Women and informal sport

A report for the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation

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Background and Objectives
Background to the research

• Women’s participation in sport and physical activity has declined over the last four years
• There is a significant gender gap in the level of participation between men and women – whilst 41% of men participate in at least one 30 minute session of sport or physical activity a week, just 29% of women do
• Yet 54% of women (almost 12 million) say they would like to do more sport and physical activity than they do at the moment
• As 51% of the population, it is vital that sports deliverers engage with the female market more effectively to drive up participation

Overcoming the problem

• National governing bodies (NGBs) and other sports deliverers are challenged with encouraging more women to take up sport and physical activity on a more frequent basis
• To help sports deliverers achieve this, the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation supports them by providing insight on the attitudes, behaviours, preferences, expectations and experiences women have in relation to sport
• Latest consumer research has suggested that traditional, formal sports offers (such as sports clubs) do not appeal to the majority of women – and that there is a need for more informal or social based sports programmes to attract and retain the adult female market
Objectives of the research

WSFF, in partnership with Sports Coach UK, commissioned Opinion Leader Research to conduct some research to better understand what makes the informal sports setting appealing to women, in order to provide advice and guidance on how these offers can be designed and promoted most effectively.

More specifically, the objective was to understand:

- The current barriers that prevent women participating in more sport and physical activity
- What it is women love about sport and physical activity – what their key motivations are for taking part
- Why the informal sports offer is appealing, and what key features it must have
- The expectations around the skill and expertise of the coach, and thus understand the appropriateness of current coaching qualifications
- The importance of the coach’s personality or personal attributes
- What these participants want their coach to facilitate, for instance improving skills, technical elements of the sport or simply a fun session
- How coaches can continue to engage entry level participants in the sport
Who we spoke to

We wanted to speak to participants and coaches of a range of existing informal sports offers. Football (Just Play), badminton (No Strings) and athletics (Run England) were selected to represent a range of sport types (team, racquet and individual). Participants and coaches of these sports formed the basis of the research.

Eight focus groups were conducted in six locations across the UK

Six groups were conducted with women – two for each sport

The remaining two groups were conducted with men who play in No Strings Badminton and take part in Run England

Twelve telephone interviews were also conducted with coaches of entry level participants – four in each sport

Focus groups lasted 1.5 hours and interviews lasted 30 minutes
Women and participation in sport and physical activity
Women’s participation in sport is in decline

Not only is women’s participation in sport and physical activity declining, but there remains a significant gender gap between the proportion of men and women that participate – 2.2 million fewer women participate in at least one session of moderate intensity sport or physical activity at least once a week than men.

% of women participating in differing levels of sport and physical activity

- Once a month (any intensity)
- Once a week (moderate intensity)
- 3 x 30 (moderate intensity)

Base: All women
Sources: Sport England Active People Survey, Office for National Statistics Population Estimates
Women described various barriers to their participation in sport

In particular, there are significant barriers for women in participating more regularly or committing to a team or a gym

Barriers to doing more

- Family commitments or general feeling of lack of time
- Weather
- Lack of facilities – (sometimes perceived)
- Cost of being a member of a gym or club
- Lack of self motivation
- Injury / age

But it is also a time factor, if you’ve got children and you’ve got other things (Badminton, London)

I think that’s the thing isn’t it, keeping it up in your priorities and once it slips it’s really hard to get it back then, to shift it back up there (Running, North)

I haven't got the time really, or sometimes you know after work it can be a bit of a chore really (Football, Midlands)
There were also barriers to specific types of exercise and sports

Particularly those requiring an investment in equipment or membership, or the gym which was perceived as a solitary form of exercise

I used to do swimming and athletics too...100m.. But age caught up!
(Badminton, Midlands)

I found the gym, it was very isolating ....You would go in and everybody would be doing their own thing and there's no social interaction in the gym...
(Badminton, London)

Barriers to types of exercise

- Cost of equipment/ membership/ venue hire
- Isolating activities, such as the gym
- No one to play with (racket or team sports)
- Worry about lack of skill/knowledge of the rules
- Logistics of organising a game
Yet despite these barriers, women have a strong demand to participate more

Strikingly, 54% of women say they would like to participate more in sport and physical activity...

