



Re-Booting School Sport

Plotting and Implementing a
Route Through the Crisis

A THREE STAGE APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

When schools closed early for Easter in March 2020, no one knew when they would open their doors again. Some felt that they would start as usual in late April, with the tacit expectation that the summer term would look similar to all the years that had preceded it. Within a few weeks, public exams had been abandoned for the year, and it was clear that the term would start substantially later than planned, if at all. Many schools had taken advantage of the Government's Job Retention Scheme to defray the cost of workers no longer required. The word "furlough" had entered the public vocabulary.

The impact upon sport was similarly rapid and dramatic. The final stages of national competitions due to be played in late March were cancelled. By mid- April all National Governing Bodies (NGBs) had suspended sport at every level, from grassroots to international. Most initially set review dates, but followed up with "until further notice" declarations, many of which still apply. Desperate attempts are underway to try to restore professional sport, especially in Soccer, Cricket and Rugby as these games are hemorrhaging money in the absence of televised competition. The Olympic Games has been postponed for a year, for the first time in its history.

The implications for independent schools are enormous, and potentially catastrophic. The future of the sector is threatened. All are desperate to restore operations as early as can safely be managed, with whatever restrictions are necessary. There is a race to get back towards something recognisable, partly to address educational omissions, but also to justify fees.

Sport and physical activity are a critical part of this. They are a distinguishing feature of the sector's identity, and a central part of its business case. Also, they are the area of school life that will find it most difficult to accommodate travel, distancing and hygiene restrictions. The impact of the pandemic may influence the character of school sport forever. This could be either a positive or negative thing, depending upon how it is handled. It is vital that schools develop a coherent plan to handle the various stages of the process if they are to emerge with a programme that meets the needs of pupils, and is attractive to a potentially shrinking market.

All contingency planning is based on an assumption that the pandemic will have an enduring, though diminishing, legacy. In a rapidly changing landscape, all expectations are conditional. Medical developments, especially the availability of a vaccine, treatment or antibody test, would change everything. Schools must hope for this, but plan for the alternatives.

This plan will recognise the three stages of recovery.

STAGE ONE

Immediate Response. Coping with School Closure.

This is the current stage. It is the one into which schools were thrust, wholly unprepared: a situation previously unimagined. In the haste to establish an online educational offer, delivered remotely, programmes were hastily assembled. Restrictions were extreme. Pupils were at home, soon to be locked down there, and boarding schools had to cope with them spread across several time zones. It was, and still is, an emergency situation. Most schools have managed to put together a programme of physical conditioning, and the more inventive and better resourced have found inventive ways of delivering a form of games coaching. Others, however, are existing on a skeleton staff of those who have avoided furlough, and delivering little beyond exam classes.

The range of provision is enormous, as are the limitations. With remote learning, NGB restrictions and social distancing, what is possible is severely curtailed. A focus on conditioning is justified by reports from international schools currently re-opening in China, that levels of pupil fitness had significantly diminished during lockdown. Schools offering a form of games programme are rarely enforcing attendance. Participation rates vary, but 40–65% appears to be the typical range.

Stage One appears certain to last until the end of the summer term. Although the return of some year groups is now possible in June, not all schools will choose to do so, many preferring their remote offer. Governing Body restrictions will prevent many of the usual summer term sports in any recognisable form. Schools' own measures for distancing and hygiene, along with parental nervousness, will probably mean that their own processes will be more risk averse – for longer – than the government and NGBs require them to be. The prospect of any inter-school competition (other than virtual) seems unimaginable in this climate.

If NGB suspensions were lifted, some adapted summer term sport might prove possible, where pupils have their own ball or implement, which is untouched by anyone else. Blue plastic gloves and hand sanitation would be prominent features in any such scenario.

The likelihood, however, is that any Stage One programme will continue to be based on physical conditioning activities. These are preferably conducted outdoors, where the virus travels less far and spacing is easier. This is also desirable if sports halls are going to be required as appropriately distanced classrooms. Other activities may become possible, often ones that have been absent, or marginal, in conventional programmes. Golf, bowls, cycling and other outdoor pursuits may leaven the conditioning diet.

