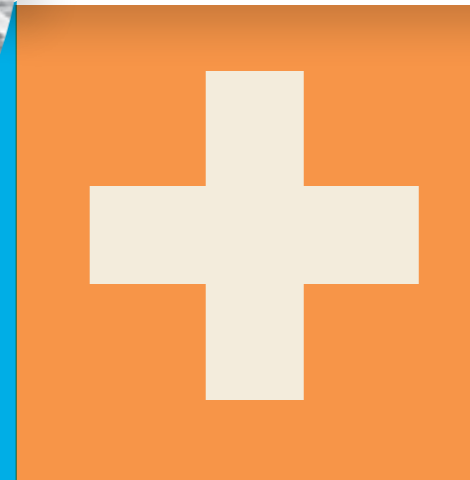




# Positive experiences for all

Our Physical Literacy Consensus  
Statement for England





## Context

The Physical Literacy Consensus Statement for England has been developed to facilitate a shared understanding of physical literacy for those working in the sport, education, physical activity, recreation, play, health and youth sectors. The statement offers a broad overview of physical literacy, why it matters, and how it can be developed and supported.

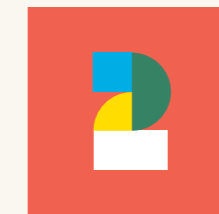
This resource and the consensus statement is intended for colleagues who work in policy, sport development, research and practice.

## Contents



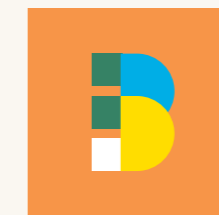
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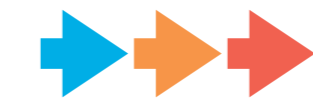


Acknowledgements for this work

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## Our consensus statement



Physical literacy is our relationship with movement and physical activity throughout life.



Physical literacy is relevant for all ages and everyone working to improve the activity levels of our nation.



**Tim Hollingsworth OBE**  
Chief Executive,  
Sport England

In Sport England's long-term strategy, *Uniting the Movement*, we said that every child and young person has the right to be active, to benefit from being active in a safe, positive and trusted environment, and to have an equal chance to achieve their potential. We must ensure children and young people have positive experiences of sport and physical activity that are fun, inclusive and help them develop.

The new Physical Literacy Consensus Statement for England provides a framework to help us explore this in greater depth. While the foundations are set in childhood, physical literacy is relevant for all ages and everyone working to improve the activity levels of our nation.

## Putting the **philosophy of physical literacy** into practice is now our collective task.

What you will read in this booklet is the result of genuine collaboration to translate academic research and on-the-ground practice into a statement that reflects our collective understanding of what physical literacy is and why it is important, as a foundation for our future work as a sector.

The consensus statement belongs to everyone. It has been developed by colleagues from academia and a number of sectors including health, education, early years and youth, as well as coaching, sport and physical activity. I'd like to thank every person who has contributed to the process, whether as a member of the expert panel, research team, or through your feedback.

### **Where do we go from here?**

The consensus statement must be seen as one of the first steps in our efforts to promote positive experiences and lifelong participation for all children and young people, but particularly for those who face the greatest inequalities. Putting physical literacy into practice is now our collective task.

The concept of physical literacy has the power to transform the experiences people have when being active. It will challenge us all to be more creative in our approaches, think long-term and put individuals at the heart of what we do. It will help us build communities that people thrive in, environments that entice us to move, and connect agendas locally and nationally.

### **Our ask of you**

We want to see physical literacy used as a framework to guide choices and approaches across our sector. Please take the time to read the consensus statement and reflect on how physical literacy can shape your work. Embracing physical literacy, and helping others to do so too, can be a catalyst for genuine change that tackles the stubborn inequalities we see.





PART ONE

**The change we  
aspire to see**





We know that those who stand to benefit the most from being active often find it hardest to access the opportunities to do so.

### State of play

It's concerning to see that, despite all our hard work as a sector, 53%<sup>1</sup> of children and young people and 37%<sup>2</sup> of adults are not getting enough daily physical activity. We know that those who stand to benefit the most from being active often find it hardest to access the opportunities to do so. This is having a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of our nation.

As a sector, we need to think deeply about what we could be doing differently.

A united effort behind physical literacy will help to build a healthier, happier and more resilient nation that loves to move.

1. Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Report; Academic Year 2021-22, page 7

2. Active Lives Adult Survey; November 2021-22 Report, page 5

## Our physical literacy is shaped by the world we live in and by the opportunities we have to be active.

### Our why

Research shows that children with high physical literacy are twice as likely to be active.<sup>3</sup> However, despite its importance in increasing activity levels, physical literacy is low and attitudinal data from young people largely mirrors the inequalities we see in activity levels. This needs to change.

To develop the physical literacy of our nation, we need to immerse ourselves in what it really means. Physical literacy is both a concept and an outcome – when we delve into the philosophy, it packs an emotional punch. It celebrates and embraces the uniqueness of each individual, placing their personal lifelong relationship with movement above athletic achievement as a

child. Relationships are complex and shaped by a wide range of influences, feelings and experiences. Positive experiences of sport, physical activity and movement – that meet our individual needs, are safe, and help us develop - are at the heart of physical literacy. Our physical literacy is shaped by the world we live in and by the opportunities we have to be active.

We need everyone, especially children in their formative years, to have as many positive and varied experiences of movement as possible. Each and every one of these positive experiences strengthens the relationship they have with sport and physical activity and increases the likelihood of them being active throughout their life.

3. Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Report; Academic Year 2021-22, page 31. Through Active Lives, we measure children and young people's attitudes towards sport and physical activity. These are important components that shape our relationship with movement and physical activity, and therefore provide an indication of physical literacy.





## Our opportunity for change

Physical literacy is no stranger to our sector. It stands on a growing body of evidence from academia. As a concept to shape our thinking, it helps us to understand why people choose to engage or disengage from sport and physical activity throughout their life.

But here's the twist – to truly embed physical literacy, we must move beyond just skills and capabilities and instead consider the role sport, physical activity and movement can play in the development of the whole person.

### We need to weave together how a person:

**Moves** e.g. movement skills, co-ordination, fitness (physical development)

**Connects** e.g. social skills, building and maintaining relationships (social development)

**Thinks** e.g. knowledge and understanding, self-reflection (cognitive development)

**Feels** e.g. motivation, confidence, resilience (emotional development)

**Physical literacy cannot be developed through one activity or setting alone, it is the culmination of positive movement experiences across our lives.**

Alongside all of these developmental areas, we must also take into account one's environment and cultural context. The magic lies in understanding how these factors can impact physical literacy, either positively or negatively.

The heart of the matter? Physical literacy isn't confined to one activity or setting. It's an outcome of many positive movement experiences throughout life's journey. Our experiences of movement are influential in defining our relationship with sport and physical activity. These experiences are shaped by the spaces, cultures and communities we live in.

We want to create the conditions where an individual is taking part in activities they enjoy and value, that feel meaningful, and that meet their needs, in spaces they want to be and with people they want to be with. However, this isn't a level playing field.

It's hard to develop a positive relationship with movement if you don't have the opportunities to do so.

The Physical Literacy Consensus Statement for England provides us with a shared understanding of this important concept. Physical literacy has the potential to be a unifying thread, knitting together various realms of our work – be it sport, recreation, active environments, community provision, physical education or play. Only through positive experiences in all of these areas, and through a broad range of activities, can we develop the physical literacy and activity levels of our nation.



# We are not at a standing start.



**Call to action**



**There is already a lot of good practice happening across our sector and we need to make this the norm.**

We need to collectively evolve our mindsets and practice to be rooted in the concept of physical literacy. This will not only help improve the quality of experiences people have of sport and physical activity, but also elevate the role of sport and physical activity in supporting the health and wellbeing of our nation.

#### **Call to action**

The consensus statement is just the first step in uniting our efforts to promote positive experiences and lifelong participation in sport and physical activity, especially for those who face the greatest inequalities. Our collective task is to now apply the principles of physical literacy into our everyday policies, practice and programmes.



## What has been your journey with sport, physical activity and movement?

- Recall the highs and lows. What pumped you up and what brought you down?
- Did anything restrict your opportunity to be active?
- Did you have access to sporting and fitness facilities?
- Could you afford to take part?
- Did you have family and friends who supported you to be active?
- Did you feel included?
- Were the activities always fun and engaging?
- When have you had a stronger and more positive relationship with movement and why?

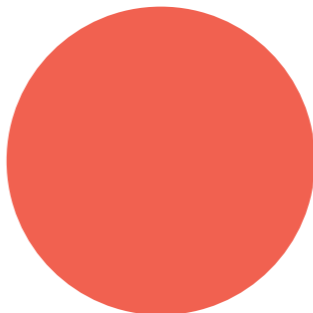
These lived experiences, whether positive or negative, have defined your relationship with sport and physical activity.

