



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# School Sport Partnerships

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## Summary

School Sport Partnerships were one strand of the previous Labour Government's Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) Strategy, launched in 2002. They were described in a 2011 Ofsted report as "a family of secondary, primary and special schools working together to increase the quality and quantity of PE and sports opportunities for young people."<sup>1</sup>

In October 2010, the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, announced that the PESSCL Strategy was being discontinued and that, as a result, ring-fenced funding for School Sport Partnerships would end from March 2011. After some strong criticism, it was announced in December 2010 that funding for School Sport Partnerships would be extended to August 2011 and that additional money would be made available to encourage the take up of competitive sport. Both announcements also emphasised that, although funding from central Government was ending, schools could continue, if they wanted, to fund School Sport Partnerships themselves.

The decision to end funding for School Sport Partnerships was controversial at the time and has been the focus of much debate since. The final section of this briefing outlines the findings and conclusions of reports and surveys since 2011 that have contributed to this debate.

The Coalition Government subsequently introduced further changes to the funding of school sport, including the introduction of the PE and Sports Premium from 2013/14. Further information on these changes, and the policies of the Coalition Government and the current Government concerning school sport in general, is included in Library Briefing Paper 6836, [School Sport](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Ofsted, [School Sport Partnerships: A survey of good practice](#), June 2011, p4

# 1. Creation of School Sport Partnerships

In October 2002, the then Labour Government launched a Physical Education and Sport Strategy: *PE, School Sport and Club Links* (PESSCL). A [guide](#) to the strategy was published in March 2013.<sup>2</sup>

The plan, supported by funding of £1.5billion from 2003 to 2008,<sup>3</sup> was to be delivered through eight programmes:

- Specialist Sport Colleges
- School Sport Coordinators
- Gifted & Talented programme
- QCA PE & School Sport Investigation
- Step into Sport
- Professional Development
- School/Club Links
- Swimming

The aim of the strategy was to increase the percentage of school children participating in two hours a week of “high quality” Physical Education and sport to 75% by 2006.<sup>4</sup> To deliver this, a network of 450 School Sport Partnerships was created across England. The introduction to the 2009/10 *PE and Sport Survey* described School Sport Partnerships as follows:

Partnerships are ‘families’ of schools which typically comprise a Specialist Sports College linked to a set of secondary schools, each of which has a further group of primary and special schools clustered around it. The Partnership Development Manager (PDM) is at the core of the Strategy and is responsible for managing the partnership; in every secondary school there is a School Sport Co-ordinator (SSCo), and in every primary or special school there is a Primary Link Teacher (PLT) or Special School Link Teacher (SSLT) who is responsible for leading the strategy at that particular school. Staff are funded by the Strategy to allow them to do this.

There is also a national network of 225 Competition Managers which was set up to create more and better opportunities for a wider range of young people to take part in competitive sport.<sup>5</sup>

The PESSCL Strategy was extended in 2008 by the [PE & Sport Strategy for Young People](#).<sup>6</sup> This was launched to build upon the existing approach and was supported with funding of £755million to be spent from 2008 to 2011. The purpose of the strategy was to continue increasing the percentage of children participating in two hours of high quality sport and to create new opportunities for children to participate

<sup>2</sup> DES and DCMS, [A guide to the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links Strategy](#), 2003

<sup>3</sup> [HC Deb 9 Feb 2009 c 1715W](#)

<sup>4</sup> DES and DCMS, [A guide to the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links Strategy](#), 2003, p3

<sup>5</sup> Department for Education Research Report DFE RR032, [PE and Sport Survey 2009/10](#)

<sup>6</sup> DCSF and DCMS, [PE & Sport Strategy for Young People](#), 2008.

in a further three hours a week with a new “[5 hour offer](#)”. 2008-2011 was the proposed period for achieving the new strategy’s aims.

