

London 2012: a sustainable sporting legacy?

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Introduction

As part of the promotional materials for the London 2012 Olympic Bid the claim is made that, if the Bid is successful:

“[...] grassroots participation would be boosted. An already sports-mad nation would get fitter and healthier.”

In other words, the staging of the Olympic Games in London would lead to ‘a step change in the nation’s physical activity’, contributing to the Government’s desire to increase participation in sport and physical activity. Such claims suggest that holding the Olympic Games in London can contribute to the Government’s broader social and health agenda. It is also claimed that it will contribute to the extremely ambitious target of 70 percent of the population undertaking 5x30 minutes of moderate activity per week by 2020 as outlined in Game Plan (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002), the Government’s strategy for delivering its sport and physical activity objectives.

However, the model of behaviour change underpinning such claims is not clear. Is it implying a media-led growth in participation as a result of widespread coverage of the Olympic Bid? Is it presuming that elite sporting role models will encourage widespread participation? Is it assuming that the coverage of individual sports will increase their popularity (even though many Olympic sports are highly technical and/or minority activities)? Why is it assuming that persistently under-participating groups will be moved to participate and enable the nation to get fitter and healthier? As the great majority of spectators of *any* Olympics will view it via television, what is specific about a London Games? Will any of the presumed impacts be restricted to the South East of England, where provision and a sense of involvement will be concentrated?

This chapter address some of these questions and examine the extent to which any successful London Bid might leave a ‘sporting heritage’ (rather than simply a facility heritage). It will examine the following issues:

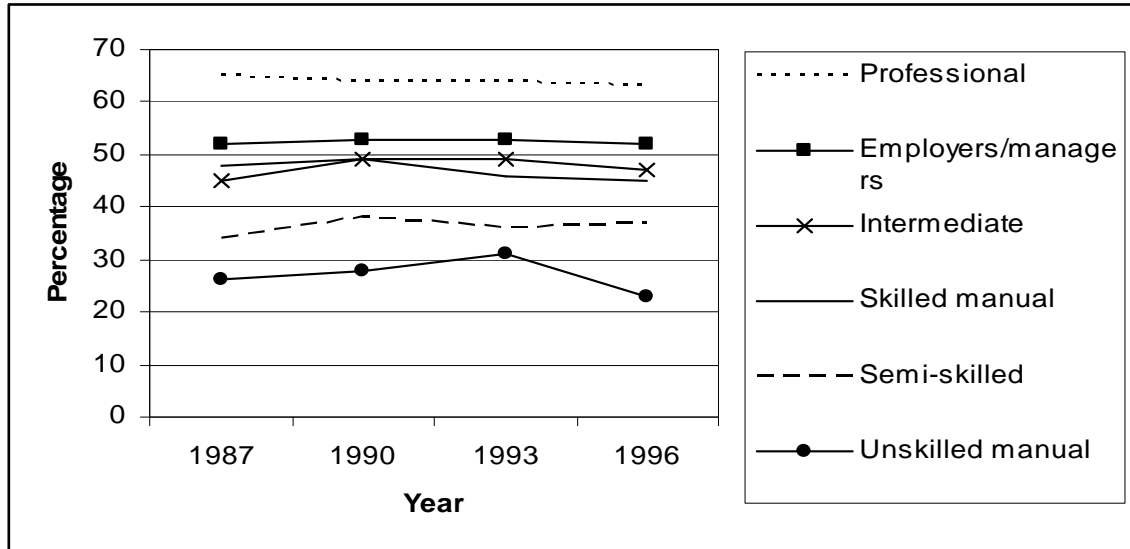
- The scale of the challenge to increase sports participation and existing evidence about the contribution of large scale sports events
- The opportunities and challenges implied by the use of sporting role models and the development of sports volunteering
- Some conclusions about the need to ‘embed’ the Olympics in a broader strategy for sports development.

The Scale of the Challenge

The ambitious nature of the Game Plan (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002) target is indicated by the fact that it will require an increase of more than 100 percent on the current levels of participation – only 30 percent of the population currently meet the Government’s target for health-related physical activity levels (Sport England, 2004). Although the Game Plan target is not based simply on sports participation, but on wider aspects of physical activity, the

contribution of sport will require a sea change in current trends. An increase in sports participation in the 1980s has been followed by relative stagnation in the 1990s. Figure 1 illustrates both stagnation and stubbornly persistent class-based differences.

