

Community Facilities Report

Executive Summary

January 2022



sported.org.uk

Sported would like to thank all the representatives from the Sported membership who very kindly gave their time to this research project and shared their experiences and learning, it is very much appreciated.

Executive Summary

Setting the scene

There is a growing recognition of the large network of trusted sports clubs, community organisations and charities who are using sport and physical activity as a tool to improve lives and strengthen communities. With more help and resources, they can make even more of a difference¹.

Sported is the UK's largest network of Sport for Development organisations supporting over 2,500 youth and community groups. Evidence shows that a growing challenge for the Sported network is securing stable, long-term, affordable access to facilities from which they can deliver their activities – 24% of groups report that they don't have access to appropriate facilities. This has been a perennial problem which appears to have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic – 68% of Sported groups responding to our Pulse Survey (October 2021) have found it harder to access facilities since the pandemic and 25% have found it much harder². Recent research by the Sport and Recreation Alliance provides important additional insight on this issue.³

Importantly, the recent House of Lords National Plan for Sport and Recreation Committee Report⁴ recommends the Government introduce a statutory requirement on local authorities to provide and maintain adequate facilities for sport and physical activity, backed up with adequate financial support from the Treasury; conduct an audit and develop a clear, fully costed national facilities strategy including pitches, leisure facilities, swimming pools, parks and other outdoor and indoor spaces; and help create and strengthen the links between schools, local clubs and communities.

¹ Sport England Strategy - [Uniting the Movement | Sport England](#)

² [Community Pulse October 2021 Results | Sported](#)

³ [Sport and Recreation Alliance's \(2021\)](#)

⁴ House of Lords National Plan for Sport and Recreation Committee Report - [A national plan for sport, health and wellbeing \(parliament.uk\)](#)

Purpose of the research

Through our network, Sported has seen that sustainable access to local facilities by community groups enhances their ability to deliver regular, safe, impactful sessions to local people, providing greater opportunity to tackle prevailing inequalities.

The purpose of this research was to develop a better understanding, from the Sported network, of the challenges groups face and the solutions that they have found in this regard. This insight is seen as contributing to the broad discussion on access to community facilities as well as supporting Sported members with their own learning and improvement activities.

Research methodology

The research methodology included a short desk research exercise to understand what already exists in this context and 12 in-depth interviews with leaders of organisations in the Sported network. In choosing those featured, we sought to ensure that we gained insight across a range of community assets including owner or leased facilities, community spaces with a short-term lease, schools, leisure centres, parks and open spaces.

Key Findings

1. Confidence in organisational survival is high but access challenges persist

In October '21, 97% of groups had reopened and 68% were extremely confident their organisation will survive the next 6 months, but 43% of groups have found it harder and 25% much harder to find facilities following the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. The challenges and solutions relating to accessing and utilising facilities, and general organisational capacity are completely intertwined

Having strong support from volunteers provides the opportunity to better maximise the potential of a facility.

3. Undertaking due diligence and accessing support are critically important when considering taking on and utilising a facility

An area of support that could be expanded is formalised peer to peer support between groups who have been through similar journeys.

4. Access to school facilities is a particular issue

In many cases management of school facilities has been outsourced to independent companies who have increased the prices for community groups

resulting in a financial barrier to access. Programmes to help schools open their facilities for community groups (such as Open Doors) have been successful.

5. When decisions regarding access to community facilities are financially based, it favours larger, more established organisations, and participants who are wealthier

Market intervention should be considered to ensure that facility owners consider social value as part of the access to facility decision making.

6. The extent to which organisations have control over their 'home' venue plays a key role in their preparedness, resilience and response

Groups are often unsure if or when they will have a booking, so planning for 'home' fixtures can be very difficult. Interventions that ensure providers don't favour longer term, block bookings, would give smaller organisations that achieve social outcomes an important advantage.

7. Policies that support the refurbishment of a relatively small facility are lacking compared to those that support a new build or a large facility

Groups point to the fact they can't get VAT reductions on refurbishments in the same way they would be able to with new builds.

8. Not owning the asset makes it harder to access grants and support

Group leaders highlight that they can't borrow against a facility and have had to use their own personal assets as equity to support facility and service development.

9. Grassroots sports groups report that funding attracts other funding

Groups find themselves either in a positive or negative funding spiral and recommend that interventions are needed to ensure that funding doesn't continue going to the same groups.

[Read the full report](#)



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