

The Class of 2035

How sport can
empower a
generation to build
a brighter tomorrow

September 2021



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Foreword



Ali Oliver MBE,
Chief Executive,
Youth Sport Trust

This second edition of the Class of 2035 shines a light on the challenges facing a generation of young people in the UK today.

Through insights from young voices and over a year of consulting with experts across sport, health and education, it sets a direction for changes we must all make if sport and play are to be a universal entitlement which bring a sense of belonging for every child by 2035.

In the six years since the Youth Sport Trust commissioned Foresight Factory to carry out the original ground-breaking Class of 2035 report, the world has changed significantly. Young people in 2021 have more worries and face more challenges to their wellbeing. Their relationship with Physical Education and sport is changing.

The insights captured in this new report, commissioned to mark the 25th anniversary of the charity, will be essential to shaping how we deliver our mission in a rapidly changing world. Just as this report has been developed with input from a whole range of different voices, I hope that it will in turn be useful for any organisation or individual who shares our passion for using the power of sport to improve young people's lives.

So, what do we know about the path to 2035?

We are at a crossroads. Following the huge disruption of the past 18 months, we have a unique opportunity to create a new and better normal for young people. One which empowers young voices and harnesses the power of sport to improve lives and drive social change. Or things could go the other way. Even before COVID-19, far too many young people were inactive and disengaged with sport. National lockdowns and school closures exacerbated inequalities which meant that play and

sport were less likely to be making a positive contribution to the lives of young people who were disabled, from ethnically diverse communities or less affluent backgrounds. Left unchecked, these inequalities will grow further still.

This report sets out four different scenarios for how the future role of sport in young people's lives could play out over the coming years to 2035. It ends with a set of recommendations for how we might work together towards the optimum scenario where a universal entitlement to sport and play is helping to improve the education and development of every young person.

Our thanks go to Foresight Factory for their work on this important report, along with the dozens of brilliant individuals and organisations who have helped to shape it.

The findings in the following pages will help inform our work as a charity in the years ahead. They will inform a new strategy we will publish in 2022. As we work toward a vision of 2035, we are committed to updating this research on a regular basis to inform how we best harness the power of sport in a fast-changing world.

At the time of publication in September 2021, thousands of young children – full of nerves, uncertainty, hope and excitement – were being dropped off by anxious mums, dads and families for their first days at school. By 2035, these children will be finishing school, heading off into higher education or joining the world of work.

I hope the insights captured in this report will help all of us working in sport and education to empower this class of 2035 to build a better future.

Executive summary

Growing health concerns apparent among young people since 2014

Since 2014, the importance of personal health has become more significant to the lives of young people in the UK. Indeed, the proportion of those aged 5-16 in the UK who claim that “being healthy” is a very important aspect of their lives has grown from 45% in 2014 to 52% by 2020. What’s more, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has not only increased personal health concerns of young people, but also wider concerns about the health of family members. For example, the number of young people who worry about their family’s health has almost doubled since 2014, both for 5–10-year-olds (36% vs. 19%) and those aged 11-16 (41% vs. 23%). The increased awareness and focus on personal and family health, accelerated by COVID-19, should be seen as an opportunity to engage young people and target new mindsets in the post-pandemic era.

Increased action is needed to promote holistic and long-term wellbeing for young people

The UK is falling behind international standards in terms of the mental and emotional wellbeing of young people. International analysis demonstrates that British students are less happy than their international peers, with data from the respected PISA survey showing that they are the second-least likely in the OECD to report positive feelings such as being proud, joyful and cheerful, while they are the second-most likely to report negative feelings such as being scared, miserable, sad and afraid. To promote enhanced holistic wellbeing and the long-term health of UK society, school culture and PE need to be fully utilised to drive better physical and health literacy among young people in the UK. Moreover, the school curriculum needs to be re-focused to give equal focus to wellbeing alongside attainment, which should include a new national approach to the measurement of the holistic wellbeing of young people (including mental wellbeing and life satisfaction).

There is growing demand for more sporting opportunities among young people

The proportion of young people in the UK who claim that they want to do more sport and exercise has growing from 44% in 2014, to 54% by 2020. Such findings point to an unmet demand in terms of sporting opportunity for young people. To target and nurture such demands, expanded and enhanced sporting experiences need to be provided. For example, by providing wider access to multi-sport opportunities across school and community environments.

Teachers need to be better trained and empowered to drive sport engagement levels

It is clear that school teachers have an important role to play in driving activity and sporting levels among young people. Indeed, over 4 in 10 young people in the UK state that their school teachers and sport coaches inspire them to be active. All school staff, but particularly PE teachers, need to be better empowered to effectively monitor engagement levels of their pupils with sport and physical activity. Furthermore, where low engagement levels are identified, teachers also need to be fully able to suggest new entry points back into alternative sporting options; in order encourage a genuine and sustained engagement with sport across a growing proportion of young people.

Sport needs to provide a sense of fun and play, to drive a natural and sustained level of engagement

Over 6 in 10 young people in the UK state that having fun is an important aspect of their lives. Ensuring that fun and play remain at the heart of young people’s engagement with sport will be vital to build a genuine and emotional connection with such activities. Such levels of engagement will help ensure that sport and physical activity becomes an organic part of young people’s daily routine, increasing the likelihood that they remain engaged and active throughout their later life. In addition, the promotion of active school systems will also help foster more natural levels of physical activity. For example, via new school formats that encourage greater movement throughout the day and options for outdoor teaching.

Sport has an important role to play in providing the accumulation of personal skills and values needed to empower young people for later life

PE lessons are clearly valued by young people in the UK, with 86% agreeing that they are important. However, the benefits that young people believe they obtain from PE remains too narrow. Indeed, there remains a disparity between what young people view as the benefits that sport and exercise provide, and the attributes required to get a good job. For instance, good grades are most likely to be mentioned as necessary for employment (with 83% of young people mentioning) but are the least likely to be cited as a benefit of exercise and sport (with only 16% doing so). Providing sport experiences that target specific skills (e.g. team building, communication, leadership) and values (e.g. honesty, resilience) will be a key step in making the broader benefits of sport more apparent to young people. What's more, such approaches will also allow for more formal accreditation of skill sets and values via school sport, while also broadening the level of human/soft-skills provided to young people. Such values and skills accumulation will better prepare young people with the versatility needed to meet the challenges posed to the future labour market by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Clear evidence of unequal levels of confidence in, and the value derived from sport across socio-economic groups

Young people from lower socio-economic groups in the UK are the least confident in taking part in physical activity, with 51% of 11-16 year-olds in the D and E socio-economic groups rating themselves as confident, compared with 75% of those in groups A and B. What's more, those in lower socio-economic groups are also less likely to acknowledge the benefits that sport and exercise can offer, with only 32% of DEs agreeing that doing PE will help them achieve their ambitions in life, compared with 52% of ABs. With the risk of increased levels of inequality in the UK in the post-pandemic era, it will be vital that the current gap in engagement with sport is closed in the short-term. Indeed, the level of empowerment and self-enhancing that sport can provide, as outlined throughout this report, demonstrates that sporting participation has the potential to be a driver of social mobility and increased levels of opportunity across all social groups. However, for this potential to be unlocked, the extent to which income levels shape engagement with sport will need to be addressed.

Levels of sport engagement and empowerment can be heightened by improved representation of young people in the design and delivery of sporting activities

Young people in the UK demonstrate an increased likelihood to participate in sport if it is designed and/or delivered by their peers. For example, there has been a considerable increase in the proportion of young people who agree that they would play more sport if it was taught by someone their own age, rising from 23% in 2014 to 36% by 2020. What's more, this figure is even higher among those with a disability at 46%, further highlighting the role that enhanced representation can have in curating sporting activities that are tailored to the needs of specific groups of young people. Such findings illustrate the importance of developing new approaches to the democratisation of young people in terms of their engagement with sport policy and delivery, which can help ensure that the sporting experiences of young people are better aligned to the specific needs of their local area and students.

New technology should be used to engage young people on a level and channel that will resonate with them

Rather than seeing technology has a barrier or distraction to sport, digital advances need to be utilised to entice engagement with physical activity. Indeed, a growing proportion of young people agree that they would like to use more technology as part of PE lessons, with 45% agreeing in 2020 compared with 37% in 2014. Developing gamification techniques that draw upon experiences from computer games will provide new approaches to encourage sporting activity, as will using data tracking devices to provide more continuous feedback and encouragement based on individually set goals. In addition, the use of augmented and virtual technology will enable schools and pupils in more remote or rural areas to attend/take part in more sports initiatives, such as School Game events.

Part 1: The Class of 2021

In the first part of this report, we explore the findings of new quantitative research conducted across 5-16 year olds in the UK, exploring core attitudes and behaviours towards their physical and mental wellbeing, as well as their engagement with sport.

While the events relating to the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have clearly had an unprecedented impact on the lives of young people, and in particular their activity levels, our survey also reveals a good deal of consistency in the attitudes and behaviours of young people towards sport and exercise compared with the last wave of research in 2014.

Taken together, the findings presented in this chapter seek to draw a line in the sand of the current attitudes and behaviour of young people today; providing the foundation for subsequent chapters where we will explore the longer-term changes shaping the future of young people and sport.

An opportunity to capitalise on an increased focus on health

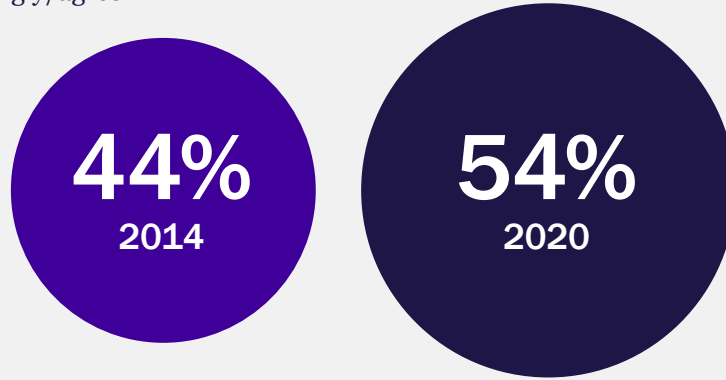
One undeniable development since 2014 is a greater focus on health, with 52% of 5-16 year olds citing “being healthy” as a very important aspect of their lives up from 45% in 2014. While this can be seen as a positive development, there are also signs that, understandably, there has been a growth in the proportion of young people who are worried about the health of themselves or their family. In particular, the proportion who worry about their family’s health has effectively doubled since 2014, both for 5–10-year-olds (36% vs. 19%) and those aged 11-16 (41% vs. 23%).

There is also an increased desire on the part of young people to do more sport and exercise, with 54% of 5-16 year-olds expressing this sentiment, up from 44% in 2014. Interestingly, this rises to 69% among children from ethnically diverse communities, suggesting that there is unmet demand among a group that has been shown to be less likely to thrive in education.



Chart 1: Growing desire to do more sport and exercise

“I would like to do more exercise/play more sports than I do at the moment”
% who agree strongly/agree



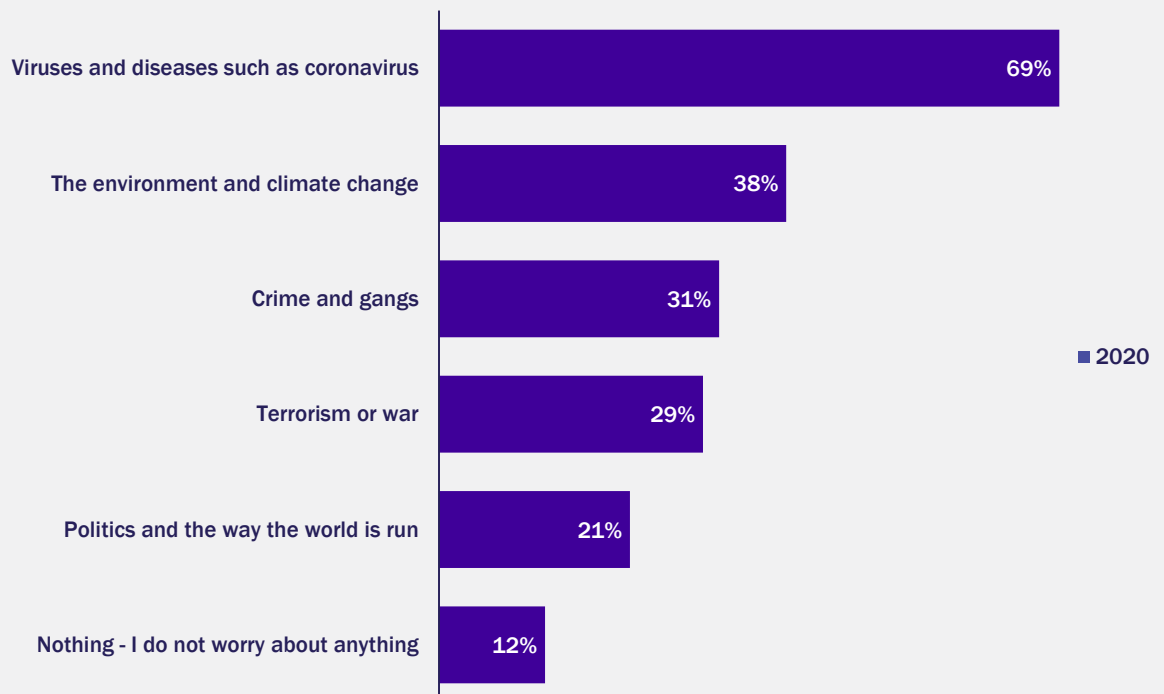
Source: Foresight Factory | 994 respondents aged 5-16, November 2020

Increased stress and anxiety levels apparent across young people today

All the existing threats to young people’s happiness and mental wellbeing have been exacerbated since 2014 and added to by worries related to the pandemic. Indeed, when asked whether they are worried about a range of topical issues affecting the world at large, 69% cite viruses and diseases such as coronavirus. At the same time, however, 38% mention the environment and climate change as a source of worry, and crime and gangs is a factor for 31%.