## 2. Removal of funding for School Sport Partnerships

In a [letter](#) to the Chair of the Youth Sport Trust in October 2010, the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, announced that the Coalition Government was lifting the requirements of the previous Government’s *PE and Sport Strategy for Young People* and would end ring-fenced funding for School Sport Partnerships:

Our approach differs fundamentally from that of the last Government. As part of this change of approach, I have concluded that the existing network of school sport partnerships is neither affordable nor likely to be the best way to help schools achieve their potential in improving competitive sport. While the network helped schools to increase participation rates in the areas targeted by the previous Government, the fact remains that the proportion of pupils playing competitive sport regularly has remained disappointingly low. Only around two in every five pupils play competitive sport regularly within their own school, and only one in five plays regularly against other schools.

I can confirm therefore that the Department will not continue to provide ring-fenced funding for school sport partnerships. I am also announcing that the Department is lifting, immediately, the many requirements of the previous Government’s PE and Sport Strategy, so giving schools the clarity and freedom to concentrate on competitive school sport.<sup>7</sup>

The letter also clarified that schools could continue to use School Sport Partnerships if they wished:

I should also clarify that the Department is not closing down school sport partnerships. Rather, they are being entrusted to schools, who can decide whether and how to use them in the future.<sup>8</sup>

The Secretary of State additionally stated that he expected “every school to want to maintain, as a minimum, the current levels of provision for PE and sport each week for every pupil.”<sup>9</sup>

### Reaction

The decision to end ring-fenced funding for School Sport Partnerships proved controversial. On 30 November 2010, the Shadow Education Secretary, Andy Burnham, responded to the announcement during an Opposition Day debate on School Sports Funding:

There was a developing consensus, which was repeated just before the recent general election. A write-up of a Radio 5 Live debate appears on the Youth Sports Trust website and it says that, on school sport partnerships, Hugh Robertson said it would be wrong to dismantle “13 years of work” and, instead, “the

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<sup>7</sup> [Refocusing sport in schools to build a lasting legacy of the 2012 games](#), Department for Education, 20 October 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

party would build on" them. But that broad consensus has now been broken by the Secretary of State. School sport partnerships have joined a growing list of things that the Conservative party said it would protect in opposition, but has scrapped in government.

Let me make one thing clear: Labour Members would have understood if the Government had decided to reduce funding to school sport partnerships and the Youth Sport Trust, as long as they kept the basic school sport partnership infrastructure in place. What we are struggling with is having to accept the Secretary of State's decision to remove 100% of their funding and demolish an entire infrastructure and proven delivery system that is improving children's lives here and now. I cannot understand why he has done that.<sup>10</sup>

The Association for Physical Education (afPE) responded to the reforms by stating that it had concerns about the proposed changes, but that it wished to build upon the positive aspects of the announcement, such as the commitment to maintain as a minimum the current levels of PE and school sport each week. The afPE also commented that although Government funding for School Sport Partnerships was ending, it was "heartening" that they were not being abolished and that schools could still directly fund schools sports partnerships if they wished.<sup>11</sup>

The Youth Sport Trust said that while it appreciated the challenging economic environment and respected the policy of empowering schools and reducing bureaucracy, it was "deeply disappointed" with the decision to reduce school sport funding. It stated that School Sport Partnerships had exceeded their given targets, were internationally envied and helped to increase participation in competitive sport.<sup>12</sup>

Community of Providers of Physical Activity and Sports (COMPASS), the trade association for providers of physical activity and sport, stated that it wanted to "balance the somewhat biased and negative views which have been represented in the media". They said that it was important to acknowledge that £2.4 billion had been spent on school sport over the last ten years and that this funding was never expected to be permanent, and that the "investment has provided a positive legacy on which further progress can be made".<sup>13</sup>

## Revised policy

A revised policy was announced on 20 December 2010: "[A new approach for school sports - decentralising power, incentivising competition, trusting teachers](#)".

Under the revised policy, Government funding for School Sport Partnerships was to continue until August 2011 instead of March 2011, at a cost of £47 million. It was again emphasised that schools could continue, if they wanted, to fund school sports partnerships directly.

<sup>10</sup> [HC Deb 30 November 2010 c 693](#)

<sup>11</sup> [afPE's statement in response to the letter to Baroness Campbell](#), afPE\_25 October 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Baroness Campbell in response, Youth Sport Trust, 1 November 2010.

