



The workforce we cannot afford to lose

Protecting the people, providers and delivery capacity that
keep children active

Prepared by Aspire Active Partnerships

June 2026

Children's Activity Provider Workforce Report

Executive summary

Aspire Active Partnerships (AAP) brings together 47 children’s activity providers operating across England. For more than 20 years, Aspire and its members have helped schools develop their workforce and engage children in physical activity. AAP estimates that hundreds of providers across the UK deliver comparable services, including PE and school sport, extracurricular activities, swimming, wraparound childcare, and school holiday provision.

This report sets out AAP’s position on the potential operational gap between the current PE and Sport Premium ending and the proposed PE and School Sport Partnerships Network becoming fully operational. The organisations represented in this survey not only support PE and school sport. They employ young people, train apprentices, provide childcare, develop the school workforce and help schools deliver wider outcomes linked to health, education and participation. Protecting this capacity during the transition is therefore relevant to several Government priorities, not solely physical activity.

It is based on responses from 40 member organisations, representing 85.1% of AAP membership. The findings are likely to indicate wider sector patterns, but all totals in this report relate only to the organisations surveyed.

40 organisations	2,358 people in the workforce	50.7% of the workforce aged 16 to 24	2,658 schools supported	614,247 children and young people engaged
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What the evidence shows

1. A substantial delivery infrastructure already exists. The organisations support schools nationwide, and deliver curricular, extracurricular, inclusion, workforce, childcare and community based services.
2. This is a notably young workforce. Of 2,358 workers, 1,195 are aged 16 to 24, representing 50.7% of the workforce.
3. The organisations are part of the skills pipeline. They report 154 current apprentices and an estimated 836 people progressing into education, sport, leisure, and related sectors over the previous five years.
4. Apprenticeship employers play a particularly important role. The 26 organisations employing apprentices account for 84% of the workforce, 83% of workers aged 16 to 24 and 81% of reported progression into related sectors.
5. Reliance on schools is widespread, while Premium exposure is concentrated. Twenty seven organisations derive more than half of their annual revenue from schools. Sixteen organisations, representing 40% of the survey, report that more than half of their school work is linked directly to PE and Sport Premium activity.
6. The potential transition effects are material. Ninety per cent identify jobs at risk, 87.5% anticipate reduced hours, and 77.5% anticipate reduced capacity to support schools if there is a gap between Premium funding ending and the new Network being fully operational.
7. Business viability is a central concern. Twenty of the 40 organisations identify business viability as at risk, which is strong evidence that uncertainty or reduced school demand could destabilise a material part of the provider base.

Priority recommendations

1. Provide Premium funding continuity for schools until the new commissioning arrangements are operational in practice.
2. Publish a clear transition timetable for schools, providers and the workforce.
3. Assess the workforce effect of transition decisions before they are implemented.
4. Protect apprentices and early career pathways employed by providers and schools.
5. Involve established, quality assured providers in local delivery and provider standards.
6. Monitor workforce loss, apprentice disruption, provider viability and changes in school provision.
7. Commission wider sector workforce research with AAP, the School Aged Childcare Association and other representative bodies.

1. Purpose and policy context

The Government has announced more than £1 billion for PE and school sport over three years. This includes £580 million for the proposed PE and School Sport Partnerships Network, which the Department for Education says will be fully operational from Spring 2027, and a one-off £100 million PE and Sport Premium payment to support primary schools during the transition year.[1]

AAP welcomes the direction of travel. Stronger standards, clearer accountability, greater consistency and a quality framework for services available to schools could strengthen the system. DfE market engagement has also emphasised local partnerships, school and community links, targeted support, workforce development, inclusion and better monitoring.[2]

This report examines the practical risks of a potential funding gap between the end of the PE and Sport Premium and the proposed Network becoming fully operational. During this period, schools may reduce or delay purchasing, creating uncertainty for providers and the workforce. AAP's position is that avoiding disruption to school provision and children's physical activity depends on retaining the people, provider capacity, and school relationships that already support delivery.