Other factors will demand consideration. It is unlikely that changing rooms can be safely deployed, both from a spacing and cleaning perspective. Danish schools are requiring pupils to

travel to and from school in tracksuits on the days that they have timetabled physical activity. They also comment on the raised costs of frequent, and extensive, cleaning. In countries which have opened primary schools, more breaks are being scheduled to allow greater physical activity to compensate for the unusually stationary classrooms demanded by distancing.

The workforce that will deliver these sessions may also be problematic. With the furlough scheme now extending beyond the end of term, schools may be reluctant to resume responsibility for the cost of games coaches, and some PE teachers, when the quantity of physical activity will be significantly diminished. In the absence of traditional summer sports, the skill set of the required staff would be different. Cricket, Athletics and Swimming coaches (amongst others) would appear surplus to immediate requirements – at a time of year when they would expect to be busiest. Without inter-school sport, the quantity of manpower necessary might be reduced.

Nothing that schools choose to do in this phase is likely to impact on later stages. Everything about the emergency programme is temporary, with no legacy for future years. This is a situation that is unlikely to recur: schools will probably never be caught out in the same way again. One of the inevitable endowments of the pandemic will be better formed disaster recovery processes, with contingency plans in place. In time, these will no doubt be gathering dust with the other compliance manuals, but they will at least establish a starting position for any similar crisis in the future – or a relapse in the current one.

STAGE TWO

The Medium Term Unknowns

There is a clear expectation that schools will return, in a recognisable form, in September 2020. It is likely that all UK pupils should be present from this time, and that schools will wish to deliver as close to a normal offering as possible, despite the inevitable constraints. If this is not achievable, the future of the independent sector is threatened.

This Stage is likely to be determined by restrictions as yet unknown. However, the range of possibilities is relatively predictable. Guidance from the Government, and NGBs, will inform schools' own risk management processes. This will determine what forms of physical activity and sport are possible, and under what conditions. It is likely that schools, and parents, will display a greater level of risk aversion than statutory bodies, at least in the short term. It is difficult to see a full programme of inter-school sport before Christmas at least, and possibly beyond. Schools must therefore plan for four principal contingencies:

1. No Team Sports Possible. Activities with balls severely constrained
2. Traditional sports restricted. No contact Rugby, plus other constraints
3. No Inter-School Sport. Traditional sports available without restriction
4. All NGB restrictions lifted. All sports and fixtures available (direct to Stage Three)

In judging each stage, there will be an inevitable focus on the activities which may be possible, and a constant eye on when recognisable programmes of inter-school sport might be restored. Operating constraints will prove a challenge, and energy and creativity will be demanding in addressing these. However, it is important to maintain an awareness of what the programme is trying to achieve. A focus on the inputs of what may be possible may deflect more worthy attention from the desirable outputs. The objectives and outcomes which schools have sought to deliver through traditional programmes should still be a focus – and remain largely achievable. The activities and approaches by which they are delivered may have to change temporarily (though some of these changes may emerge as permanent improvements). It is important to begin the process by clearly identifying the desired impact of the programme, in terms of skills, attitudes and personal qualities: it should then be possible to construct an emergency programme to deliver these.

Are you intending to trial new, or different, sports in the programme from September?

NO 4%

YES 46%

UNDECIDED 50%

If it is feasible, schools will inevitably want to include their usual traditional games and principal sports, even if in modified form. This is something they are equipped to do, and these games are part of the identity of a school, and of the sector. It will also create least disruption in transitioning to Stage Three. Without the pressure of the fixture list, however, it is doubtful whether these sports will command as much time. There may be no matches to prepare for, and if games have significant constraints (e.g. non-contact Rugby and Netball) their appeal to pupils may diminish.

Are you hoping to run a version of traditional team games from September 2020?