That’s almost 12 million women
Women described several driving factors for taking part in sport or exercise:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Driving Factor</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be fit, healthy and active</td>
<td>‘Health’ was seen as more important than looks – particularly for older participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feel good factor</td>
<td>Having a sense of achievement by taking part and seeing improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td>To have some ‘me’ time</td>
<td>A break from family life or the routine of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve / personal goals</td>
<td>Setting personal objectives of taking up a new hobby or leading a more active life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social reasons</td>
<td>To meet new people in the area or as an activity to take part in with friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adrenaline rush</td>
<td>To get a ‘buzz’ from taking part (although more so for men than women)</td>
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‘Health’ was seen as more important than looks – particularly for older participants.
In their own words, women are motivated because:

- You're just having fun and it's competitive and the whole exercise thing just goes out your head and you just enjoy yourself as well. It's a good stress relief. *(Football, North)*

- *(Zumba)* ... it's exercising and you're not actually realising that you're exercising as such, it's just the music and if you like music, you like dancing. *(Running, North)*

- Just to keep the weight off. *(Football, Midlands)*

- I think with the running and as well the dance classes I go to, I think the reason why I stick at them is that there is a really nice social group in both of them..so even if I don't feel like it I know when I get there we’re going to have a good chat, it’s going to be fun! *(Running, London)*

- It’s the feeling afterwards.. It’s that satisfaction that you’ve done it! *(Running, London)*
There were also specific reasons why running, badminton and football were appealing.

It’s important for sports deliverers to consider the specific appeals of their particular sport in order to effectively tap into these unique motivations.

Badminton
- You can play with family (children, partners)
- Indoors
- Sometimes perceived to be easier than other racket sports for beginners
- No Strings sessions are often cheaper than hiring a court
- Social – meet and play with other people
- Sense of competition (without being in a formal competition)

Running
- It’s outdoors
- Don’t need equipment
- Get a lot out of it in short space of time
- You can go at your own pace
- No one else needed to take part
- Running in groups offers additional safety (particularly on dark evenings)

Football
- Try something new
- Played when younger with family
- Love the game – watch it etc
- Good thing to do with friends
- Good for fitness
The appeal of informal sport
The informal offerings are appealing for a number of reasons

Motivation – more likely to do sport more frequently because of the group environment and the coach

Convenience – often at local facilities at convenient times

Fun – no pressure to perform

Social – have friends who attend or made friends at sessions

Visible improvements to fitness and performance

I think because it is a group it does make you go, as opposed to if you was just going out by yourself you think oh it’s cold, it’s dark, shut curtains... I wouldn’t have come out tonight if I was going for a run on my own.

(Running, North)

I just thought I'd try this No Strings because I work shifts and I never know what shift I'm going to be on..and it suits me because I can go when I want to.. I wouldn't want to commit to a gym because some weeks I can't go.

(Badminton, Midlands)
Informal offers don’t just attract beginners
They are appealing to participants of different levels of skill and experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry level</th>
<th>Returners</th>
<th>Experienced participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The open and flexible environment makes informal offers appealing to those who are just starting to play or take part</td>
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<td>• Coaches / coordinators giving support and advice when asked helps them feel more confident without too much pressure</td>
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<td>• Participants getting back into a sport were often intimidated by formal settings as they were apprehensive about their level of skill or fitness</td>
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<td>• Informal settings enable them to play at their own level and progress at their own pace</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Experienced participants also enjoyed the informal sessions as it offers another chance to play/participate, with different people and in a different type of (social, fun) environment</td>
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Despite different attainment levels, participants wanted the sessions to all be about...

- **Meeting people / socialising**
- **Doing something active**
- **An inclusive environment**
- **A motivating atmosphere**
- **Simply playing / taking part**
- **Friendly and welcoming**

**FUN**
There were commonalities as to how the session should be structured

The emphasis should be on the main activity (e.g. game play, running) rather than on skills coaching

Meet and greet participants
Explain structure of session and what to expect

Warm up

Main game(s) or run

Short session on ‘skill’ or ‘drill’ of the day

Cool down, stretches and feedback

Invite to social media page / email list
For these participants, taking part in this environment was not....

