



SPORT OUTCOMES EVIDENCE REVIEW

**SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW
AND FINDINGS**

MAY 2017

ABOUT THE REVIEW

WHAT?

We commissioned a review of evidence on the contribution of community sport and physical activity to the outcomes in Sporting Future, the Government's strategy for sport: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development.

WHY?

The review aims to demonstrate the contribution that sport and physical activity make to the outcomes, identify what intervention characteristics are important for delivering outcomes and stimulate further research and improved evaluation practice. The specific objectives were to:

- Collate the evidence
- Identify what makes interventions work
- Surface evidence on different subgroups
- Identify gaps in the evidence base

HOW?

A rapid evidence review identified evidence via a database search and submissions from stakeholders in the sector. 11 databases were searched and 129 studies reviewed in full.

The focus was on systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and other high quality studies, to access a large body of evidence, focusing on the UK and drawing on international material to cover each outcome.

To keep the scope manageable, the review excluded evidence on major events (eg the Olympics).

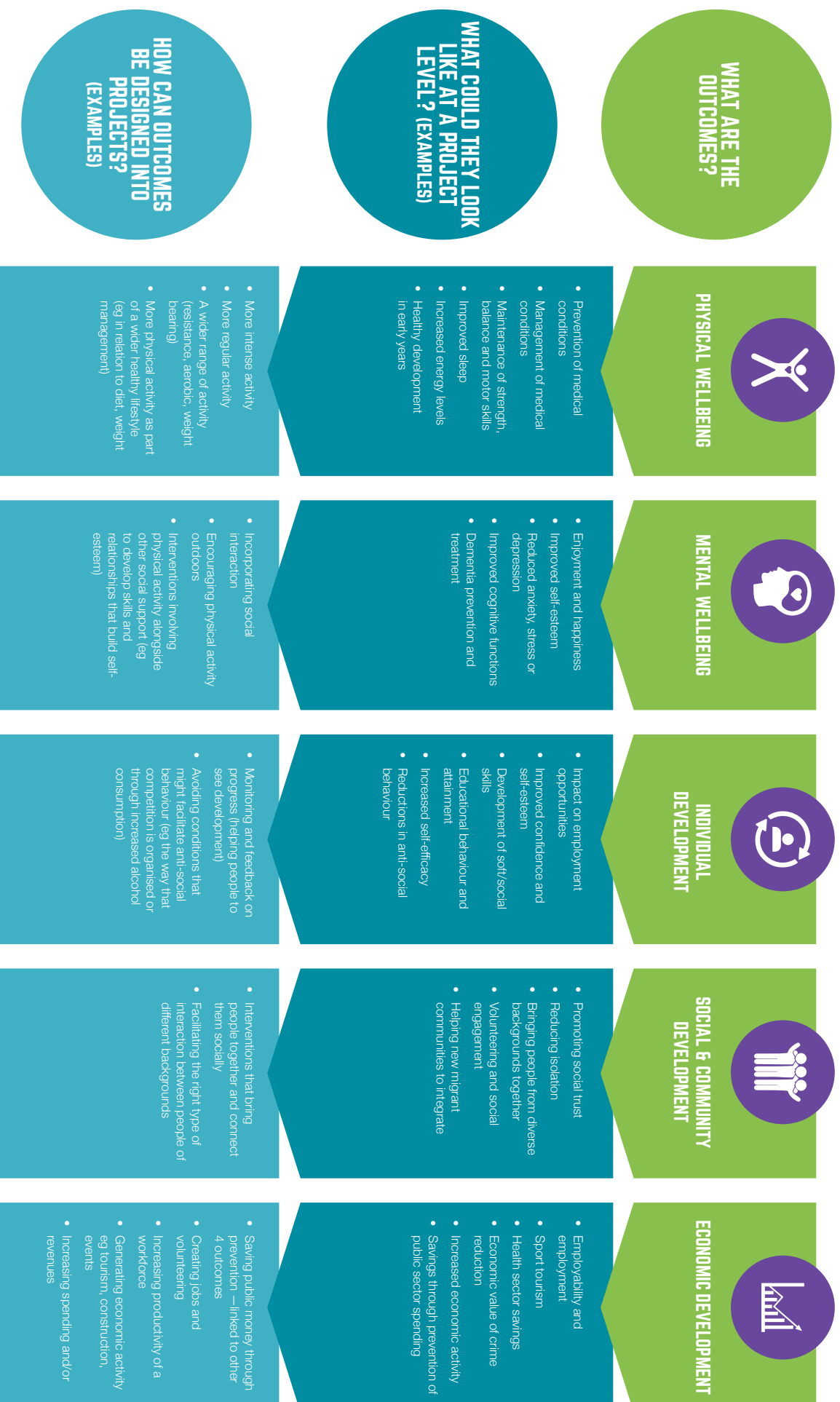
WHO?

OPM, an independent research organisation, conducted the review for us. An advisory group, with members from Sport England and nine other organisations supporting and delivering sport and physical activity in England, informed the review process. Academic experts reviewed the draft report.