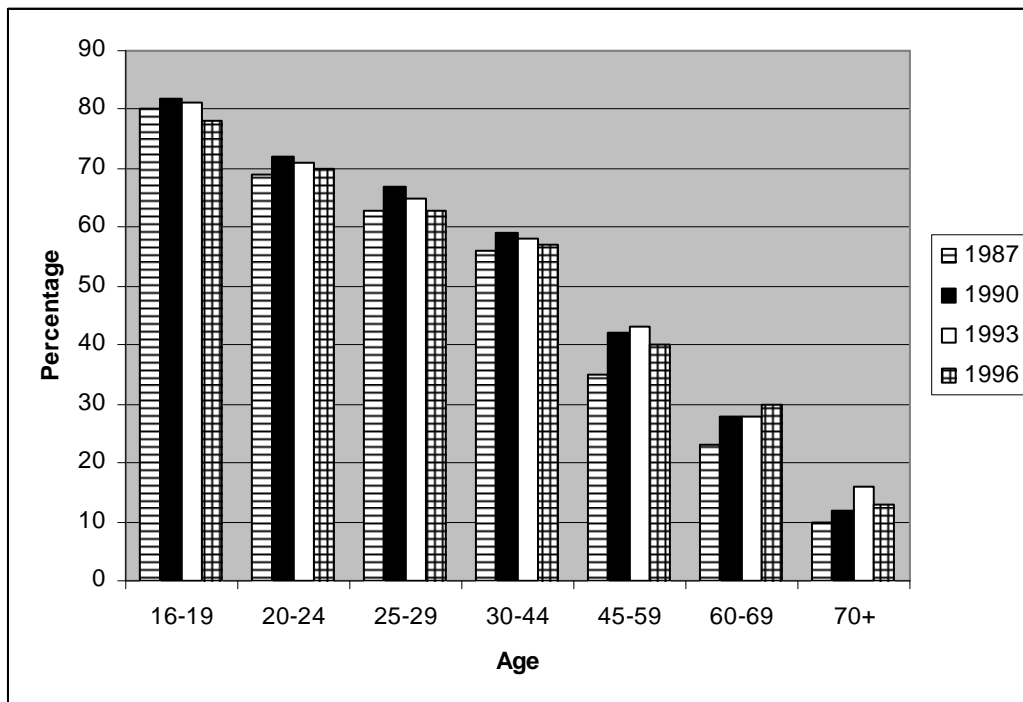
Figure 1: Sports participation and social class



Source: General Household Survey

Figure 2 illustrates that, despite recent increases in participation among older age groups, there is still a strong relationship between age and sports participation.

Figure 2: Age and Sports Participation



Source: General Household Survey

Further, despite increases in the late 1980s and early 1990s, women's overall participation remains less than men's and concentrated in a much narrower band of activities. Further, cultural shifts and increased pressure on time has led to a shift away from traditional, Olympic-type, sports to forms of activity which are flexible, individualistic and non-competitive (e.g. aerobics, hi-tech fitness, cycling, walking) (Coalter, 1999).

Such long term stagnation and changing trends in sports participation pose major challenges, both for general attempts to increase sports participation and, more directly, for the claimed contribution of the Olympic Games.

Impact of events on general sports participation: survey evidence

Despite the substantial claims made about the wider social impacts of major sporting events, there is a lack of rigorous post-games evaluation (Cashman, 2003). More specifically, in relation to our concerns, there is little research on the impact of major events on sports development (Hindson *et al.*, 1994). Nevertheless, the data that do exist are sufficient to raise critical questions about some of the assumptions underpinning the London 2012 claims about its potential impact on sports participation, although some also provide an indication as to how to maximise the impact of an event on sports participation.

There is very little participation data permitting an evaluation of the impact of the Olympics on general levels of sports participation. However, Veal (2003), in an analysis of sports participation in Australia between 1985 and 2002, provides some indicative data. Although the analysis is concerned with methodological issues that limit longitudinal analysis, Veal does provide

comparable data for 2000/01 and 2001/2, before and after the Sydney Olympics.

In the year following the 2000 Games, although seven Olympic sports experienced a small increase in participation, nine declined. The pattern for non-Olympic sports was broadly similar, with the biggest increase in non-competitive walking. Veal (2003) also speculates that declines in participation for certain sports could be explained by a 'couch potato' syndrome induced by so much sports coverage on television! However, his overall conclusion is that it is "a mixed picture [...] difficult to attribute it to the Olympic Games" (Veal, 2003: 261).