Chart 2: Young people have many worries besides COVID-19

“Here are some issues that are sometimes in the news.
Which of these, if any, do you worry about?” % mentioning



Source: Foresight Factory | 477 respondents aged 11-16, November 2020

When it comes to concerns closer to home, how well they are doing at school is the most common source of worry, with 52% of those aged 11-16 and 42% of those aged 5-10 mentioning it. What’s most striking here is that the proportion who say they don’t worry about anything has fallen since 2014, from 15% to 11% of 11-16 year-olds, and from 36% to 26% of 5-10 year olds. A carefree childhood is certainly less common than it was five years ago.



“The unerring focus on just one measure in terms of academic attainment has ensured that the education system has become narrower and narrower in recent years. Equal weight needs to be given to the wellbeing of young people alongside attainment. Indeed, improving the life satisfaction and wellbeing of children and young people should be a key policy driver, in order to complement the current focus on exam results.”

David Gregson, The Gregson Family Foundation

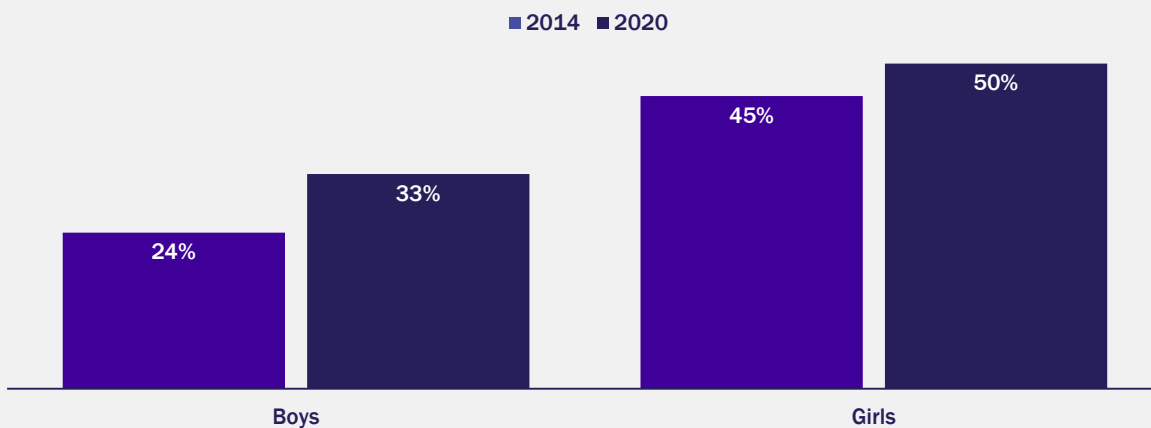
Another important aspect to bear in mind is the gender inequality when it comes to worries, with girls more likely to admit to a range of anxieties than boys. In particular, 39% of girls aged 11-16 mention the way their body looks as a source of worry, compared with 23% of boys. At the same time, 26% of girls worry about what people at school write and post on social media, versus 16% of boys. Having said that, agreement that they feel under pressure to look good, while still lower overall, has risen more among boys than girls in the past five years, showing that this is a growing area of concern for boys as well.

“Our research shows that young people’s well-being has been in decline since 2009. While the drivers behind this are complicated, it’s clear that school is one area young people are particularly struggling with. This isn’t just about school work and academic pressure - school culture matters. From worries about appearance and fitting in to bullying, behaviour management and relationships between staff and students, there are a range of issues. Schools are finding these challenges really hard to respond to. Our education system is aimed at getting kids to pass their grades – and often supporting young people to cope with wider cultural issues or to support them developing stronger overall wellbeing is seen as ‘nice-to-have’ and not essential.”

Richard Crellin, Policy and Research Manager, The Children’s Society

Chart 3: Growth in boys feeling under pressure to look good

“I feel under pressure to look good” % agree strongly/agree



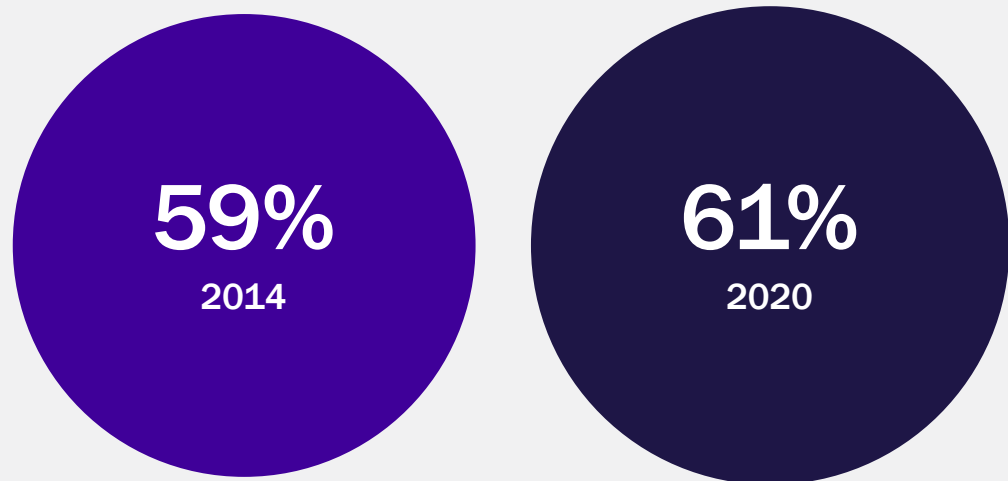
Source: Foresight Factory | 477 respondents aged 11-16, November 2020

The importance of fun and enjoyment when it comes to sport and exercise

With over 6 in 10 young people saying having fun is an important aspect of their lives, it is important young people see sport, exercise and PE as enjoyable activities that they want to take part in, and not chores that have to be endured. As Baroness Tanni-Grey-Thompson states, “there is a massive opportunity to re-think PE in school. School programmes can be key to embedding physical activity into the daily lives of children; making it a big, natural part of their lives that will continue into later life.”

Chart 4: Fun is an important part of life for many young people

“How important are each of these things to you? Having Fun” (% rating as very important)



Source: Foresight Factory | 994 respondents aged 5-16, November 2020

Inequality remains a fundamental challenge

Inequalities of outcome across socio-economic class (SEC), gender, ethnicity and disability were already apparent and growing in British society. It is feared that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could exacerbate these if appropriate mitigating action is not taken swiftly.

Our research shows that across a wide range of measures, those in the lowest socio-economic groups are less confident than those in the highest groups. This is most marked when it comes to confidence to take part in physical activity, with 51% of 11-16 year-olds in the D and E socio-economic groups rating themselves as good, compared with 75% of those in groups A and B. Team working skills are another area of considerable disparity, with 73% of ABs rating their confidence as good, compared with just 52% of DEs.

“It is clear now that affluence is the biggest factor in driving issues with mental or physical wellbeing and activity levels. The more affluent you are, the more choice you have, e.g. access to clubs, etc. The more affluent also have access to private spaces for exercise, like gardens. The less affluent are more reliant on schools and public places.”

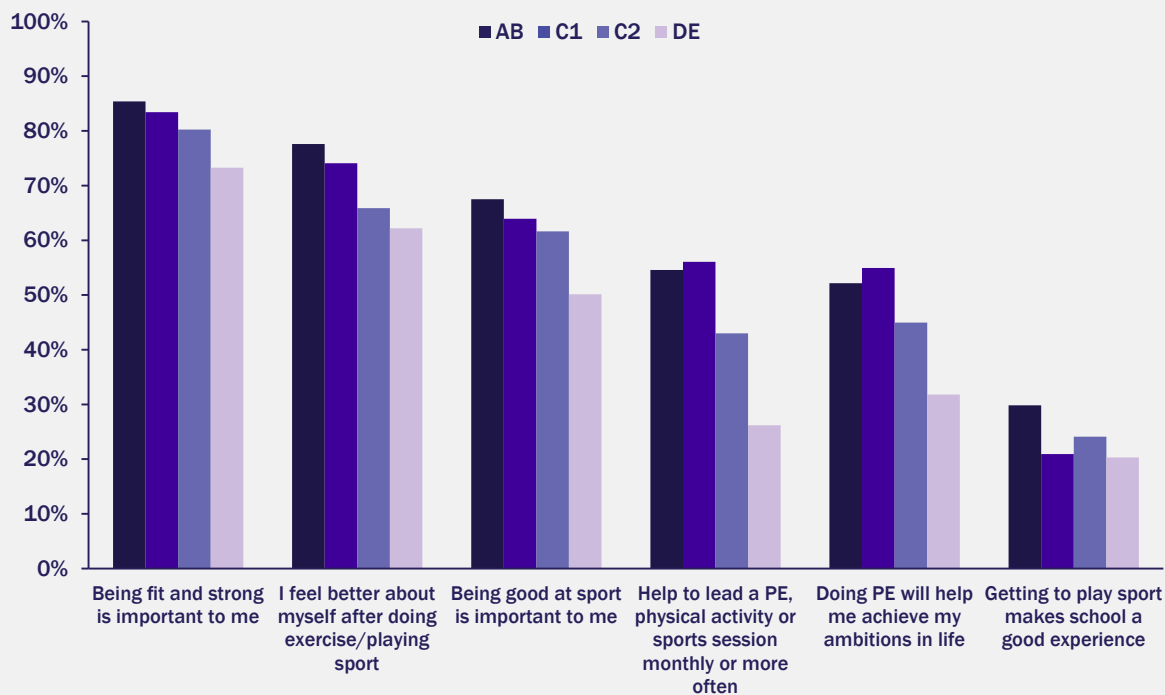
Mike Diaper, Executive Director Children and Young People at Sport England

Besides the lack of confidence when it comes to various aspects of life, those in lower SEC groupings are also less likely to acknowledge the benefits that sport and exercise in particular can bring, with lower levels of agreement that being fit and strong is important to them, and that they feel better about themselves after doing exercise or playing sport. Crucially, only 32% of DEs agree that doing PE will help them achieve their ambitions in life, compared with 52% of ABs. One of the bigger disparities relates to volunteering, with only 26% of DEs saying they help to lead a PE, physical activity or sports session at least monthly, compared with 55% of ABs.



Chart 5: Lower SEC groups are less likely to see the benefits of exercise, including PE in achieving ambitions

% agree strongly/agree



Source: Foresight Factory | 477 respondents aged 11-16, November 2020

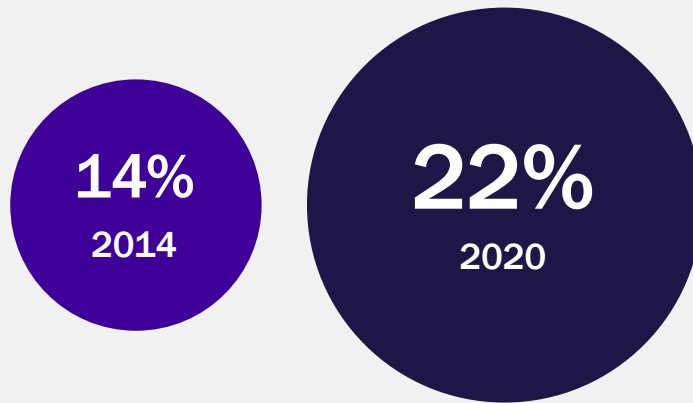
Technology has empowerment potential, but is hampered by inequalities in use or access

The role that technology can play in facilitating physical exercise was underlined during the pandemic, with just over half of young people aged 7-16 surveyed – 53% - reporting that they had done an online exercise class such as those offered by Joe Wicks during the UK's lockdowns.

