

spear

centre for sport, physical education
& activity research

Kent Insight Report: A Deeper Understanding of PE, Sport & Physical Activity Participation of Young People Across Kent & Medway



January 2018

About *spear*

The Centre for Sport, Physical Education & Activity Research (*spear*) is located within the Faculty of Social & Applied Sciences at Canterbury Christ Church University. *spear* undertakes a range of evidence-led analyses, from critical commentaries and reflections on current policy and practice, to commissioned research, evaluation and consultancy.

The Centre's research is funded by a range of national and international funders such as the International Olympic Committee, World Health Organisation, Terre des Hommes, Department of Health, Department for Education, English Federation of Disability Sport, Mencap, Access Sport, Youth Sport Trust, UK Sport, Sports Coach UK, Sport England and Sport Wales. Recent work has focused on sport, physical activity, health and wellbeing in schools and communities.

Research conducted by *spear* has helped guide and inform public policy by contributing to the wider evidence base used by policy makers, providing a rationale for government and commercial investment, and steering programme improvements that enhance the experience of practitioners and participants.

The Centre for Sport, Physical Education & Activity Research (*spear*)
Canterbury Christ Church University
North Holmes Road
Canterbury, Kent, CT1 1QU
Tel: 01227 922680
email: spear@canterbury.ac.uk
www.canterbury.ac.uk/spear
Twitter: [@spear_news](https://twitter.com/spear_news)

Insight Report undertaken by *spear* and commissioned by Kent Sport
Report produced by *spear*.

Author: Dr Sarah Fullick

Project Team: Dr Abby Foad, Michelle Secker, Karley Hubbard & Professor Mike Weed

Kent Sport Support Team: Daniel Bromley, Lousia Arnold, Lucy Cassell & Louise Milne

January 2018

Context

About Kent Sport

[Kent Sport](#) is an integrated team of Kent County Council and Sport England funded staff, and forms part of a nationwide County Sports Partnership Network (CSPN) consisting of 44 County Sports Partnerships (CSPs). Working with a wide range of partners and networks across Kent and Medway, Kent Sport aims to provide high quality and accessible sport and physical activity opportunities for all, regardless of their age, background or level of ability to encourage more people to be more active, more often. In 2017 Kent Sport launched its sport and physical activity strategic framework, *Towards an Active County*¹. Aligned to Sport England's *Towards an Active Nation*² and wider Government agenda, the overarching strategic objective is to *'Make Kent More Active by 2021'*. Key to achieving this is tackling inactivity and supporting inactive Kent and Medway residents to become more active in line with CMO guidelines³.

Cognisant that early life-course experiences of sport and physical activity have been found to influence attitudes and behaviours towards participation in adulthood, Kent Sport has funded an independent research project designed to increase knowledge and understanding of young people's barriers, motivations, perceptions and attitudes towards participation at a local level. Insight gained will inform and shape programme delivery⁴, and provide the county's workforce⁵ with the knowledge and skills required to engage young people from a variety of sporting and social backgrounds in fun and enjoyable activities.

About the Research Project

[spear](#) was commissioned from September 2017 to January 2018 to conduct an independent research project designed to gain a deeper understanding of youth sport and physical activity participation across Kent and Medway. This Insight Report focuses on capturing the perceptions, attitudes, behaviours, motivations and barriers to sport and physical activity participation in inactive/irregularly active young people. In addition, this report provides insight into what would encourage inactive/irregularly active young people to do more sport and physical activity on a regular basis, as well as highlighting a number of activities they would be interested to try.

Data informing this Insight Report are drawn from Graffiti Wall activities, semi-structured focus group activities, hands up and activity surveys and informal interviews with 94 young people (44 female and 50 male) aged 13-16years from 5 secondary educational settings across Kent and Medway: Spires Academy (Canterbury), The Royal Harbour Academy (Ramsgate), The Folkestone Academy (Folkestone), Sittingbourne Community College (Sittingbourne) and The Rowans AP Academy (Chatham). The report is divided into four substantive sections: Core Insights & Headline Findings; Case Studies; Summary Insights; and Recommendations.

¹ [Towards an Active County: A Strategic Framework for Sport and Physical Activity in Kent and Medway \(2017-2021\)](#)

² [Sport England \(2016\) Towards an Active Nation](#)

³ Davies, S., Burns, H., Jewell, T., & McBride, M. (2011). [Start active, stay active: a report on physical activity from the four home countries](#). Chief Medical Officers, 16306, 1-62.