2. Survey scope and method

The AAP Workforce Survey received 40 submissions from a membership of 47, an 85.1% response rate. Every retained submission contained an answer to all 20 survey questions.

The survey spans several time periods, which have been kept separate throughout the analysis.

- Schools and children engaged relate to the current academic year.
- Services delivered cover the previous three academic years.
- Workforce, apprentices and workers aged 16 to 24 describe the current workforce.
- Potential effects and roles at risk are scenario based estimates, not confirmed outcomes.
- Progression into related sectors covers the previous five years.

Organisations confirmed that their child counts represent unique children within their own activity, including both direct service delivery and indirect engagement through school workforce training.

3. An established delivery infrastructure

The 40 surveyed organisations report working with 2,658 schools and engaging 614,247 children and young people in the current academic year. Their activities span the country.

Coverage of 40 out of 47 AAP members provides a strong view of the network and, given its geographic reach and service mix, a reasonable indication of how the wider children's activity provider sector operates.

Measure	Total	Median	Period
Schools worked with	2,658	40	Current academic year
Children and young people engaged	614,247	9,326	Current academic year
Current workforce	2,358	40	Current
Workers aged 16 to 24	1,195	16.5	Current
Apprentices	154	2	Current
Roles potentially at risk	577	10	Scenario estimate
Progression into related sectors	836	15	Previous five years

Table 1. Core survey measures.

Service breadth

AAP members are not simply providers of sports coaching. During the previous three academic years, a typical organisation delivered 11 different service types, spanning curriculum support, extracurricular activity, workforce development, inclusion, swimming and water safety, wraparound childcare, holiday provision and community programmes.

Service delivered	Number	Share
Extracurricular provision	40	100%
School holiday childcare	40	100%
PE curriculum delivery	39	97.5%
PPA cover	38	95.0%
HAF programme delivery	37	92.5%
Wraparound care	35	87.5%
School workforce training, mentoring or CPD	34	85.0%
Enrichment days or events	32	80.0%
SEND support or inclusive provision	32	80.0%
Swimming and water safety	21	52.5%

Table 2. Selected services delivered during the previous three academic years.

This breadth supports a reasonable conclusion that the provider workforce represents established delivery capacity.

4. Workforce scale and composition

The organisations report a combined workforce of 2,358 people. This includes employees, casual staff, apprentices and regular self-employed team members. The median workforce is 40 people, while the largest reported workforce is 220.

Estimated workforce composition

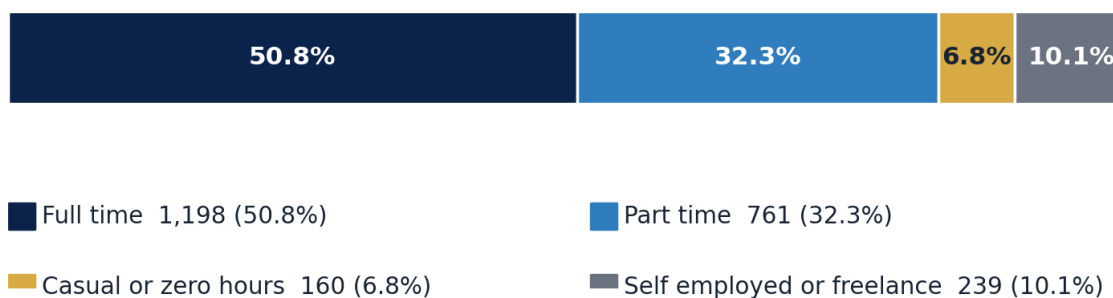


Figure 1. Employment status composition.

The estimated composition indicates that around half the workforce is employed full time, almost one third is employed part time, and the remainder is divided between casual or zero hours and self-employed work.