While growing use of technology among young people has in the past often been seen as a barrier to physical activity, there are signs that attitudes could be changing, in part driven by the experience of the pandemic.

Chart 6: Technology plays an increasingly important role in the lives of young people

“How important are each of these things to you? Owning the latest technology”
(% rating as very important)



Source: Foresight Factory | 994 respondents aged 5-16, November 2020

Young people’s enthusiasm for technology has certainly grown in the last five years or so, with 22% agreeing that owning the latest tech is a very important aspect of their lives, up from 14% back in 2014. This proportion rises to 29% among children from ethnically diverse communities. We also see that a growing proportion of young people agree that they would like to use more technology as part of PE lessons, with 45% agreeing, compared with 37% in 2014. Girls are more likely than boys to agree with this sentiment, at 49% vs. 41%. The figure also rises to 66% of those with a disability, underlining the role that technology can play in overcoming this form of inequality.

“Today, everything is tracked by data and this will only increase in the future. Young people want to be able to use data to benchmark their activities, and school sport will need to find ways to incorporate this. Young people are used to continuous feedback loops in today’s society (e.g. you share a post on social media and you get immediate likes). As we approach 2035, I can see this approach becoming used far more in PE where digital devices and trackers are used to provide specific and continuous feedback on the performance and progress of individual students, which they can then choose to share with their friends or family.”

Born Barikor, CEO and Founder of Our Parks

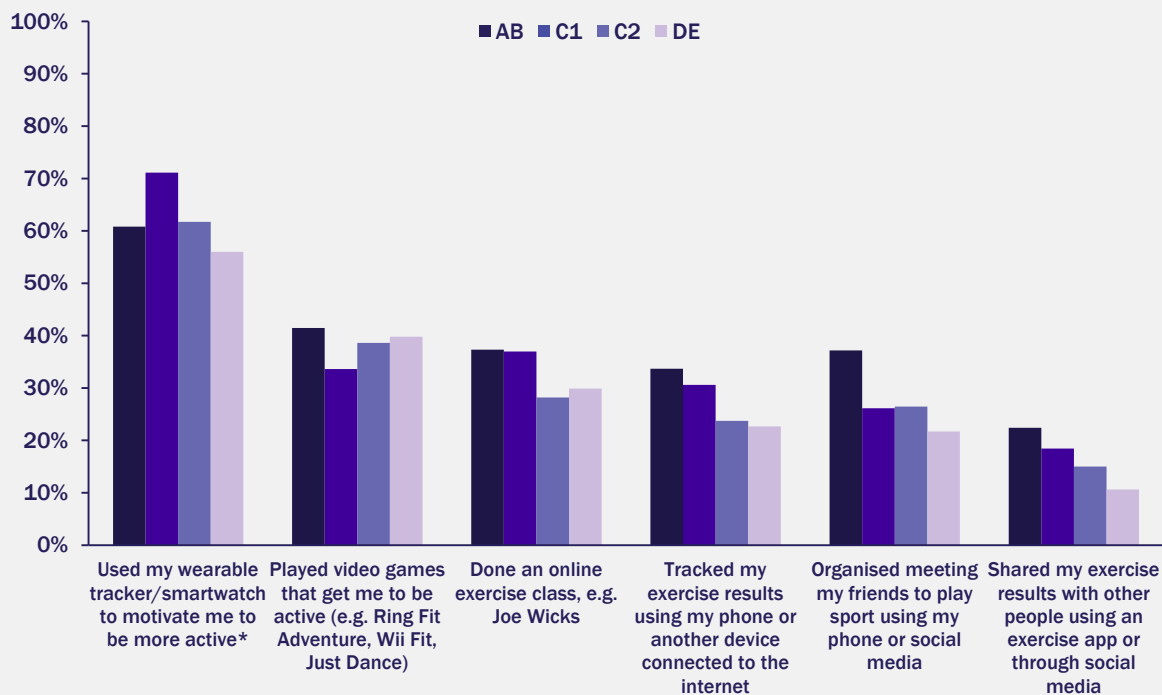
On the wider topic of inequality, there are signs that using technology to facilitate or enable exercise, such as doing online classes is something that unites young people across the socio-economic divide. While ownership of fitness trackers is lower among 7-16 year-old DEs (24%) compared with ABs, young people in all SECs who own one are just as likely to agree that they have used the device to motivate them to be more active, at 61% of ABs vs. 56% of DEs. There is also relatively little variation in the proportion who have done an online exercise class, at 56% of ABs versus 50% of DEs.



Differences by social class do become more prominent, however, when it comes to using technology to organise an in-person meeting to play sport, with 37% of ABs reporting they'd used their phone or social media to do this, compared with just 22% of DEs. More could be done, therefore, to encourage all young people to use their affinity with technology to facilitate more exercise and sport participation.

Chart 7: Lower SEC groups less likely to use technology to organize playing sport with friends

% who have done activity and would like to do again



Source: Foresight Factory | 821 respondents aged 7-16, November 2020 *among those who own a wearable device

One of the most striking findings from the original Class of 2035 report in 2015 was that almost 1 in 4 young people (23%) agreed that playing a computer game is a kind of exercise. In fact, agreement is even higher in 2020, at 32%, rising to 40% of children from ethnically diverse communities and 45% of boys. Of course, it is even more the case now than it was five years ago that gaming does often have an element of physical activity, and with the development of more sophisticated haptics this trend is likely to continue. Gaming doesn't necessarily have to be the threat to physical activity that it is sometimes painted as.

“There is an opportunity to seek to turn our approach to online gaming on its head. We are not going to stop kids playing computer games. But if you look at the top eSports players, they know that in order to perform to the best of their abilities they take their mental and physical wellbeing seriously. That is a message to take to young people – if you want to be like them, or be good at computer games, or simply improve your ability at anything – then physical and mental wellbeing is key.”

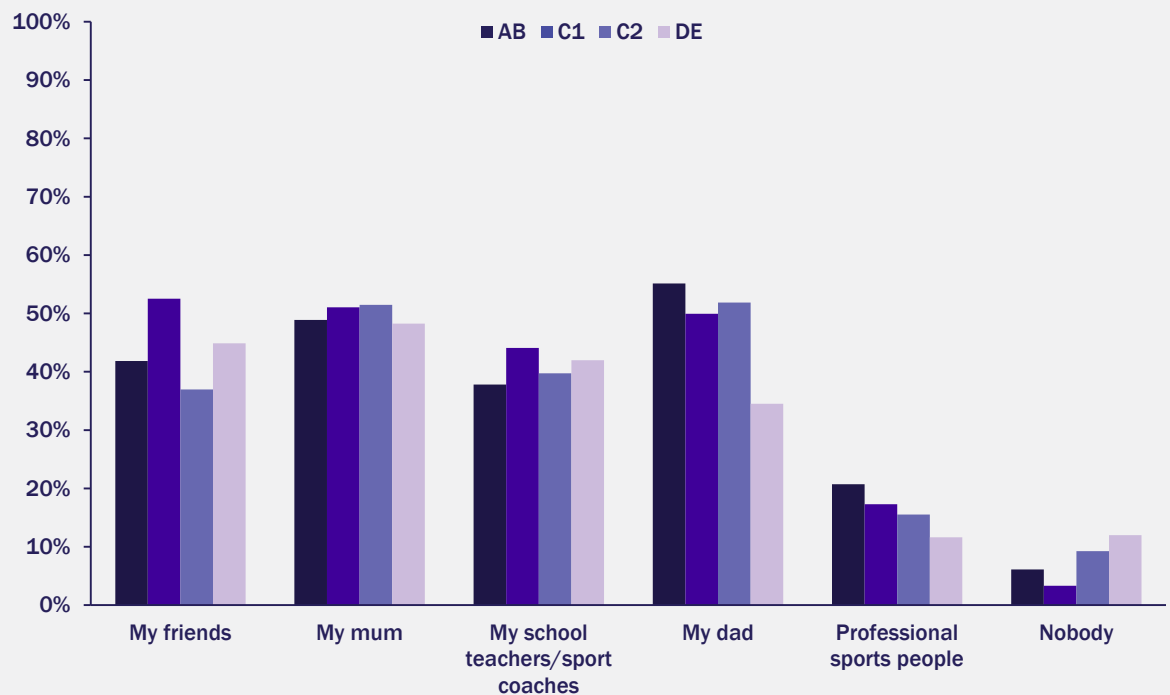
Jayne Molyneux, Director Children & Young People at Sport England

Schools have a key role to play in combatting inequality

One striking finding is that teachers are likely to inspire young people to be active regardless of social grade. When asked whether certain groups of people inspire them to be active, those in the DE group are actually more likely, at 42%, to mention their school teacher or sports coach than those in the AB group, at 38%. By contrast, those in DE are twenty percentage points less likely to agree their dad inspires them to be active than young people in AB, at 35% versus 55%. This underlines the ability of teachers to inspire young people regardless of background.

Chart 8: Those in lowest SEC groups less likely to say their dad inspires them to be active

Who or what inspires you to be active? (% mentioning)



However, those young people who describe themselves as having a disability are less likely to say their school teacher or sports coach inspires them to be active, at 33%, compared with 42% of those who do not. This suggests more could be done to ensure that this group receive the encouragement and support they require to achieve their desired levels of activity.

Another area for consideration is that the proportion of young people who agree that they would do more PE if their school facilities were better has grown to 45%, compared with 31% back in 2014. This does not necessarily mean that school facilities have got worse in the intervening years. It could be a reflection of the fact that when the 2020 survey was carried out, use of many facilities and school activities were being restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It does serve to underline the important role that school has to play in the activity levels of young people.

When asked which factors are important to them for a good school experience, 24% of 5-16 year-olds mention getting to play sport as one of their top three factors. The most widely mentioned factors were enjoying their time at school, having good friends and getting good grades. The importance of playing sport is more likely to be mentioned by boys, at 30%, than girls, at 18%. It is also most likely to be mentioned by those in the AB social grade, at 30%. These findings show that while getting to play sport is an important aspect of school for a sizeable proportion of young people, there is more to be done to convey this importance to all groups.

More needs to be done to convey the benefits of physical activity

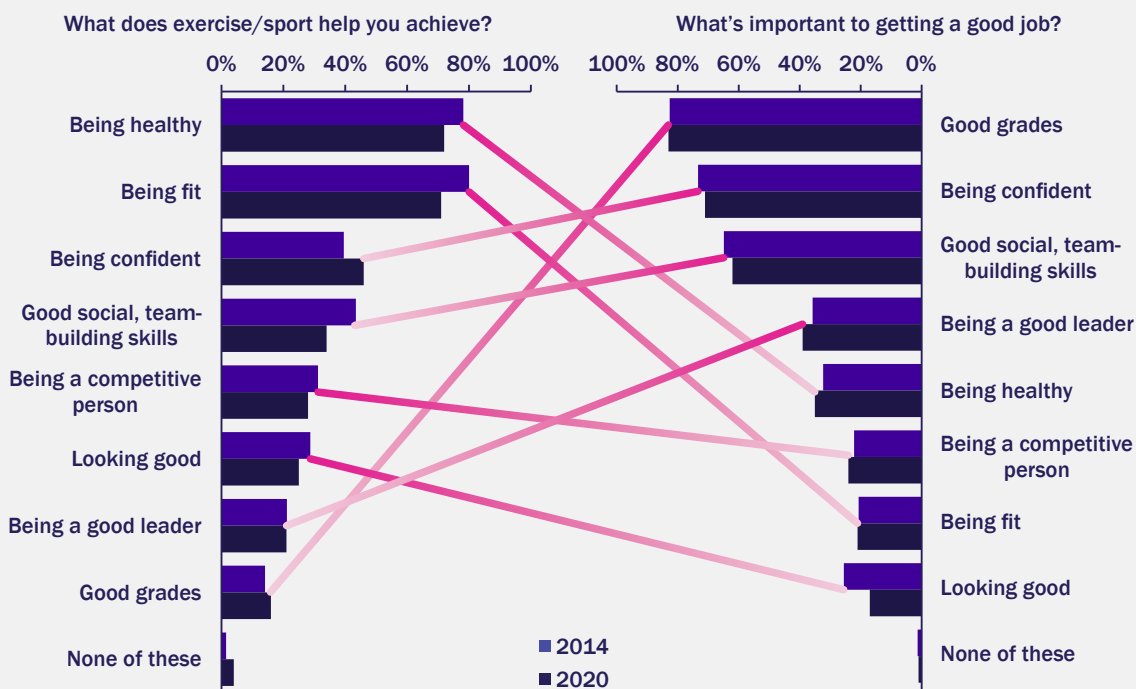
Overall, PE lessons are valued by young people, with 86% agreeing that they are important. They are also enjoyed by many, though this is more apparent among boys, with 49% saying they like PE lessons a lot, versus 39% of girls. This is reflected in the fact that girls are more likely to mention a wide range of reasons for not enjoying PE lessons, including worries about catching COVID-19 (17% of girls mention vs. 3% of boys), not being very competitive (42% of girls vs. 31% of boys) and not being very good at exercise or sport (37% of girls vs. 26% of boys).