⁴For example, Satellite Clubs, Kent School Games

⁵For example, coaches, activators, leaders and teachers

Definitions:

Inactive: Doing less than 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week – where you raise your heart rate and feel a little out of breath

Fairly Active: Doing 30-149 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week – where you raise your heart rate and feel a little out of breath

Active: Doing 150+ minutes of moderate intensity activity per week – where you raise your heart rate and feel a little out of breath¹

¹Sport England, [Active Lives Adult Survey Report May 2017](#).

Research Aims:

1. *Identify why inactive/irregularly active young people do not participate in sport or physical activity*
2. *Establish what can be done to encourage inactive/irregularly active young people to become more active on a regular basis*

Core Insights & Headline Findings

- 94 inactive/irregularly active young people (53% male and 47% female) aged 13-16 years from 5 secondary educational organisations situated in Canterbury, Ramsgate, Folkestone, Sittingbourne and Chatham participated in the research.
- Over two-thirds of young people involved in the research (73%) did not attend after-school sport/physical activity clubs.
- Differences by gender were observed with 14% of girls and 38% of boys engaging in any sport and physical activity after-school club.
- 64% of girls and 74% of boys stated that they would attend an after school sport/physical activity club if they had a say in the activities they took part in.

“
You feel rubbish when people judge you, especially when you don't fit in or can't do something.

Female Pupil

“
Sometimes people are too hard on us like there's consequences if we don't do PE so it means it's a negative thing like detention.

Male Pupil

Attitudes & Perceptions

- Attitudes to and perceptions of sport and physical activity are strongly influenced by experiences of PE and sports clubs especially as young people transition into and progress through secondary education.
- Inactive or irregularly active girls perceive PE, sport and physical activity as judgemental, stressful, embarrassing, uncomfortable, pressured, limiting and restrictive, with activities often being repetitive and boring.
- Inactive or irregularly active boys see PE, sport and physical activity as a requirement that limits choice and opportunity, with non-compliance or non-participation having negative consequences or punishment.
- Young people believe that engaging in physical activities that they enjoy is healthy and therapeutic, offers opportunities to learn to manage their social and emotional wellbeing, and can develop broader life skills essential for future employment.
- Day to day informal or lifestyle physical activities such as walking the dog, tending to horses and taking siblings to the park are viewed positively, with young people disassociating them from their perceptions of PE, traditional sport and formal physical activity.

“
I don't like sport because it's boring and people just judge you or think they are better than you.

Female Pupil

“
I like it when you can hang around with friends, be part of a team and have fun together.

Female Pupil

Barriers & Motivations

- Young people cite being judged or bullied, feeling forced or bored and not being listened to as the key barriers to participation.
- Self-consciousness, lack of confidence, social isolation, weather, cost, accessibility, and inappropriate or uncomfortable kit are salient barriers highlighted by girls.

“
Some teachers & coaches just shout too much or are too full of themselves. Miss is decent though she listens.

Male Pupil

Barriers & Motivations Cont...

- For boys key barriers to participation include unengaging deliverers, competing interests and restricted choices or limited opportunities.
- Key motivators cited by young people to taking part in PE, sport and physical activity include health, wellbeing, managing emotions, being with friends, family and socialising, feeling part of something, trying new or different things and taking risks.
- Weight loss, fun and enjoyment, cost and accessibility are highlighted by girls as factors that influence participation, while having understanding deliverers who provide opportunities to develop broader life and employment skills are more important to boys.

“
Peer Pressure! There's not much choice, all the popular ones get to choose and we just have to go along with it otherwise they start yelling at you.

Female Pupil

Understanding What Young People Want...

- Give young people a voice and involve them in the design and delivery of PE, sport and physical activity programmes.
- Provide variety, choice, flexibility and opportunity both throughout the programme of delivery and within the sessions themselves.
- Create safe, fun and inclusive environments that challenge inequalities and social norms and dispel stereotypes.
- Allow young people the time and space to socialise with friends, make new friends and develop a supportive activity group.
- Develop engaging and understanding deliverers who are fully cognisant of the wants and needs of young people.

“
When you get someone good delivering it makes a difference. Miss Young she's a good teacher, her sessions are alright.

