



More people
More active
More often

The Next Generation:

A strategy for investing in the future of children and young people's physical activity levels

July 2024

ukactive is dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of the nation by promoting the transformative power of physical activity.

This strategy paper outlines our commitment to fostering a healthier, more active future for children and young people across the UK through the promotion and integration of physical activity into their daily lives.

The importance of physical activity for young people cannot be overstated. It is a cornerstone for supporting mental health, social connection, academic attainment and improving overall health

and fitness. Regular physical activity has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression and provides a vital boost to the mental wellbeing of young people. We also know that active children tend to perform better academically, with improved concentration, memory, and behaviour.

Beyond mental and academic benefits, physical activity is essential for developing strong and healthy bodies which is vital during developmental years. Being physically active builds and maintains healthy bones, muscles, and joints, and it significantly reduces the risk of children developing chronic diseases later in life. That is why we must work together to tackle the current disparity of children and young people's activity levels in more deprived areas right across the UK.

Through this strategy, ukactive aims to create positive environments that encourage and facilitate children and young people to take part in physical activity, irrespective of their background, age or ability. By working collaboratively with our members, stakeholders, communities, and policymakers, ukactive strives to make physical activity an integral part of children and young people's daily routine, ensuring that everyone can lead a healthy and active life. This shared ambition has a major role to play in reducing the UK's health inequalities in future.

To promote the health and wellbeing of the next generation, this paper complements ukactive's Vision 2030 strategy, which set out a clear commitment for the sector to be 'fully supportive of children, young people and families to make being physically active a life habit'. To support this, we want to get one million more children and young people active by 2030.

We invite all ukactive members to join us in achieving this important mission.



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Chief Child Experience Officer, Junior
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Wider Activity Forum Vice-Chair

Ensuring the Next Generation strategy is aligned directly to the agenda of improving the health of the nation and driving economic growth.

1. Active Lives CYP Survey 2022–23 available here: <https://www.sportengland.org/news-and-inspiration/childrens-activity-levels-hold-firm-significant-challenges-remain>

By raising the **standards and investment** within children and young people's physical activity across the UK, we will be able to benefit significantly through **enhanced affordability and accessibility** of activity and care. This will ensure that all parts of the community and the economy; including parents, activity providers, schools, gyms, leisure centres and sports clubs; can offer the very best services to help keep young people, active and healthy.

By raising the quality and investment in physical activity provision for children and young people, it will not only improve the education, health and wellbeing prospects for children and young people across the nation, it will also help to improve career pathways and prospects for young people who want to work in the sector.

ukactive's Next Generation strategy is designed to help provide more opportunities for children and young people to access our members' facilities, products, services and programmes. The delivery of the strategy will support raising the standards of the services provided to children and young people and will help showcase the significant role that ukactive members play in positively impacting children and young people throughout the UK.

The UK Chief Medical Officers' (CMO) Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that all children and young people should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day. However, children and young people from the least affluent families are the least likely to be active, with only 42% meeting the CMO' guidelines compared to 52% of those from the most affluent families.¹

Our 2030 target is to ensure that **one million more children and young people in the UK** have access to regular physical activity.





- ukactive exists to improve the health of the nation by getting more people more active, more often – providing services and forging partnerships for a broad range of organisations that share our mission.
- ukactive's members have a significant role to play in improving the health, wellbeing and physical activity levels of children and young people across the UK. Our members are driving increasing activity levels of children and young people on a daily basis, through a vast array of services and environments, including gyms, fitness and leisure facilities, schools, swimming pools, communities and open spaces.

- ukactive serves more than 4,000 members and partners from across the UK's physical activity sector, including public, private and independent operators, sports bodies and other activity providers, as well as major health bodies, consumer brands, tech firms and equipment manufacturers.
- ukactive and the wider sector play a key role in providing solutions, programmes, accessibility and workforce to increase activity levels for children and young people within communities across the UK.
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a significant increase in gym and fitness activity among children in primary school (years one to six, ages five to 11) and secondary school (school years seven to 11, ages 11 to 16). As a result, we are seeing 11.8% or 908,000 more children and young people taking part in gym and fitness activity compared to five years ago.²
- More than 10,000 primary schools are utilising external activity and sport professionals to enhance their physical education and physical activity offering (including enrichment clubs and activities outside of school hours).³



- ukactive's support and work alongside key partners such as Sport England and other members of the National Sector Partners Group (NSPG) is providing Government departments (including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education) with insights and guidance, while raising awareness of the essential role of ukactive's members for children and young people.
- More than one million children learn to swim using our sector's facilities every year. However, only 45% of children and young people attending school in the country's most deprived areas can swim 25m, compared to 76% in the least deprived areas.⁴
- The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMPSA) has committed to ensure that children and young people are defined as a 'specialist population', which helps systematically to raise standards, enhance skills and identify best practice that should be adopted by our sector.⁵

Working together, we can achieve even more. By increasing accessibility and affordability we can help increase children and young people's activity levels further and start to reduce inequalities by getting one million more children more active by 2030.