When asked what benefits PE lessons help them achieve, the most common responses among young people are being healthy, with 75% mentioning, and being fit, at 74%. Social and team building skills are mentioned by 43%, along with confidence at 42%. Having said that, getting good grades is seen as an outcome of PE lessons by only 14%.

As uncovered by the last piece of research, there is still a disparity between what young people view as the benefits that sport and exercise provide, and the attributes required to get a good job. For instance, good grades are most likely to be mentioned as necessary for employment, with 83% of young people mentioning this, but are the least likely to be cited as a benefit of exercise and sport, with only 16% doing so. Conversely, 71% agree that sport and exercise helps achieve better fitness, but only 21% agree that being fit is important in getting a good job.

Chart 9: What sport and exercise helps you achieve vs. what's important to getting a good job

% mentioning each option



Source: Foresight Factory | 477 respondents aged 11-16, November 2020



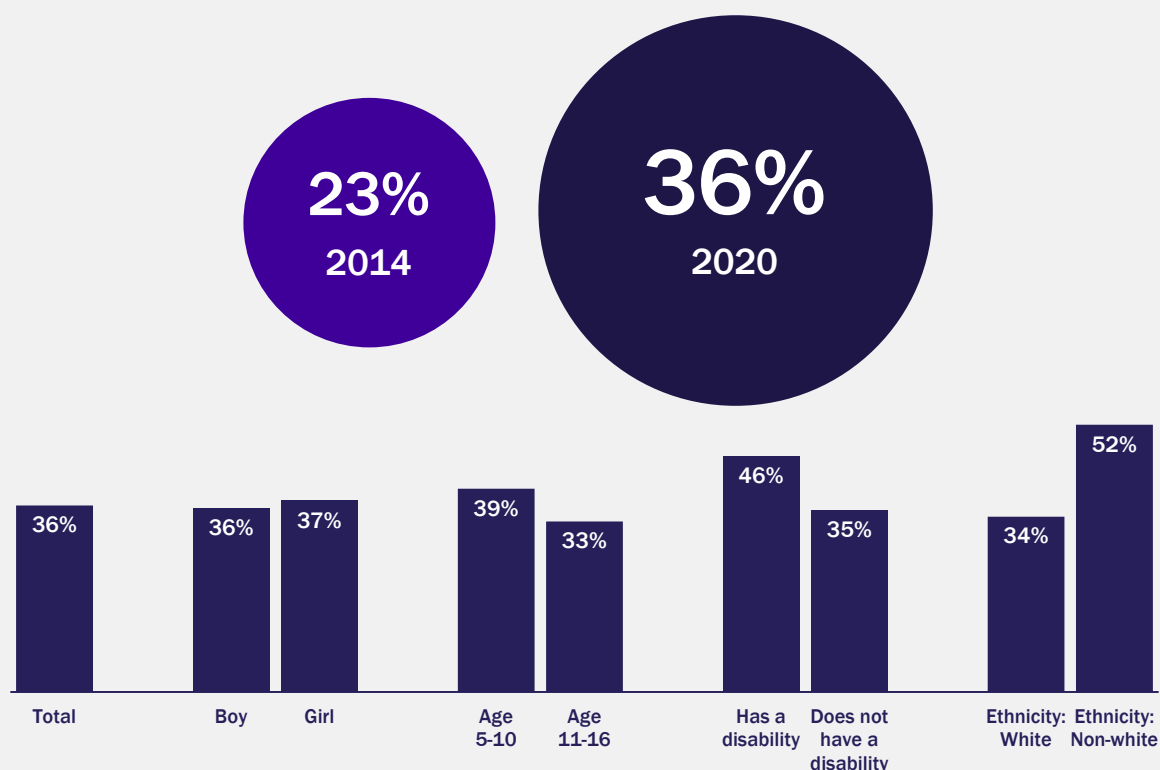
One positive development is that the proportion of young people who agree that sport and exercise provide confidence has grown, from 39% in 2014 to 46% in 2020. At the same time, 71% find that being confident is important to getting a good job. Overall, however, it is fair to say that there is more work to be done to encourage young people to see the role that PE, sport and exercise can play in developing skills that are important for getting a good job and other life skills.

Young people have an important role to play

There has been a considerable increase in the proportion of young people who agree that they would play more sport if it was taught by someone their own age, from 23% in 2014 to 36% now. The figure is even higher among those with a disability, at 46%, and underlines the importance of coaching and volunteering by young people.

Chart 10: Young coaches and volunteers have an increasingly important role

“I would play more sport if it was taught/run by someone my own age” (% agree strongly/agree)



Source: Foresight Factory | 994 respondents aged 5-16, November 2020

Such findings highlight the key role that young people can play in the design, development and delivery of physical activity as a means to drive broader and deeper engagement with sport.

“There is a general lack of role models ... particularly for young women. That doesn’t have to be a supermodel or a superstar – it can be a role model in your own school. But we have to build those role models – people who are healthy, active, rounded individuals who can model why it’s important.”

Baroness Sue Campbell, Director of Women’s Football, The Football Association



Part 2:

Getting to the future

In this section, we look at some of the macro forces that will drive change in the lives of the Class of 2035. These forces are beyond the control of individuals, but will certainly shape the attitudes and behaviours of young people, their parents, teachers and other adults in 2035. As part of our work in this section, we identified and considered a longer list of potential drivers of change, and through a process of research and interviews with experts we pinpointed the following five, which we believe will have the biggest impact on how the lives of young people will change over the next decade and a half. These drivers will then be synthesized to develop four scenarios for the year 2035.

Driver 1: Affluence & Inequality

In 2020, the income of the richest 20% of people in the UK was over six times higher than the poorest 20%, while the richest 10% received 50% more income than the poorest 40%¹. Further illustrating the scale of the national divide, the Office for National Statistics has also reported that income inequality was as much as 2.4 percentage points higher on average than official figures had suggested over the decade since the financial crisis in 2008².

Growing affluence for some, combined with expanding inequality across specific consumer groups and geographical regions, has been the core economic narrative shaping UK society in recent decades. And this dual impact is set to be exacerbated further by the COVID-19 crisis in the 2020s, as the impact of the pandemic has not been evenly distributed across income groups in the UK³. Indeed, excluding key workers, 80% of those in the bottom tenth of the earnings distribution were in a shut-down sector or could not work from home, compared to only 25% of those in the highest-earning tenth. Moreover, school shutdowns were likely to accentuate the divide in educational attainment, while COVID-19 death rates in the most deprived tenth of areas in the UK were more than double those in the least deprived tenth. In addition, regional inequality will also be a key challenge in the 2020s. Pre-pandemic research from the University of Sheffield in 2019⁴ found that the UK has the highest level of regional inequality of any large wealthy country. Overall, such findings point towards the risk of growing inequality levels in the 2020s across income groups and regions.

What is more, inequality has a direct impact on the wellbeing and attainment of young people, with children from low-income families four times more likely to experience mental health problems than higher-income families, and white working-class boys in England the lowest academic achievers at the age of 16 for any socio-economic class grouping.

Looking towards the coming decade and beyond, the extent to which affluence and inequality levels in the UK increase or decrease will have a significant influence on engagement of young people with sport and physical activity. At the negative extreme, there is a danger of a significant increase in socio-economic inequality, resulting in a growing chasm of activity levels and opportunities to engage with sport, as affluence becomes the main driver of health and wellbeing of young people. Our data show that there are already considerable divides between the highest and lowest social grades when it comes to many attitudes and behaviours around sport and exercise. At the positive extreme, significant reductions in socio-economic inequality will enable

1 ONS, July 2020: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/householdincomeinequalityfinancial/financialyearending2020provisional>

2 ONS February 2020: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/compendium/economicreview/february2020/topincomeadjustmentineffectsoftaxesandbenefitsdatamethodology>

3 Covid-19 and Inequalities, IFS, July 2020: <https://ifs.org.uk/inequality/covid-19-and-inequalities/>

4 <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/uk-higher-regional-inequality-large-wealthy-country-1.862262>



young people from all social backgrounds to have the same incentives and opportunity to be active and engage with sport – removing income levels as the key indicator of wellbeing among young people in the UK. This has the potential to create a virtuous circle, given that tackling inequality in sporting engagement can play a role in tackling wider inequalities, as well as building skills such as confidence and leadership which will support social mobility in the longer term.

Driver 2: Perceptions of Wellbeing

There is little doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has made the nation focus anew on the importance of health, with, for example, 61% of British adults in 2021 feeling at personal risk of infectious disease, up from just 11% in 2016⁵. There is also evidence that on balance, the nation's perception of its overall levels of health has declined, with 43% of British Gen Z (born after 2000) reporting that their physical health has got worse during the pandemic, and 58% of the same cohort reporting that their mental health had worsened⁶. What's more, international analysis shows that British students were already less happy than their international peers. According to PISA data, students in the UK are the second-least likely in the OECD to report positive feelings such as being proud, joyful and cheerful, while they are the second-most likely to report negative feelings such as being scared, miserable, sad and afraid.

Furthermore, evidence showing that, for instance, obese people are significantly more likely to become seriously ill and be admitted to intensive care with COVID-19 compared to those with a healthy BMI⁷ has increased focus on the importance of staying fit and healthy generally. It is little wonder that research carried out for this report shows that health and wellness is a topic on the minds of young people much more than before.

Even before the pandemic, we had been seeing a shift in how we define health. For those with the means, being healthy now goes beyond simply being illness-free. It means a continual focus on feeling better and striving for holistic wellbeing. This means that sleep, exercise, mental wellbeing, diet and more are monitored and behaviours changed – and we move closer to a future of preventative, rather than reactive, healthcare.

⁵ Foresight Factory | Base: 4801 online respondents aged 16+, GB, 2021 March

⁶ Foresight Factory | Base: 4730 online respondents aged 16+, GB, 2021 March

⁷ Public Health England, July 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/excess-weight-can-increase-risk-of-serious-illness-and-death-from-covid-19>

All of this suggests that we are at a juncture where there is an opportunity to foster in young people a genuine interest and enthusiasm in staying healthy via exercise and sport, as opposed to forcing them to take part in activities they may not be interested in. On the one hand, the government may choose to go down a more draconian, top-down avenue, with impositions of daily exercise targets that are not designed to encourage or motivate young people. Such activities may be designed with the sole intention of getting kind moving around, rather than engaging in team sports that help foster valuable life skills such as empathy and teamwork.

On the other hand, the renewed focus on health and wellbeing that COVID-19 has brought about could lead to a more holistic policy towards the topic, trying to foster an ongoing embedding of wellbeing as a part of daily lives. This would include attempts to ensure that P.E. lessons are engaging and that young people understand the benefits they can derive from taking part, besides being fitter and healthier.

Driver 3: The Fourth Industrial Revolution

Research by the World Economic Forum⁸ has found that 43% of businesses surveyed plan to reduce their workforce through technology integration, so that by 2025, based on today's tasks, the average estimated time spent by humans and machines at work will be equal.

The employment market is evolving so that many occupations are at increased risk of automation, meaning that different skill sets will be valued by employers in the years to come – particularly softer, human skills such as empathy and teamwork, which cannot be easily automated and which can be improved via team sports.

“COVID has held up a mirror to our education system and shown an over-focus on cleverness being the main metric to measure and the main sign of success. COVID has shown the importance of empathy and kindness, which may lead to a new craving for humanity. We need to be able to promote these soft, human skills more in young people and the arts, sport, etc. will be critical to achieving this.”

Geoff Barton, General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders

The risks to jobs from automation will be unevenly spread across industries and skill levels, with low-skilled workers at greater risk of losing their jobs to automation than high-skilled workers. Research by PwC⁹ has suggested that 44% of workers with a low education level (GCSE-equivalent level or lower) will be replaced by automation by 2030, compared with only 11% of workers with graduate degrees.

Some skills will remain uniquely human. Machines are now capable of judgement and basic decision-making, bringing up the question of which skills will remain uniquely human. As even creativity is mastered by robots, true empathy is likely to become increasingly valuable as a human skill. The presence of physical staff will also remain highly valued.