Female Pupil

“
I like the gym as there's more variation, but we can't use it after school hours unless it is supervised.

Male Pupil

Young People's Perceptions of Health & Fitness

- Social media (particularly Instagram, SnapChat and WhatsApp), wider media outlets and peer groups are key influencing factors shaping perceptions of and attitudes to health and fitness.
- Boys and girls associated being fit and healthy with specific body types; being skinny, toned and beautiful are considered elements essential to describing a healthy and fit girl, while having a six pack and being muscular are attributes associated to a healthy and fit boy.
- Young people recognise healthy eating and physical activity as key healthy behaviours, however they are not fully aware of what constitutes a balanced diet, or of the daily recommended levels of physical activity.
- Positive social and emotional wellbeing is seen as important, however young people feel that the pressure to achieve the ideal body image often adversely affects how they feel about themselves.

“
Having a choice and doing what sports you want to is important.

Female Pupil

“
People judge you when you can't do things, sporty people judge less sporty.

Female Pupil

Summary Insights: Attitudes & Perceptions

Early life-course experiences of sport and physical activity have been found to influence attitudes and behaviours towards participation in adulthood. Gaining a deeper and broader understanding of the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of inactive or irregularly active young people is key to shaping and providing a sport and physical activity offer that best suits their wants and needs. Kent Sport and *spear* engaged 94 inactive/irregularly active young people (53% male and 47% female) aged 13-16 years from 5 secondary educational settings across Kent and Medway to explore their perceptions, attitudes, behaviours, motivations and barriers to sport and physical activity participation. Over two-thirds of young people involved in the research (73%) did not attend after-school sport and physical activity clubs. Differences by gender were observed with 14% of girls and 38% of boys engaging in any sport and physical activity after-school club.

For many of the young people PE, sport and physical activity is perceived as a stressful and uncomfortable experience engendering feelings of being judged by others, especially peers believed to be more sporty or more popular. Some young people even experienced instances of bullying or being made fun of because they are perceived as different. Girls in particular feel that PE and sport are high pressure situations that elicit feelings of self-consciousness and embarrassment that are heightened by a fear of failure or non-conformity to perceived social norms. This is further compounded by the sense of being forced to perform tasks in front of peers, or having to participate in sports or activities they do not like or lack confidence engaging in. Being set or grouped by ability further highlights perceived inadequacies and can elicit feelings of social isolation through separation from friends. However, boys suggest that PE and sport programmes generally limit freedom of choice and opportunity, making them feel like activities are a requirement they are forced to participate in with impending negative consequences and punishment for non-compliance. Many suggest that PE, sport and physical activity offer lack of variety and is repetitive, prescriptive and inflexible in nature. This increases feelings of boredom, reduces levels of enjoyment and negatively influences young people's willingness to take part. A small group of young people indicated that given the right activities, a conducive environment and an engaging deliverer, sport and physical activity can be a healthy and therapeutic experience. In addition a number of boys suggested that PE, sport and physical activity can provide opportunities to socialise, as well as develop broader life and employment skills.

All young people involved in the research regularly participated in informal physical activity with friends and family, such as taking younger siblings to the park or riding their bikes, or spending time with parents or grandparents walking dogs, tending to horses or going for a walk or run. Many young people use walking and cycling as their primary source of transportation to get to and from school, part-time jobs, or to spend time with friends and family. However, these activities are considered as insufficient by young people in relation to achieving daily recommended activity levels. Activities where physical fitness or physical health are not the primary goal are generally not considered by young people as sufficient enough to 'count' towards achieving their daily recommended levels of physical activity. Attitudes, perceptions and experiences are consistent across age groups and locations.

“
Rugby because they land on your chest when they tackle you and it hurts.