The Next Generation strategy aligns with ukactive's three areas of purpose:

- Support, protect and inform our members
- Represent and champion our members
- Help our members grow.

2. Active Lives CYP Survey 2022– 23 available here <https://www.sportengland.org/news-and-inspiration/childrens-activity-levels-hold-firm-significant-challenges-remain>

3. Allen, J., Quarmby, T., & Dillon, M. (2023). 'To a certain extent it is a business decision': exploring external providers' perspectives of delivering outsourced primary school physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2023.2264319>

4. Swim England <https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/swimming-water-safety-schools/>

5. CIMSPA Professional Standards <https://www.cimspa.co.uk/education-training/professional-standards/professional-standards-library/>

The How: Strategic Headlines

SUPPORT, PROTECT & INFORM

Provide a sector specific regulatory framework (within The Active Standard) and guidance underpinned by research, data and consumer insights to increase quality and standards for working with children and young people in a wide range of environments. This will include children and young people in gyms, fitness and leisure facilities, swimming pools and within and out of school.

REPRESENT & CHAMPION

Drive reform and policy for future investment in children and young people's physical activity, with The Active Standard becoming the entry level for members to access opportunities. Represent children and young people activity providers through policies such as a zero VAT rating, DBS portability via the update service, and ensuring our members' impact on is recognised and prioritised alongside care.

HELP OUR MEMBERS GROW

Build partnerships specific to children and young people through ukactive's Wider Activity Forum, member engagement, CIMSPA's workforce development, government and stakeholder advocacy and alignment that uses research and projects to support the development of these partnerships, underpinned by the physical literacy consensus.

1. The Active Standard – Delivering a recognised framework for quality among children and young people activity providers:

While Ofsted and national governing bodies for sport provide quality assurance for providers and provision (i.e. education, childcare, specific sports), this does not encompass the wider range of providers and provision across ukactive's membership; meaning many activities are being delivered without such regulation. This can undermine the sector's credibility as it seeks to provide solutions for investment to the Government, meaning our sector is often underfunded. The Active Standard will contain specific reference to children and young people, providing a regulatory framework and sector-specific guidance to increase quality and standards when working with younger participants.



Opportunity: A regulatory framework to ensure a consistent standard of quality service, safety, safeguarding, and provision when working with children and young people in a wide range of environments. This means previously low funded and unregulated activity provision will be more credible for national funding streams. There is also an opportunity to ensure this is recognised within Government guidance papers (Physical Education and School Sport Premium, Holiday Activities and Food Programme, National Wraparound Childcare Programme, Tax-Free Childcare, Value Added Tax, Disclosure Barring Service). Improved standards and guidance will help ensure future funding is available to providers that have achieved The Active Standard certification – providing assurance for parents, stakeholders, educational settings and Local Authorities.

Action: ukactive will develop a quality and standards criteria for working with children and young people as part of The Active Standard in 2025.

2. Guidance – Children and young people in fitness and group exercise

There is uncertainty surrounding children and young people using gyms and other fitness and leisure facilities, and while guidance exists, ensuring it is clear and concise will help increase the accessibility for young people and improve efficiency when it comes to customer enquiries.

Opportunity: Members can build on the growing physical activity levels among children and young people (specifically aged 11 to 16) participating in gyms and other fitness and leisure facilities, reported within Sport England's Active Lives Children and Young People Survey

Action: ukactive will update and renew its 'Children and Young People in Leisure Facilities' guidance, including FAQs and specific references from research and case studies on the usage of gyms, pools, fitness and leisure facilities by children and young people.

3. ukactive Members' Impact – Key research and data collation

There is an opportunity to further demonstrate the impact our sector has on children and young people within communities across the UK. To help showcase the factors that are driving engagement and participation as well as tackling reasons for inactivity and addressing inequalities, we want to work with our members to gather direct input, as well as the co-design, of data and insights that reflect children and young people's engagement with the sector's facilities and programmes.

Opportunity: Highlight the impact our sector has on children and young people across the UK, to champion, represent and help drive reform and increase the funding opportunities for the sector.