According to research from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI)¹⁰, 44% of UK businesses feel schools and colleges are not equipping young people with an aptitude or readiness for work. Non-academic, broader skills such as listening, creativity and teamwork are an area frequently cited as priority areas for primary and secondary.

When it comes to how this mega trend could evolve, at the negative extreme, the current focus on academic attainment would be continued and perhaps intensified, with a need to “catch up” pupils on what they missed during lockdowns. Softer, more human skills such as teamwork would be de-emphasised, and team sports more broadly may be squeezed out of the curriculum as more time is given over to more academic subjects.

8 WEF Future of Jobs Report, October 2020 <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020/digest>

9 PwC, Will Robots Really Steal Our Jobs?, February 2018 <https://www.pwc.co.uk/economic-services/assets/international-impact-of-automation-feb-2018.pdf>

10 CBI Educating for the Modern World, November 2018 <https://www.cbi.org.uk/articles/educating-for-the-modern-world/>

At the positive extreme, policy-makers could appreciate the importance of human skills against a backdrop of automation, and decide to recalibrate towards a more rounded education of young people. Furthermore, they would appreciate that many of the skills that will be important for the new world of work, such as empathy and teamwork, can be achieved via team sports, and they are consequently given due prominence in the curriculum.

Driver 4: Empowerment of Young People

The impact of COVID-19 on young people's lives and future prospects is much talked about, but to what extent are their views being listened to and acted upon? There is an opportunity to give young people the power to help shape the future of sport and exercise.

Research carried out by the Prince's Trust on the impact of lockdown on young people showed that almost half (47%) of 16-25 year-olds in the UK did not feel in control of their lives. This was up from 38% just five months earlier, and 28% back in 2017. Meanwhile, research conducted among young people in Northern Ireland during lockdown showed that 73% felt their voice had not been considered as important during the pandemic.

In 2021, 40% of British Gen Z claimed they take part in a demonstration or protest at least once a year¹¹. They are the generation that protest the most; well above the 17% national average. More broadly, in recent years, real-world demonstration numbers have swelled as grassroots movements are spread by communication technology, energised by a divisive political landscape and troubled democratic transitions.

Meanwhile, 2020 research among teens showed that 63% of 12-19 year olds in GB were concerned about what they can personally do to help protect the environment¹². 2019 saw thousands of pupils across the UK walking out of their classrooms to take part in Climate Strikes, urging government and other organisations to do more to address climate change. Urged on by the movement's figurehead, Greta Thunberg, they embodied a group of young people who are aware of and engaged in wider social issues.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has seen many negative effects on the lives of young people, not least missing many days of in-person schooling. Even after the return to school, many previously normal activities such as school trips have had to be curtailed, with movement around school restricted and compulsory mask-wearing and regular testing for those in secondary schools. Research commissioned for this report, meanwhile, shows that young people aged 11-16 have many sources of concern, including climate change, which 38% worry about, crime and gangs, a worry for 31%, and terrorism or war at 29%. Only 12% claim not to worry about any issues they hear about in the news.

This could evolve in a couple of different ways over the course of the next decade or so. At the negative extreme, the current top-down approach to policies for young people could continue, or even worsen as the "crisis-mode" of COVID-19 becomes a semi-permanent state of affairs, with less listening to citizens. At the positive end of the spectrum, the crisis facing the future of our young people as a result of COVID-19 could be a wake-up call to listen to their voices. One embodiment of this could be a dedicated cabinet minister for children in the UK government, or a UK-wide equivalent to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in Wales.

Driver 5: Virtual Technology

Technological advancements during the next decade and a half will be a driving factor that cannot be ignored. One in particular that is likely to grow in popularity, as well as having the potential to impact how young people engage with exercise and sport, is virtual reality. It is predicted that by 2025, 26% of British consumers aged 16 and above will own or have access to a virtual reality headset, up from 11% in 2021¹³. A further 16% are predicted to be interested in acquiring one in 2025.

11 Foresight Factory | Base: 4611 online respondents aged 16+, GB, 2021 March

12 Foresight Factory | Base: 1011 online respondents aged 12-19, GB, 2020 February

13 Foresight Factory | Base: 4801 online respondents aged 16+, GB, 2021 March

In fact, a spectrum of new technology is giving us more control over how we experience reality. Augmented reality (AR) technologies allow users to alter what they see, hear and even feel. Hearables, for example, adjust ambient audio frequency levels and promise real-time translation of spoken dialogue, while AR eyewear overlays imagery and information onto the world as you experience it.

These technologies turn reality into a spectrum, where virtual adjustments can be dialled up or down. At one end lies full-blown immersion (for instance, via VR headsets); at the other lies “mixed reality”, where the physical world forms the backdrop to a rich and dynamic overlay of digital signage. All of these technologies could have an application in the world of sport and exercise, either to make them more engaging, or to bring together people who are separated by physical distance.

More generally, the pandemic and the enforced isolation it caused led to a striking increase in the use of virtual communication technology, with data from Ofcom showing that the proportion of UK adults using video calls doubled, and that more than a quarter of waking hours on average were being spent online for the first time¹⁴.

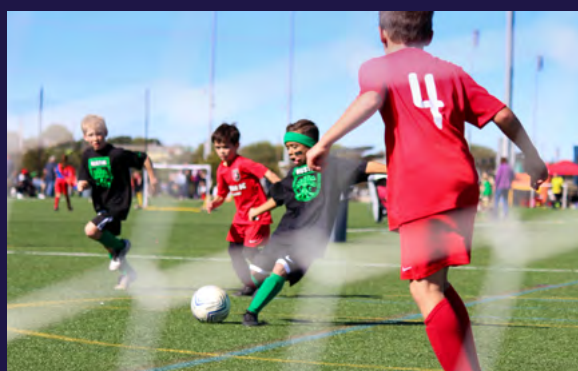
“Young people have this broadening of their connection through technologies, and the thing that worries me about that, is the concept of replacement of a relationship via something which technology will try to replace for them, and try to take all the all the cognitive and emotional impacts of friendship and support, and then layering that with the use of technologies, into something that can be incredibly superficial”.

Billy Downie, YST Trustee and Headteacher of Streetly Academy

Again, this driving force could play out in a number of ways when it comes to young people’s engagement with sport or exercise, some of which are positive and others not so. At the negative extreme, virtual technology may increasingly serve as a replacement for real-life interactions, including exercise and sport, with the potential replacement of real-life activity with e-sports, for example. The longer COVID-related restrictions persist, the more ingrained this habit could be.

On the other hand, technology in general, and virtual technology in particular, could be used as an enabler to facilitate exercise and sport. For example, currently, 37% of ABs have used tech to organise playing sport with their friends, vs. only 22% of DEs.

¹⁴ Ofcom, June 2020 <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2020/uk-internet-use-surges>



Part 3:

Welcome to the Class of 2035

What role will physical education and sport play in the lives of children in 2035? What will the world look like to them? Is it likely that they will be healthier, or happier, than today's young people? And how will schools, sport bodies, government and wider stakeholders need to respond to promote the best possible outcome and mitigate the likelihood of more negative outcomes?

The future is never entirely clear, and making predictions, particularly predictions reaching as far forward as 2035, is not an exact science. To put forward a single, definitive scenario – this is how things will be – would be to misplace confidence and ultimately do an injustice to the complexity of forces shaping and reshaping a constantly evolving British society. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has added new waves of uncertainty into the evolution of British society. As we enter the post-pandemic era, it is clear that there are multiple drivers of change that have the potential to shape the Class of 2035 in differing and polarised directions, further highlighting that the future of this generation cannot be viewed through the lens of one singular vision.

Instead, we present here four possible visions for the world in 2035 as it looks for young people. They are grounded in our understanding of the key drivers shaping the current sporting landscape (as explored in Part 2 of this report), extrapolated into the longer-term future and intersected with our expectations for what the next 14 years will bring in the way of societal change.

The starting point in creating these four futures has been to establish the two core drivers of change that, when drawn out to their extremes, generate dramatic and opposing scenarios for credible futures. These drivers emerged from an in-depth consultation process with key stakeholders across the sports and education sectors, using the priority drivers outline in Part 2 of this report and identifying the two overarching and most influential drivers of change that we expect to have the most defining impact on the evolution of the Class of 2035.

In sum, we identified the most important two contingencies on which the future of young people and their engagement with sport would hinge. By testing assumptions about where the future would fit on these two axes, we have been able to create four narratives which showcase the possible futures facing the Class of 2035. The two key drivers for this project are:

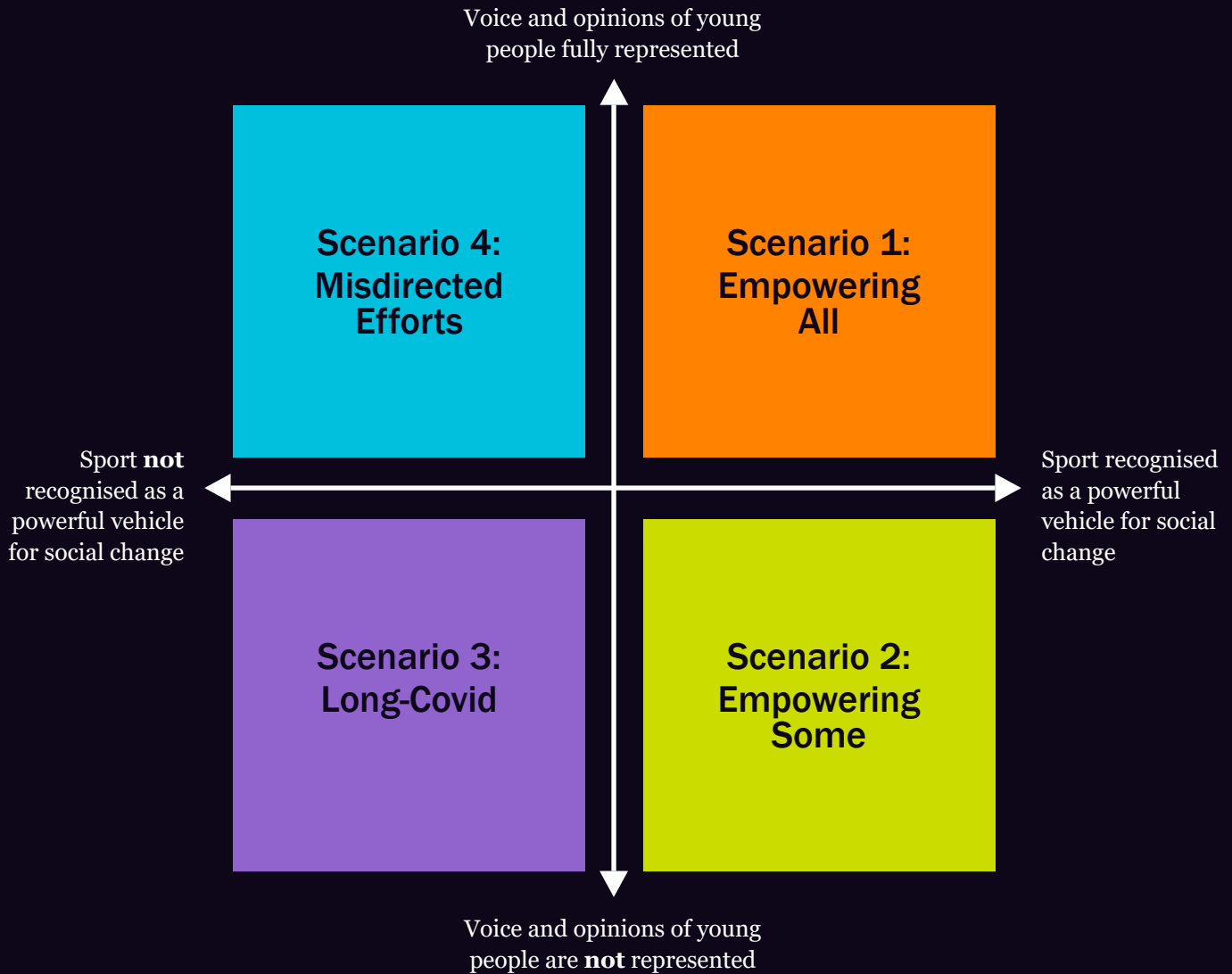
Key Driver 1:

The extent to which the voice and opinions of young people are represented in the design, development and delivery of sport and physical activity.

Key Driver 2:

The extent to which sport, play and physical activity are harnessed as a powerful vehicle for social change.

Scenario Grid



As shown here, these two drivers have been taken together and pulled to their extremes to create four distinct future landscapes.

Working within these future landscapes, we have worked with stakeholders and experts to explore what the Class of 2035 would look like within each possible future. As highlighted below, this allowed for the creation of four dynamic and thought-provoking scenarios of what the Class of 2035 might look like.