UK Sport commissioned research on the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games indicates broadly similar results (MORI, 2004). Although survey results show that respondents *felt* that the Games had had a positive effect on their playing and watching habits, there appears to have been no recorded impact on sports participation levels across the North West.

A recent report on the impact of the highly publicised curling Olympic gold medal on participation in curling in Scotland (**sportscotland**, 2004: 24) concluded that:

"[...] the success has had the greatest impact on those who were already active in sport. Consequently, care should be taken when asserting that success on the world stage in sport has an impact on general levels of participation."

Such an analysis is also supported by Game Plan (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002), which concluded that "it would seem that hosting events is not an effective, value for money, method of achieving [...] a sustained increase in mass participation."

On the basis of the data presented above it is clear that the London 2012 Bid needs to be careful about how it presents the potential 'Olympic effect', avoiding raising expectations which it cannot fulfil and possibly alienating support within the wider sporting community. A key issue here will be addressing the concerns, whether valid or not, about Lottery funding being diverted away from community sports development to support the London 2012 Bid.

More generally, given the clear difficulties in isolating any 'Olympic effect', it would seem inappropriate to establish strategic sports participation targets related directly to a successful Olympics. However, it may be possible to propose targets for increased participation rates at sporting facilities in the Lower Lea Valley. Another possible approach might be to move beyond the broad aggregate targets used under the Government's Public Service Agreement approach, towards incremental targets for individual sports, especially those involved directly in Olympic competition.

Clearly, if a London 2012 Games is to make any contribution to a sustained increase in sports participation, it must be as a partner in a much broader development strategy, with a wide range of organisations seeking to build on the heightened profile of sport. This chapter will now turn to some of these issues.

Impact on participation: governing bodies and clubs

Although there are good reasons to understand the lack of measurable impact of major games on general participation, it might be expected that they would have more impact on sports clubs, especially those for Olympic sports. Again, very little evaluation of this hypothesis has been undertaken. However, one study undertaken in New Zealand (Hindson *et al.*, 1994), provides a rather pessimistic analysis (especially if reliance is placed solely on some presumed 'trickle down effect').

The analysis is based on a postal survey of 35 New Zealand sports clubs and six National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) in the period following the 1992 Albertville Winter Olympics and Barcelona Olympics Games. The purpose of the survey was to examine the impact of these events on club membership. The evidence for a 'trickle down effect' was very limited, with only six of the clubs having an increase in membership inquiries. Only three experienced an increase in competitive membership, with two increasing 'social' (i.e. recreational) membership.

However, Hindson *et al.* (1994) do not simply conclude that the Winter and Summer Games had no effect on sporting demand. They also point to a series of supply-side failures, in which both the NSOs and clubs failed to capitalise on the publicity surrounding the Games. For example, they conclude that there was:

- A lack of innovative marketing. Only four clubs used the Games as a marketing and promotion tool
 - A general failure to forward plan and to market and promote the sport in the run up to the games
 - Both NSOs and sports clubs were simply complacent, relying on an anticipated 'trickle down effect' from Olympic coverage to promote sport
 - The relationship between NSOs and clubs was not conducive to capitalising on the promotional opportunities provided by the Games, with the NSOs being wholly concerned with competitive sport and having little interest in the recreational ('social') sporting activities of clubs.
- Opportunities to promote the various sports in a coherent national strategy were lost.

As the authors conclude, "trickle down benefits from the Olympics are not automatic" (Hindson *et al.*, 1994: 22). Unless the Games are embedded in a longer-term developmental strategy they are very unlikely to have any general, and only limited sports-specific, impacts (this point will be returned to later).

These concerns prompt issues about the roles and responsibilities of governing bodies and sports clubs in capitalising on the 'Olympic effect'. Some issues for consideration are:

- The need for an influential 'sports legacy champion' within the London 2012 organisation. This would ensure that sports legacy issues are sufficiently considered and that liaison with all relevant organisations (including the relevant local authorities) was central to the Bid. This post should act as a catalyst to promote a more holistic approach to planning for sports development, both before and after the Olympic Games
- Regional sports boards and national sporting bodies must be encouraged and supported to maximise on the publicity and profile associated with the Games
- Governing bodies of sport, especially Olympic sports, should be given specific participation targets during this pre-Olympic period. As part of this, governing bodies need to engage more effectively at local level.