5. A young workforce and progression pipeline

The clearest finding is the concentration of workers aged 16 to 24. The organisations report 1,195 people in this age group, equivalent to 50.7% of the workforce. Every organisation engages at least one worker aged 16 to 24, and young people make up at least half of the workforce in 20 organisations.

This matters in a national context where youth employment is a stated government priority. The Office for National Statistics estimated that 1.012 million people aged 16 to 24 were not in education, employment or training in January to March 2026, equivalent to 13.5% of the age group.[3] The Government has also announced a major youth employment and apprenticeship drive intended to unlock 200,000 jobs and apprenticeship opportunities, including support for small and medium-sized employers taking on young people.[4]

Policy connection. AAP members already provide employment at scale within the 16 to 24 age group targeted by national policy. Their workplaces also provide mentoring and practical routes into education, sport, leisure and youth work.

Apprenticeships and workplace learning

Twenty six organisations currently engage apprentices, with 154 apprentices reported across the network. Their contribution extends beyond the current apprentice headcount. These employers provide workplace mentoring, practical experience and progression routes. If employer capacity falls, future apprenticeship starts and access to experienced mentors could reduce even where existing apprentice roles are protected.

Over the previous five years, the organisations estimate that 836 people progressed into roles in education, sport, leisure, youth work or related sectors. The survey indicates that these organisations contribute people and experience to the wider education and physical activity workforce.

The 26 organisations currently employing apprentices account for 1,973 of the 2,358 people in the workforce, representing 84% of the total. They also employ 987 of the 1,195 workers aged 16 to 24, representing 83%, and reported 674 of the 836 progressions into related sectors over the previous five years, representing 81%. Of these 26 organisations, 24 believe apprenticeships or early career roles could be affected during the transition. This shows that apprenticeship employers are central to the sector's workforce, youth employment and progression capacity.

6. Exposure to schools and the PE and Sport Premium

School generated revenue is important to most organisations. Twenty seven of 40, representing 67.5%, report that more than half of their annual revenue is linked to schools. Ten place school revenue in the highest band of 76% to 100%.

Premium exposure is more concentrated. Sixteen organisations, 40%, report that more than half of their school based work is linked directly to PE and Sport Premium activity. All 16 also derive more than half of their total annual revenue from schools.

School and PE and Sport Premium reliance

Share of surveyed organisations within each reported percentage band.

Annual revenue linked to schools



School work linked to the Premium



Figure 2. Reported reliance on schools and Premium related activity.

This distinction is important. The data does not support treating every provider as equally exposed to the Premium transition. It supports a targeted approach that identifies organisations, localities, services and workforce groups where disruption would be most severe.

The survey asks whether work is linked to Premium funded activity. It does not audit individual school expenditure or establish that every linked service was purchased directly using the grant. No conclusion about compliance should therefore be drawn from these responses.

7. Potential effects of a prolonged transition

Organisations were asked what could happen if schools experience a gap in PE and Sport Premium funding during the transition to the new Network. Thirty nine of 40 selected at least one substantive adverse effect. The pattern is consistent across workforce, recruitment, apprenticeships and school capacity.

Potential effects of a funding delay, reduction or gap

Percentage of 40 surveyed organisations selecting each option. Multiple selections allowed.



Figure 3. Potential transition effects reported by surveyed organisations. Multiple selections were allowed.

The survey identifies several potential effects of a prolonged funding gap or reduction in school purchasing. While the survey cannot predict exactly how organisations or schools would respond, the findings suggest a plausible pathway through which workforce and delivery capacity could be affected. Figure 4 illustrates this potential sequence.



Figure 4. Potential transition pathway

Roles potentially at risk

Under the separate scenario of a prolonged gap or significant reduction in school funded work, organisations estimate that 577 roles could be at risk. This is equivalent to 24.5% of the reported workforce.

The distribution shows that the concern is not confined to one or two large organisations. Twenty one estimate that at least a quarter of their workforce could be affected. Seven estimate that at least half could be affected.

Business viability

Exactly half of the organisations, 20 out of 40, identify business viability as a potential consequence. This is one of the report's most important findings.