**Being part of a club or team**
Clubs were often perceived negatively by participants, for example: commitment, achieving and maintaining a high standard of skill, ‘training and fitness’ sessions and competition, as apposed to just ‘taking part’ and playing games.

**Commitment (time or money)**
Women who had children or those who worked shifts found it difficult to commit to doing exercise regularly because of other obligations. Participants new to sport were also reluctant to invest money in a gym or club membership until they were sure they would play/take part regularly.

**Competing in organised competitions**
Participants enjoy a level of competition within a session through playing, and trying to win games (badminton and football) or beating their own personal best times or distance (running). However formal or organised competition or tournaments were unappealing.

**A team /other people**
Participants take part in the sessions for their own enjoyment or to achieve their own goals. It was reassuring to them that if they missed a session they would not let anyone down.
And they would be put off if it became about...

Having your performance judged
This was particularly a concern for entry level or returners, whose goals for playing the sport were about taking part, being fit and active and seeing personal improvement. Judgement from other participants or coaches goes against these goals.

Being shouted at or corrected constantly
Linked to the above. Singling participants out by shouting or correcting them in front of the group was intimidating and off putting. Particularly important for entry level or returners who acknowledge that they may have low levels of skill but simply enjoy taking part.

Young, fit, skilled, and stylish people only
It was important to all participants that the sessions were very inclusive and welcomed people of all ages and ability. Not needing to invest in expensive equipment or kit made sessions appealing.

Not everyone coming along to the group is there to try and win the race, that for a lot of people the important thing is that they have actually got off their backsides and got there, which is an achievement in itself (London, Running)
Coaches’ perceptions of what they should be delivering in these sessions is in line with what participants want.

For coaches, these sessions are distinct from club sport and more traditional coaching of a team or person.

It’s mixed, some come to do some exercise rather than doing none, some come for the social side of things or the motivation...and some have come because they want to enter races.

*(Running leader)*

I think it’s just to get a bit active... Sport has become so expensive these days... But No Strings is so cheap that people can just turn up, do a little bit of sport.... and they get to meet lots of new people and that’s what people always say to me... It’s so friendly!

*(Badminton coordinator)*

We do have some guys that are quite good, they’re county level or they play for a club. But obviously those people generally won’t be coming to No Strings session for coaching, it’s more for the beginner people or people that have been out of the sport and haven’t played since school like 20 years ago.

*(Badminton coordinator)*

I think a lot of people get involved in football through their kids... and these days people are quite aware of fitness and health implications of not being fit which I think has a bearing as well.

*(Football, leader)*

I think it’s just to get a bit active... Sport has become so expensive these days... But No Strings is so cheap that people can just turn up, do a little bit of sport.... and they get to meet lots of new people and that’s what people always say to me... It’s so friendly!
Key features of an informal sports offer
What is ‘informality’?

- Informality can mean different things to different people:
  - For some people it might be about logistics, such as the location of the offer, the flexibility of dates/times, or the pricing and payment structure
  - For others, it might be about the environment at the setting – friendliness and sociability
  - And for others, it might be about what they hope to get out of participating – pursuing their own goals at their own pace, rather than training to compete
  - And it may well be a combination of the assets above that define ‘informality’ in different ways for different individuals

On the following few slides, we present some case studies of existing ‘informal’ sports offers from Badminton England, The Football Association and England Athletics and try to draw out some of the key features of ‘informality’ which women described as being positive about each offer
No Strings Badminton

To engage with a wider audience, BADMINTON England needed to have more on offer than simply the traditional, competitive club setting and the casual court booking provision. It was clear there was demand for a recreational, low-commitment offer of badminton to bridge the gap between two existing offers.

No Strings Badminton is aimed to meet that demand by providing semi-structured, fun, social pay-and-play badminton sessions for the recreational player.