<sup>13</sup> [Open letter to the secretary of state for education](#), COMASS, 29 November 2010.

The December 2010 announcement also stated that secondary schools would receive funding to allow one day a week of PE teachers' time to be spent out of the classroom encouraging intra and inter-school competition in primary schools, and that Lottery funding would be used to "build a framework of competitions as part of the new School Games". More information on this funding is available in Library Briefing 6836, [School Sport](#).

### Further reaction

The then Shadow Education Minister, Toby Perkins, reacted to the Education Secretary's new announcement during education questions on 20 December 2010. He welcomed the change in policy but criticised the Government's approach to reforming school sport funding:

**Toby Perkins:** We welcome the Secretary of State's humiliating climbdown on the school sports partnerships. It is hard to know what is most disgraceful: the refusal to meet Baroness Campbell or the way the Government badmouthed the Youth Sport Trust, the hundreds of school sports co-ordinators and the thousands of volunteers. The Secretary of State said that school sports partnerships had failed, another Minister slammed them and even the Prime Minister said they had a terrible record. Now, in the face of a storm of protest, the Government claim to be leaving them in place until shortly after the Olympics, albeit with dramatically less funding. We hope that the Secretary of State learns a lesson from this, which is just the latest shambles he has presided over. Will he acknowledge that school sports partnerships have not failed and have not got a terrible record, and will he promise to back them up to the Olympics and beyond?<sup>14</sup>

The afPE expressed "delight" in response to the revised approach and the additional Government funding made available for School Sport Partnerships. The association commented that it believed that once direct Government funding came to an end, local funding for School Sport Partnerships would prove to be successful.<sup>15</sup>

The Youth Sport Trust also welcomed the Government's new approach. The Chair of the trust, Baroness Sue Campbell, said she was "absolutely delighted" and commented that the provided level of investment would allow children to continue to have opportunities to take part in sport.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [HC Deb 20 December 2010 c 1171](#)

<sup>15</sup> [afPE's response to the Government announcement regarding funding for School Sports Partnerships](#), afPE Press release, 20 December 2010

<sup>16</sup> [New funding provides lifeline for school sport](#), YST Press release 20 December 2010

### 3. Further developments

In its 2013 report on school sport, the Education Committee stated that “a number of school sports partnerships remain, although the provision was generally described as “patchy””.<sup>17</sup> The report noted that in some places partnerships had been successful in sustaining themselves beyond the period of ring-fenced funding, but that these represented the exceptions and that in most cases the system was “tailing off”.<sup>18</sup> In comparison, a majority of respondents to a May 2013 survey by the Smith Institute stated that their School Sport Partnerships had remained in place, but a “significant minority” stated that they were no longer part of a partnership.<sup>19</sup> In addition, in its November 2013 report, the Select Committee on Olympic and Paralympic Legacy cited witnesses who stated that “about 50%” of school sport partnerships had “survived in some form or other”<sup>20</sup>.

In responses to parliamentary questions on 16 July 2015, Edward Timpson, the Children and Families Minister, stated that the Government does not collect information on the number of School Sport Partnerships, or on the effect of School Sport Partnerships on sport participation.<sup>21</sup> The Minister also stated that “schools are free to work in partnership with each other to deliver PE and sport for their pupils”<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Education Committee, *School Sport following London 2012: No more political football*, 22 July 2013, HC164 2013-14, p17

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Smith Institute, *School sport participation and the Olympic legacy*, May 2013, p5.

<sup>20</sup> Committee on Olympic and Paralympic Legacy, *Keeping the flame alive: the Olympic and Paralympic Legacy*, HL 78 2013-14, p35.

<sup>21</sup> [PQ6815, 16 July 2015](#) and [PQ6679, 16 July 2015](#)

<sup>22</sup> [PQ6679, 16 July 2015](#)



## 4. Surveys and reports

As outlined above, the decision to end central Government funding for School Sport Partnerships was controversial. The decision, and the effectiveness of School Sport Partnerships, have continued to be the subject of debate.