It does not mean that 20 organisations will cease trading. It demonstrates that a transition affecting school demand could create material instability across the sector. Even if only some concerns resulted in closure, workforce reductions or withdrawal from school delivery, experienced staff, local relationships, apprenticeship settings and operational capacity could be lost.

Provider capacity is not instantly recoverable. Recruiting and developing staff who can work safely and effectively with children takes time. Rebuilding school trust, safeguarding systems, mentoring arrangements and local delivery infrastructure also takes time. A gap could therefore create a delay between future funding becoming available and suitable delivery capacity being ready.

Early career risk

Thirty two organisations (80%) believe apprenticeships or early career roles could be affected. Twenty two specifically selected apprenticeships at risk within the transition impact question.

The policy risk is clear. A reduction in employer capacity could affect current jobs, future recruitment, apprentice completion, access to workplace mentors, and progression opportunities simultaneously.

8. What schools and children could lose

Thirty one organisations, 77.5%, anticipate a reduced ability to support schools if there is a gap in funding. Given the breadth of services reported, reduced capacity could extend beyond PE lessons to extracurricular clubs, teacher development, inclusive provision, swimming and water safety, holiday activities, enrichment, wraparound childcare and community links.

The survey shows the scale of current engagement and the high proportion of providers expecting their capacity to fall.

The sector also contributes to broader activity engagement and school-age childcare. Thirty five of the 40 organisations delivered wraparound care during the previous three academic years, and all 40 delivered school holiday provision. These services help schools offer after-school activities and childcare that supports working parents.

DfE guidance expects schools to help ensure that families can access school-age childcare, whether delivered directly, through private, voluntary and independent providers, or through local coordination and signposting.[7] Many schools use external organisations to provide this. If workforce capacity falls or businesses leave the market, schools could find it harder to secure reliable partners and families could face fewer affordable local options. The survey does not quantify the size or price of any resulting childcare shortfall, so this is a policy risk rather than a measured outcome.

The wider context remains important. Sport England's latest Active Lives Children and Young People Survey reported that 49.1% of children met the Chief Medical Officers' guideline of an average of 60 minutes of activity a day, while 28.4% were active for less than 30 minutes a day.[5] Protecting access and continuity during the transition is therefore a practical concern, not simply a commercial one.

DfE Premium guidance places emphasis on healthy active lives, easier participation, positive experiences and high quality PE and sport.[6] A transition that unintentionally reduces local delivery capacity would work against those objectives, even if the longer term approach is well designed.

9. Implications for the proposed Network

The proposed Network will require people and organisations capable of delivering, coordinating, training, safeguarding, monitoring and building relationships with schools. The survey indicates that much of this infrastructure already exists outside the school workforce.

The evidence does not establish that every organisation should receive future commissioning or that existing practice should be protected regardless of quality. The new approach should raise standards. The strategic issue is whether capable providers and experienced workers can remain available long enough to meet those standards and contribute to the new model.

Implementation risk. If organisations reduce their workforce or withdraw before commissioning begins, the new Network could have fewer skilled people, fewer apprenticeship employers and less local delivery capacity available when it launches.

A quality led transition

Continuity should be linked to clear expectations. Providers seeking to participate in future delivery should be able to demonstrate safeguarding, workforce development, appropriate employment practice, continuing professional development, quality assurance, data capability and a commitment to inclusive provision. This would retain capacity while supporting the Government's ambition to improve standards.

Established providers should also be involved in implementation design. Their operational knowledge can help test commissioning timescales, school purchasing routes, workforce requirements, local capacity and the practical consequences of moving from one funding model to another.

10. Recommendations

1. Secure continuity until the new arrangements are operational

Government should avoid a period in which existing school purchasing reduces before local commissioning, provider routes and payment mechanisms are functioning. The solution could involve continued Premium support, a bridging arrangement or another mechanism. The survey supports the need for continuity but does not determine the best financial instrument.