No Strings Badminton sessions are facilitated by a No Strings coordinator who is generally on hand to provide support and advice to participants and rotate game-play. Although not essential, the majority of No Strings coordinators hold a UKCC Level 1 coaching qualification. The essential criteria are having an appropriate badminton knowledge base and having the characteristics to create a fun and welcoming environment.
Emphasis should be placed on making the environment welcoming, friendly and sociable.

Drop-in sessions mean women are offered the flexibility they can’t get from traditional clubs.

**Location:** Local leisure centre

**Session time:** 6-9pm Wednesdays, 10-12am Saturdays

**Leader:** Lead coordinator with an assistant

**Cost:** £3 a session, pay per session

**Session structure:**
- Session works as a drop-in session – do not need to attend for full 3 hours
- Coach matches players with others depending on ability levels
- Just play games of badminton with regular rotations – no drills coaching
  Coordinator joins in when appropriate, tailoring level of play to different participants

Coaches join in sessions, building rapport and fostering an inclusive environment.
Just Play Football

Football provision has traditionally been formal, competitive and required significant skill acquisition as a prerequisite to participation.

In partnership with Mars®, the FA produced ‘Just Play’ as an informal and social offer to simply play football.

Just Play sessions are coordinated and delivered by ‘Just Play Organisers’
The emphasis should be on the main event (e.g. game play) rather than drills and coaching.

The gender of the coach is not important – but they must be skilled and above all passionate about the sport – this is what enthuses and motivates participants.

**Location:** Local football complex

**Session time:** 6-7pm, Tuesday evenings

**Leader:** Female coordinator and qualified male coach

**Cost:** £1.50 a session, pay per session

**Session structure:**
- Meet coordinator in reception Find reserved pitch together, where coach meets the group
- 5 minutes warm up
- 10 minutes of drills
- 40 minutes of game play
- 5 minutes warm down

Sessions should be pay as you go, rather than requiring a long-term financial commitment.
Run England

To capitalise on a tangible shift in popularity of informal running, England Athletics have created Run England, a program designed to better engage with current runners and address barriers to those wishing to take up running.

Run England is led by ‘Group Leaders’ who are mostly volunteers who undertake a basic running qualification and then set up their own running group.

Run England group leaders facilitate the session – they undertake a specifically designed ‘leadership’ course.
Sessions should be delivered at convenient locations and at convenient times.

**Location:** Meet outside local leisure centre

**Session time:** Mondays 6-7pm

**Leader:** Female group leader

**Cost:** £2, pay per session

**Session structure:**
- Meet in local leisure centre.
- Session is 1 hour – timed around a children’s gymnastics class.
- 1 leader and two assistants means class can split into three levels
- Warm up, long run in ability group, back together for intervals/ hills/drills, cool down.

Delivered at convenient times to meet a variety of women’s needs e.g. mums, full time professionals

Delivered from convenient locations – close proximity to homes, workplaces etc.

Women are able to participate at their own level and pursue individual goals.
Sport can also learn from other commercial offers...

- **Parkrun**: Free and flexible. Offers chance to train with other people.
- **British Military Fitness**: Payment options are flexible – pay for 10 sessions upfront then go when you like, or monthly fee and go as many times as you like.
- **Zumba**: Combines fitness and fun. No need for skill or experience – doesn’t matter if you ‘go wrong’.

*Its all about fun really more than anything and getting involved so she doesn't really care if you're not following what she's doing.....If she was the sort of person who told you off every time you put a step wrong you probably would never go again....*(Zumba)*

*Midlands, Football*

*The lady who takes it is mad, she makes it really fun* *(Zumba)*

*Runnning North*
What informal sports participants want from a coach
What is in a name?

Throughout the research, the term ‘coach’ was used interchangeably with other names when respondents referred to the person running an informal sport session.