Although personal to you, your physical literacy will have been significantly influenced by the world around you and the opportunities available to you at different times in your life. Everyone's relationship with and experiences of movement will be different. The concept of physical literacy encourages us to consider these wider and often structural influences in understanding why people value and choose to be active and why others don't.

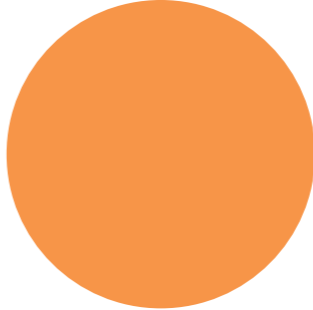


**We will all be at different starting points in our understanding of physical literacy and how this approach can be used as a guiding principle for how we design, deliver and support opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to be active.**

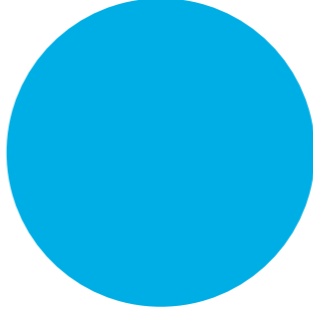
Regardless of where you are in your understanding of physical literacy, we would encourage you to consider the following in relation to your work and spheres of influence:



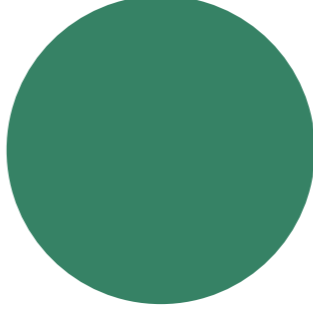
Is the aim of your work to support people to **find enjoyment and meaning in movement, and a lifelong love of being active** or are you focused on your individual sport or setting?



Are you considering how they **move, connect, think and feel** during movement and how these evolve over a lifetime?



Are you responding to the **individual and ever-changing needs** of your participants?



Do you consider how experiences of sport and physical activity can be affected by the **people, communities, cultures and spaces** we exist in?



**The physical literacy consensus statement helps us to recognise that everyone has a unique and complex relationship with sport, physical activity and movement.**

What makes a positive experience for one may be a negative experience for another. It isn't always easy to live an active life and we know that personal circumstances and wider socio-economic factors make a significant difference. We need to listen and respond to individual needs and circumstances and recognise that these change over time. We need to provide safe, inclusive and supportive environments.

Similar to the concept of physical literacy itself, there is no end-state to this work, and no single organisation can lead this change alone. Collectively, we need to use physical literacy as our guiding principle to develop the wellbeing of our nation at both a national and local level. Providing these positive experiences will help people of all ages and abilities choose, enjoy and value sport, physical activity and movement for life, especially those who have the most to gain from being active.



PART TWO

**Our consensus  
statement**



An expert panel comprising of around 60 researchers and stakeholders (practitioners and professionals) supported the physical literacy consensus building work.

### Our expert panel process

An expert panel comprising of around 60 researchers and stakeholders (practitioners and professionals) supported the physical literacy consensus building work.

The expert panel have a broad range of expertise covering the health, education, early years, youth, and sport sectors, as well as disciplines such as psychology, physiology, human movement, physical activity, pedagogy, play and child development. We utilised the expertise and experience of the panel members to join up thinking across people, organisations, and sectors within the system.

### Research team



# Positive Experiences for All

## Our Physical Literacy Consensus Statement for England

### Our consensus statement

Physical literacy is our relationship with movement and physical activity throughout life.



#### Understanding physical literacy

Physical literacy refers to the degree to which we have a positive and meaningful relationship with movement and physical activity.<sup>1</sup> It is a complex and ever-changing relationship.

It reflects our connection and commitment to movement and physical activity, influenced by various factors such as our thoughts, feelings, engagement, and experiences.



#### Why physical literacy matters

The quality of our relationship with movement and physical activity profoundly influences our choice to be active.

Having a positive and meaningful relationship with movement and physical activity makes us more likely to be and stay active, benefiting our health, well-being and quality of life.



#### Supporting physical literacy

How we move, connect, think and feel<sup>2</sup> during movement and physical activity plays a crucial role in shaping our physical literacy.

By doing activities that we enjoy, find meaningful, and value, we deepen our connection with movement and physical activity, and foster an ongoing commitment to maintain an active lifestyle.