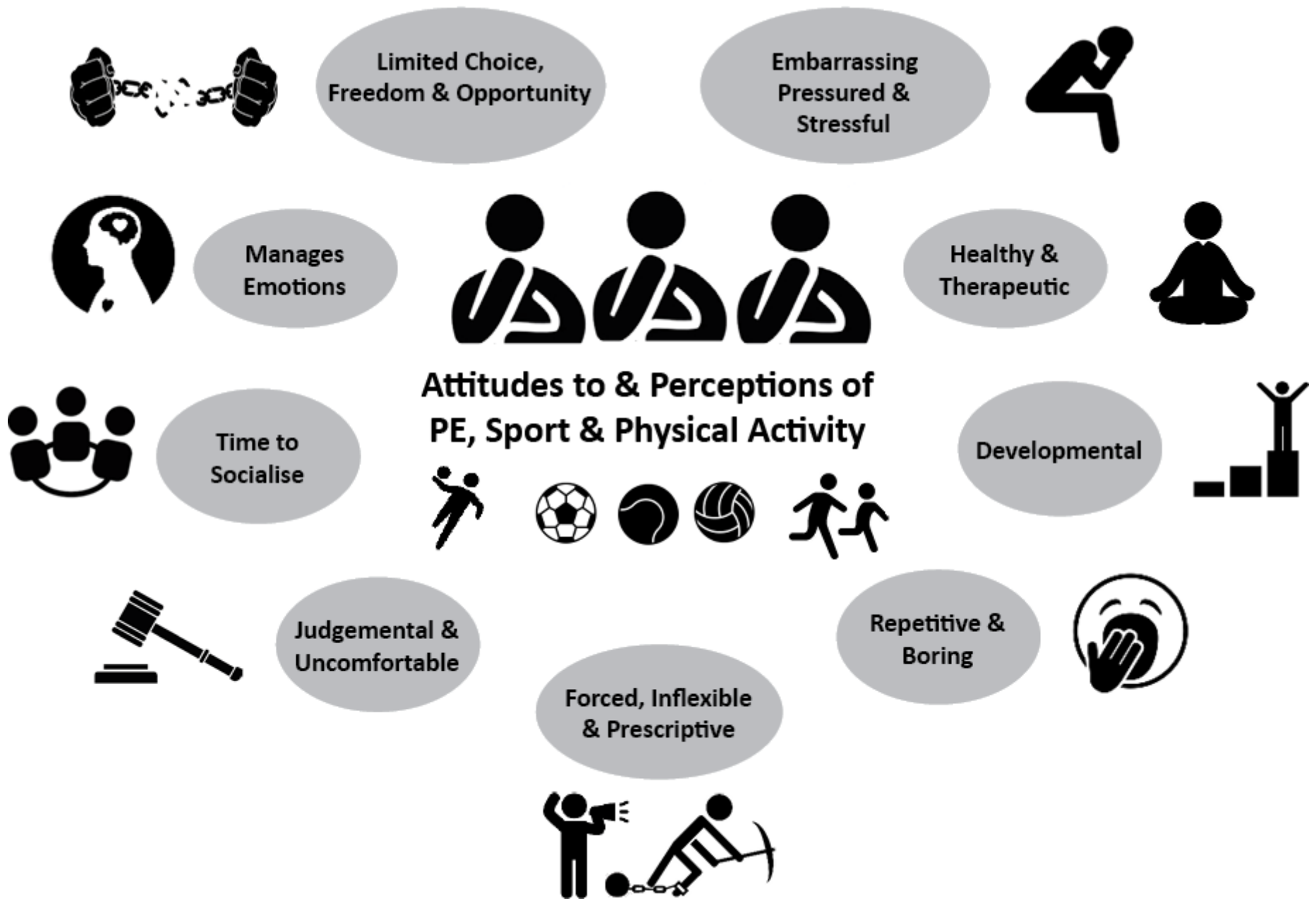
Male Pupil

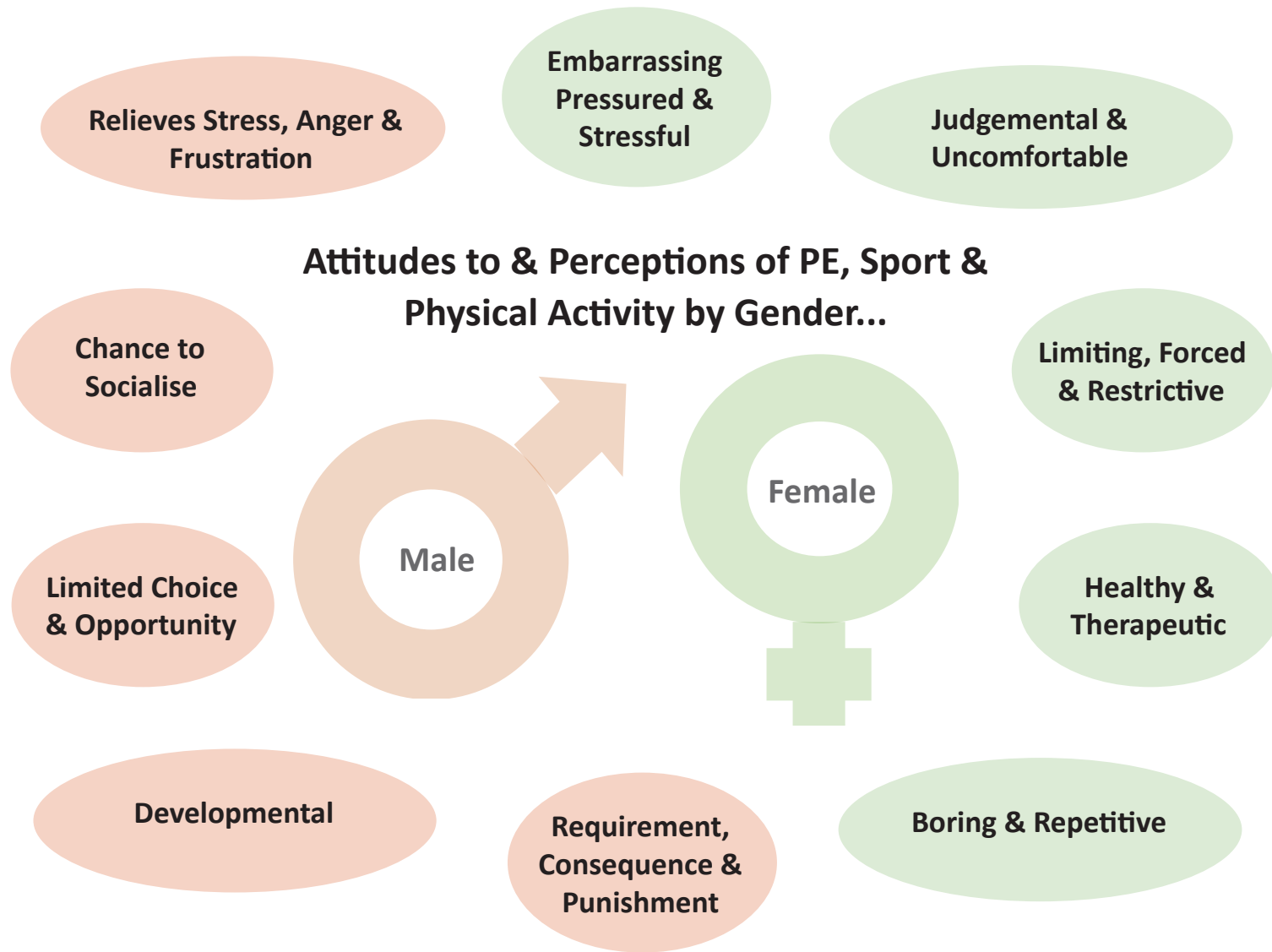
“
Some of it's cruel, like going out in the freezing cold and they make you do something when you don't want to do it.

Female Pupil

“
After PE you feel uncomfortable as we don't get time to shower after, and the showers are too exposed anyway.

Female Pupil





Summary Insights: Barriers & Motivations

Being judged and/or bullied, as well as feeling forced, bored and not listened to are the most prominent barriers to PE, sport and physical activity participation cited by young people. In addition girls highlight self-consciousness, lack of confidence and social isolation as influencing factors, while boys suggest unengaging deliverers and competing interests are the most salient barriers. Young people suggest that PE, sport and physical activity programmes lack variety, choice and opportunity, indicative of the lack of consultation or involvement of young people in shaping programmes. Inadvertently reinforcing negative stereotypes and gender inequalities through sport is cited by young people to limit their freedom of choice and opportunity to new try things. Girls indicate that cost and accessibility (particularly age restrictions) of gym and fitness based activities, as well as less traditional activities such as baton twirling, kick boxing and banger racing negatively influence their ability to take part in regular physical activity. Inappropriate kit that exacerbates issues relating to body image also pose significant issues for girls. Participating in sports during extreme weather conditions, combined with limited time to shower in uninviting or unclean facilities are also concerns particularly associated with PE.

