



Impact of Covid-19 among members

December 2020

Research aims and objectives:

To understand directly from members their needs and challenges related to Covid 19, so we can:

- Adapt and provide support accordingly
- Evidence this insight and need to key national stakeholders
- Improve fundraising applications, ultimately to generate funds and support members
- Build experience of what works for member groups in terms of advising and supporting our insight gathering
- Learn how we can best communicate and deliver the support that Sported offers

Methodology:

Sported enlisted voluntary support from a professional qualitative researcher, and conducted:

- 2 x 1.5 hour online groups (1st & 3rd December 2020)

Focus groups and interviews were recorded and later analysed by Sported's insight team.

Participating Groups



Participating groups are typical of Sported's membership; they use sport as tool to address other social outcome, often engaging participants who face disadvantage. All participants had a decision-making role and influence over the organisation they represent.

For context, some details of the groups are listed here. In order to maintain anonymity, locations of groups are listed separately; Scotland and England (South East, Yorkshire and Humber, East Midlands, North East, East of England.)

Main Activity	Organisation type	Years in operation
Kayaking	Constituted club	10
Multisports	Charity	28
Table Tennis	Constituted club	31
Boxercise	Community Interest Company (CIC)	2
Rugby Union	Community Interest Company (CIC)	96
Multisports	Community Interest Company (CIC)	4
Exercise and Fitness	Constituted community group	3

Summary of key findings



- Covid 19 has had substantial impact on young people, particularly on their **mental health**. Youth workers and community volunteers need additional training and support to be able to deal with this.
- Community organisations are putting in every effort to **operate as much as they can**, whether they can do this socially distanced, or virtually, because they empathise with the needs of their participants.
- ‘Phases’ of recovery are ever changing. There’s a sense that rather than ‘recovery phase’ which implies back to the ‘old ways of doing things’, it will be **more about ‘renewal’ for the long term**.
- Different experiences **depending on what sport they deliver re: the need for social distancing**. How easily they can deliver their sport whilst socially distanced, and how close they can get to the ‘normal’ that their participants enjoy. Therefore response needs to be detailed and specific to different sports.
- Different experiences **depending on additional challenges of participants**. Enhanced challenges if BAME and/or those with underlying health conditions, people with impairments.
- An emerging challenge is **access to facilities**, groups are unable to open or unable to provide space for community groups. Rules around hiring facilities are more complicated, so some owners choosing not to do this.
- Groups find that **areas of guidance don’t match up**, e.g. where groups operate in a crossover between schools, youth sector, voluntary sector, or in a crossover between different sports.
- **Lack of resources** is a fundamental issue – in terms of financial support and particularly for smaller less established community groups (knowledge, experience and eligibility criteria). Plus the need for funding is ever growing and so more competitive.
- **Keeping volunteers engaged** is a key challenge – given the risks of COVID, it’s not worth it like it was before.

Summary of feedback to Sported



- Sported strength is in its support to niche, marginalised sports and groups – those that can't access sufficient support from their NGB.
- Areas of Sported's support that member groups have most appreciated:
 - Information about funding (the **funding bulletin**).
 - Online delivery
 - Being proactive
 - **Right level of communication**, and members know where to find more information if they need it
- Member groups recommend that Sported should:
 - Access approved **training/qualifications** at reduced rates and offer to members e.g. safeguarding
 - Work harder to **showcase the work** that they do; to generate awareness, to enable funding, to inspire and emotionally uplift e.g. case studies of success stories during Covid, highlight their work with minority sports
 - Provide more **opportunities to participate in focus groups** (to inform, to feel engaged, to connect)

Impact on young people – as seen through members



Findings:

-> mix of positive things around re-engagement again and the ongoing negative impact

-> members stating they need additional training to deal with increased mental health challenges among adults and children, these are linked to:

- Lockdown
- Loss of employment
- Change

-> however, young people maybe more resilient than adults during this period as still have structure through attending school

Current level of operating (mid Dec)



Partially operating

Barriers to operating

- Unable to access external facilities due to their staff on furlough
- Volunteers reluctant to engage due to Covid risk
- Participants disengaged

How operating

In person:

“Operating on a shoe-string.”

- Support to vulnerable participants (1 to 1 sessions)
- Activity sessions run at half capacity
- Buddy systems

Virtually:

“Paddling on our own in a canoe.”