Opportunities and Challenges

Sporting roles models and mass participation

However, in addition to concerns about supply-side failures Hindson *et al.* (1994) raise a further, fundamental, issue. They question the extent to which the competitive excellence associated with Olympic Games could be effective in promoting recreational sport at a local level. In opposition to the 'role model' thesis, in which people are inspired to emulate the feats of sporting heroes, the authors suggest that it is equally possible that sporting and technical excellence can reduce non-participants' feelings of self-efficacy, leading them to conclude that they do not have the necessary skills and competence to participate in sport. As Hindson *et al.* (1994: 24) conclude:

“[...] sports organisations need to ensure that marketing is sensitive to consumer resistance arising from an awareness of how difficult it is [...] to emulate our sporting heroes and heroines.”

This reflects a more general questioning of the nature of any presumed link between sporting excellence and mass participation (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002). In this regard it is possible to suggest that there are several, increasingly unconnected, 'worlds of sport':

- Sporting events/spectacle (driven by economic and political imperatives)
- Sporting excellence (driven by talent identification and specialist sports science support and, in some cases, illegal drugs)
- Recreational sport and clubs (driven by competition, enjoyment of sport and sociability and local authority investment in facilities)
- Social inclusion, government-driven policies which attempt to use sport for instrumental purposes (e.g. crime reduction; health improvement) that are more likely to be provided by youth workers or health professionals than coaches.

Further, Payne *et al.* (2003) in a wide-ranging review of literature, illustrate that much thinking about the relationship between sporting role models and wider sports participation fails to understand the complexity of processes of learning and behavioural change. They illustrate that role model programmes (RMPs) form a continuum: from a single exposure event (role model visit to school/club) to approaches based on long term mentoring and systematic reinforcement – with success in changing attitudes and behaviour related to the length and intensity of contact with any role models. The review illustrates a number of factors of direct relevance to the sporting role model approach, which seems to be implicit in the London 2012 claims.

Firstly, the target audience needs to perceive that the role model is both relevant and accessible. Relevance relates to a number of factors, including race and gender – the review highlights data that suggest that there are important gender differences in the perception of relevant role models. Young males are much more likely than females to view sports people as role models, although some might argue that this is because of a lack of female sporting role models in the media. Secondly, the extent to which individuals adopt role models relates to personal perceptions of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy – the extent to which individuals perceive that they can achieve acceptable levels of performance and obtain positive outcomes. Learning is more likely to occur when the learner perceives that they are capable of carrying out the behaviour and thinks that there is a high probability that the behaviour will result in a particular, desirable, outcome.

This reflects Hindson *et al.*'s (1994) suggestion that sporting excellence might not be the most appropriate role model for achieving increased recreational participation and getting the nation "fitter and healthier". Payne *et al.*'s (2003) third concern about role models is an increasingly widespread one – sporting role models are not always positive. Many aspects of professional sport (violence, cheating, disputing decisions, feigning injury, drugs) fall short of the Olympic ideal.

Where these issues can be addressed, Payne *et al.* (1994) suggest that, to be successful, any role model programme must have the following elements:

- *Provision of ongoing, needs-oriented, support for participants*
Programmes need to take account of the needs and competencies of the target audience, with attention given to the selection and training of mentors and on-going support
- *Ongoing reminders of role models' message*
The nature of the positive attitudes and behaviours need to be reinforced constantly
- *Support and encouragement of a variety of role models*
Sporting role models need to be supported and embedded in a wider support network in including the involvement of parents, teachers and significant adults.

The overall conclusion is that sporting role model programmes need to be 'embedded' – part of a more general, on-going, programme of support.

Fleeting media images of sporting achievement may not be enough to ensure that such role models contribute to a substantial increase in sports participation. There is a need for a more systematic and integrated approach which links the promotion of national sporting heroes to support for local role models, who can develop on-going relationships with local people and communities.

Volunteering in sport

Volunteering is an aspect of major events that has the potential to contribute to social regeneration and the strengthening of social capital (although its effects are likely to be geographically limited). A study of the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games (ICRCTHI, 2003) found that 23,000 people applied to be volunteers, with 9,000 being selected. Of those selected, a quarter (24%) had no previous volunteering experience and over half (53%) were under the age of 45. While older volunteers were motivated by wanting to 'give something back', young ones were more instrumental, being motivated by a desire for personal and skill development.