Below, we explore each of these scenarios in turn and consider how young people's level of wellbeing, sport engagement and overall development will look across each scenario by 2035.

Scenario 1: Misdirected Efforts



In this scenario, we present a world of 2035 where young people are fully represented in the design and delivery of school and community sport. However, the holistic value of sport in driving positive social outcomes across the wellbeing and development of young people is not acknowledged or embedded into school experiences; resulting in school sport becoming solely focused on a narrow set of benefits and failing to deliver a wider sense of empowerment to prepare young people for the future challenges presented across their personal and working lives. Consequently, sport fails to support and empower marginalised or vulnerable groups (e.g. young people with a disability or from ethnically diverse communities and low-income households) as greater access to sporting opportunity is not utilised or capitalised on to transfer core skills, values and self-enhancement.

In such a scenario, while there are positive outcomes with more young people having improved engagement with sport opportunities, the enhancement and empowerment offered via such opportunities are minimal. Indeed, such a scenario is defined by a core focus on basic activity targets rather than using sport as a means to transfer critical skills and confidence to empower young people to meet the challenges they face. While the required level of engagement of young people with sport has been achieved via improved representation, there has been a failure to connect sport with wider health/wellbeing, skills and development strategies.

The primary consequences for young people are four-fold. First, as sport provision has been highly functional - prioritising narrow targets around physical activity levels over more holistic and long-term benefits - the engagement of young people with sport is short-lived. Better engagement has been provided, but not the level of experience that demonstrates the value offered by sport to genuinely help and empower young people throughout their lives. Consequently, young people are not enticed to continue their sporting habits into later life, failing to build a sustainable and longer-term engagement with sport. Second, an understanding of the importance for sport and physical activity on current and long-term physical and mental health is not well established in this class of 2035; limiting the opportunity for sport to act as a bottom-up facilitator of improved national wellbeing. Third, the ability of sport to transfer and nurture soft skills to young people is limited, failing to prepare this generation of young people to succeed in a labour market dominated by the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Fourth, the gains in representation provide an engaged and receptive audience for sport activities across all parts of UK society, but the quality of sport provision fails to encourage the development of key skills, values and attitudes that would provide more equal empowerment for all young people. As a result, there is a missed opportunity to use sport as a means to reduce levels of inequality and drive enhanced social mobility in the UK.

Pen Portrait: Rod's 2035 School Day (within Misdirected Efforts)

Rod, an eight-year-old schoolboy, is rudely awakened by the vibrations of the smart device on his wrist. It was provided to him by his school as part of the new government initiative to ensure all children from low-income households are so equipped. The voice assistant informs him that even though it's time to get ready for school, he's not had the required amount of sleep. That probably has something to do with the fact he ignored its pleas to stop playing with his friends in the virtual world last night. Much as Rod would like to have sugar-coated cereal, he is directed to have a piece of fruit and a healthy cereal bar, which he takes from his healthy-eating box, again provided via the school by a government scheme.

The assistant prompts him to brush his teeth (timing him and providing feedback on how well he deals with plaque), and to ensure he takes his PE kit. This reminds Rod, much to his annoyance, that he will need to complete his daily exercise quota when he gets to school, during activity hour. At the appointed time, Rod makes his way to the sports zone, where his smart device vibrates again, informing him of how much activity he must do. He can choose from football, gymnastics or running, which were the three activities voted for by the children themselves when the scheme was introduced. That suits some of his classmates, because they like those activities, and they appreciate the fitness credits they will receive for meeting their target. These can be spent on a range of products for use in real or virtual sports, which again were voted on by the class. Rod didn't actually bother to vote, however, because he doesn't really see the point of sport and exercise. As usual, he opts to do running, which he sees as the least bad option, because he doesn't have to interact with anyone else. At least he will have met his target and earned his points.

Like many other children in the Class of 2035, especially those from low-income households like he is, Rod receives a good deal of support and attention from the state in order to increase his activity levels and general health. While the views of young people were taken into account when designing the scheme, insufficient care has been taken to ensure he and others like him are aware of the benefits of such a programme, or to show that there are benefits to sporting activity that go beyond increased activity levels and rewards.

Scenario 2: Empowering All



In this scenario, we present a world of 2035 where the voices of young people are fully represented in the design and delivery of sport experiences, combined with a clear recognition of the value of sport in driving wider social change - building a future defined by broad engagement with sport across all parts of society and where the full benefits of sport participation are obtained. As a result, this generation are empowered with the required skills, values and attitudes to enable them to thrive throughout their future lives. In sum, creating a healthier, happier and able generation across all backgrounds – driving social mobility, reduced inequality and a greater sense of belonging for the class of 2035.

Increased awareness of the role of sport and play in driving enhanced wellbeing and development of young people has resulted in significant changes and innovation to school sport facilities. Indeed, the physical design of schools have been enhanced to provide wider access to sporting opportunities, with a focus on multi-purpose spaces – areas of the school that can be flexibly re-configured to cater for a much broader set of sporting activities. Such developments allow for better multi-sport provision, providing continued access to a full spectrum of different sporting experiences – heightening engagement levels and reducing the chance of young people becoming isolated from physical activity due to a dislike of specific types of sport. Moreover, such innovation also empowers the school environment in 2035 to become a key community hub, acting as an intersection between school-based sport and wider sporting activities in the local community.

Concomitant to such enhancements in the provision of school sport, the diverse views and needs of young people are fully represented. With the empowerment of a broad set of voices and ambassadors from this generation, there is significant innovation in the delivery of sporting experiences in school and beyond. Increased levels of co-creation in the format and design of sport activities between young people from all backgrounds and sport teachers/practitioners, combined with young people supporting the running and delivery of such activities, has significantly enhanced levels of engagement with sport across marginalised groups (e.g. young people from low-income families). Such improvements not only cater to the specific needs of different parts of society, but also helps ensure that a deeper understanding of the value of sport is nurtured.

Furthermore, to maximise the full value of sport to the development of young people, the role of sport within the national curriculum is made more prominent – with a new focus on supporting the advancement of physical and mental wellbeing alongside academic attainment. What’s more, the importance of soft-skills is also more widely embedded into the school environment, with specific sporting activities aligned to skills and values accumulation, as well as codified certification of such talents awarded alongside traditional academic subjects.

Finally, advances in virtual technology have been integrated into sport engagement and practice strategies throughout UK schools, with immersive lessons and tuition helping ensure that digital innovations by 2035 have driven increased activity levels as opposed to encouraging more sedentary and distracted lifestyles.

In sum, the role of the school and wider engagement with sport is optimised from both a supply and demand perspective. Increased awareness of the role of sport in driving wider social change has seen enhanced access to sport for all, while empowering the voices and diverse representation of young people encourages a new approach to sporting provision that creates a long-term and sustained engagement with sport.

The result is happier, healthier and more able generation, with such improvements consistently visible across young people from all backgrounds. Indeed, improved representation within sport and the widespread benefits offered result in the accumulation of key skills and values across groups that are more marginalised and at risk of isolation (e.g. young people with a disability or from ethnically diverse communities and low-income households). As a result, sport and physical activity in this scenario has become a core driver of social change – improving social mobility, reducing inequality levels and empowering a generation of young people to be mentally and physically prepared to thrive in their future lives.

Pen Portrait: Winnie’s 2035 School Day (within Empowering All)

Fourteen-year-old Winnie really looks forward to her Activity for Success classes at school. As a disabled student, she realises she is lucky to be growing up in 2035, and not 20 years earlier, when, she has heard, disabled youngsters didn’t always feel they were supported as much as they could be to take part in physical activity, or “PE lessons” as they were referred to in the bad old days. In fact, children of all abilities seem to prefer the new way of doing things, and one of the things Winnie likes most about activity sessions is that she gets to mix with a diverse group of young people from different backgrounds and with different ability levels.

At the beginning of each term, she has a meeting with her Activity for Success mentor, a specially-trained Year 6 student, who discusses how she’s feeling about life in general, and what skills she’d like to focus on in upcoming sessions. This discussion covers not just physical literacy and health, but also mental wellbeing and wider skills for life such as resilience, which is particularly important if she has an assessment period coming up. Then, also taking into account recent data from her wearable diagnostic and tracking device, together they choose a programme from the wide range of activities available, both at her school and others in the area.

While Winnie enjoys taking part in a wide range of sports, her particular passion is wheelchair basketball, where she competes in the school team, and has built up a close rapport with her team mates. As well as practising regularly during lunchbreak and after school, the team also frequently competes against teams from other areas. There is no need to worry about transport and other costs, as these are provided by the Activity for Success programme.

There is also a vibrant online community for wheelchair basketball players, where Winnie and her friends can meet in virtual reality, to discuss the game, but also any other topics of interest to them, including helping each other with problems. This really helps to create a sense of belonging and camaraderie among the players, reinforcing the important role that this activity plays in fostering Winnie’s physical and mental wellbeing, as well as helping her to thrive in the years to come. She can’t imagine a life without the sport, and is sure the friends she has made, and skills she has learned, will play a central role in her future life.

Scenario 3: Long-Covid



In this scenario, we present a world of 2035 where a lack of recognition in the role of sport in driving social change is combined with low levels of representative of young people in the design and delivery of sport. This future generation is characterised by growing physical and mental health concerns, a lack of confidence and skills to meet the challenges of the job market and growing inequality and division across different income groups and backgrounds.

In such a scenario, a failure to improve school sport as a means to drive wellbeing and development of young people results in access to high quality sporting experiences being limited to the privileged few who can afford to subsidise the lack of enhanced state- and school-led activity. Moreover, the lack of representation of young people results in sport experiences that are not catered to the needs and wants of specific groups (e.g. young people with a disability or from different cultural/ethnic backgrounds), further marginalising the levels of engagement with school sport across this generation. Consequently, elite sport will suffer as the pool of young people engaging with different sporting activities will be significantly curtailed.

A failure to fully represent young people in the design and delivery of sporting activities also further isolates and limits engagement levels of young people from low-income families. Combined with the wider benefits of sport, such as skills and values accumulation, this results in a national failure to use sport as a driver of social mobility. Rather than supporting more equal skills and personal development across all income groups, the unequal sporting opportunities within this scenario results in sport becoming a driver of inequality as opposed to a key means to address it.

The limited access to, and the narrow benefits offered by, sport in this scenario would see increased levels of obesity and rising levels of mental health issues. Combined with the lack of physical literacy engrained in young people, due to the failure to fully engrain the holistic value of sport via the school experience, this results in mounting pressure on the National Health Service both in the short- and longer-term. Alongside a decline in physical and mental wellbeing, this scenario would also produce clear barriers to social health and community cohesion. With declining engagement with physical activity, school and youth sport is not able to act as a connecting force, helping to break down barriers between young people from different backgrounds.

Moreover, the failure of sport to provide more holistic soft-skills, such as team building and empathy, further limits the ability of this generation to connect and engage with one another. The result is a more isolated and divided generation of young people, who are more vulnerable to being enticed by digital activities and virtual technology – further exacerbating sedentary lifestyles, social isolation and levels of inequality across the UK.

Pen Portrait: Aiden's 2035 School Day (within Long Covid)

Aiden is a 16 year old British Jamaican student who is in his final year at secondary school. He wakes up and decides to cycle to school. He has not been getting much exercise in or outside of school recently and is conscious that he has put on weight.

Arriving at school his first lesson of the day is PE. The school sports facilities were already in a sorry state when he first joined and seem to have only gotten worse over the previous 5 years. Today they are told they will be playing football on the outdoor pitch. Aiden loves playing football but the lesson is uninspiring. It follows the same format they have played for years and the competency levels vary significantly. He actually finds the matches he arranges with his friends outside of school far more competitive and interesting than the lessons offered in PE. In fact, Aiden has tried to suggest changes to the PE programme based on some new formats and styles of play him and his friends have been trialling, but he has been unable to find a clear channel to get these views across.

At lunch, Aiden and his friends share their frustration at the quality of their PE lesson. Some students in his year have less of an issue with the level of sport opportunities provided in school, but these are usually students from better off families who can afford to pay for lessons and coaching outside of school. He has noticed that he has lost touch with many former friends who he used to play sport with at primary school. Nowadays the students who play for out-of-school sport teams seemed to be forming a bit of a clique. Aiden and his friends, who mainly play with people from their local neighbourhood, feel more and more isolated from the rest of their classmates.

To make up for the poor PE lesson, Aiden and his friends agree to meet up for a football match after school. They used to do this more often but have found it harder to find suitable places to play, especially in the winter. Aiden loves playing sport with his friends but is aware that other students who pay to join sport clubs outside of school are now getting formal certificates; recognising specific skills they are acquiring via physical activities. Aiden hopes that this will not put him at a disadvantage as he applies to local colleges for his A Levels.