- Online activity packs
- Activity sessions (via zoom), using volunteers with digital skills
- Coach’s videos (via YouTube)

Stopped operating

Barriers to operating

- Can’t work with schools (can’t access due to social distancing)
- Staff are furloughed (and at partner orgs such as at NGBs)
- Not worth operating at half capacity, such as holiday camps
- Cannot access swimming pool
- Training and qualifications for staff and volunteers on paused, so not able to provide these for new recruits

Findings:

- > Difficult to keep engagement, motivation and structure, as rules are changing
- > Additional challenges for people with disability or impairment. Autism or other learning difficulties, difficult to understand restrictions. Physical disability who normally need physical support to do things (e.g. carry/use equipment), not able to get close to people
- > **Going into Tier 2** – could go back to reduced delivery, but not worth opening anything before Christmas – with reduced capacity & have had little uptake anyway
- > **Going into Tier 3** – going into tier 3 won’t feel different to the lockdown

New model of the phases of recovery

Stars indicate where members see themselves



Initial/first time emergency response phase – emergency funding pots, looking at outgoings, adapting to Covid response etc.

Reactive normal – new or different ways of operating. Depending on the regulations Virtual, in-person

Planned adjusted normal – more thought through, learnings. new or different ways of operating. Virtual, in-person

Findings:

- > this is a good reflection of their journey.
- > Switching between 'planned adjusted normal' and 'learnt emergency response', depending on how extensive restrictions are
- > Depends what your 'full delivery' looks like, e.g. very different for contact sport (such as rugby) compared to that can be done socially distanced.
- > Renewal: thinking about long term

Emergency response phase (learnt) – emergency funding pots, looking at outgoings, adapting to COVID response etc.

Planning during 'quiet time' – good time for refurbishments etc.

Recovery phase – thinking and planning how you might get back to full delivery

"It's renewal, more than recovery"

Challenges

- Unable to access facilities, e.g. swim pool only open for public swimming
- Unable to deliver project (restricted funds), as can't access facility
- Need to adapt quite a lot to be able use venues – different entrances/exits/washing facilities – not possible in small venues or with large groups of people
- More complicated to hire out facility to others, so places not as willing to do this
- Trying to follow different rules for hiring, as for using own facilities

Needs

- Funding
- Support to help volunteers do assessment of their venue or facility
- Standardised rules for own use or for hiring facilities
- Ideas for how to successfully operate

Solutions

- Frameworks that reassure and support facilities to allow access to different organisations.
- Programme of support (perhaps volunteers) to help with risk assessments of venues
- Opportunity to reassess rules around different entrances, exits, toilets etc. Maybe could still use space, but with a break in between
- Solutions to operate
- Targeted information from local authorities/government

Challenges

- Not enough staff and volunteers to deliver at reduced capacity (social distancing)
- Staff or coaches not coming back, don't feel like it's worth the risk for £10/£15 an hour or if you're voluntary
- Staff or volunteers themselves are shielding
- Using technology to engage people, such as zoom

Needs

- Need time and understanding (from funders / trustees) that it will take time to get back to where they were before
- Need to train staff/volunteers to work in different ways e.g. smaller group work, more outreach
- Volunteer re-engagement and recruitment (on and off the field, all roles)
- Upskilling in technology, different social media for different audiences

Solutions

- Training in digital technologies
- Accepting that will lose some staff and volunteers, strategies to recruit and energise new ones
- Strategies that upskill a new volunteer workforce, in all areas, e.g. safeguarding, GDPR, coaching, admin
- Clear backlog of safeguarding & disclosure assessment (currently in hibernation)
- More funding to train and recruit

Challenges

- More competition for funding, only goes to those they know
- Often told too small for funding
- Not financially viable to deliver to low income participants. With what they can afford to pay, could just about cover costs. But with reduced numbers (social distances) doesn't cover costs.
- Crowdfunding a good idea, but practically difficult. Time consuming, don't have affluent connections, so not worth it (cost-benefit perspective).

Needs

- When unsuccessful with funding, need specific, actionable feedback.
- Funds of all amounts, need some specifically set up to give small amounts
- Funds for additional staff, so we can still deliver to smaller groups
- Other clubs and organisations to survive as well, so there can be teams nearby to play against in the future
- Access to more affluent people as potential givers

Solutions

- Decentralised assessment of funding, those who know groups can make more informed decisions – make it fairer
- Streamlined crowdfunding process
- More sustainable sources of funding, so don't just need to 'stagger on' with what we can get. More planned rather than reactive
- Programmes that provide funding along with professional support to upskill volunteers

Challenges

- Raising awareness of what community groups are doing and what they require to operate
- Limited collaboration, everyone is focusing on their own ability to keep going. Difficult to be outward looking at this time.
- Some groups much more connected and supported than others, depends on size and resources of your NGB