NO 15%

YES 85%

This raises two possibilities. The first is to re-arrange the conventional seasons to accommodate the sports that might be expected to be more easily distanced. At whatever stage full versions of regular team sports become possible, there is no doubt that some sports will be available before others. Rugby will be the last one. It would therefore appear that there is most chance of some Rugby activity if it is scheduled later in the school year. An example of seasonal switch would be to play summer sports in autumn, or to replace Rugby with Boys' Hockey in the first term (switching Girls' Hockey with Netball, or adding Girls' Soccer, to accommodate this). The advantage of this would be the continuity of activities, but a weakness would be integrating a return to conventional competition midway through the school year. This problem would be reduced if schools aligned themselves with others in their locality. School programmes have long been dictated by the confines of the fixture programme. It is ironic that the ghost of competition continues to exert this influence, even when inter-school sport is no longer possible. Any plan that might be implemented could have a legacy of changed expectation for future years, and the implications should be carefully considered.

An alternative is to introduce some new sports, or activities, those not part of the conventional programme. This could be done alongside traditional games, or instead, depending upon constraints. The rapid development of facilities has left schools equipped to deliver a bigger range of activities than they usually choose to do, opening up previously unexplored possibilities. Some of these will undoubtedly have novelty value. Others might reflect trends in adult recreation that schools have to date ignored. Many of these will be activities which pupils recognise from their parents' involvement, and could have a lifetime implication. It is possible, however, that indoor activities may be more significantly restricted, as disease transmission carries greater risk in this environment.

Are you intending to trial new, or different, sports in the programme from September?

NO 4%

YES 46%

UNDECIDED 50%

Physical conditioning activities will form part of the programme, though are unlikely to dominate it, as in Stage One. This offers a significant opportunity for worthwhile programme development. Schools have the chance to develop a meaningful culture of Health and Physical Wellbeing. Devoting time, energy and creativity to promoting benefits of healthy, active lifestyles could enhance the programme, improve pupil outcomes and interface seamlessly with Stage Three. This is an uncontroversial ambition, and one for which many schools are well-equipped. Without the pressure of the fixture list, and its dominance of resources, there is the opportunity to develop an imaginative, and lasting, range of experiences which could impact upon all pupils. This is a rare chance to promote inclusivity and universal impact. Sport may not be for All, but physical wellbeing can be. Replacing the scores and victories in assembly could be the more enduring message of the benefits of an active lifestyle, and potential impact upon academic attainment. These can be available to all pupils. Conditioning activity must be integrated within the concept of Physical Education, with an emphasis on the second word. A Joe Wicks-style “follow the instructor” experience may impact on fitness levels: however, this hamster-wheel type of activity will not, on its own, inspire changing attitudes and values.

The actual activities which compose the programme are only part of the challenge. If they are offered simply as entertainment to fill the timetable requirements, much of the value of the subject could be lost. A youth-club style programme of active recreation might be necessary in Stage One, but the second Stage should aspire to deliver some more robust educational outcomes. Building positive attitudes to physical activity will be among them. Another possibility is the development of desirable personal characteristics, such as determination, leadership, persistence and empathy. New approaches may be necessary to achieve this focus. Opportunity abounds.

The unique conditions which will apply during Stage Two are perfect for experimentation. It is a chance to explore new operating mechanisms, different activities and seasonal variation. It is an opportunity to elevate the PE programme beyond games teaching into physical and mental wellbeing education, combined with personal development. Successful innovations can be adopted within Stage Three, and failures blamed on the restrictions of the crisis-era. The value of such experimentation would be to improve the programme for the future. It is unlikely that the current operation of school sport is the optimum possible: initiatives should be aimed at investigating improvement, rather than simply providing short term alternatives until the status quo can be restored. As with any attempt at development, retaining the current strengths, and improving the shortcomings, are the overall aim. These will be unique to individual schools, and should be assessed on that basis. However, here is a general reflection of the sector:

Are you intending to include traditional summer term activities in the autumn term 2020?

