

What now for school sport and PE?

Steve Grainger, chief executive of the Youth Sport Trust, writes exclusively for *The Leisure Review*

The sweeping cuts to school sport funding announced in the comprehensive spending review (CSR) left all of us at the Youth Sport Trust bitterly disappointed but with a determination to continue on our mission to build a brighter future for every young person through PE and sport. Our real concern is for the millions of young people and thousands of schools across the country who have benefited from the £160 million-a-year investment from the Department for Education over the seven years. That's now been cut to zero.

The country's 450 school sport partnerships have provided millions of hours of coaching, created thousands of new links between schools and clubs, and offered young people more competitive sport opportunities than in recent history. Over the last ten years the progress in transforming school sport has been huge, both in terms of the quantity and quality of physical education, but also in the variety of different sports being offered in schools and the amount of sport that is being played beyond the school day.

The Youth Sport Trust has been advocating, developing and implementing school sport since it was established in 1995, over which time government investment in school sport increased dramatically. The bulk of this investment has been used to create a new infrastructure for the delivery of school sport. Every school in England now has dedicated human resource to deliver a varied programme of PE and sport for all young people. This incredible progress has not happened overnight and it is thanks to the army of dedicated, passionate and committed people throughout the country who have delivered such change for young people in recent years.

There is no question that our school sport system is world-leading. That is why these cuts are staggering, given the transformational change that has been created and the results which have been delivered. There is a real concern now that in the run up to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, when we should be making the most of that opportunity, these cutbacks will cause real challenges. Our aspiration in 2005 was that we would keep building towards 2012 when the fantastic inspiration of the London Olympics and Paralympics will generate huge demand for sporting opportunities from young people. What the school sport network is doing is finding new people who want to get involved in coaching, training them up as coaches, deploying them into our schools and making sure we have lots of clubs set up after school in traditional sports but also some of the less traditional Olympic and Paralympic sports. For example, we are establishing boccia clubs now, we are making sure there are handball clubs and volleyball in schools, so that when those youngsters see those sports being played at the London Games they have opportunities to take them up in September and October 2012.

Indeed it was said back in 2005, as part of the London bid to host the 2012 Games, that young people who were inspired by watching the likes of Chris Hoy, Rebecca Adlington or Jessica Ennis and wanted to become a cyclist, swimmer or athlete would have the opportunity to follow their dreams through their school or local clubs. It is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to inspire a generation which has got to be at risk now. If the supply of those opportunities is not there for our youngsters in those immediate few months after the Olympic and Paralympic Games I believe it will be an opportunity lost forever. I genuinely believe promises which were made in terms of delivering a genuine Olympic legacy will be compromised by these cuts.

Every year we experience the great Wimbledon fortnight where we see all the tennis action happening, lots of children wanting to go out and play and yet two weeks later that interest dies. We must remember that the efforts to turn school sport around in this country, from what was a very dire situation no more than 20 or so years ago to where we are now, did not begin the minute IOC president Jacques Rogge made the dramatic announcement that London would be hosting what is still the greatest sporting event on the planet. We've been working with government, schools, national governing bodies, local authorities, corporate organisations, other charities and supporters to transform school sport over the last 15 years. What winning the right to host



Is the promise of the Olympic and Paralympic legacy is now at risk?

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the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games gave us all was the opportunity to turbo-charge the progress that had already been made and build further on these solid foundations of increased participation, leadership, volunteering and competition.

Let's be very clear. We are as much about promoting opportunities for young people to take part in competitive sport as we are about raising participation but in order to create more opportunities in competitive sport for all young people you have to build a participation base. The irony is that over the last ten years that participation base has been built to a level that is now unprecedented. The genuine desire is there to continue to extend participation opportunities and also offer a competitive experience for young people but to do that you need a delivery system in schools.

We cannot leave this just to the choice of individual schools otherwise those schools that have always done it will continue to do it and those schools where there have always been challenges will really suffer. That is why we remain fully focused on improving the PE experience for every young person and will work to ensure that sport remains at the heart of school life. In these very challenging times what does not change is our determination to continue using sport as a way of increasing young people's aspiration and achievement. What has been created, and what we will work hard to maintain, is a PE and sport system which our young people need and deserve.

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