Action: ukactive will collate all data, case studies and research (linked to point 4 below) that demonstrate the impact that operators and providers have on children and young people that are participating within activities across ukactive's membership.



4. Future Members – who are the next generation of gym, fitness and leisure users and how do we engage and retain them?

ukactive's Vision 2030 strategy sets out an ambition to be 'fully supportive of children, young people and families to make being physically active a life habit'. Our Consumer Engagement work seeks to understand the motivations, perceptions, barriers and engagement with existing users and potential users of our sector. We have identified an opportunity to look at the next generation, ensuring the sector is thinking ahead on its products, services and facilities to support future participation.

Opportunity: Support ukactive members in understanding the next generation of members and customers, by looking at their motivations, barriers, perceptions and needs in order to enhance accessibility and create habits for long-term participation. Linked to our wider Consumer Engagement workstream, this will adopt a collaborative approach, working with children and young people members and providers to develop this work.

Action: ukactive will explore research that captures the voice of children and young people, which is essential to inform future programme design and strategies for operators and providers to engage the next generation of gym, fitness and leisure users.

5. Creating opportunities for children and young people through policy

Alongside our work in supporting members directly to engage children and young people, ukactive is also working to create a policy environment that delivers increased participation among children and young people by removing barriers to activity and empowering schools and activity providers to deliver real change in young people's activity levels.

Opportunity: There are several areas where ukactive can advocate on behalf of the sector, across school sport, tax reform, and expanding community hubs.

The Government has previously shown ambition to support school sport, and it could cement this further by providing more security around funding and targets. Renewing the PE and School Sport Premium for three full years would provide more security for schools to invest in PE. This would be further supported by a clear target for PE levels across all levels of school. There is also an opportunity to scale the work of Opening School Facilities, making greater use of community resources hidden behind school gates. ukactive aims to work with partners and stakeholders to strengthen and grow the relationships between schools and our core members to enable greater accessibility and opportunities for children, young people and their families to be more physically active.

We can see further support for children's activity through tax reform, both bespoke for children's providers and more broadly for the sector. VAT is a particular area of focus, especially as it relates to children's activity provision such as swimming lessons. The current system severely disincentivises private provision of activity, and with little funding for public sector providers, the overall levels of provision are affected.

The Home Secretary has expressed her desire to introduce Youth Futures Hubs in order to tackle antisocial behaviour. We know activity plays a critical role in providing young people with more positive outcomes in life and embedding it within the Youth Futures Hubs is an important opportunity for the Government to deliver on the aims of the programme. By providing physical activity role models we can promote Youth Employment and



Opportunities (alternative pathways), providing young people with meaningful employment opportunities, vocational training, and educational pathways to reduce the likelihood of involvement in criminal activity due to economic deprivation and lack of opportunities.

Action: ukactive will drive advocacy for better activity provision for children and young people through our broader lobbying strategy, with bespoke activity around children's activity providers and school sport. We will do this by liaising and building relationships with the relevant people and teams in Government, providing evidenced-backed solutions to drive participation among children and young people and remove barriers to entry. We will continue to do this in collaboration with other bodies within the sector, including as part of our work with the National Sector Partner Group.

The new Government needs to commit to utilising the full resources available across sport and physical activity when making new policy and investment decisions on activity for children and young people. Previously, policy and investment has been narrow in focus, and heavily weighted towards traditional sport. While this is an important area, it is not the panacea, and a more inclusive, diverse programme of policy focus and investment is required that includes the full breadth of the sector. Only then will the Government and its agencies begin to shift the dial on physical inactivity.

It is evident that our sector and ukactive members have a major role to play in increasing children and young people's physical activity levels.

The Next Generation strategy is designed to support the UK's agenda for improving health and economic growth and is aligned with the previous Government's Get Active: a strategy for the future of sport and physical activity and Youth Sport Trust Strategy: Inspiring changemakers, building belonging.

By enhancing the quality, standards, and investment in children and young people's activities, we aim to significantly benefit communities and the economy. This includes improved **affordability and accessibility** for parents, families, children, activity providers, schools, and our members.

The strategy is expected to lead to better accessibility, affordability and improved career prospects for the sector's workforce which will in turn improve **educational, health, play and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people**. It will increase opportunities for children and young people to access various facilities, products, services, and programmes, while raising awareness of the positive impact our members have across communities throughout the UK.

This comprehensive approach aims to ensure that **more children and young people are more active, more often**, ultimately fostering a happier, healthier and more active future generation.

We look forward to supporting our members and stakeholders and achieving our mission of **one million more children and young people in the UK** engaging in regular physical activity.