#### Our experiences affect our physical literacy

The people we interact with, the communities we are part of, the culture we experience, and the places and spaces we move in, powerfully influence our physical literacy. These influences may be positive or negative.

Positive experiences of movement and physical activity that meet our needs and support our development encourage us to be active in the future.



#### Physical literacy is personal

Everyone has their own strengths, needs, circumstances,<sup>3</sup> and past experiences that affect their relationship with movement and physical activity. Our physical literacy is therefore unique, and changes over our lifetime.

### Footnotes

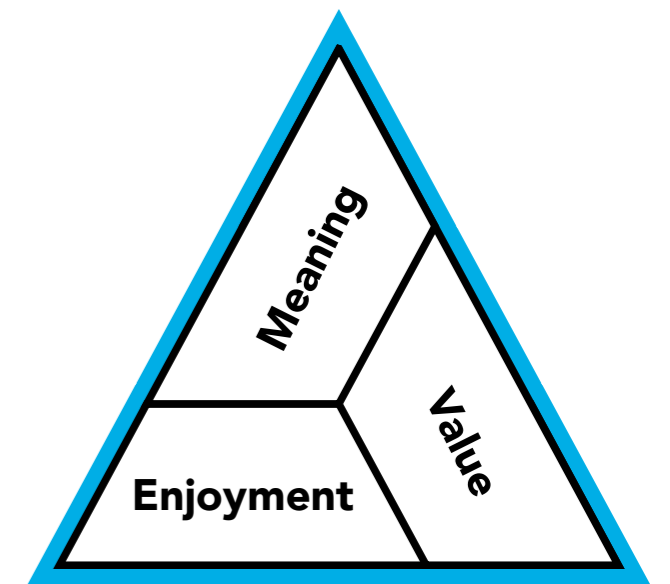
1. The phrase “movement and physical activity” is used as an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of activities that involve movement, including but not limited to sport, active recreation, play, exercise, lifestyle activities and active transport. We acknowledge the importance of engaging in different types of movement and physical activities for a positive and meaningful relationship with movement and physical activity.
2. ‘Move, connect, think and feel’ represents physical, social, cognitive, and affective areas of learning and development, respectively.
3. We acknowledge and recognise that individuals have diverse experiences and relationships with movement and physical activity dependent on their personal characteristics, circumstances, and wider socio-economic factors. This includes age, disability, gender, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, educational background, caregiving responsibilities, health conditions, and cultural influences.

## Our consensus statement

Physical literacy  
is our **relationship**  
with **movement**  
**and physical activity**  
**throughout life.**

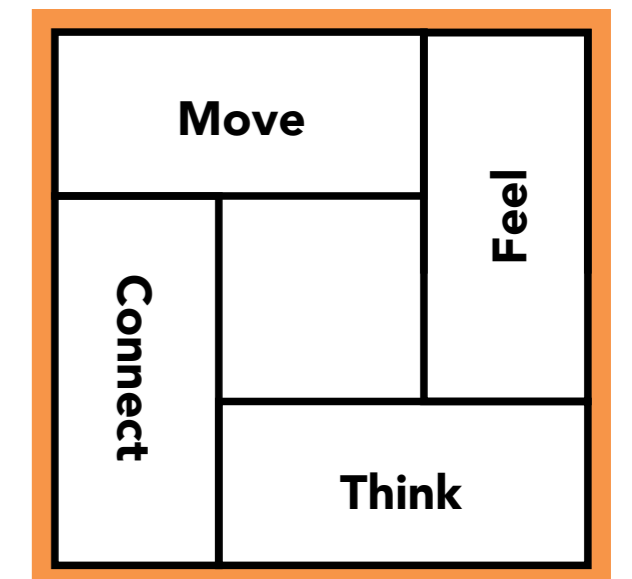
### A personal relationship

Having a positive and meaningful association with movement and physical activity.



### Movement and physical activity

How we move (physical), connect (social), think (cognitive) and feel (affective) during movement and physical activity plays a crucial role.



### Throughout life

Influenced across the lifecourse by individual, social and environmental factors.





PART THREE

**Perspectives  
from sector leaders**





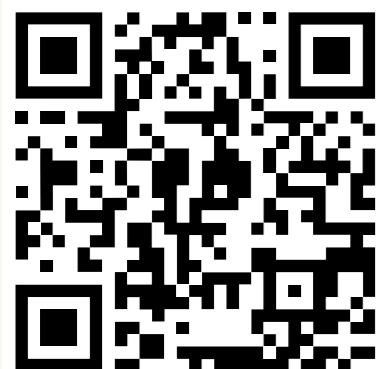
We captured the perspectives of sector leaders to highlight the essence of physical literacy.

