

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Over the past decade, the UK has earned a reputation as a world leader in staging major events. Since the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, we have hosted two Commonwealth Games, two Jubilees, and three UK Cities of Culture, as well as numerous internationally acclaimed sporting events and cultural festivals, many that take place on an annual or biannual basis. There are also thousands of local events celebrated up and down the country each year, some of which are local interpretations of national activities; others, unique expressions of the places in which they are held.**

These events can act as catalysts for wider change, with long-term social and economic impacts in the host places and profound benefits for the people who participate. However, this doesn't happen automatically but requires a shared vision between hosts and organisers, focused on achieving specific outcomes, with the resource to deliver it over the long term. This inquiry was set up on the tenth anniversary of the London 2012 Games in order to learn the lessons of past events and to identify how we can capitalise on the power of events to facilitate and encourage wider social and economic change.

Whilst this Inquiry seeks to encourage and influence all event organisers to adopt our recommendations, we acknowledge that the events sector is funded and motivated in a variety of ways. Events which receive public funding or other forms of public sector or state support have a stronger responsibility to achieve social outcomes than purely commercial events.

Chaired by Sir Tom Hughes-Hallett, the Inquiry's 25 members have spent the past year taking evidence from experts across arts, sports, and community development as well as hearing directly from the public about why events matter to them.

The evidence was structured around three questions:

- Thriving communities: how can events contribute to local economies and levelling up?
- Connected communities: how can events bring people together?
- Happier communities: how can events help our physical and emotional wellbeing?

## **Thriving communities: how can events contribute to local economies and levelling up?**

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Events can bring a wide range of economic opportunities to the areas hosting them. They can forge connections between the public, private and charitable sectors, and can play a crucial role in broader levelling-up strategies. Events also have a crucial role to play in how people feel about where they live – whether that is their local area or the country as a whole.

There are strong examples of cities, such as Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester, where a focused, long-term events strategy has been an important part of economic regeneration over several decades. The bidding locations to the UK Cities of Culture programme, whether or not they received a designation, also showed a commitment to events and culture-led regeneration. In many cases, bidding cities are planning to deliver elements of their plans – the impetus of the bidding

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process having drawn together public, private and voluntary sector partners with a shared goal. Event organisers are increasingly considering how major sporting events – and the economic gains that come from them – can be distributed across the country, and particularly beyond London and the South East. UK Sport, the government agency responsible for investing in elite sport, estimates that 83% of investment and benefits from UK Sport's programme of events will impact towns, cities and communities outside south-east England<sup>1</sup>. Major events are increasingly being delivered across multiple towns and cities rather than being staged in a single host city.

Events often involve investment in new infrastructure and improvements to the public realm, a key driver of levelling up. New or regenerated venues are generally viewed as the main long-term legacy of an event, with event organisers placing equal emphasis between planning how they will be used by local people after the event and planning for how they will be used during the event itself. There is also a drive to reduce the financial and environmental costs of an event by hosting in places that already have facilities available. This can be very effective, although stakeholders warned that taken too far, this approach may prevent places which lack existing high-quality facilities from bidding successfully to host. There are challenges too in ensuring that the benefits from events extend to rural and suburban areas, or even smaller cities. The DCMS Select Committee was critical of the UNBOXED Festival for its interim audience figures. The figures were, at least in part, due to the festival's decision to host many of its commissions outside the places usually associated with major events, a decision taken to reach underserved audiences.<sup>2</sup>

While economic regeneration may initially only seem relevant to major events with large budgets and detailed plans to create jobs and attract tourists, smaller events also have a role to play in levelling up. Local Trust was set up to give 150 communities across England the money to invest in improving their community, and decision-making over how that is spent. Hosting events is a popular choice: organisers want to provide opportunities to bring their community together, but are often also looking

to attract visitors. Focus group attendees described a wide range of meaningful community events, from a black pudding competition to a local farmer who organised a Christmas lights tractor trail. Events of all scales can contribute to the idea that somewhere is a good place to live.