WHAT DO OUTCOMES LOOK LIKE, AND HOW DO WE DESIGN PROJECTS TO GENERATE THEM?

The diagram below shows the outcomes for which evidence was found, and how projects can be designed to increase their likelihood of achieving these outcomes.



FINDINGS IN DETAIL



PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Physical wellbeing has a very well-established evidence base, and the most robust, perhaps in part because the measurement of physical wellbeing outcomes is supported by well-established and often validated measurement tools (compared to 'softer' outcomes like self-esteem or social skills). A large amount of evidence pointed to beneficial impacts of sport and physical activity in terms of **prevention of ill health** (including cancer, strokes, type 2 diabetes and heart disease), **therapeutic and management** effects (particularly for people affected by cancer), improvements in **strength, balance, gait and motor skills** (tending to focus on older or younger people, or on rehabilitative contexts), and maintaining a **healthy body weight**.

Other physical wellbeing outcomes evidenced included improved quality of **sleep**, increased **energy** levels, healthy **early years development**, reduced **risky behaviours** such as smoking, reduced **mortality**, effective **pain** management and improved quality of life in **ageing**.

WHAT WORKS FOR PHYSICAL WELLBEING?

Factors affecting the effectiveness of interventions were often specific to particular projects or subgroups of participants. However, generic conclusions included: more **intense and sustained activity** leads to greater physical wellbeing benefits; a **range of physical activity types** have benefits (resistance, aerobic, weight bearing); certain benefits may only be realised from physical activity as **part of a wider healthy lifestyle**.

Scope for further research on physical wellbeing. Not surprisingly, evidence for physical wellbeing outcomes focused on participation more than volunteering or spectating.



MENTAL WELLBEING

Mental wellbeing also has a large and well-established evidence base. Challenges around the varied definitions used in mental wellbeing and the subjective nature of measures were noted, with many authors highlighting the difficulty of claiming causality between sport and physical activity and mental wellbeing outcomes. That said, there was much evidence that they contributed to **enjoyment or happiness**, or more broadly to **life satisfaction**. Often the element of social interaction was cited as central to this. Volunteers and sports fans also experienced increased life satisfaction, associated with having a sense of purpose and pride.

Self-esteem and confidence were found to increase through short- or long-term participation or volunteering, because of the opportunity to develop new skills and relationships. There was general agreement that sport and physical activity have the potential to **reduce anxiety and depression** symptoms, with most evidence on this focusing on specific subgroups.

Other positive outcomes included improved **cognitive functioning**, benefits for people with **dementia**, and impacts around **emotion regulation**.

WHAT WORKS FOR MENTAL WELLBEING?

Factors affecting the effectiveness of interventions were specific to particular interventions and subgroups of participants, most often older adults. Common success factors were: incorporating social interaction into programmes; encouraging regularity and duration of engagement; and interventions involving physical activity alongside other support such as counselling.

There is scope for further research in terms of **longitudinal studies** to explore the long-term impacts of sport and physical activity on mental wellbeing, or to consider the sustainability of interventions. In addition, the evidence base leans towards broad, overarching concepts of mental wellbeing, tending not to consider the underlying constructs beneath broad brush terms like anxiety. This lack of specificity has implications for understanding the relationship being measured and the transferability of findings to practice.

FINDINGS IN DETAIL



INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

Individual development has a substantial evidence base which reflects the growing interest in this relationship. It included evidence of improved **educational attainment**, either directly (improved grades, school engagement, behaviour and reduced absenteeism) or indirectly (by enhancing skills such as self-control and concentration, team working and time management). Positive impacts on **employability** were discussed in terms of employment opportunities, earnings, job performance and job satisfaction. The evidence on **NEETs** (young people not in education, employment or training) found positive impacts of sport participation or volunteering in terms of employability, but only a very small number of sources addressed it. There was a positive association in the evidence between sport and physical activity and **self-efficacy** (for example motivation, goal setting and commitment), for groups including elderly people and disaffected young people.

Other outcomes were an increased **willingness to volunteer** and the development of **soft skills** (such as integrity, responsibility and leadership).

WHAT WORKS FOR INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT?

Factors in more successful interventions were wide ranging and specific to interventions. Some themes were: longer duration of engagement, and integration of physical activity with strategies such as self-reflection (reflecting on what has been learned through taking part).

Further research could shed light on the potential negative outcomes associated with participation including the links between sport and **anti-social behaviour**, with some evidence finding that sport can promote anti-social behaviour by intensifying competitiveness or through its links to increased alcohol consumption.

There is also strong evidence that sport participation is related to better self-control, which is associated with reduced alcohol and drug use. More long-term studies are needed to establish the overall impact of fixed term interventions.



SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Social and community development

is one of the hardest outcomes to evidence, because the concepts involved – social capital, trust, networks – are notoriously hard to define and measure. That said, there was some compelling evidence particularly around the role of sport and the integration of **migrants**. Sport was widely seen as a conduit for people of different backgrounds to interact, building **bridging capital**, via participating, volunteering and spectating. Though the majority of the evidence relating to migrants and sport focused on opportunities to adapt to differences between the country of origin and the host country ('acculturation'), it also covered bridging divides between men and women, homeless people and those who are not homeless, and people with different employment backgrounds. Equally interesting was the small body of literature on sport and **bonding capital**, which suggested that sport helps to build bonds and relational skills between members of communities.

There was some evidence focusing on **volunteers**, in which their motivations and outcomes overlapped both the personal and the community level – for example volunteers built links and bonded with others, which increased their sense of community and citizenship.

WHAT WORKS FOR SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?

A key factor was offering types of opportunities that are appropriate and appealing, especially for children and young people, and considering the wider context of their lives (sport and physical activity alone will not necessarily lead to outcomes, because of other influencing factors).

There is considerable scope for building the evidence base further around community development, with current research characterised by uncertainty about the direction of causality between sport and physical activity and social and community development and a lack of conclusive evidence for the impact of different types of activity on social capital. More effective measures for social and community outcomes are sorely needed.

FINDINGS IN DETAIL



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development yielded a variety of sources in terms of breadth and depth, despite making up a relatively small proportion of the sources identified. Some larger papers included complex economic data and used econometric modelling/analysis techniques. There was some evidence on the **direct impact** of the sport sector on the economy (largely in terms of **gross value added** or **job creation**), and more evidence on the **indirect impact** of participation in sport and physical activity on the economy (**reduced healthcare costs** due to a healthier population, **reduced crime**, and **improved employability**).

Only a small number of sources looked at the economic value to the UK or local economies of sports as an industry, eg the value of gyms, clubs and other facilities; of clothing and retail; of spectating/broadcasting of non-major events.

Further research on economic development could focus on critically evaluating the wide range of methods in use for **calculating the economic value of participation, with a view to recommending a standardised approach**. This would help evidence the value of, and enable robust comparisons between, interventions. In particular, we need a shared understanding of how best to place a monetisable value on social outcomes, for example around health and crime, at population and local level. Another area for further research is the economic impact, either local or national, of non-major sporting events, as current research in this field appears to be dominated by a focus on major events. The major events literature, although excluded on this occasion in order to help keep the scope manageable, would in itself merit analysis in a future iteration of this review.

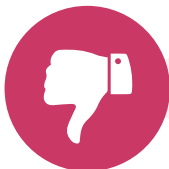
OVERALL CONCLUSIONS



Physical and mental wellbeing evidence bases are well-established



Individual development evidence base is fairly well-explored



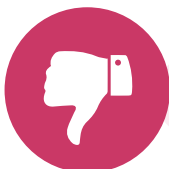
Social/community and **economic development** (not including evidence on major events) need further research



There is more evidence on outcomes gained through **participating...**



...than through **volunteering...**



...and **spectating**, at the local/community level.

KEY MESSAGES

How can I use this review?

You can use this review to:

- Help you understand and demonstrate to others how sport and physical activity contribute to the Government strategy outcomes.
- Inform how you set up your project to maximise impact on the outcomes. General factors that increase effectiveness include inclusive approaches, appropriate environments and continuing engagement. However, much of the evidence is very specific, so if you're designing and delivering interventions you should refer to the relevant sections of the evidence on how to impact specific outcomes for specific target groups.

What are the gaps in the evidence?

This review has identified some key gaps in the evidence:

- The evidence base is strongest for the physical and mental wellbeing outcomes than the individual development outcome. It is weaker for the social and community development and economic development outcomes.
- More longitudinal studies could help strengthen the evidence base by identifying the longer-term effects on mental wellbeing, individual development and social and community development.
- There is much more evidence on participation than volunteering or spectating. There may be value in comparing outcomes for sports volunteers against those in other sectors, to identify the specific impacts of the sporting aspect of their volunteering. Spectating has received little attention, yet offers the potential to reach many people.

- The main focus of this review was on examining the evidence of impact on the outcomes rather than how interventions should be set up to maximise the achievement of outcomes ('what works'). Understanding the evidence of what works will be an important focus for future work.

How can we strengthen the evidence?

This review is a step in an ongoing process of understanding the evidence, identifying gaps and moving towards filling them.

We will contribute to strengthening the evidence base in the following ways:

- By regularly updating this work. We will work closely with academics and partners in the sector to identify priorities for future updates. These updates will explore new evidence and examine the parts of the evidence base that were outside the scope of this initial review eg evidence on what works to achieve the outcomes, literature on the impact of major events.
- By creating and sharing an Evaluation Framework to help ourselves and our partners to implement more consistent and proportionate evaluation arrangements. As part of this work we will seek to establish shared definitions and measures for the outcomes, eg 'social trust'.
- By evaluating our investments to generate new evidence on how sport and physical activity can contribute to the outcomes. We will focus particular effort on evaluating innovative and untested delivery models.
- By working collaboratively with academics and partners in the sector to develop the evidence base, in line with the commitment in our strategy, Towards an Active Nation.



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