This section provides brief information about a number of surveys and reports since 2011 that have commented on School Sport Partnerships.

### 4.1 Ofsted's School Sport Partnerships Assessment, June 2011

A report was published by Ofsted in June 2011: [School Sport Partnerships: A survey of good practice](#). This "small-scale survey" assessed the impact of School Sport Partnerships by visiting twelve partnerships. The report was made with the Education Secretary's October and December 2010 announcements in mind, and was intended to help schools learn the lessons of School Sport Partnerships and apply them in this "new environment".

The report found that School Sport Partnerships had a beneficial effect and allowed schools to improve the quality and quantity of PE and sport they provided. Benefits were seen most clearly in primary schools but increasingly so in secondary schools. Partnerships were thought to have improved the link between schools and sports clubs. In addition, Partnership Development Managers were found to have worked effectively with partners, increasing PE participation and raising standards.<sup>23</sup>

### 4.2 Ofsted's physical education report, February 2013

In February 2013, Ofsted published a report based on inspections of physical education in schools between September 2008 and July 2012.<sup>24</sup>

While a small minority of primary school headteachers had not ensured that their school engaged fully with them, the report stated that School Sport Partnerships had a beneficial impact in the majority of schools visited. It stated:

Funding for school sport partnerships ended in 2011. Evidence from this survey is that these partnerships had left a notable legacy in the vast majority of secondary schools and their feeder primary schools over the last four years. Pupils enjoyed a much broader curriculum; their participation in mini-competitions, festivals and sporting events, and new opportunities to organise sport and lead others were firmly embedded and thoroughly enjoyed by large numbers of pupils. Well-organised staff training, additional resources and stronger links with sports providers in the

<sup>23</sup> Ofsted, [School Sport Partnerships: A survey of good practice](#), June 2011

<sup>24</sup> Ofsted, [Beyond 2012 – outstanding physical education for all: Physical education in schools 2008–12](#), February 2013.

local community were enhancing the experiences of pupils of all ages and abilities.<sup>25</sup>

The report recommended that “the Department for Education considers devising a new national strategy for PE and school sport that builds on the successes of school sport partnerships...”<sup>26</sup>

### 4.3 Smith Institute report on school sport participation, May 2013

In May 2013, the Smith Institute published a report on school sport based on an online survey of school teachers, school games organisers and School Sport Partnerships staff.<sup>27</sup> The report highlighted the following key findings relating to School Sport Partnerships:

- Since the loss of ring-fenced funding for School Sports Partnerships participation was falling.
- 88% of surveyed School Games Organisers and School Sport Partnership staff preferred the former funding system to the new one.<sup>28</sup>

### 4.4 Education committee report on school sport, July 2013

In July 2013, the Education Committee published a report, [School sport following London 2012: No more political football](#).

The report cited evidence from a range of witnesses who were critical of the decision to end ring-fenced funding for School Sport Partnerships and contended that the decision had a negative impact on the delivery of school sport and PE. It further stated that, for some witnesses, School Sport Partnerships were regarded as the “golden age of school sports and as an excellent model for universal delivery”. However, the report also noted criticisms from some witnesses that the quality of School Sport Partnerships was variable, that the model was not sustainable, and that they were too bureaucratic.<sup>29</sup>

Edward Timpson, then Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, told the Committee that School Sport Partnerships were not “bringing about high enough levels of participation” and “had not overcome the “disappointing dropoff at the age of 16.”” He additionally stated that they had been “excellent in some areas” and that schools were free to continue them where they wanted to.<sup>30</sup>

The Committee concluded that it was understandable that the Government looked to make savings but that there was clear evidence

<sup>25</sup> Ofsted, [Beyond 2012 – outstanding physical education for all: Physical education in schools 2008–12](#), February 2013, p48

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p4

<sup>27</sup> Smith Institute, [School sport participation and the Olympic legacy](#), May 2013.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pp4-5.