There is a need for a much more strategic approach, with a stronger connection between events and how they interact with the other things that a place is trying to achieve. While the events of 2022 had a solid commitment to long-term impact, there is little sign that, despite significant levels of investment, much thought had gone into how they could be greater than the sum of their parts. The Inquiry also observed competition between event organisers committed to their own particular approach, willing to share their learning but more reluctant to learn from others. Different types of events can fulfil different roles, so local and national event commissioners must look at their overall social and economic objectives to identify how events might support these, rather than working on an event-by-event basis. The Inquiry found that events could also capitalise on bringing together partners who had a shared goal but might not otherwise have reason to collaborate. From cross-department working in national and local government to opportunities for the business and voluntary sector, events help bridge divides between different sectors.

### Connected communities: how can events bring people together?

Events reach a wide spectrum of society. Across the major events of 2022, half of UK adults watched the Birmingham Commonwealth Games or took part in events such as the Queen's Baton Relay. The Lionesses' victory in the UEFA Women's Euros was watched by a crowd of 87,192 at Wembley and a further 17.4 million on the BBC. In June, 44% of UK adults (23.3 million people) took part in one or more Platinum Jubilee event.

However, the Inquiry found too little attention is being paid to who benefits from events. There are strong incentives for event organisers to demonstrate high participant numbers – like those

given above – at the expense of understanding who might benefit the most and who is missing out. About a quarter of the public feel like the place they live is less likely to run events than other places – rising to 34% in Wales, 37% in Northern Ireland, and a massive 43% in Scotland<sup>3</sup>. While events can play an important role in increasing the visibility of disabled people in society and challenging negative perceptions, only 44% of disabled people felt that theatres and sport stadiums were usually accessible to disabled people, and only 47% of disabled people thought that public transport was usually accessible to disabled people<sup>4</sup>.

The best events have a deep understanding of who is and isn't accessing their event and the reasons for this. Where possible, event organisers need access to this information quickly so they can act on it whilst the event itself is still going on or, in the case of short-term activities, make changes to appeal to a broader range of people in the future. While it is not realistic, or even desirable, for all events to cater to all people, there is more that can be done to remove barriers which prevent many from even being able to decide if an event is for "people like me".

Data about who is and isn't attending is also vital for capitalising on the potential of events to bring people together. Inquiry polling and focus-group evidence showed that many people feel local or national pride after an event, and it gave them the chance

to be part of something bigger. Events can also bring people from different backgrounds together, creating shared experiences and leading to greater trust and understanding.

In Leicester, a city where religious tensions bubbled over into riots in September 2022 (triggered at least in part by sporting rivalry), focus group attendees spoke passionately about the events that brought communities together. One man described attending Diwali celebrations explaining, "I don't have much to do with religion personally but [ ... ] it is amazing. I've never seen anything quite like it." Another described coming across Pride celebrations in Victoria Park, "At first me and my family weren't too sure, like can we go in or not? You know? But they made us feel so welcome [ ... ] there were people there to educate you too, so whatever misconceptions you might have, or whatever stigmas there might be, you talk to somebody."<sup>5</sup> The public are particularly positive about the potential of the 75th anniversary of the NHS this year and, if the UK were to host it, the UEFA Men's 2028 Euros to bring people from different backgrounds together (74% and 64% agreeing respectively).<sup>6</sup>

While events have the power to bring people together across divides, if not carefully planned and managed, they can have adverse effects, increasing feelings of exclusion. Stakeholders stressed the importance of representative boards and



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organising committees, community consultation, co-production, and hyperlocal activities. A diverse volunteering workforce, including large representation from the groups an event is seeking to bring together, is also key. When asked about how events could best bring people from different backgrounds together, the most popular response was “events that catered for all ages so that families were brought together”, followed by “events that used shared open spaces like parks and gardens”.<sup>7</sup>

There are many examples of community projects doing fantastic work to bring people together, including from different backgrounds, through the shared experience of an event. Simple changes to event advertising and the way the event is delivered can make a big difference to people’s likelihood to interact with other attendees – Jo Cox Foundation, The Big Lunch and Together Coalition have all been leading work in this area.