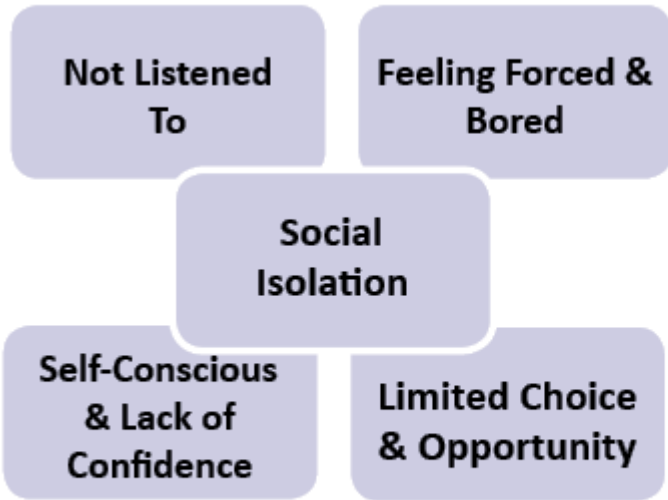
Young people cite opportunities to socialise with friends and family, trying new things, feeling part of something and doing something different as key motivators to participation. Girls highlight health and weight loss as primary motivators, with boys frequently citing managing their emotions as a reason for engagement. Both boys and girls indicate that activities that enhance overall wellbeing are key to encouraging participation. For boys having engaging and understanding deliverers who encourage and inspire participants while providing an inclusive and flexible environment is essential. Having opportunities to develop broader life skills that will be useful in the world of work is a key motivating factor for boys, however, for girls having fun and enjoyment are more important. Collectively young people state that taking risks, or engaging in sports and activities such as banger racing, parkour, martial arts and dirt track racing add an element of intense excitement, and enable them to engage in new or different activities.

“
It's ok if you get to spend time with your friends and learn new things together.
Female Pupil.

“
When you are doing it for that moment in time you escape from everything in your head, which is why I like it, I stopped for a while but started again and now it really helps me.
Male Pupil

“
If it was my choice to do what I wanted to do, I would do more sport.
Male Pupil

Barriers to...



... Young People aged 13-16yrs Participating in PE, Sport & Physical Activity



Motivations of...



Not Listened To

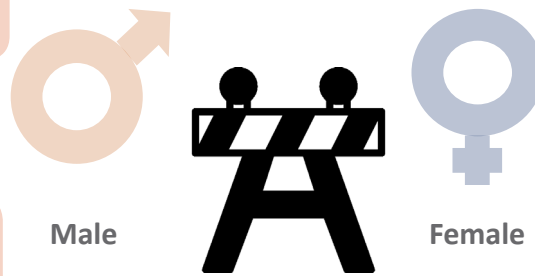
Feeling Forced & Bored

Unengaging Deliverers

Competing Interests

Limited Choice & Opportunity

Barriers to...



Cost, Accessibility & Opportunity

Feeling Forced, Judged & Bullied

Social Isolation & Not Listened To

Self-Conscious & Lack of Confidence

Poor Weather, Kit & Facilities

... Young People aged 13-16yrs Participating in PE, Sport & Physical Activity by Gender

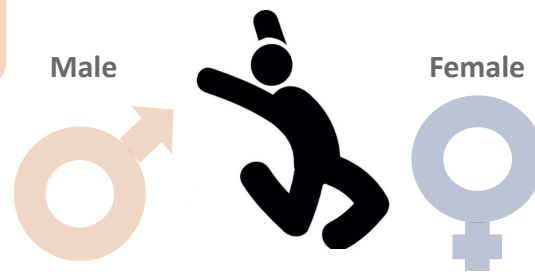
Understanding Deliverers

Fun With Friends & Feeling Part of Something

Managing Emotions & Wellbeing

Developing Life & Employment Skills

Trying Something Different & Taking Risks



Motivations of...

Feeling Part of Something & Taking Risks

Health, Wellbeing, & Weight Loss

Doing Something Different & Trying New Things

Fun & Enjoyment

Socialising with Friends & Family

Summary Insights: Understanding what young people want...

