



Dear Mr Dowden,

We are writing to you as the National Governing Body for Cheerleading in England, on behalf of the athletes, coaches' and gym owners in our country.

While Cheerleading may seem a small, insignificant sub-culture in the considerations of re-opening sport, it is perhaps a much larger national activity than you imagine: There are an estimated 89,000 athletes across the UK, and 141,000 spectators annually pack arenas such as the NEC, to watch this highly athletic team sport, that incorporates jumps, tumbling, dance, stunts and impressive acrobatic tosses. Cheerleading is a provisional Olympic sport, and Team England are a world class national team, who since 2017 have won 9 gold medals in various divisions at the ICU World Cheerleading Championships.

Since 2015 Sport England have actively worked to improve the disproportionate gender gap in sport participation through their successful *This Girl Can* campaign. As a predominantly youth sport, with 98% female participation, Cheerleading is critical to the physical and mental wellbeing of a key demographic in this country at risk of inactivity. By not addressing the return of indoor sport in the UK, the government are systematically restricting girls and young women from sport. We know this is not the intention, but it is an unfortunate outcome and reality. There is also a growing fear for the mental health of our children and young people during this pandemic, and Cheerleading provides a positive activity with friends that can help alleviate the feelings of isolation and promote wellbeing. Many Cheerleading programmes have gone above and beyond during this lockdown, to ensure their athletes remain engaged, active and supported (through regular team Zoom sessions, phone calls to parents, and mentoring with young people); regarding the mental health and wellbeing of their participants as being of equal importance to physical health.

We have been overwhelmed by the commitment and dedication of our coaches to their athletes, and it is a testimony to the positive power sport and coaches can play in young people's lives. However, we have also noticed a drop off in engagement from young people as the lockdown continues, and we have a genuine concern for the increased risk of inactivity, isolation and risk to mental health of the young people we serve.

The government's lack of guidance for community sport in the latest set of announcements is understandably frustrating and distressing for the many hundreds of Cheerleading programmes and coaches we represent; particularly those that operate as small businesses, and for whom the activity is their sole income.

Many Cheerleading gyms risk permanent closure unless able to reopen their doors soon. As many premises' are large warehouse spaces with adequate capability to control the number of participants, apply social distancing measures, sanitise equipment and bathrooms, take temperature checks on entry, provide clear track and trace information etc, we see no reason why with adequate risk assessment and safeguarding in place, they cannot return.

We hope that this request will be considered and look forward to your timely response to a matter adversely affecting so many.

Yours sincerely,

The board of SportCheer England  
National Governing Body for Cheerleading in England