However, while it is clear that volunteering provided a fulfilling and productive experience for those chosen, its broader impact on increasing sports participation may have been rather limited. For example, 92 percent of the volunteers claimed to have taken part in sport or physical activity in the previous 12 months, 87 percent on a 'regular basis' – participation levels far above the national average (e.g. in 1966 the General Household Survey indicated that only 32 percent of the adult population had taken part in sport in the previous four weeks) – and only 4 percent said that they had no interest in sport. Consequently, although this may also reflect the nature of the selection procedures, this seems a case of preaching to the converted and may have had limited impact on sports development.

Further, the volunteering programme appears to have been very limited in terms of inclusivity, with 92 percent of volunteers being white British. Ritchie (2000) also refers to this issue in an evaluation of the Calgary Olympics. Ritchie suggests that as volunteerism has the potential to make a substantial contribution to civic pride and social cohesion, although there is a need to adopt formal procedures for the registration and recognition of volunteer efforts. Further, because of the multi-cultural nature of large-scale events, efforts need to be made to recruit more volunteers from ethnic minorities (who can also contribute to the multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of such events). Waitt (2001) also addresses the issue of the relationship of minority ethnic groups to such celebratory events. Via a survey of Sydney residents prior to the 2000 Olympics, Waitt (2001) concluded that theories of 'civic boosterism' were supported. Overall, two years before the Olympics, respondents had positive feelings of national achievement, civic pride and community spirit as a result of the prospect of hosting the Games. The interesting fact for Waitt (2001) was that the most enthusiastic were under 50 and non-English speaking. Waitt (2001: 272) concludes that:

“Those most enthusiastic about the games are perhaps exactly the people amongst whom the Federal and State Governments would wish

to engender feelings of belonging to the 'imagined community' of Australia and a greater community through the identification of self and place."

Available literature on volunteering in major games indicates the substantial potential to use such events as a catalyst for community and multi-cultural involvement. However, in terms of widening participation in sport, the Manchester experience indicates that such events may only attract those already committed to sport.

Interestingly, Cashman (2003) implies that if the catalytic impact of games for the host community is to be sustained, there is a need to plan for what happens after them, to provide some degree of continuity (see also Ritchie, 2000). Cashman (2003: 16) argues that there is a need to:

"[...] plan for the immediate post-games period when there is often a great sense of loss experienced by many members of the host community, even a post-games depression."

This argument for the need for post-games planning raises a more general point about viewing such events as being only one part of a much longer and systematic process of both sporting and community development.

Meeting the Challenge

Embedding the Olympics: the need for a strategy

We have already noted Hindson *et al's* (1994) comments about the dangers in depending on a 'trickle-down effect' and the need for systematic promotion of sport in the period running up to major games. Further, Payne *et al.* (2003) also argue that sporting role models need to be embedded in systematic programmes of development. This need to 'embed' a games in broader processes of development is also supported by Ritchie (2000). Reflecting on the Calgary Winter Olympics Ritchie (2000) makes four strategic points:

- Legacy planning needs to ensure that the enthusiasm for the 'event window' is maintained by ensuring that sporting commitments are consolidated prior to event to ensure post-event commitment
- There is a need for annual sporting events ('mini games'), before and after the main event
- The Olympic facilities must be available to public, before and after the event
- There is need to adopt a 'community development' approach, by understanding and building on the values of local residents and stakeholders.

There is some indication that elements of this approach have been adopted by the London 2012 Bid. For example, following the model adopted for the Manchester Commonwealth Games, the majority of the proposed capital investment is based on a strategic evaluation of the longer-term sports development needs of the South East (if not the particular local authorities

who will host the games and be responsible for subsequent revenue and maintenance). Further, Roger Draper (2003: 16), the Chief Executive of Sport England, has commented that:

“We are totally in support of the Olympics, but what we have said is that it has to leave a legacy. It’s got to be twin tracked. It’s no good having a great Olympics in 2012 and inspiring many young people to take up sport if we don’t have the facilities, coaching and infrastructure to get them involved and keep them in sport.”

Most of the evidence quoted here suggests that major sporting events have no inevitably positive impacts on levels of sports participation. Further, many of the implicit assumptions about stimulating participation (sporting role models, ‘trickle down effects’, media coverage) are at best simplistic as single variable theories of behavioural change. While events such as the Olympic Games may have *some* role to play, this is only as part of a much more systematic and strategic developmental approach. This appears to be partly recognised by London 2012, who state that the physical infrastructure of the Games needs to be supported by:

- Sustained government investment
- Local authority commitment to sport
- Re-establishing sport in schools
- Developing grass roots coaching programmes
- Commitment of Department of Health to sport and physical activity.