NO 29%

YES 71%

STRENGTHS OF CURRENT SYSTEM	SHORTCOMINGS OF CURRENT SYSTEM
Development and support of high performance	Diminishing retention in team games amongst older teenagers
Provision for school teams in traditional sports	Social pressures on some boys' bedrock activities (e.g., Rugby, Cricket, Rowing)
Extensive programme of competition	Focus of resources on high performers
Some outstanding coaching	Low quality of some teams and activities, especially for less able
Sport valued in schools and the sector	Wide range of pupil fitness levels
Outstanding resources	Limited post school involvement

The lack of school competition, and diminished focus on traditional activities, permits an opportunity to consider whether other approaches and activities might win wider engagement, especially amongst older teenagers. Improving the profile of physical wellbeing, alongside athletic conditioning for high performance, presents an opportunity to put health and fitness at the heart of school life.

Inevitably, there will be reduced focus on team preparation. Without this, and the high profile of weekly results, schools will want to maintain the culture of these sports and the commitment upon which they depend. It is important that there is not a period in which traditional games are absent, for fear that the interest of players will wane. Finding ways of maintaining team connection, and the profile of any sports which are dormant, will be important. This is particularly important amongst pupils who are new to the school, and unsure what to expect. Some of this culture building may need more overt scaffolding than is normally the case.

Some sports will require more support than others. Many team games were already struggling to retain a player base amongst senior pupils in some schools. If a year went by when it proved impossible to play school Rugby, Cricket, Rowing or Netball, it might be difficult to restore them to their previous prominence. Maintaining a profile for these activities, and finding adapted versions to play, would be important.

There is likely to be a period during which intra-school sport will be possible, but before confidence is restored sufficiently to allow inter-school sport. This is an opportunity to resume internal formats, house matches etc., in a more meaningful form than might previously have been the case. Over recent decades, the growth of inter-school sport has often diminished the internal offer, and the crisis presents an opportunity to explore whether this could be profitably

resumed. It is a stage of return that is likely to occur, and would benefit from a creative approach to planning.

There will be inevitable restrictions, and amended operating processes, during this period. Varying degrees of distancing will be demanded.

It is unlikely that changing rooms can be in operation, and protocols for thoroughly cleaning facilities and equipment will need to be robust. Store rooms will need careful regulation, both in terms of cleanliness and control of the equipment that can, and cannot, be used. Transport, and use of external facilities – whether off-site fields, or commercially available ones – will

be difficult, and maybe impossible in the short term. This may restrict the offer for some senior pupils, and those schools whose fields are not on the main campus. Emergency logistics will be specific to every situation. Commercial lets of facilities would be extremely difficult in these circumstances.

It is likely that pupils will be required to have a complete set of clean kit for every activity session. They may also need to have some equipment (e.g. Netball, Tennis ball, skipping rope, water bottle) that they carry with them for personal use, and do not share. Gloves, maybe also masks and cleaning equipment, may be part of this emergency kit.

Schools should be particularly sensitive to the legacy of the Stage Two programme. At some future time, there will be a transition to Stage Three. It is important that nothing that occurs before that detracts from ambitions for the next “normal” state of affairs. If traditional sports lose their profile, or more attractive alternatives are introduced, it might be difficult to revert to anything approaching the status quo when restrictions are lifted. If unglamorous and dedicated team practice disappears temporarily, and is replaced by novel and undemanding recreations, it might prove problematic to restore. Short term expedients may have longer term consequences. Maintaining a culture of commitment, and the bonds of teamship, will not be easy, but will dictate what is achievable in Stage Three.