Consulting with young people and providing a platform for them to share their thoughts, experiences and ideas to shape provision based on need is vital. Programmes that are developed in partnership and not imposed or forced upon young people enable them to take ownership of and build a vested interest in activities, encouraging regular and sustained participation. When asked 69% of young people (64% of girls and 74% of boys) stated that they would attend an after-school sport or physical activity club if they had a say in the activities they took part in. Young people require variety, choice and flexibility, not just within a programme of delivery but during activities as well. Having a range of activities to 'dip in and out' of during sessions, while also have the chance to try new and different sports and activities, rather than 'the same thing all the time' is essential to engaging inactive and irregularly active young people. Building in comfort or water breaks and allowing young people to stand back, watch and rejoin the session when they feel comfortable are factors deliverers and practitioners need to consider. Sessions need to be fun, enjoyable, and positively challenge participants. Creating safe and inclusive environments that challenge preconceived ideas, prejudices and judgements while also fostering a friendly and supportive ethos is paramount. Celebrating difference and allowing young people to explore their own identities away from the pressures of societal norms would engage young people who believe PE, sport and physical activity 'is not for people like me'. Cohesive activities that enable young people to develop new friendships as well as reinforcing existing relationships will create a sense of community, reduce isolation, develop confidence and build self-worth. Developing a workforce that is prepared and able to understand and work with young people to develop flexible programmes based on need, that might include non-traditional elements such as music or social media breaks, is important to foster sustainable participation. Finally ensuring activities enhance holistic health and wellbeing, with a focus on building strong and resilient young people, is key to the successful engagement of young people in life-long sport and physical activity participation.

“
Judo is fun because you can tackle your friends, but channel your energy in the right way.
Male Pupil

“
I've played cricket since I was 4, I'm at an alright standard but I don't know I just really like it as a sport and I am good at it.
Male Pupil

“
I like it when you meet new people and have fun, I think that's important.
Male Pupil

Top 10 activities young people aged 13-16yrs would try



Top 10 activities young people aged 13-16yrs would try by gender

♂
Male

-  Self-Defence
-  Swimming
-  Football
-  Shooting
-  Boxing/Boxercise
-  Cycling
-  Trampoline
-  Parkour
-  Tennis
-  Basketball

♀
Female

-  Self-Defence
-  Zumba/Dance
-  Clubbercise
-  Swimming
-  Boxing/Boxercise
-  Cycling
-  Gymnastics/Trampoline
-  Cheerleading
-  Shooting
-  Parkour

Summary Insights: Young people's perceptions of health and wellbeing...

Perceptions of health and wellbeing initially focused on physical attributes and body image. Young people generally suggested that a healthy and fit girl is skinny, slim, toned, sexy and beautiful, while a healthy and fit young boy is someone who is strong and muscular with a six pack. Many young people feel a growing pressure to fulfil the perceptions of an ideal body image. Social media platforms, in particular Instagram and SnapChat, coupled with broader media outlets and peer groups collectively reinforce the need to have a skinny, toned or muscular physique. Non-conformity to these perceptions often sees those young people who do not *'fit the ideal'* being judged or bullied, with many feeling that PE, sport and physical activity environments further intensify such behaviours.

Young people are generally cognisant of key health behaviours such as eating a healthy and balanced diet. However, they struggle to fully articulate what a healthy and balanced diet comprises, indicating that healthy eating consists of less junk or fast food while consuming more fruit and vegetables. Engaging in regular physical activity and being energetic are highlighted as a positive and important health behaviour, however many young people are not aware of recommended levels of activity. Quantity and quality of sleep are also highlighted, as was the need for activities that relax young people and take them away from the everyday stresses and strains of modern day life. Young people cited a number of social and emotional factors that are key to good health, for example happiness, resilience and strength, confidence and competence, commitment, effort, and determination. Interestingly many young people feel a strong, determined and resilient young person is characterised as someone who is *'a winner'* and is *'loud and extrovert'*.

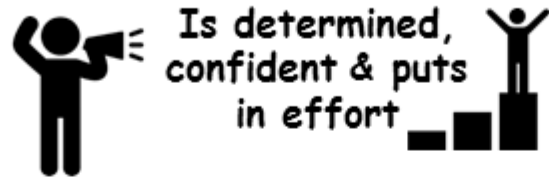
“
I don't like rugby because it's dangerous, and it's freezing when we do it outside.
Male Pupil

“
I don't like competition, and I get bored of doing the same thing and not feeling like we have a choice.
Female Pupil

“
You get nagged by coaches or teachers if you don't do it, it's like you are forced sometimes to do things you don't want to do, or don't feel confident doing.
Female Pupil

How would you describe a healthy & fit young person?