The person organising and running the session

Across all groups, respondents were looking for similar qualities from this person, regardless of what term they were referred to.
Participants want the coach to be:

- Friendly
- Encouraging
- Motivating
- Helpful
- Supportive
- Knowledgeable
- Organised
- Positive
- Professional
- Active
- Fit
- Happy
- Caring
- Understanding
- Fun
- Inclusive
- Supportive
- Relaxed
- Motivated
- Energy
- Inspired
- Professional
- Technical knowledge
- Informal
- Cherry
- Laid back
- Motivated
- Warm
- Remembers you
- Fair
- Enthusiastic
- Optimistic
- Expressive
- Playful
- Democratic
- Adaptable
- Challenging
The coach is there to help you participate in a way you couldn’t do or wouldn’t do alone

This is achieved through:

**Organisation**
- Grouping people to play/run together of similar level
- Being on time and in a regular slot
- Has a structure /route planned out

**Motivation**
- Encourages you to go further/ faster / improve skill
- Uses own experience to show they understand how you feel

**Support**
- Offers advice about injury/stretching/rules of the game
- Welcomes you back if you’ve missed a session or two
- Understands your goals and reasons for attending

Participants felt that the coach played a fundamental role in creating the right environment and atmosphere – so displaying the kinds of qualities above is important in retaining people in sessions
The role of the coach in these sessions is critical to participants enjoyment of the session.

Participants are unlikely to return if they have a negative view of the coach.

The primary role of the coach in these sessions is to organise and coordinate – to get sessions set up, start and finish on time, ensure equipment is provided and ensure people are matched with correct ability levels.

The ‘coach’ should not actually ‘coach’!

Beyond this, the role of the coach is to support, motivate and create the correct kind of environment for participants (friendly, fun and easy-going).

• ‘Coaching’ is associated with performing drills and skills sessions – people just want the coach to facilitate the game or session.
• But the coach should be able to provide guidance, hints and tips when asked.

I come back because I like my coach.

Running, London
Dos and don'ts for coaches

Coaches should

✓ Take an individual approach
✓ Listen
✓ Understand a person’s ability
✓ Demonstrate
✓ Participate
✓ Give people advice (with appropriate tone)
✓ Be passionate about (and skilled in) the sport
✓ Be motivational and enthusiastic
✓ Plan sessions in advance
✓ Be on time
✓ Keep the group organised
✓ Lead warm-up and warm-downs

Coaches should not

✗ Single people out
✗ Be badly organised
✗ Be inexperienced in the sport
✗ Patronise
✗ Push people too hard beyond their level
✗ Be judgemental or impatient
✗ Be too strict or intimidating

You’ve got to be really talkative and very clear... And also good at listening too. *(Badminton leader, level 1 experience)*
Recruiting coaches to facilitate informal sport
There is a clear expectation that the coach will have a level of training or qualification

Participants felt they should be trained in....

**People skills**
The coach’s interpersonal skills were seen as being absolutely paramount for the informal setting – it is less about their ability to ‘coach’ and ‘develop’ participants, but more about their ability to understand participants’ individual needs, motivate and enthuse them to participate.

**Organisation skills**
The coach needs to be organised – women commonly talked about their expectations that sessions would start and finish on time, that equipment would be organised, and that the coach would be able to organise participants in to games with appropriate partners.

**Health and safety**
Women commonly said that knowledge of health and safety was important in order to select appropriate locations (e.g. if outdoors, with appropriate street lighting) as well as deal with minor injuries should they occur.
But they also expected specialist sport experience...

**Specialise in their sport**
It was expected that the coach would specialise in the sport which they were leading. Whilst women did not want to be ‘coached’, they did want the coach to be able to guide them when asked. Women said that they were more likely to be motivated to take part if the coach was very good at the sport themselves. It is also motivating to have the coach taking part and join in with the participants.