This has clear implications for the Saturday programme. If schools have ambitions to restore weekend competition when this becomes possible, they should be wary of pupils and parents getting out of the habit of commitment. Boarding schools will have no alternative but to devise a mass participation programme for Saturday afternoons; their challenge is not to maintain the

Risk Management

NGB restrictions on regular sports and facilities

Distance regulations

Cleaning/Hygiene protocols

Changing room use

Kit washing requirements

Travel

Use of offsite fields and external facilities

Indoor/Outdoor activities

Levels of physical exertion

expectation of sport, but to ensure that they can comfortably restore traditional games when the time comes. Day schools have a challenging decision of what, if anything, they provide on Saturday in Stage Two. They must also question which pupils may access this: will it be democratically available, or ability-based, as school competition has conventionally been? What will be the programme that replaces it in Stage Three?



The Saturday issue will be especially important in intake years, where pupils have no previous experience of the school, its culture and expectations. “Housetraining” pupils and parents into normal operating processes may be more difficult in the absence of a competition programme, but essential if there is to be a return to this in Stage Three

It is not only pupils who might lose the habit of commitment to weekend sport. Many schools (especially in the boys’ and co-ed sector) depend upon a critical mass of classroom teachers supporting the Saturday sport programme. Freed, temporarily, from this obligation, there is a danger that not all will wish to return. Many schools struggle to manage the fairness gap between those teachers who contribute to sport and those who do not: a period of no school matches may heighten this comparison. Expectations of staff at each Stage should be clearly laid out. Observers with long memories will recall the impact of the teachers’ industrial action of the 1980s; little of the previously plentiful school sport was ever seen again following the period of disruption.

There are other implications for the workforce. The staffing of school sport reflects the labour intensive nature of running school teams, especially in sports of small numbers, such as Netball. Many of the coaches furloughed in Stage One may find themselves surplus to requirements until Stage Three. This will present challenges for schools as they audit their short term staff requirements in terms of both quantity and skill set. In activities likely to be the last to be restored, such as Rugby and Rowing, specialist coaches will not be in high demand until competition is restored.

Stage Two will be complete once travel and distancing restrictions have been lifted. It will also demand restored parental confidence. Until full contact training and competition is possible, and schools are comfortable for their pupils to travel into other environments, it will not be possible for the school sport sector to progress. Without medical breakthroughs, it is hard to imagine the previous world of inter-school matches, or national competitions, returning.

Stage Two will be a volatile, and shifting, stage. Possibilities may change and develop regularly. Stage Three will not begin until there is a stable set of conditions and expectations. However, there is an opportunity to experiment and collaborate to ensure that, once it is possible to move forwards, there is a clear picture of what the new world will look like. If the opportunities which Stage Two present have been seized, it is possible that sport post-crisis could be the best programme ever delivered. It would be a wasted chance to simply revert to what had existed previously.

STAGE THREE

Long Term Recovery

A return to a stable world, where the most intrusive restrictions have been removed, is a coveted aim. It is unclear whether this would be the same as the pre-crisis environment, or whether some dimensions will have changed forever. In terms of school sport, there are two fundamental questions:

1. What may no longer be possible ?
2. What may no longer be desirable ?

The former will be dictated by national forces: the latter is within the control of schools. It may be that some Stage Two experiments have revealed shortcomings of previous practices that can be amended. Further, some historic expectations may prove impossible to restore in their recognised form, and change will be inevitable.

Rather than wait to let these changes emerge organically, or drift into a new way of operating, schools should seek to define what a desirable Stage Three might look like. The clearer this picture is, the greater the possibility that it will be realised. Inevitably, some schools will have greater appetite for change, and more creative staff driving it. The better prepared schools will be evolving plans for all three stages simultaneously. Constraints may emerge that compel change, but without a clear picture of what excellent might look like, at each stage, little coherent achievement is unlikely.

What might this involve?

1. Restoration of high performance mechanisms

The best teenage athletes will have been deprived of a period (possibly a full season) of preparation and competition. They will have missed both the intensity and the purpose. The cultural highs of big school matches, and the stimulating effects of success in competitions can have a big impact. The pursuit of excellence, in all its forms, is an important goal for every school, and restoring athletic excellence before the habit and drive is lost, will be important.