Needs

- Lobbying funders & authorities - raise awareness of what we are delivering and what we need
- Encourage partnerships
- Greater collaboration
- Larger organisations to raise awareness of smaller organisations

Solutions

- Funding pots for those doing effective collaboration projects
- Support to smaller, less well-resourced NGBs

Challenges

- Making sense of guidance if cover multiple sports or multiple sectors. Guidance for youth centres and community centres doesn't match up. Sports council doesn't match up with schools.
- For hiring guidance set by local authority for own set by sports council – doesn't match up
- Priorities don't seem fair (e.g. gyms are open with sharing equipment, but can't do social distanced dance class inside)
- So many risk assessments, Completing risk assessments, ever changing risks
- Doing video walk throughs of venue

Needs

- Clear guidance that is easy to find. Needs to be easier to navigate guidance from different NGBs.
- Support for NGBs that are under-resourced
- Guidance needs to be more streamlined and match up from different sources.
- Help with funding bids
- Human resources, to understand and implement guidance, write risk assessments

Solutions

- Updates on GDPR, for online delivery
- Standardised guidance, for schools, youth centres, community centres etc.
- Centralised guidance for 'multi-sports' groups and clubs
- Access to centralised templates for risk assessments

Challenges

- Keeping up engagement (creating a routine), building confidence and trust again (can't promise no one has COVID).
- Making it attractive, e.g. for contact sports the training we can do just isn't the same
- Young people finding non-compliant ways to socialise. Hard to compete with this and get them back.
- Running sessions outside, in the dark, wont work for vulnerable people
- Lack of awareness (before the pandemic) about the different challenges faced by different disabilities and impairments.

Needs

- Convincing people it's worth coming back
- Need people power, to message & check in with participants & encourage them to come back
- Social media messages to encourage engagement
- Recovery to be sport specific e.g. depends on distance between players
- Need time, will take months to get back to numbers seen before. Awareness from funders & sector that it will take a long time to get numbers back up

Solutions

- Funding to develop creative solutions for now e.g. table tennis pack sent out; bats, net, ball and a link to a video, use dining room table). Endorsement by famous sports person.
- Accept that we will lose people. See it as an opportunity to renew and grow new following of the sport
- Investment in young people – 'kickstart' schemes
- Sports might need to adapt rules, at least in the short term
- Volunteers proficient in social media
- Vaccine

Feedback to Sported

Things Sported has done well...

"They are very good at identifying professional people that act as mentors. They help us with specific problems that we are facing."

"Funding newsletters are great. They save us loads of time."

"Keeping us abreast of what funding opportunities are the available. We don't see that anywhere else. That helps me know what's out there."

"It's great to access so much stuff online. This is then accessible to anyone in the organisations, for example those who can't travel to a workshop."

"the funding bulletin is actually a real lifeline, I often forward it to others."

"Very useful to meet online the other Sported members like this. Would be useful to have more of this, and learn from each other."

"Sported offers a very personalised service. Much more than the NGBs."

"I don't think Sported should change the way it communicates. You've got the balance right."

"It's THE most pro-active organisation I've come across."

"It's a lonely place, for volunteers it's overwhelming. It's nice to know you're not the only who spent 3 days trying to set up a crowdfunding page."

Feedback to Sported



Things Sported could do better...

"Would be great to have a really obvious list of places to be signposted to for various things."

"Sported regional staff cover a huge area, could they have more staff so each one covers a smaller area."

"It's not that we don't appreciate them (as a mainstream sport) but I think Sported are at their best when they support minority sports that have less access to support and are less able to rely on their NGB. I think it's got a huge niche here, which it could make more off."

"Communicate case studies better, so far I've not been aware of any."

"If you asked me to do a video, I'd need a real idiot's guide to it."

"Can they help with access to training and qualifications, such as safeguarding? Maybe Sported could get a subsidized rate if there is a big group."

"This session has had a clear theme. More opportunities like this would be great, but there needs to be an agenda and a structure."

"What Sported did for me for girl's rugby, I hope Sported can do that for many other marginalised groups in the sporting community."

"I would encouraged Sported to continue with their support to niche, minority organisations that don't have good enough access to NGB support. Sported has filled a huge void in British sport."

"We don't get opportunities like this. I hope you'll get this research out to the right people."

"Maybe send a nice uplifting message out to all your members, we're encouraged to see that Sported is still there, doing what it's doing."

"People just want to see what others are able to do. Despite everything this year."

THANK YOU!

To the group leaders
who took part.

To volunteer Rachael
Walton (rkwconsulting
ltd) who facilitated the
sessions.