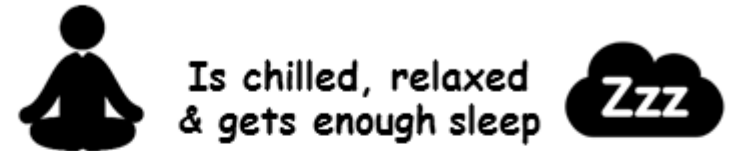
Is determined, confident & puts in effort



Has a balanced diet & doesn't eat fast food



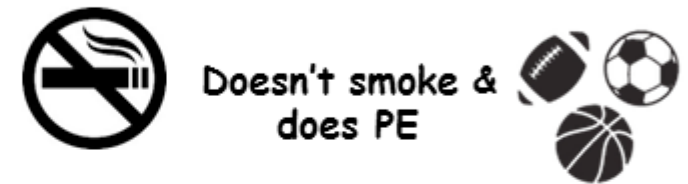
Is chilled, relaxed & gets enough sleep



Is energetic & active



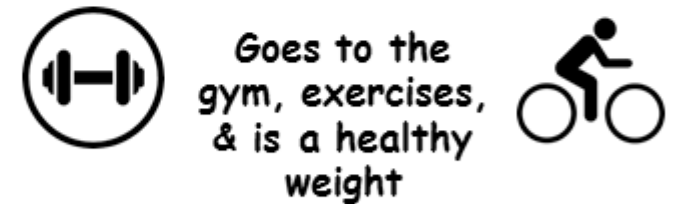
Doesn't smoke & does PE



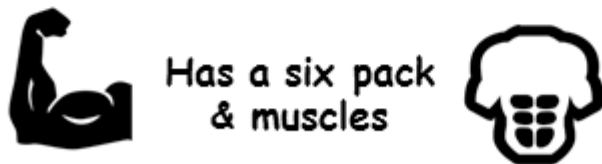
Looks beautiful & sexy



Goes to the gym, exercises, & is a healthy weight

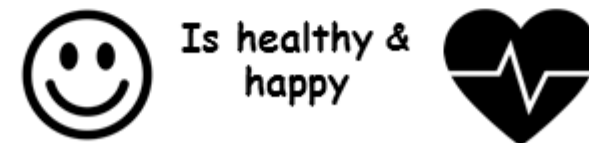


Has a six pack & muscles

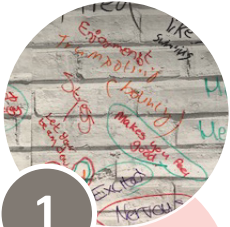


Has high self-esteem & is strong

Is healthy & happy



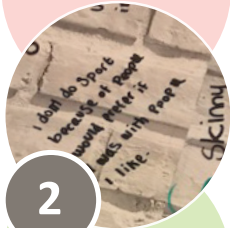
Recommendations for Engaging Young People in PE, Sport & Physical Activity



1

Involve & Listen to Young People

Provide a platform for young people to share their thoughts and ideas on: the activities that they would like to try; session content and delivery; and appropriate clothing to wear. Involving young people in the design and delivery of activities is key to engagement and retention.



2

Offer Choice & Opportunity

Develop rich and diverse programmes that provide young people with: a variety of choices; a chance to try new and different activities; and opportunities to get involved regardless of their level or ability.



3

Develop Inclusive & Safe Environments

Create friendly environments that: include all young people regardless of their level or ability; embrace differences; support development based on individual need; provide a safe space to engage in activities without being judged or a fear of failure; and celebrate success.



4

Deliver Fun & Fair Activities

Facilitate fun and fair activities that enable young people to: develop strong and cohesive relationships; enhance their ability to positively interact with each other; and to engage in fun competition, individually and as part of a team.



5

Embed Opportunities to Socialise

Integrate regular breaks and opportunities into activities that enable young people to socialise with their friends, as well as encouraging them to make new friends outside of their existing peer group.



6

Provide Understanding & Engaging Deliverers

Ensure delivery staff are empathetic, compassionate, approachable, available, prepared to listen and change, and able to offer flexible but challenging sessions that meet the needs of all participants.