Arriving at the local park, Aiden and his friends realise that all the available green space is taken up by other people. Giving up, they agree to each head home and meet later online to play the new virtual edition of Call of Duty. Feeling restless after getting little exercise that day, Aiden and his friends agree to get to the park early at the weekend to hopefully get a decent game of football then.

Scenario 4: Empowering Some



In this scenario, we present a world of 2035 where the role of sport in driving positive social change is fully understood and integrated into the provision of school sport, but such improvements are offset by a lack of representation of young people in the design and delivery of such sporting experiences. This creates a future where young people are better empowered through school sport compared to their counterparts in 2021, but such empowerment is not equally distributed. Indeed, the poor representation of young people results in marginalised groups, who already suffer from low engagement with sport, being further disconnected from the enhanced opportunities presented by school sport. Such a scenario points to a future where access to sport provides an additional driver of inequality between those who are represented and engaged vs. those who are not.

This scenario is defined by a failure to provide adequate representation of young people in the design and delivery of school sport, both in terms of enabling all groups of young people to be fully represented and in ensuring that detailed levels of engagement are achieved – where the voices of young people can have a genuine impact on the provision of sport. Moreover, within this scenario,

teachers have not been empowered to diagnose and respond to poor engagement levels with sport. Indeed, central to driving representation of young people will be the enhanced ability of teachers to detect pupils who are disconnected from school sport and whose voices most need to be heard. In this scenario, representation is provided to some young people, who have an existing level of confidence and engagement with sport, but there is a failure to identify and engage groups of young people who require better representation.

While the lack of representation is the major barrier to widespread sport engagement and empowerment in this scenario, such developments may also create counter-trends that have some positive outcomes. Indeed, young people will have to act more unilaterally to plan and arrange sport opportunities that better suit their specific wants and needs, providing opportunities to build much needed soft skills such as team building, communication and leadership skills. Moreover, this scenario would also provoke a more reactionary and activist mindset among young people in the UK. Even in 2021, young people in the UK display growing interest and intention to engage with societal, eco and ethical issues. By 2035, expect to see young people in this scenario respond to limited opportunities to have their voices heard by campaigning for greater representation for all parts of their generation.

In sum, this scenario would create a generation whose engagement with, and empowerment through, sport will vary considerably across groups and profiles – highly dependent on level of representative afforded to them in the design and delivery of their sporting experiences.

Pen Portrait: Aditi's 2035 School Day (within Empowering Some)

Aditi is a British Indian schoolgirl who is 6 years old and attends primary school. Waking up and getting ready for school she feels a slight sense of apprehension about her PE lesson planned for later in the day.

Aditi's school has undertaken significant innovation in the delivery of PE in school. Indeed, many of her classmates are using the new Sportify digital app and platform that is setting personalised objectives that they can meet via various physical activities. Each set of objectives covers a range of benefits across physical and mental wellbeing, as well as skills and values accumulation. As these objectives are achieved each user levels up and is set new targets.

On her way to school, Aditi looks at her Sportify app on her phone and reviews her objectives for the upcoming lesson. Sportify is proving very popular with some members of Aditi's class. However, while she has access to the app and is keen to meet the objectives set, her experience of sport activities offered in her school have put her off engaging with physical activity beyond the bare minimum expected. Indeed, she does not enjoy the sport options offered and how the sessions are run as they do not excite or inspire her. Many of her friends feel the same, but other members of her class are very engaged with the opportunities offered. Increasingly Aditi and her friends are organising more sporting activities themselves during lunchtime and when they visit each other's homes.

During her PE lesson, her class is offered a variety of activities they can do that day. But as always, the options and formats seem to be designed and tailored for the kids in her class who are the most sporty and engaged already. Aditi and her friends decide to play netball, as the option they are least put off by. The lesson starts with a short download from her teacher on the health benefits and skills that they are focussing on that day. Apparently today's session is aimed at teambuilding and communication, but it is clear that only some kids are listening and engaged.

After the lesson, some of Aditi's class stay behind to continue their activities and win more rewards via Sportify. However, she leaves as soon as she can and heads home. On her way home, she feels a twinge of resentment that each PE lesson seems to be made for just part of her class and wishes she could feed back what she would find fun and enjoyable. She is starting to feel disengaged from sport. Moreover, she can sense a divide emerging in her class between those who are naturally engaged with sport and those who are not.

She can't help but notice that the most engaged all seem to be from better off-families. Already at her age, she can tell that the kids who are more engaged with sport seem more confident generally across their other lessons. She hopes there will be better opportunities in future for sport experiences that are more tailored to people from her background and to her personally.

Part 4: Promoting the ultimate future

To conclude, we will examine the possible futures presented for 2035 and outline proposed responses for how an optimised future for the Class of 2035 can be achieved.

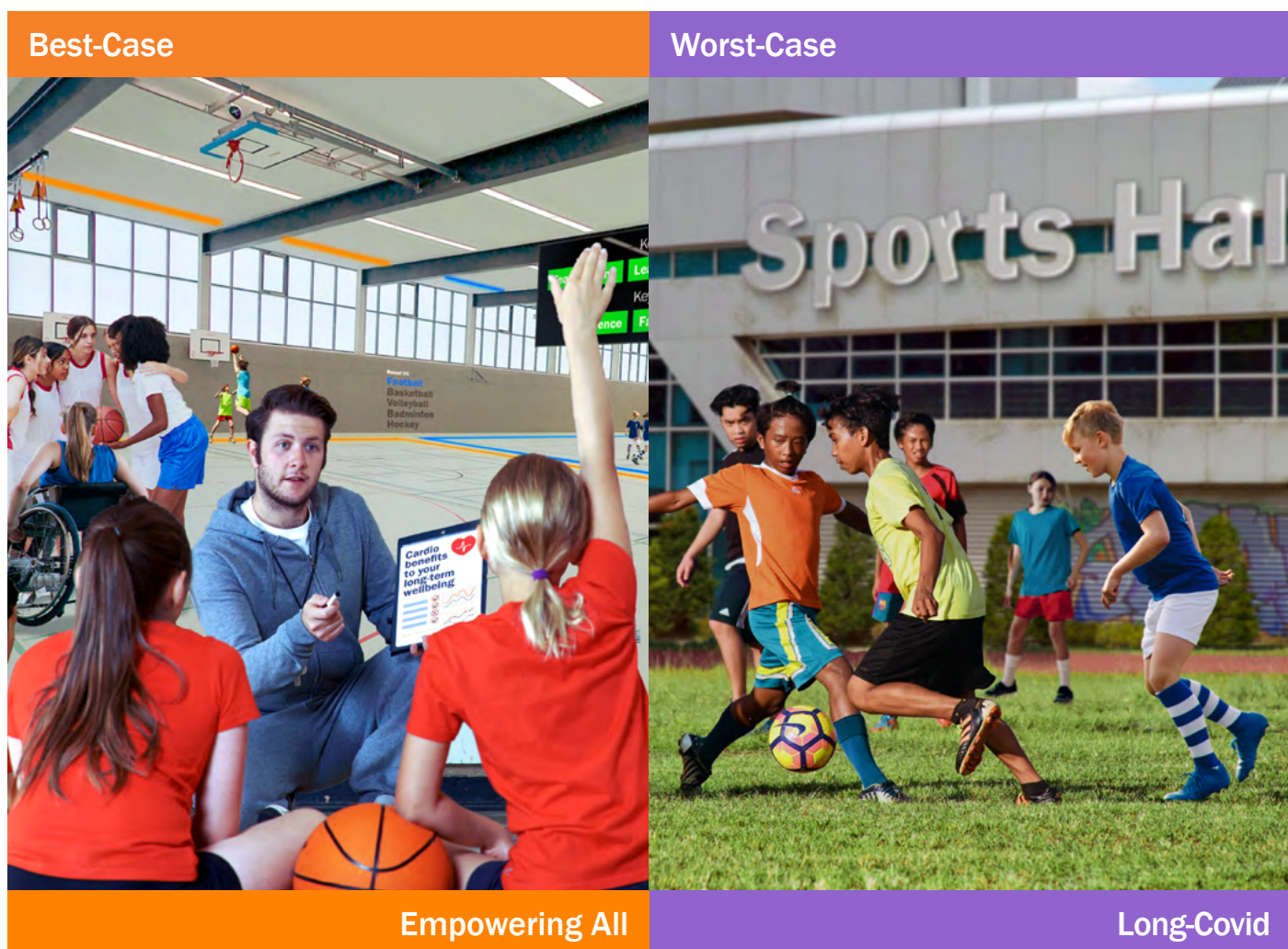
The report has outlined four possibilities for what the Class of 2035 could look like. Of course, no one scenario standing alone will entirely encapsulate the future. The world of 2035 will almost certainly represent a complex mix of different elements from all the scenarios presented in this report.

However, what is clear is that an uncertain and polarised future awaits – with a range of drivers that could propel us towards a world most defined by one scenario or another.

To develop recommended responses to this research and how the best possible future can be promoted for the youth of tomorrow, in this part the report we look specifically at the best-case and worst-case scenarios presented in this work. They are as follows:

Best-Case:
Empowering All

Worst-Case:
Long-Covid



We have consulted with industry stakeholders and experts to mark the actions required to lead us towards a future in which the Class of 2035 inhabit the world of the Empowering All scenario and avoid the consequences of living in a world of Long-Covid.

These proposed actions have been separated into two broad categories:

Development Recommendations:

Where action can be taken by relevant organisations (such as the Youth Sport Trust) within the current environment.

Policy Recommendations:

Policy decisions and actions which need to be championed to shape the future school sport and physical activity environment.



Developmental recommendations

Develop new approaches to the democratisation of young people and vulnerable voices

At a grassroots level, the views and voices of young people from all backgrounds need to be empowered and channelled into sports policy making and how it is delivered – whether in schools, in clubs or in the community. Young people in the UK display increased activist mindsets around issues such as climate change and racial equality. Sport can be a powerful vehicle for social change and can provide a platform to give young people a voice. Schools and those working with young people should enable and empower young people to create the change they want to see in the world through sport. Young people's appetite for activism can be harnessed to promote the mental and physical health of their generation – as well as equality of access and opportunity to sport and physical activity. Elected or representative bodies of young people, with a specific focus on ensuring the participation of individuals from all parts of UK society, will be vital to effectively enable the views of this generation to optimise the effectiveness and success of national sport policy. Moreover, to ensure that sport experiences, both within and outside of school, meet the needs of young people, representatives of this generation should be encouraged to actively contribute to the co-creation of new approaches to the formats and design of sport activities. Such initiatives would be best deployed a local level to promote personalised and tailored approaches to school and community sport that best engages the needs of students from different parts of the UK.

Foster strong physical and health literacy, with a focus on holistic and long-term wellbeing

Through Physical Education, every child should be supported to develop their physical confidence and competence and a lifelong love of movement and regular physical activity. The value of Physical Education, as a fundamental building block of every child's education, should be maximised with a clear focus on the subject being the primary channel for developing young people's understanding of the importance of physical activity to long-term health. Nurturing young people's enjoyment of activity aligned to a comprehensive understanding of its role in promoting health and mobility in later life should be a priority. As awareness of an ageing population and the likelihood of living much longer into older age becomes more widespread over the coming decade, linking physical activity to long-term health goals will help nurture a more sustained engagement with sport throughout life-stages. Creating a better understanding of the benefits of physical activity to mental health and overall performance, alongside physical health, will be an additional core requirement of a more advanced level of physical and health literacy in the 2020s. The development of physical literacy across this generation will be critical to support improved overall levels of wellbeing in the UK and mitigating future costs to the National Health Service.

Drive engagement with physical activity via multi-sport provision

To decrease the risk of young people being put off by specific sporting experiences, and this creating a knock-on effect that discourages wider engagement with sport, greater focus should be given to increasing the provision of multi-sport opportunities across school and community environments. Indeed, undertaking the same sport for a prolonged period can be discouraging for young people who do not have a natural sense of enjoyment with the activity in question. Too narrow an experience of sport reduces the likelihood of children finding the sport for them. By creating school and community environments that can provide opportunities for young people

to engage in more sporting activities over the same period, there is an increased likelihood of developing a genuine engagement with sport across a wider proportion of the young people taking part. Allowing young people to co-create and design such multi-sport programmes will also help increase the likelihood of positively engaging experiences. Understanding the specific needs of the community and young people within the local area will be vital to designing tailored multi-sport programmes that can best serve the needs of a particular areas, whether that be through Physical Education or multi-sports club outside of the school environment.