**Physiology and anatomy (particularly in running)**
Some women, particularly those in running groups, said they would expect the coach to have some knowledge of physiology and anatomy in order to be able to provide advice and guidance on injury prevention and recovery.
Recommendations for recruiting coaches for informal settings

Based on what participants said was important about the person leading these sessions, we recommend a few tips in recruiting an appropriate workforce:

• Use people who have a great passion and enthusiasm for the sport to lead the session
• The coach should lead the warm up and cool down, be aware of the contact a new participant has had with the sport and also a rough guide to their fitness levels
• The coach should be happy to facilitate a social approach to playing and provide time for this to happen
• The coach should also be prepared to book the venue and take the payments, if relevant
• Informal participation sessions will require little or no coaching drills. Developing technique and strategy should be introduced as requested by the participant
• Be led by the participants and ensure an open dialogue between the participants and the coach/leader
• The coach must be organised, turn up on time and ensure they are fully equipped to cater for the needs of the entire session
• Ideally, the coach would be able to utilise social media channels (e.g. Facebook, twitter) to promote the opportunity and build a relationship with existing participants
Case study: recruiting Run England leaders

Run England work with partners such as CSP’s, clubs, local authorities, companies, universities, leisure operators etc. to advertise/identify people who are interested in becoming Run England Group Leaders.

Key messages for Run England Group Leader recruitment

• You don’t need speed to lead
• Could you help beginner runners get started?
• Are you:
  • Supportive?
  • Passionate about running?
  • Patient?
  • Keen to share your love of running?
  • Excited by the success of others?
Run England advertise for new leaders using a template poster

Wanted!
Running Leaders for your area

You don’t need speed to lead

Could you help beginner runners get started? Are you:
- Supportive
- Passionate
- Patient
- Excited by the success of others
- Keen to share your love of running?

If you are interested get in touch to find out how to apply for the Leadership in Running Fitness Course. We’ll support and guide you every step of the way.

For more information contact the Run England team on 0121 7817271, email runengland@englandathletics.org.

Application forms are also available from the England Athletics website www.englandathletics.org
Coaching qualifications for the informal setting
Which qualification does a coach need to facilitate an ‘informal’ setting?

The current approach to attaining coaching qualifications leads to over delivering on technical elements, and under-delivering on people and organisational skills.

I don’t think there is a level of qualification necessary to be honest. I think if you have experience that is more probably worthwhile than the qualification if you’ve got a vast amount of experience in dealing with people, communicating, motivating people you don’t necessarily get that from any of the courses that you take. It always helps to have a bit of a technical background.

(Football coach, various qualifications including level 1-4 with the FA)

The level 2 athletics..... involves the throwing and the jumping as well which I don’t think is relevant with just a running group

(Running leader, UKCC level 2 and Run England leadership course)

It breaks things down between what you're looking for in a shot and how to break the shot down and to coach it better. It doesn’t really give you a – go in there, introduce yourself, get the group running

(Badminton leader, previous Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications)
Case study: Run England ‘leadership in running fitness’ course

In order to develop a bespoke ‘Run England’ workforce, Run England have designed a bespoke qualification for people who want to lead Run England groups.

The Run England qualification is a one day course which includes:

• Looking at barriers to running and how to overcome those barriers
• How to develop a session & session components including risk assessment, safety, goals and reviewing practice
• Managing your group to include all abilities
• Session planning, different activities to include, importance of variety
• Goal setting – how to set and use personal goals
• Warming up and cooling down
• Correct stretching for running
• Common injuries and injury prevention
• Footwear – the basics
• Being a leader – what’s expected of you
Many coaches, however, felt that they sometimes relied on their own prior experience.

Sport specific recreational courses have been useful, but need to deliver enough detail and content – some coaches have found themselves relying on being able to draw on prior experience. Coaches said they could also benefit from:

• Specific training for working with entry level and returner adults
• Administration relating to running sessions – paperwork, health and safety
• Basics of marketing – how to recruit participants to your sessions
• Mentoring system/shadowing other successful coaches
• How to manage large groups of participants, with often diverse levels of skill and ability
• Keeping sessions fresh – ideas for games or new activities
• Anatomy/injury prevention or cure

The leadership in running fitness course which would be the main one at the moment....it's quite good but I think it relies on the fact that people have come from a running background. (Running leader, UKCC level 2 and Run England leadership course)
Be prepared to listen to the needs of coaches, and adapt the delivery of training accordingly

For example, based on the feedback from coaches to date, Run England have developed further training tools in addition to the one-day training course:

- A ‘Leaders Only Area’ on their website, which provides additional information on topics such as health and safety and marketing.
- Local workshops for coaches
- A formal mentoring system for coaches
Attracting and retaining women in informal sport
Women were quite clear about the key features that are attractive about an informal sports offer

To attract new members to sessions the following key benefits should be promoted

- Friendly
- Everyone welcome
- No commitment
- Personal goals
- Fun
- Exercise without even noticing it
- Organised
- Work at your level

These benefits appeal to entry level participants who may be anxious about starting a new sport or returning to a sport after a period of time.