Despite pockets of good practice, it is clear that social connection is often given as an aim of an event without a concentrated focus on how it can be achieved or the monitoring and evaluation processes in place to see whether it has been successful.

### Happier communities: how can events help our physical and emotional wellbeing?

One of the most important roles of events is simply that they create happiness and joy for those taking part. As well as the short-term boosts to mood that you can get from attending – detectable in national wellbeing data around the London 2012 Games – there are less measurable long-term impacts from the memories events leave behind.

Participation in arts and culture, physical activity and volunteering has been shown to increase levels of wellbeing, so events can also have long-term impacts on wellbeing by encouraging more people to take part in long-term participatory activity.

For this to happen, there needs to be funding for those long-term activities. One contributor to our Inquiry sitting said, “Everyone wants legacy, but no one wants to pay for it.” There is a role for more funders, including, but by no means limited to, Government to commit upfront to demarcated

funding for post-event activities. Where possible, being transparent about ring-fencing some of this funding before the event would allow event organisers a clearer sense of how to transition participants into longer-term activities. Where no such funding is available, the best event organisers have a clear understanding of the local landscape so they can point people towards existing activities. More funders could look to come in at the end of an event to fund ideas that have emerged or grown during the event itself. There is space for greater collaboration amongst major funders to identify what role each could play in the event funding ecosystem.

Since the London 2012 Games Makers, event volunteering programmes have been one of the major highlights of UK events. Event volunteers benefit from high quality training, and there are often great efforts made to open up volunteering to new audiences. While there is an increasing focus on how to route volunteers into future volunteering opportunities, the Inquiry found greater effort must be made in this area.

To increase physical activity over the long term, events must integrate proven approaches that work to reach the least active. This includes sporting and non-sporting organisations working together, and using inclusive messaging and relatable imagery to attract participants.

Inactivity is a stubborn national health issue, and one that a single event cannot solve alone. But events can act as a galvanising force, encouraging the public, private and voluntary sectors to work together to achieve a common goal. If those with an interest in public health see an event or series of events as an opportunity and integrate it into a longer-term programme of work, then events are more likely to increase physical wellbeing.

Much of this report deals with the broader, long-term impacts which successful events can have on individuals and communities at a regional or national level. However, we should not underestimate the importance of the event itself in creating the conditions for this broader impact to take place: the quality of the event and the experience of those participating in it are crucial to the success of an event’s legacy.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation one: **Long-term impact and a clear plan for “what next” must be the drivers for the decision to bid or host a major event.**

- Publicly funded events should have a shared vision agreed by national and local stakeholders to ensure each event catalyses wider social and economic change.
- *Government, funders and event organisers* must commit to a small number of realistic and genuine long-term goals which drive decision-making and delivery.
- Where public funding is being used, *Government, funders, and event organisers* should consider how these goals contribute to the wider social and economic goals of the areas and communities in which the events are held.
- *National and local governments* must curate an events strategy, across arts, sports and civic life, ensuring that the collective impact of their events programme is greater than the sum of its parts.
- *Organisers* of large-scale events must prioritise partnership working, across public and private sectors and civil society, in order to optimise the delivery of these long-term impacts.

### Recommendation two: **The long-term impact of events must be underpinned by demarcated funding, accountability and governance.**

- *Funders and event organisers* should adopt a model which sees events as long-term projects, with funding allocated accordingly.
- *Government, national lottery distributors, and other funders* should take an open and collaborative approach to their funding strategies for events, striving for greater clarity for host locations about what they should expect.
- *Event organisers* should design large events with a delivery cycle that gives equal footing to post-event legacy activities.
- Responsibility for long-term impact must be with those who are around to deliver it, such as *local and combined authorities*. There should be clear responsibility and accountability for delivering these impacts.
- *Event organisers and funders* should measure the impact of events through independent evaluations undertaken over much longer time periods.

