count findings, develop further insight into the types of clubs and groups which exist in areas of deprivation, the organisations who work with them and the support they need. Build and share case study evidence of club environments who work effectively with lower socio-economic groups.
- 1.5 Develop insight and understanding on the support provided/needed by clubs to link athletes and coaches into the NGB talent pathways, particularly clubs in areas of high relative deprivation.



## 2 PARTNERSHIPS

- 2.1 Continue to develop and to extend the range of strategic partners we work with, including organisation within and beyond the sector, to enable to us to reach out to a wider range of clubs, groups and agencies at a local level through our club support resources.



## 3 DIGITAL PLATFORM

- 3.1 Re-procure services to continue the Club Matters digital platform.
- 3.2 Adopt a more targeted approach to the development of resources, which relate to our strategic outcomes and target audiences.
- 3.3 Place greater emphasis on developing resources and learning materials for intermediaries and support workers as well as clubs.
- 3.4 Make stronger linkages between Club Matters and other support resources e.g. Street Games 'Zebra', NCVO 'Knowhow'.
- 3.5 Use the learning management system within Club Matters to maximise learning opportunities 'on the ground' via local club support.
- 3.6 Review the tone, content and approach to club support resources to help them to reach/land with non-traditional clubs and groups who are providing sport and physical activity, particularly those working in deprived areas.

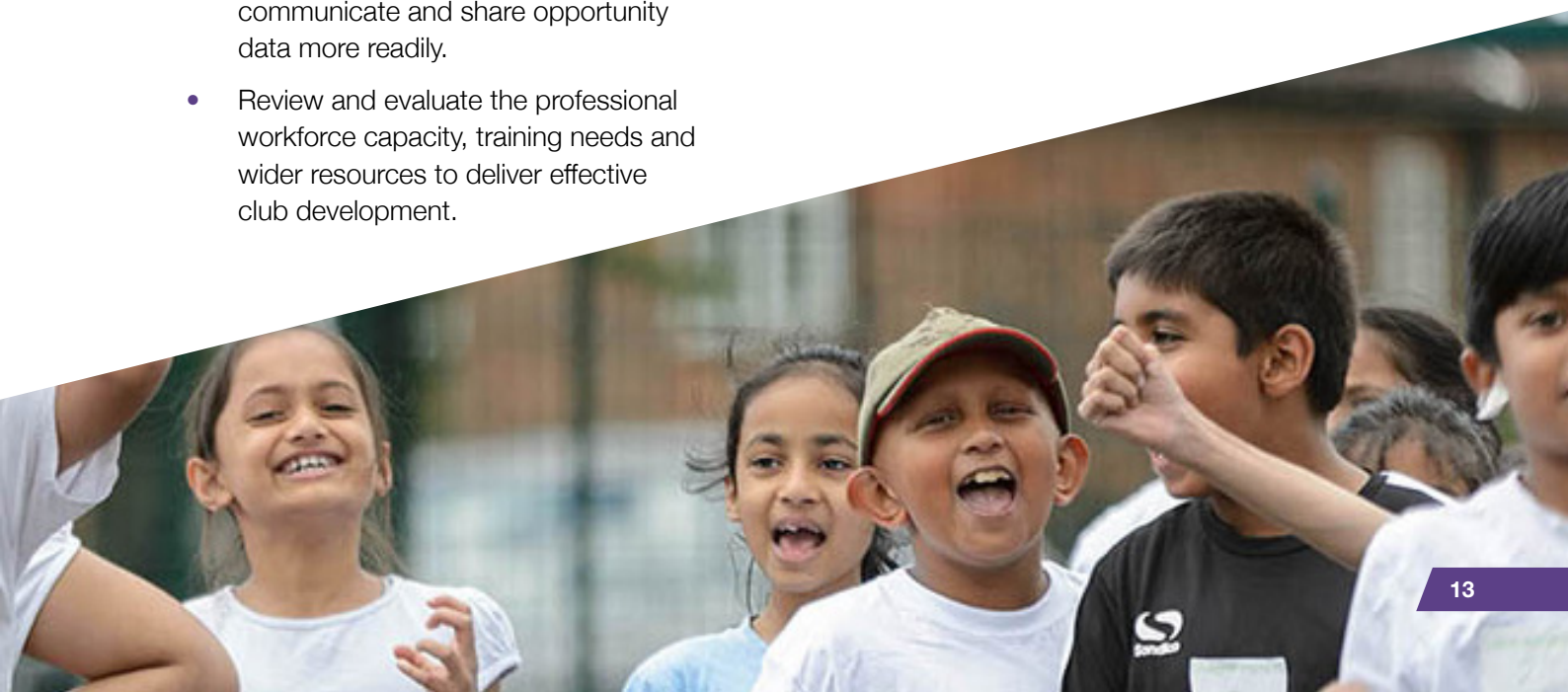


## 4 LOCAL CLUB SUPPORT

- 4.1 Invest in local/sub-regional organisations to provide focused local club support, for clubs and groups working with our target audiences.
- 4.2 Provide support and training for those organisations we invest in, mechanisms for sharing challenges and good practice.

