

# Nigel Huddleston Youth Sport Trust Annual Conference speech

In the year of your 25th anniversary, I want to offer my congratulations to the Youth Sport Trust, and thank you for the important role you play in helping children and young people across the country to get active and develop healthy lifestyles.

Now it's exciting to be here in this venue, which in just over two years time will play host to the judo and wrestling events of the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

The performance of our elite athletes at major sporting events, like the Commonwealth Games, can play a huge role in inspiring young people to try sport.

We're fortunate to have many recent examples but who could forget the England Women's Football squad in France last year? Those heroic performances saw an unprecedented surge in girls wanting to take up football. And the importance of role models cannot be overestimated in sport.

It was an honour to be appointed as the Minister for Sport. As many politicians will tell you, this is the best job in Government. And while I can assure you that it does come with a few challenges, I am honoured to take on the role.

Looking back at my own track to becoming Sports Minister, my initial enthusiasm in sport really started at school many years ago. In particular, due to the inspirational leadership of two of my PE teachers: Harry Pounger and Mr Brown, and the fact that I still remember their names and still remember their influence on me, 38 years since I first met them, which says something about the power and influence that many of you as teachers in the room today can have.

I think it's also vital at school because it's that time in your life where you actually get the opportunity to try out so many different types of sport, whether individual sports or team sports. My enthusiasm for a whole range of sports is down to the experiences I had at school.

But the good thing about being Minister of Sport is that I do not have to be fantastic at sport – it is not part of the remit. I'm not expected to be the best sportsperson in the country. I'm not expected to be the best quiz person in sports quizzes at the local pub.

But what is my responsibility is to be a champion for all sport, in and outside Government, and to champion the UK's sporting achievements. To get international sports to come to the UK, whether that be the Commonwealth Games, the Olympics, World Cup and so on. It's also my responsibility to work with the governing bodies and help enable them to do their job effectively

and efficiently. And also ensure we increase participation in sport, which is the most important thing, at all levels. That means making sure there's access for disabled people, for both engaging in sport and watching sport.

It's my responsibility to make sure we have the flow of money in sport, in the value chain, going in the right direction, and also that we've got enough money for grassroots sport. So it's a fascinating brief. But the most important bit is making sure that we get as many children participating in sport as possible, and that is something I take very seriously, and something that you play an absolutely pivotal role in encouraging.

I'm also fortunate to represent an area of the country, Mid-Worcestershire, that is extremely enthusiastic about sport.

In my role as a Member of Parliament, I have seen through the Worcester Warriors rugby club in my constituency what an important role sport can play in bringing together local communities, and driving employment and investment for the local area, and inspiring young people.

And as the father of two children aged 11 and 13, I have always encouraged them to get active. I recognise the many important benefits that participation in sport can deliver.

Taking part in sport has strengthened their physical health and mental health. Sport has helped them to forge friendships, learn teamwork and leadership, and develop important skills like resilience and drive.

And of course I'm familiar with the challenges too – not least because thanks to all my encouragement, I now spend my weekends acting as a taxi service to get them to all their training sessions and matches!

I've also reached that point in life where my children are better than I am in many sports, and that's actually something I'm quite proud of, rather than embarrassed about.

Now as I said, it's at school where young people's views on sport and physical activity are shaped.

A positive experience of sport at a young age can build a lifetime of participation, and it's a real pleasure to meet so many of the inspirational teachers, coaches, School Games Organisers and sport providers bringing that to life.

Thanks to Sport England's Active Lives Children survey, we now have evidence to show that physically literate children are happier, more active, more resilient and more trusting of their peers.

And that, as I suspect most of you in the room already knew, enjoyment is the key factor in increasing children and young people's participation.

While it is encouraging that over 3 million children in England meet the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines on physical activity, this means that over half are not leading sufficiently active lives.

A third of children and young people are doing less than 30 minutes a day – half the recommended amount.

And there are stark inequalities; children from poorer families are less active, and the gender gap in activity levels is apparent from just five years old.

This government is clear; we want all young people to be healthy and active, regardless of gender or background.

Too many children are losing their confidence, understanding and enjoyment of sport as they progress to secondary school, and we can see their activity levels decline through their teenage years. I find this particularly disappointing because that's the complete opposite of my own experience, where my enjoyment of sport increased in my teenage years.

So that is why we are working together across government to develop a comprehensive new strategy for children and young people's sport and physical activity.

We need to develop a culture where daily – yes daily – physical activity is the norm, and ensure that all young people have sufficient opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity.

And above all, we need to ensure it's fun and enjoyable, so that they want to take part.

The Action Plan we published in July set out the government's commitment to ensuring that all children and young people take part in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

We are calling on schools to ensure that all pupils have access to sufficient opportunities to be active throughout the school day. To build a strong PE and sport offer that appeals to young people, delivered by skilled, confident teachers.

I will work with Ofsted and the Department for Education to ensure that schools and teachers are supported to promote physical literacy and competitive sport.

This will include the commitments made during the election to invest £17 million in primary school PE teaching, and £15 million every year to help schools make good use of their sports facilities.

But this isn't just about schools; we need to take a joined-up, collaborative approach.

We need schools, parents and communities working together to ensure that young people have access to the sporting opportunities that are right for them, inside and outside the school gates.

This will benefit not just their physical health, but their mental health as well.

For secondary school pupils in particular, we cannot underestimate the importance of promoting positive wellbeing, and the power of sport to lower anxiety, tackle loneliness and promote body confidence.

And as the teachers in the room will know, there are also positive impacts on educational attainment – and behaviour in the classroom!

So I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for the huge part you already play in getting our young people active.

We will be doing more work to bring the School Sport and Activity Action Plan to life over the coming months. And I'm looking forward to hearing your expert insight into how we can build young people's confidence and help them to develop a positive relationship with sport and exercise.

You have the power to change young people's lives, and I hope that you will continue to inspire them to build healthy, active lifestyles that benefit them for years to come.

Thank you very much.