Empower teachers to detect and respond to low levels of sport engagement among pupils

Enhanced training and support need to be provided to schoolteachers to better enable them to understand and tackle low engagement levels with physical activity among individual students. In an education system which prioritises wellbeing, this should be a whole-school priority, and not just a responsibility of PE teachers alone. Indeed, experts interviewed for this report highlighted the challenge of detecting poor engagement levels with sport, stating that simply witnessing a young person taking part in an activity is often insufficient to determine if a genuine understanding and love of sport is being nurtured. To promote long-term connection with sport, better mechanisms for evaluating young people's engagement levels will be required, both at a human level through teacher observation and via the testing of new technological innovations that can allow for real-time data tracking via personal/wearable devices (providing more detailed and localised understanding of engagement with sport within specific schools and communities). Alongside better testing and awareness of exit points away from sporting activities, teachers need to be better empowered to facilitate entry points for young people as well – finding ways and approaches to connect disengaged pupils with alternative sporting options that stand a better chance of building a genuine and sustained engagement with sport.

Create active school systems and environments

Promoting increased levels of activity among young people should not be the remit of Physical Education alone. Indeed, time spent in school and lessons throughout a standard week are often sedentary by nature. New approaches that foster more activity within lessons, new school formats that encourage greater movement throughout the day and options for outdoor teaching should all be trialled to promote more natural and organic opportunities for physical activity during schooltime. Moreover, extending the time of a school day would also provide greater opportunity for increased activity, while also reducing the risks and challenges associated with the after-school time period. Indeed, the immediate period after the school day (15.30-17.00) is a time now associated with growing risk of gang activity and youth violence.

Provide values- and skills-led sporting activities

To support the role of sport in driving more positive social change, sporting activities should be provided that cater specifically to promoting enhanced skills and values for young people. Indeed, providing sport activities connected to specific skill-sets (e.g. team building, communication, leadership) will help drive a clearer intent in sport's role in terms of skills accumulation and support a more direct connection among young people between sport and their future career/working prospects. Values-led sporting activities provide a means to instil in young people vital character traits that will empower them in later life, while also allowing a broader reward and recognition programme beyond specific sporting outcomes. A values-led approach will also help build a stronger bond and affinity to activities which will in turn help to sustain participation. Such approaches are already being rolled out in the UK. For example, Ultimate Frisbee is a sport that was introduced into the School Games in September 2018. At the heart of Ultimate Frisbee is 'spirit scoring' whereby teams score their opponents based on the spirit they have shown whilst competing. Such scoring allows young people to be rewarded for specific values displayed, such as fairness, honesty and determination. Extending skills and values based sporting activities will help optimise the value of sport for young people in preparing them for later life, as well as providing added incentives for key stakeholders (e.g. parents) to encourage sports participation.

Focus on cultural engagement, not cultural change, with regard to digital and virtual technology

Young people will continue to be ahead of older age groups in terms of their adoption and use of digital and virtual technology. Rather than trying to restrict youth engagement with such devices and platforms, opportunities should be sought of how to use such online and digital behaviours to entice sport engagement. For example, digital learning platforms such as Lyfta are examples of how virtual and immersive engagement can be used to drive sport engagement and embed skills and values in young people. Another approach will be to build gamification techniques into school and community sport. Indeed, developing sporting experiences that draw on approaches from computer games, where participants can level up and be rewarded at different stages, can be a powerful way to avoid zero-sum sports events (with a singular sense of a winner and loser, and therefore a good performance vs. poor performance) and avoid disengaging some of those taking part. What's more, as the use of virtual headsets and gaming becomes more widespread in the 2020s, schools should seek to incorporate augmented and virtual technology into sport teaching. Such innovation will also enable schools and pupils in more remote or rural areas to attend/take part in more sports initiatives (e.g. School Game events), as they will have the ability to participate virtually in a more meaningful fashion. Not opposing the engrained digital behaviour of young people, but utilizing it to engage them on their level, will be a clear means to entice better sports engagement over the coming decade. However, steps must also be taken to ensure that young people do not conflate virtual-sport with real-life sport – virtual experiences must be used to entice greater physical activity, not to replace or compete with it.

Generate close partnerships between industry and education

The extent to which young people can acquire the holistic skillsets, across both technical and human skills, will be of vital importance to UK businesses. Indeed, as soft and human skills become more in-demand over the coming decade, creating connections between UK industry and schools will be an important step in ensuring that young people have the right skill sets to meet the needs of the future workforce. For school sport, understanding the skills in most demand by UK industry and adapting the teaching of sport to optimise the development of such skills, will help ensure that PE has more tangible and direct benefits in supporting young people in their future careers. Moreover, having industry leaders visit and engage young people about the need for specific skillsets linked to sport and physical activity, will be a further means of encouraging wider and more engrained engagement with school sport.



Policy implications

Re-focus the school curriculum to give equal focus to wellbeing, alongside attainment

The existing purpose and testing of schools in the UK is too narrowly focused on academic attainment, over wider character and skill development and the promotion of holistic wellbeing. The research presented here highlights the extent to which young people are increasingly putting health concerns at the top of their personal agenda. What's more, the current generation of young people face a post-pandemic world defined by increased risk to their physical, mental and social health. To respond to such challenges, government policy should focus on enhancing the school curriculum to put the promotion of wellbeing on an equal setting to academic achievement. A key means to achieving this aim will be to create a new national approach to the measurement of holistic wellbeing (including mental wellbeing and life satisfaction) that will ensure 1. there is an accurate and central analysis of wellbeing; 2. there is the ability to track changes in wellbeing over time, across regions and across demographics; 3. there is an evidence base to guide policy decision making and evaluate the impact of policies that are implemented.

Enhanced training for teachers is needed to drive higher quality PE experiences, improved engagement levels and to unlock the full value of sport for young people

To ensure that young people can obtain the full benefits from sporting activities it will be vital that teachers are able to deliver PE that can provide concrete skills and values development. More broadly, enhanced training that improves the quality of PE will also increase the likelihood of young people developing a more natural love and enjoyment of sport, helping drive longer-term and sustained engagement with physical activity. The role of teachers, and concomitant training required to facilitate this, also needs to better encompass the development of health and physical literacy to ensure that the value of sport and exercise to the long-term mental and physical wellbeing of young people is fully understood. With children and young people presenting with needs not previously evident before the pandemic, there is an increased need for teachers and support staff to receive current professional development that draws upon emerging research in order to ensure young people with SEND and other support needs are able to access unique offers to increase engagement in PE, sport and school life. As highlighted in this report, the post COVID-19 landscape will provide fertile ground to communicate health and physical literacy to young people; teachers need to be empowered to drive such understanding and ensure that this opportunity is not missed. Finally, improved training also needs to be provided to enable teachers to be able to effectively identify and tackle low engagement levels with sport and physical activity, as well as the ability to advise and redirect young people towards other sporting opportunities. In sum, teachers need to be empowered to become wellbeing consultants – able to detect and respond to challenges facing young people in terms of their engagement with sport, and more broadly their physical and mental health.

Ensure the representation of young people in the development of national sport policy

Since the previous study in 2014 there has been a notable increase in the influence that young people have on their peers in terms of improved engagement with physical activity. What's more, to optimise access to sport across the UK, the precise needs of schoolchildren from all backgrounds will need to be input into national policy. As a result, the opinions and voices of young people should be given a more prominent role in the development of national policy for

school sport. Increased action should be dedicated to promoting the ability of young people from more vulnerable and isolated backgrounds, who are the most likely to be disconnected from sport, to engage in policy development; ensuring genuine representation and enhancing solutions for wider access to sport/physical activity and enhanced quality in the design and delivery of sport provision.

Empower localised activation of national sport policy

National sport policy should be allowed sufficient freedom at a local level to determine the most suitable and effective means of execution based on the needs of the school and local community in question. To achieve this, funding for programmes which give young people a leadership role in sports provision will be vital, helping to design initiatives at a local level optimally tailored to their specific needs; designed by young people for young people. This should be supported by a local infrastructure of nationally deployed professional school sport and activity organisers who are supported to drive up the quality and quantity of opportunities for young people in every community, ensuring that access to play, sport and healthy lifestyles are not subject to a postcode lottery.

Government spending should prioritise mitigating the impact of economic equality

A core finding from this report is that economic inequality will be a key factor in determining the level of engagement with sport over the coming decade. Government investment must be prioritised and targeted at young people from low-income households who are most at risk of becoming entirely alienated from sport. The primary focus should be to provide access to a high standard of physical activity for such young people through school or community-based sport, via investment in new facilities, coaching and teaching. However, where state-led sport opportunities are not available, the government should seek to find other solutions to subsidise access to paid-for sporting activities, to promote equal access for all young people.

A more joined up policy approach is required across health, education and sport

The role and value of sport and physical activity to the future wellbeing and success of young people has a spectrum of challenges and opportunities that engages many parts of government policy. From the role of physical activity in reducing lifestyle related diseases and reducing the health costs of the nation, to the role of sport in generating the holistic skillsets needed for the future workforce, it is clear that sport policy development should not be siloed or disconnected across these policy remits. To unlock the full potential of increased youth engagement with sport and physical activity, a new approach to policy making will be required – which can combine all relevant government stakeholders into one organising and decision-making body. Conversely, a future defined by disjointed policy making towards young people and sport, will see government spend and energy targeted at siloed objectives – dampening the impact of such policies and failing to unlock the full opportunities presented by increased engagement with sport.

Invest in infrastructure to provide required access to sport

To maximise access to physical activity and increase opportunities for multi-sport provision, options for school sport will need to become more flexible and diverse. This will also be important to ensure high levels of engagement across sport categories to enhance elite sport performance in the UK. To promote this, school sport environments will need to be designed to support multi-functional spaces – venues and environments that can be more easily adapted to enable a wider array of sporting events. Moreover, access to green spaces, within school grounds and in the nearby area, must be protected and expanded. As the green spaces across the UK are in decline, securing access via and around school environments will become increasingly vital over the coming decade.

Promote schools as community hubs to facilitate connections to wider sporting opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic, and over a year of life in lockdown, has highlighted the importance of social wellness; the role of human connections and community involvement to overall mental wellbeing. In the post-pandemic world, there will be an opportunity to focus investment on new school facilities to allow for increased community events and activities. Moreover, enhanced connections between schools and local grassroots sport clubs should be promoted to amplify the flexibility, convenience and quality of access to sporting opportunities, as well as inspiring increased physical activity outside of the school environment/hours. Recognising that 40% of all sports facilities in England are on school sites, schools should be supported to open up their facilities for community use and to become multi-sport homes to youth sport. This would help tackle inequality of access and nurture a more sustained engagement in sport among young people by providing a natural pathway from school sport into the community.

Capitalise on the opportunity to engage new audiences and new mindsets post COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a clear impact on the mindsets of young people. Concern over personal health and the health of their families has been the area of most significant increase in anxiety for young people in the UK since the previous study conducted in 2014. Such findings suggest that communicating and embedding an understanding of the value of sport and physical activity to long-term wellbeing will resonate more strongly with the current generation of young people. This opportunity should not be wasted and a post-pandemic strategy to drive physical literacy and awareness of the impact of physical activity on holistic wellbeing should be prioritised, to capitalise on a receptive audience in the post COVID-19 era.



Methodology

Quantitative Research

Foresight Factory conducted a bespoke survey in November 2020 on behalf of the Youth Sport Trust, in order to provide insight into the current generation of young people (i.e. The Class of 2021). This research was conducted online with a nationally representative sample of 994 children aged 5-16 and is the primary source of quantitative data for this report.

Qualitative Research

Foresight Factory undertook an extensive literature review of significant research conducted to date surrounding the health and wellbeing of young people, as well as the role and potential impact of sport.

Beyond this, we are grateful to the panel of experts who were interviewed and contributed to the findings of this report. Please see the list of experts who comprised the panel below:

- Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson
- Baroness Sue Campbell
- Mike Diaper, Executive Director Children and Young People at Sport England
- Richard Crellin, Policy and Research Manager, The Children's Society
- Geoff Barton, General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders
- Jayne Molyneux, Director Children and Young People at Sport England
- David Gregson, David Gregson Foundation
- Billy Downie, Headteacher of Streetly Academy
- Born Barikor, CEO and Founder, Our Parks

Research Process

This report was developed using the above quantitative and qualitative research, as well as the outputs of in-depth workshops (with internal and external stakeholders) to visualise and evaluate the future of sport in the UK and Class of 2035.

A full list of the external stakeholders who participated in the workshops is provided below:

- Sports and Recreation Alliance
- CatalYST
- Sport England
- Activity Alliance
- Welsh Council for Voluntary Action
- Young Minds
- The Football Association