<sup>29</sup> Education Committee, [School Sport following London 2012: No more political football](#), 22 July 2013, HC164 2013-14, p18

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*

that the ending of funding for School Sport Partnerships had had a negative impact (emphasis in original):

Given the state of the nation's finances and the cost of the SSP programme—£2.4 billion of Exchequer and Lottery funding between 2003 and 2010<sup>31</sup>—it is understandable that the Government looked to make savings in this area. However, it appears that a price has been paid for these savings.

**There is clear evidence that the ending of the school sport partnerships funding has had a negative impact, including on the opportunities for young people to access competitive sporting opportunities in school. School sport partnerships were expensive but delivered benefits for children. The Government needs to show that an alternative programme (at lower cost) can deliver significant increases in participation in school sport.**<sup>31</sup>

In its response to the Committee's report, the then Government stated that:

We agree with the Committee's assessment that school sport partnerships (SSPs) were not flawless and were particularly expensive. Whilst the Government removed the requirement for schools to take part in SSPs, it did not remove the ability for schools to choose to take part, should they so wish. Schools are free to work in partnership with neighbouring schools and other organisations, including SSPs where they continue to support schools. There is information on the Department's website for headteachers should they wish to pool their funding to ensure greater impact, if that is appropriate for local circumstance.

The impact of the new strategy will be monitored closely, both by Government and through external evaluation, in order to ensure significant, sustainable benefits for children and schools and to secure better value for money for taxpayers.<sup>32</sup>

## 4.5 Report of the House of Lords Committee on Olympic and Paralympic Legacy, November 2013

The report of the Select Committee on Olympic and Paralympic Legacy, [\*Keeping the flame alive: the Olympic and Paralympic Legacy\*](#), published in November 2013, noted that funding of school sport had generated "significant controversy in recent years, most centring on impact of the Government's discontinuation of funding for School Sport Partnerships".<sup>33</sup>

The report cited evidence from Baroness Campbell, Chair of the Youth Sport Trust, that School Sport Partnerships still had some improving to do and that "about 50% have survived in some form or other".<sup>34</sup> The

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<sup>31</sup> Education Committee, [\*School Sport following London 2012: No more political football\*](#), 22 July 2013, HC164 2013-14, p19

<sup>32</sup> Education Committee, [\*School sport following London 2012: No more political football: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2013-14\*](#), HC 723 2013-14, p5

<sup>33</sup> Committee on Olympic and Paralympic Legacy, [\*Keeping the flame alive: the Olympic and Paralympic Legacy\*](#), HL 78 2013-14, p35.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

report also quoted evidence from Kate Hoey, Sports Minister when School Sport Partnerships were introduced, that they were intended as a transitional tool, and that where they had been successful they were “still largely in place”.<sup>35</sup> The report also cited evidence from the May 2013 Smith Institute survey (see above) that participation had fallen since the removal of ring-fenced funding for School Sport Partnerships.<sup>36</sup>

The report concluded that:

We received evidence from several quarters that the ending of funding to SSPs, and ultimately its replacement by the School Sport Premium, was a mistake. The rights and wrongs of this decision are now academic to the legacy, which must be forward-looking. SSPs were not universally successful, but did provide a way for schools to cooperate to build shared infrastructure, particularly in competitive sport. The Government, Local Authorities and schools themselves must all be alive to the danger of individualised funding to different schools, giving them a high degree of discretion, leading to uneven teaching of PE. They need to consider what more they can do in concert to ensure cooperation and the building of shared infrastructure.<sup>37</sup>

In February 2014, the Government and the Mayor of London published a [response](#) to the Committee’s report.

The report and the Government’s response were debated in the House of Lords on 18 March 2014. During the debate Baroness Billingham criticised the decision to end funding for School Sport Partnerships and Baroness King of Bow contended that since the funding had ended the problem was that “money goes to individual schools but does not support the sporting infrastructure between schools that promotes competitive sport”.<sup>38</sup>

Responding to the debate on behalf of the Government, Lord Bates stated that the Government was “trying to focus attention on primary school teachers and club coaches through investment in primary schools”.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p37.

<sup>38</sup> [HL Deb 19 March 2014 c236](#)

<sup>39</sup> [HL Deb 19 March 2014 c267](#)

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