In fact, without being too cynical, one might conclude that, if this is done, in terms of sports development, there is little need for the Olympics! One of the most significant challenges would be, therefore, to ensure that a London 2012 Olympic Games acts as a catalyst in bringing these programmes forward.

In this regard a comment about the Lottery Sports Fund seems relevant. There has been some concern about the extent to which London 2012 could divert Lottery funding from community sports development. With the various reservations about the ‘Olympic effect’, there may be a case for arguing that an increase in sports participation would be more likely to be achieved via direct, local, investment. Because some aspects of facility planning for London 2012 are based on the sporting needs of the South East of England, investment is not based wholly on the ‘diversion’ of Lottery funding from sports development. However, it is clear that if the London 2012 Bid is successful, additional money will need to be diverted from broader investments in sport. For example, a front-page headline in the Scotsman of 9 January 2004 proclaimed:

Olympics setback for sport in Scotland
London bid may cost sport in Scotland £40m

In the accompanying article an un-named spokesperson for **sportscotland** was quoted as saying:

“There is a terrible irony in the fact that bringing the greatest sporting show on earth to the UK could devastate the regeneration of sport in Scotland and set us back 20 years.”

While this may seem a rather apocalyptic analysis, it does express widespread concern within sport that the proclaimed aims of boosting grassroots participation and achieving a fitter and healthier nation might be better achieved by more direct investment in sporting infrastructure. For example, a recent unpublished Sport England report, *The condition and refurbishment of public sector sports facilities*, concluded that, to sustain the current level of public sports halls and swimming pools, there was a need for £110 million extra expenditure per year for five years. One conclusion from this might be that, even if the Olympics led to an increase in sports participation, the physical infrastructure for sport may not be able to cater for such demand. Taken together, these issues present some obvious challenges for investment in sport. Some options for consideration are:

- Both HM Treasury and DfES should be approached to obtain funding to improve grassroots sports participation. The London 2012 and heightened government interest in sport provides an unprecedented opportunity to make this case. Expenditure of the Olympic Bid should not be instead of continued investment in grass-roots sport
- Sport Endowment Fund could be set up with donations from visitors and corporate sources
- At a more local level, the London boroughs within which it is proposed to hold the Games, would argue strongly that the emphasis must be on local-led regeneration and that the issue of subsequent revenue costs for the facilities in the Olympic Village must be addressed. One potential option here may be the establishment of a trust to ensure that any profits are reinvested into maintaining the facilities.

Conclusion

As suggested in Game Plan (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002), celebration, economic regeneration, tourism development, international prestige and spectacle may be legitimate reasons for public investment in an Olympic Games. However, existing evidence suggests that the presumed ‘trickle down effects’ of general increases in sports participation and a general improvement in fitness and health are unlikely direct outcomes of a successful Olympic Games Bid. Leaving aside the not inconsiderable problem that sporting excellence may not be the best model for encouraging ‘grassroots participation’, in terms of broader strategic outcomes the Olympic Games can only be regarded as only *one* element in a much broader, long term, developmental programme.

If large-scale changes in sports participation are to occur, this will be the result of complex (and not well understood) interactions between such factors as changing public attitudes and values, changing distributions of work time, sustained government investment in schools and improved infrastructure of local, quality, facilities. Within this broader, social, strategy, the Bid for the

2012 Olympic Games may act as a catalyst for some forms of sports participation, if some of the following steps are taken:

- Governing bodies and clubs need to work together more closely to develop innovative marketing and promotional campaigns that capitalise on the high profile media coverage of the London 2012 Bid.
- The Bid for the Olympic Games should be viewed as only one part in a broader process, with a programme of pre- and post- Games inclusive events throughout the country.
- The relevance of sporting role models and associated images of excellence need to be carefully considered. Where such models are used, they need to be embedded in systematic and ongoing local programmes of promotion, mentoring and support.
- The potential of Olympic volunteering programmes to develop commitment beyond the Olympics and the potential sustainable contribution to the sporting infrastructure needs careful planning.
- If the Bid for the 2012 Olympic Games is taken as an indicator of a renewed government commitment to sport, a failed bid should not be used as a reason for reduced public investment in sport. To fail to build on the greatly increased profile for sport could be regarded as a rather cynical use of sport for non-sporting purposes.

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