

Active Partnerships Beyond 2021

Co-producing the future relationship
between Sport England and Active
Partnerships

A working document to stimulate thoughts
and discussions
March 2021

Our work together building the future



Our narrative for working together

To co-create a shared ambition and common narrative that includes both the role of Active Partnerships and the relationship required between Active Partnerships and Sport England to maximise our collective impact towards our shared mission.

Investment

To establish the principles, value and process for medium term Active Partnership investment for 2022-25, aligned to our shared mission and narrative for working together.

Measurement, evaluation and learning

To underpin our relationship with progressive methods of evaluating our collective impact and monitoring progress that support a learning culture.

Our narrative for working together

Where we are now:

- Sport England have launched an ambitious strategy for the next decade, co-created with the sport & physical activity system, which will guide what we do and how we work with others. It needs relationships in every place in England with more targeted approaches in some for its successful implementation.
- The strategy engagement process highlighted that the ‘big issues’ are relevant in every place. Active Partnerships agree that these are the things we should collectively be working on and reflect them in their own strategies. This presents a significant opportunity to create genuine collaboration behind the shared mission set out in Uniting the Movement.
- In this context Sport England’s ambition for the relationship with Active Partnerships is to use this moment in time to maximise the potential of our combined efforts with every Partnership, working as a single network and workforce. This means deliberately and explicitly placing the relationship as a central foundation of the implementation of Uniting the Movement.
- We have a strong basis for this, and the past 18 months have accelerated our collaboration. But we know there is more for us all to do to make this ambition a reality in everything we do, if we agree it is a shared ambition.

Some questions to resolve (are there more?):

- Assuming the mission in Uniting the Movement is shared, is the ambition for our relationship shared?
- What does this mean for the work we will do together and for our respective roles?
- What does this mean for *how* we will work together?
- What is the relationship we want – can we describe it (tone, style)?
- Is that shared at all levels in Sport England and Active Partnerships?
- What have we learned from the ‘Primary role’?

Investment

Where we are now:

- Active Partnerships are funded until March 2022. Sport England has committed to confirm funding to at least March 2025, by September 2021.
- This funding has typically been via separate investment strands according to the roles they play for certain parts of the organisation (e.g. CYP, workforce). These have been consolidated as far as possible in 21-22.
- The effect of maintaining current levels of funding has been in real terms a reduction. More recently 'core' funding has reduced, and some programme funding has ceased.
- Uniting the Movement places tackling inequality as a fundamental part of the mission, and proportionate universalism as one of the guiding principles. The funding approach needs revisiting in this context.
- The Active Partnership role and function has evolved since the introduction of the 'Primary Role' requiring more collaborative leadership skills, competencies and behaviours. The capacity implications and the cost of resourcing these roles has not been objectively evaluated.
- Uniting the Movement commits to expanding 'place-based working' and prioritising the right blend of national and local collaboration. Active Partnerships investment should be considered in the context of Sport England's relationship with 'place' more broadly.

Some questions to resolve (are there more?):

- What is the value of the relationship, in line with the ambition to place it as a central foundation of Uniting the Movement?
- What is the approach to funding allocation in line with the principles of Uniting the Movement?
- What is the real cost of resourcing the local capacity and skills, competencies and behaviours required?
- How much is wider system investment in places a factor in our decision making?

Measurement, evaluation and learning

Where we are now:

- We have been evolving systems of performance measurement and improvement with Active Partnerships for several years. This has taken place alongside a maturing relationship and growing trust between Sport England and Active Partnerships.
- New methodologies of measuring and evaluating progress and impact are emerging.
- The commitment to expand 'place-based working', prioritising local and national collaboration and an ambition to work more as a collective workforce (trusting and empowering our partners more) will require more shared evaluation of our collective efforts than judgement of performance by one party.
- To judge the success of Uniting the Movement we will develop new measures that give assurance that progress is being made, that the things we expect to change are changing and that we're learning, adapting and refining as we go.

Some questions to resolve (are there more?):

- Do we have a shared language, understanding and definitions of what we mean by e.g. value, impact, learning?
- How do we build on the practice and learning of previous and existing systems of measurement, evaluation and learning (PMIF, TIF, other)?
- What will the measures be in Uniting the Movement and how will these apply to our collective work?
- What are the minimum standards and expectations that will be required for assurance/compliance around public investment?

What happens next?

- Our conversation at the convention: have we identified all the right questions to be resolved?
- Continuing one-to-one meetings between Sport England and Active Partnerships to explore individual perspectives, experiences, hopes and fears
- Implementation planning for Uniting the Movement, positioning the relationship as a central foundation
- Ongoing collective conversations with all colleagues (Sport England and Active Partnerships)
- Next event in April (date to be sent to all Active Partnership CEOs and Sport England colleagues shortly)