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Our Day Out, Creative Arts East

### Recommendation three: **Greater attention must be paid to who benefits from events and who is left out.**

- *Event organisers* should explicitly set out how they will reach and remove barriers for groups of people who are traditionally less likely to participate and, where possible, how they will act on emerging attendance data to address gaps in participation.
- *Event organisers* should undertake inclusion audits to make sure that disabled people are able to attend, making reasonable adjustments where necessary. These audits should include a review of transport.
- *Funders* of community events should prioritise low social capital neighbourhoods, recognising that there may be additional costs per participant to deliver activity in places with weaker voluntary sector infrastructure.
- *Event organisers* should consider where they are holding events. Public and outdoor spaces tend to be accessible and approachable and can attract a more diverse group of attendees.
- *Organisers* of large sporting and cultural events should work with business partners, colleges and other training providers to improve progression routes in the events industry and the hospitality and retail sectors.
- *Independent evaluations* of events must give more attention to the distributional impact of the event on different sections of society. The intelligence generated about participation during major events – including what was less successful – must, as standard, be passed on to local organisations who can use it to support ongoing efforts to extend their reach.

## Recommendation four: More events should be designed and curated with a broad range of stakeholders to build common ground across divides.

- *The DCMS and the Palace* should maximise the potential of the Coronation to unite people across divides, undertaking rapid research to identify effective messaging that helps to reach groups who traditionally feel excluded from ceremonial events.
- *The UEFA Men's Football Euros 2028* should be used as an opportunity to harness the power of sport to promote social contact between people from different backgrounds. The Government, governing bodies, football clubs, community trusts, supporters, schools, grassroots sport and volunteers need to make the most of this opportunity.
- *The Government* should back the move to make the Windrush 75th anniversary a national moment working with the organising committee, mayors, councils, faith and community leaders, the NHS, business, the armed forces, broadcast media, sports, and culture to do this.
- *Major funders of community events*, including NLCF and Arts Council England, should better support grant holders with simple, proportionate tools to understand to what extent their events are inclusive and how successful they are at bringing people together from different groups and building understanding.
- *Event teams in local authorities and at cultural, sporting, recreational and community organisations* should review their event calendars, to ensure that their programme not only caters for different communities of interest but also includes moments that bring people together.
- *Event organisers* must nurture the local and community elements of national-scale events. National events hold a particular power in instances where they can be celebrated and interpreted locally, with a common thread between the national and local.
- *Funders and event planners* should pay attention to unifying factors like using neutral outdoor spaces and food.



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### Recommendation five: Events that use volunteers should have a clear strategy to boost longer-term community volunteering.

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- *All large events* that use volunteers should have a volunteer legacy plan. This should make provision for those that want to continue to volunteer to share contact details with other organisations that work with volunteers. It should also set out how to sustain volunteers' interest in giving their time.
- *Event commissioners* must decide, based on local consultation, who will have the remit for the volunteer legacy programme in advance of the event, and there should be demarcated funding and data protection processes at the outset to support the transition of volunteers in post-event activities and to new organisations. The long-term volunteering strategy should also be responsive to the motivations and ideas of the volunteer cohorts themselves and adapt plans accordingly.
- *Event organisers working with volunteers* need to address the barriers that prevent people volunteering, including those faced with disabled people and people on low incomes. *Community organisations* should aim to use events to increase community volunteering post event and ensure they have permission for follow-up contact with volunteers, proactively signposting them to other similar opportunities or retaining them for ongoing volunteering within their own organisation.
- *Major event organisers* should continue to collaborate with the existing volunteering organisations to identify how the event and associated training can address gaps in capacity. These gaps may include targeting people from underrepresented groups who could be inspired into long-term volunteering, mapping to organisations in need of particular skills.