There are number of specific topics and issues, in respect of both content and delivery, that we wish to address in the provision of resources either digitally or via local engagement and support. These are as follows:

- Review the tone, content and approach to club support resources, to help them reach/land with non-traditional clubs and groups who are providing sport and physical activity, particularly those working in deprived areas.
- Develop resources that encourage and help clubs to put the customer at the heart of delivery of their activities.
- Develop and promote resources and guidance for clubs, groups and community organisations on engaging and working with families.
- Develop and promote resources and guidance to support clubs, groups and community organisations with digital development, enabling them to communicate and share opportunity data more readily.
- Review and evaluate the professional workforce capacity, training needs and wider resources to deliver effective club development.
- Continue to work with the Volunteer team to influence a culture change in the way clubs think about, plan for and support their volunteers.
- Share best practice with clubs, helping them to think about and improve the experience of their volunteers. Use our club development resources to challenge and support clubs to have a greater diversity in their volunteer workforce. Thinking about the way they recruit and retain volunteers and plan for the future, encouraging them to be more diverse and ensure their volunteer workforce is representative of their customers and local community.
- Continue to liaise with the facilities and planning and investment teams, as well as external partners, to help clubs and groups to address the challenges they face when developing and maintaining facilities.
- Work with the facilities and planning team to better align and promote existing resources and to develop new resources for clubs and groups on the design, planning, management and maintenance of facilities.
- Promote the 'Active Design' principles and encourage clubs and groups to consider participant travel to and from their venue and how their venue connects with other places and spaces in the community.



# ANNEX A

## FACTORS INFLUENCING THE WAYS IN WHICH CLUBS ACCESS SUPPORT

Some of the factors that influence the ways in which clubs and activities can best access support are as follows:

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### **Nature of the club or activity**

Organisations, clubs and groups working in deprived areas are more diverse in their background, structure, management and objectives than the 'traditional' sports clubs. Many of these are not sports organisations but use or want to use sport and physical activity to engage their target audience and to help to solve a local issue, such as anti-social behaviour, poor health, etc.

Some of the most effective local organisations may be unaffiliated, un-constituted and operate outside the networks through which they could receive information on programmes and services, so to reach them it is important to make information as accessible as possible.

Organisations working in deprived areas generally need more hands-on support over a sustained period. Part of this is about gaining trust and developing strong relationships. The strength of skills and knowledge as well as the relationship management approach of the support provider/intermediary are of particular importance.

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### **Areas in which support is required**

If a club, group or organisation has a small-scale, specific issue or challenge it will very often look online for advice, instruction or guidance, e.g. GDPR, finding a first aid course, etc.

If it is a larger-scale, developmental issue which is more complex and involves several aspects of their operations, clubs value face-to-face, one-to-one support from a development officer, local advisor or expert practitioner. Ongoing support from an individual or an organisation with which they have a longer-term relationship is especially valued.

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### **Access to existing networks**

There are existing networks of support for community organisations, such as NCVO, Locality, Community Organisers and local 'Community Action' organisations who can support clubs and groups. Better use of these networks would avoid duplication and draw in a wider range of expertise.

As well as sourcing information from experts and technical advisors, community organisations like to know of and to hear from other organisations similar to them, who have overcome the same challenge or found a solution to their particular problem. Peer learning in the sector is very valuable.

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**Preferences  
for face-to-face  
support**

Face-to-face workshops are popular as a way of learning about a subject, having access to an expert advisor and meeting people and sharing practice from other clubs.

Organisations new to sport and physical activity provision value in-situ training, someone to come and work with their group of young people so they can 'see how it's done'.

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**Use of  
professional  
intermediaries**

Organisations that are new to delivering sport and physical activity, or for whom it is not their core business, are more reliant on intermediary support and relationships, certainly in the early stages. They do not have an affiliation to or a relationship with a national governing body, who they recognise as an expert and potential provider of support and advice. Building trust and a strong, longer-term relationship with an intermediary is extremely important.

There is clearly a need for well-informed, confident intermediaries, support workers and expert practitioners at a local level who can provide support, information and practical advice and who can connect clubs, groups and organisations to share experiences.

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Sport England  
21 Bloomsbury Street  
London WC1B 3HF

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