2. Greater commitment to inclusivity?

School sport has been historically meritocratic in its provision. The best athletes, usually the older and earlier maturing, have had an indisputably better experience than those less fortunate. This has had a lasting impact on the levels of engagement with sport, and physical activity, for some pupils. At least as many children have learned to hate games at school, as have learned to love them. It is a poor success rate. Freed from the pressure of the fixture list,

schools have the opportunity to find the approaches, activities and delivery styles that might engage this constituency.

3. Culture of Health and Fitness

Sport exists on the periphery of many schools. Other than perhaps a central Cricket ground, most facilities are on the margins of the campus. The action is often in places, and at times, away from the main school day and therefore invisible to all but games enthusiasts.

A raised profile of physical wellbeing – alongside mental health – could have a much more central, and visible, place in the culture of a school. Healthy, active lifestyles, whether or not they incorporate competitive sport, have much to contribute to the wellbeing revolution in education.

4. Death of the Single Sport Model

The era of mass participation in traditional games has established a series of discrete seasons. They are so well-established as to become a calendar of their own. “The Netball Term” or “The Rugby Term” are concepts clearly understood. Even where two sports are played together, as in many girls’ schools, they are still separated into a “Netball Week” or a “Hockey Week”. In part this is an organisational expedient. Its foundation, however, is to allow the best athletes to play in every team. By minimising overlap, the marquee athletes can maximise the chance of school teams winning. Where clashes occur, such as Netball competitions in the “Hockey Term”, or between Sevens and Boys’ Hockey, there is an unseemly scramble for the services of the top performers. The judgement of Solomon is required, and the sports disadvantaged by the conclusion rarely take it well.

Are you intending to use the autumn term 2020 to experiment with changed seasons?

NO 14%

YES 19%

UNDECIDED 67%

This model has deteriorated with the demise of compulsion. In many schools, the principal sport of the term (the “major” sport, to acknowledge its full rank) engages fewer than half of the pupils, significantly less in the Sixth Form. It is no longer a “major”ity sport in many places. This renders obsolete a model that prevents meaningful alternatives for those pupils not involved. Ensuring the best athlete can play in every competitive encounter comes at a price of reduced opportunity for many others.

In practice, this has been crumbling for a while. The rise of Association Football and Sevens in the Spring Term have challenged the autonomy of Boys’ Hockey. The national competitions, of girls’ games particularly, intrude across both winter terms. The more enlightened (and bigger) institutions have acceded to the principle of choice, especially for older pupils. As the playing populations of some sports decline, most notably the sector flagships of Rugby and Cricket,

there exists the possibility of running sports side by side. Temporarily freed (by their absence) from the pressure to win school matches, the crisis provides the opportunity to experiment.

5. Inflexible Seasons Model

Schools have long been comfortable with the concept that the best scholars have to choose a small number of subjects at A Level, despite the fact that they could have achieved top grades in the ones they rejected. They have been less accommodating of a pupil who wanted to play Tennis instead of Cricket.

As soon as the single term model is abandoned, many things become possible. Running two sports alongside each other solves many problems. Its only cost is that the best athlete can no longer dominate all the teams. In an era when it is no longer possible for a Sixth Former to be an elite player of more than one game, seasonal flexibility is already extended. Hockey players train through the summer, and Cricketers practise year-round. Blurring of the seasons allows an accommodation of this, and individualised programmes for the top performers. Smaller schools may be compelled to offer smaller choice, or culturally favour one activity: bigger schools have always been able to offer more.

Autumn Cricket has been advocated as a possibility for at least 25 years. The concept has consistently failed to gain traction owing to the primacy of Football (often the Rugby code) at that time of year. A senior Cricket team composed of enthusiasts who will not become involved in winter games until the end of September is an unarguable concept (resources permitting). If the competitive Rugby programme started a couple of weeks later, instead of being a race to compete on the first Saturday of term, teams might be better conditioned and prepared, and pitches more accommodating. As more parents become nervous of the dangers of Rugby, a meaningful alternative team game appears desirable. Boys' Hockey might prove a suitable supplement, though would require seasonal adjustment of girls' sport to accommodate it. However, Netball would be a much more attractive prospect in September than January, and could operate alongside girls' football, for which demand will inevitably increase.