Benefits in the circle are particularly important to emphasise to new starters who may be anxious about their ability to take part.
Women gave various pieces of advice about how to attract participation in an informal sports offer...

Try and emphasise how friendly and non-threatening the groups are to try and attract those people who maybe would love to come but who are a bit scared about what they might find.

(Running, London)

There needs to be more places that do it as well... there isn't like an actual team thing just where you can go and have a lark about.

(Football, North)

I'm in the beginners group and I think that the lady who runs it is one of the main reasons I keep coming, because she is such a good motivator.

(Running, North)

You can pay as you go - that is a real bonus... Hiring a court is quite expensive so this is fantastic value.

(Badminton, London)
Many women had heard about the sessions through word of mouth

However there are a number of other channels which could be utilised to reach this audience

Google
Many participants rely on this to find information about local and national initiatives – often using simple search terms including the sport and local area, e.g. ‘badminton, Leeds’

Local press
Local newspapers E.g. Newham council

Local supermarkets and libraries
Not everyone is a member of a gym or attend the local leisure centre, so need to be exposed to the opportunity elsewhere

Leisure centres
However some participants with children were at the session venue anyway (e.g. Running case study)

NGB website
For those taking an interest in the sport looking at options for taking part or those returning to the sport
But what will keep them coming back?

During the research, many women said they were nervous or apprehensive about attending a session for the first time. Important factors which encouraged them to keep attending were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A proper welcome - introductions</th>
<th>Allowed to progress at own pace</th>
<th>Friendly setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to drop in</td>
<td>Not pushed too hard too soon</td>
<td>An incentive – t-shirt after 10th session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group emails / facebook group</td>
<td>Motivating coach or group</td>
<td>Being asked your goals for attending session</td>
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</tbody>
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Send out emails after each running session because they are a good way to keep everyone linked into the group *Running, London*

Be approachable and friendly and just keep it fun and informal *Football, Midlands*
10 top tips for developing an informal offer
1) Keep in mind the key barriers to participation
Think about the key features of informal settings that are appealing and help women to overcome these barriers.

2) People coming to the sessions have different levels of skill and experience levels
And for some sports (e.g. badminton and running) matching ability levels. New participants need reassurance that the session is about taking part and motivating one another and that specific attainment levels are not needed.

3) Emphasis should be placed on ‘taking part’ and ‘game play’ rather than ‘coaching’
But coaches need to be prepared to provide advice upon request

4) The individual approach is vital - coaches need to understand their participants personal goals for attending

5) The coach is critical to the success of the informal sports setting - participants expectations of coaches may be different than in other setting
More emphasis should be put on enthusiasm and people skills than technical skills – training and qualification pathways need to reflect this.
6) Build a strategy for workforce development and recruitment
Will you use existing qualified coaches, and if so how will this impact on resourcing your informal, and other, offers? Will you design a bespoke course to attract a new workforce?

7) Ensure that marketing materials communicate the key features of informality
Ensure that the appropriate tone and imagery are used – emphasis on friendly, fun, flexibility.

8) Advertise opportunities in a range of places
Consider who you’re trying to reach and where they would be likely to see your messaging.

9) Ensure there is an online presence
A website is the first port of call for many women – it is vital to have a site, even if a very basic one, with information about the offer and how it can be accessed.

10) Make use of social networking opportunities
Dedicated Facebook pages, and even sending group emails, add to the ‘sociability’ and ‘inclusiveness’ of the offer, and enable women to ‘keep in touch’ even if they miss a week.
If you have any questions, please contact insight@wsff.org.uk