#### **Who we spoke to**

The creation of the Physical Literacy Consensus Statement for England was a collective process, informed by a range of voices. We embarked on a journey to capture various perspectives that illuminate the essence of physical literacy. These stories – captured in an audio format with transcription – emphasise that physical literacy is an inclusive concept accessible to everyone.

## Perspectives on physical literacy

To access the audio stories and transcripts, please visit [sportengland.org/PLaudio](https://sportengland.org/PLaudio) or scan the QR code with a smartphone camera.



### 1 **Unlocking Active Lives: The Power of Physical Literacy**

Take a journey to understand the vital distinction between physical activity and physical literacy. Learn how finding purpose and joy in movement can lead to a lifelong commitment to an active and fulfilling life.



**Dr Lawrence Foweather**  
*Reader in Physical Activity and Health, Research Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University*

### 2 **Unveiling Physical Literacy: From System Thinking to Everyday**

Discover how physical literacy empowers individuals of all ages to take control of their lives and health. Join us on a journey from reflection to action, involving people at the heart of it all.



**Jeanette Bain-Burnett**  
*Executive Director Policy & Integrity, Sport England*

### 3 **Coaches as Catalysts: Fostering Physical Literacy and System Change**

Explore the role of coaches in fostering physical literacy and catalysing systemic change. Explore the power of coaching relationships, goal setting, and holistic movement experiences.



**Heather Douglas**  
*Head of Coaching & Policy, UK Coaching*

### 4 **Unlocking Young Hearts: Nurturing Physical Literacy**

Understand physical literacy's profound impact on young hearts and minds. Discover how encouraging a deeper connection to movement and physical activity can shape a brighter, more resilient future for our youth.



**Emma Mackenzie-Hogg**  
*Development Manager Education (Primary), Youth Sport Trust*

### 5 **Shaping Active Environments: A Physical Literacy Perspective**

Join a multi-hat-wearing advocate and explore how we can redefine our built environments to inspire a more active and engaged society.



**Trevor Smith**  
*Managing Director, Sportsmith Ltd and Vice Chair of the International Physical Literacy Association*

## Perspectives on physical literacy

### 6 Diving into Physical Literacy: A Lifelong Connection to Movement

Dive deep into the essence of physical literacy. Learn how drawing lines connecting physical activity to positive emotions and experiences forms the core of this lifelong relationship with movement.



**Katie Towner**  
*Head of Learn to Swim,  
Swim England*

### 7 Unlocking Potential: The Power of Physical Literacy in Schools

Discover how schools and communities can collaborate to create a strong physical literacy foundation, benefiting pupils, students, and society as a whole.



**Joe Armstrong**  
*Programme Manager (Children &  
Young People), County Durham Sport*

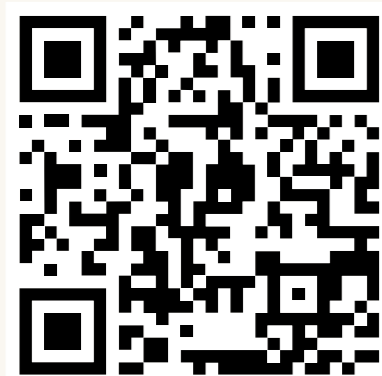
### 8 Physical Literacy for All: Shaping an Inclusive Future

Explore how physical literacy amplifies the importance of fostering positive experiences and environments for disabled people. Learn how a collective commitment to physical literacy can benefit everyone.



**Adam Blaze**  
*Chief Executive,  
Activity Alliance*

To access the audio stories and transcripts, please visit [sportengland.org/PLaudio](https://sportengland.org/PLaudio) or scan the QR code with a smartphone camera.





PART FOUR

Acknowledgements  
for this work





Physical literacy belongs to everyone and therefore it has taken a number of organisations to come together to help unite perspectives on it.

### Our teamwork

The year-long project to develop a Physical Literacy Consensus Statement for England began in March 2022 and included desk research, two national consultations focus groups with young people and the creation of an expert panel. Over 50 organisations from the world of sport, health, education, academia, and community sectors came together to 'unite' perspectives on physical literacy.

This has been a truly collective process and the expertise, guidance and support of the organisations listed here has proved invaluable in the creation of the Physical Literacy Consensus Statement for England.

With thanks to the research team led by Liverpool John Moores University for their valuable contribution to the development of the Consensus Statement.



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