Do you think the current seasons of school sport require adjustment?

GIRLS	BOYS
NO 32%	NO 28%
YES 33%	YES 29%
UNSURE 35%	UNSURE 43%

SPORT	CURRENT LIMITATIONS
Rugby	Reducing player base, especially in Sixth Form Hard pitches early in season Safety concerns, especially at start of season Difficulty accommodating non-Rugby players in alternative activities in sufficient volume
Netball	Played predominantly outdoors in worst weather Limited capacity (small teams and limited courts)
Boys' Hockey	Pressured in Spring Term by growth of Association Football and raised profile of Sevens
Association Football	Introduced later to protect Hockey Season restricted by clashes No current place for the girls' game
Cricket	Senior game severely constrained by exam season

SEASON	POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES
Autumn Term	Rugby season starts c 20 Sept to allow better conditioning and fewer hard grounds Senior Cricket in September to extend season for most committed players Boys' Hockey alongside Rugby to provide an alternative game with significant capacity Netball move to this term for better weather Girls' Football alongside Netball to increase capacity
Spring Term	Association Football alongside Sevens Girls' Hockey

Inevitably some schools, especially those focused on high performance, would have some adjustments. This is already the case. These would include schools with year round programmes and two terms of the same winter sport. Lacrosse could continue to operate across two terms alongside other winter games.

6. Higher Quality Alternatives

A temporary suspension of traditional games allows experimentation with alternative activities, and better ways of delivering them. The challenge has always been to manage the interface between sports teams and other activities. The latter have frequently suffered, sometimes suppressed in order to maintain a critical mass of team members to fulfil the

fixture programme. There is often a significant loss of quality here, which contributes to disengagement. An opportunity exists to experiment with what an excellent programme looks like for these pupils, and how positive attitudes to physical activity can best be inspired.

7. PE Programme

Many of the staples of conventional PE lessons may prove impractical, with restraints on swimming pools, gymnastics, changing rooms and a need for distanced, and preferably outdoor, activity. The opportunity to experiment with new approaches, based on physical literacy and wellbeing should be welcomed. PE has an important place in the “recovery curriculum” and this chance should not be lost.

8. A Focus on Culture-Building

The nature of approved, or “normal” behaviour is the essence of the culture of every school. This is often absorbed passively by pupils from the behaviour of older years, expectations of staff, assemblies and the pastoral system. Given that many of these usual processes will be temporarily suspended, it may be necessary to artificially scaffold some of these expectations in the short term. It will be important for schools to define their cultural values for sport, and develop processes that instil, reinforce and protect these. The aim must be for them to re-emerge relatively intact in Stage Three.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR OF SPORT

Navigating a route through these stages will be a new challenge for Directors of Sport, and school leaders. It will bring a new focus to the role, and one for which there has been no preparation, and in which no one has prior experience. The priorities, however, will be unchanged. These will be leadership, culture-building and quality control.

It is important that planning starts “with the end in mind”. A clear picture of what high quality post-crisis sport looks like will be required before the steps towards this can be defined. Simply accommodating restrictions, on a week by week basis, will not achieve this.

The overall objectives are no different from pre-crisis. The success criteria of school sport are plural, with none more important than the other. These are:

- High Performance
- Retention of pupils in team games
- Meaningful alternatives
- Culture of Wellbeing

The balance of these, and the programmes which might achieve them, are temporarily suspended. This compels schools to investigate alternatives, at least in the short term. The winners will be the ones who emerge from this period of confusion with a more robust, modern and inclusive programme which continues to deliver a range of sector objectives. This will include competitive achievement, but also go far beyond this. The losers will have a diluted form of what they had before. It is a matter on which schools have a choice.



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