These principles, when applied, will build stronger events and greater returns on investment for the communities that host them. In addition, the Inquiry is calling for:

### One: The creation of a UK City of Sport competition, modelled on the success of UK City of Culture, with a focus on health and wellbeing.

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**The Inquiry recommends that the Government launch a new UK City of Sport competition, with one of its primary aims being increasing wellbeing and reducing physical inactivity. The competition would commit to delivering the five recommendations set out in this report. The UK City of Culture programme shows how a major event, held over the course of a year, can bring together partners from across the public, private and charity sectors around a shared vision for a place. It can promote closer relationships between businesses and communities and raise the profile of a place on the national and, even, international stage.**

The Inquiry is calling on the Government, sports councils, governing bodies, councils, schools, the media and faith and civil society to back this proposal. The competition would be open to cities, towns or whole counties.

The competition's focus would be increasing levels of physical activity among the least active, as well as participation in sport, with a real emphasis on using public spaces that are outdoors. Increasing volunteering as well as using the power of sport to connect people and bridge divides should be further objectives. Increases in cultural participation and cultural confidence have been major successes of the City of Culture competition, and there are good reasons to believe this could be replicated here.



The place-based programmes of Sport England and its counterparts in the other home nations, as well as European-wide initiatives such as *Healthy Cities*, demonstrate how this might be done. UK City of Sport would be a galvanising force for long-term, local commitment to increase physical activity. This would not be about concentrating elite sport in one location for a year. Instead, bidding cities would develop a dynamic programme of participatory activities alongside flagship spectator events unique to the history, assets and needs of their place.

#### This may include:

- A shared commitment to improving physical activity;
- Launching new, participatory events that bring different communities together;
- A schools' programme;
- Businesses supporting their employees to be more active;
- Innovative partnerships between non-sporting and sporting organisations;

- Investment to roll out initiatives such as Sporting Memories, which brings together older people through a shared love of sport;
- Attracting more/more varied spectator sporting events or mass participation activities to the area;
- A strategic approach to strengthening the visitor economy through a celebration of the location's opportunities for active recreation and spectator sport;
- Investment in the public realm in the run up to the event, with a specific focus on active travel and improving facilities, as with City of Culture.
- Host cities might also join the Global Active Cities Network's *Global Active City – Active Well-being Initiative*, linking them up with a wider network of learning and action.

**The Inquiry recommends a further feasibility study be undertaken by a coalition of interested partners over the next six months.**



Family Fun Run, Northern Ireland

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### Two: The formation of an events observatory to marshal evidence and data on the long-term impacts of events.

There are many leading academics and researchers exploring the impact of events, some of whom shared their work with this Inquiry. There is also significant work being done to improve the impact evaluation of events themselves at a policy level, from DCMS's work on valuing cultural heritage capital to UK Sport's increased focus on social impact. Organisations such as What Works Centre for Wellbeing, whose work is referred to several times in this report, have done much to bring together evidence on some of the themes covered here from volunteering to culture and physical activity.

However, the Inquiry believes there is a role for dedicated resource specifically focused on supporting events to deliver lasting and measurable social outcomes across the various mechanisms deployed by events (sport, arts, volunteering etc.).

This could be housed within an existing university department or research institution. The observatory would support policymakers and event organisers to:

- Look across different types of events, ensuring culture, sport, commemoration etc. are learning from what has worked (and what hasn't) rather than operating in silos;
- Explore the role of different types of events as one factor in a wider system of change;
- Take the long view, capturing outcomes that do not occur within the timeframe of traditional event evaluations, and after those that measure legacy have often concluded;
- Look at the collective impact of events within a place or timeframe linking to local data sets;
- Be independent rather than beholden to funder and commissioner objectives;
- Provide a learning bank to support continuous improvement;
- Mitigate against a tendency for evaluations to either be overly positive or highly critical;
- Develop an overarching theory of change for events that is not dependent on a specific mechanism like arts or sports