2. Publish a clear and realistic transition timetable

Schools and providers need timely information about funding, implementation milestones, commissioning routes and the point at which the new Network can support delivery. Clear communication would reduce avoidable recruitment freezes, shortened contracts and precautionary workforce reductions.

3. Assess workforce effects before transition decisions are made

DfE and the national delivery partner should assess how transition decisions could affect jobs, working hours, apprenticeship completion, future starts, experienced mentors and local capacity. This assessment should cover both external providers and schools that directly employ sports coaches or apprentices to deliver PE, sport and physical activity. It should sit alongside financial, school and programme mobilisation planning.

4. Protect apprentices and early career pathways

Transition planning should identify current apprentices, support completion wherever possible and provide contingency routes if an employer can no longer sustain a placement. This should include apprentices employed by schools as well as those employed by providers. Protecting future apprenticeship capacity also requires viable employers and experienced mentors.

5. Involve established providers in design and local implementation

High quality providers should have a structured voice in developing standards, the school facing route to services, local needs analysis and commissioning arrangements. Their involvement should be based on capability and evidence rather than automatic entitlement.

6. Link continuity to quality and accountability

Any transitional recognition or future commissioning should require appropriate safeguarding, employment standards, workforce development, continuing professional development, inclusive practice, quality assurance and impact reporting.

7. Commission wider sector workforce research

DfE should commission a wider workforce study and structured engagement with AAP, the School Aged Childcare Association (SACA) and other representative bodies. This would establish the scale, age profile, employment model, apprenticeship capacity and financial exposure of the wider sector.

8. Monitor transition effects in real time

A small set of indicators should track provider confidence, workforce reductions, apprentice starts and completions, business withdrawal, changes in services available to schools and areas where capacity is becoming thin. Early warning would allow proportionate intervention before capability is lost.

11. Conclusion

The AAP Workforce Survey shows an established provider workforce operating at scale across schools, physical activity, childcare and early career development. AAP's 47 members represent a substantial and geographically broad part of a wider sector. With 40 members contributing to this survey, the evidence offers a strong view of the network and a credible indication of wider sector patterns without claiming to quantify the whole market.

The evidence does not justify preserving every current arrangement or protecting providers regardless of quality. It supports a practical conclusion. The new Network is more likely to succeed if workforce continuity, employer capacity, school needs and implementation are planned together.

The proposed Network offers an opportunity to raise standards, improve consistency and target support more effectively. Achieving those ambitions will depend not only on future structures and funding arrangements but also on retaining the workforce, employers, and delivery capacity that already support schools today. A managed transition can protect the people, businesses and local relationships that help keep children active, support working families, create opportunities for young people and provide schools with access to high-quality provision.

About Aspire Active Partnerships

Aspire Active Partnerships is a national network of children's activity providers operating across England. The network supports organisations that deliver PE, school sport, physical activity, wraparound childcare, holiday provision, swimming and water safety, workforce development and related services to schools and communities.

AAP is part of Aspire Active Education Group, which has worked with schools and children's activity providers for more than 20 years. The network exists to raise standards, strengthen collaboration and enable responsible providers to engage more children in positive activity experiences.

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Appendix A. Sources

- [1] Department for Education, £1bn boost to PE and school sport to end fitness postcode lottery, 21 May 2026.
- [2] Department for Education, PE and School Sport Partnership Network market engagement notice, 10 September 2025.
- [3] Office for National Statistics, Young people not in education, employment or training, UK, May 2026.
- [4] Department for Work and Pensions, Major employment drive to help unlock 200,000 new jobs and apprenticeships for next generation, 16 March 2026.
- [5] Sport England, Children's activity levels rising but inactivity remains too high, Active Lives Children and Young People 2024 to 2025.
- [6] Department for Education, PE and sport premium guidance for primary schools, updated 6 October 2025.
- [7] Department for Education, Delivering school age childcare provision, non-statutory guidance, 15 April 2026.