

# **KEY FINDINGS FROM GIRLS ACTIVE SURVEY**

November 2017

## Background

We know that girls are not doing as much physical activity as boys. Girls aged 11-18 years old exercise less regularly and for less time than boys. Only 8% of girls meet the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation that young people aged 5 -18 should do 60 minutes of physical activity every day. The figure for boys is double that at 16%.

Understanding young people's attitudes, motivations, barriers and behaviours is the key to increasing their participation in sport and physical activity.

In 2016 Women in Sport and the Youth Sport Trust surveyed over 26,000 students from 138 secondary schools in England and Northern Ireland which had signed up to the Girls Active programme. For the first time, we included boys in our quantitative research, to help us understand the differences and similarities in activity levels and attitudes across both genders (21,000 girls and 5,000 boys).

These insights have been used to improve the sports offering for girls in schools across the UK.

We hope our findings will be used to help teachers and other sports providers offer girls a more tailored programme of activities that meet their needs and encourage wider participation. This will give girls access to numerous physical and mental health benefits as well as the transferable skills and confidence.

The Girls Active programme developed by the Youth Sport Trust and delivered in partnership with This Girl Can and Women in Sport, involves girls in the design and delivery of PE and physical activity in secondary schools. The programme is already having a huge impact. So far 50,000 girls have been reached in 200 schools with a further 200 soon to join programme. Girls are consulted and given leadership positions which give them influence over the PE curriculum, making it more appealing and relevant to their everyday lives.

## Headline statistics

### **Attitudes towards physical activity**

**Both girls and boys understand the importance of an active lifestyle.**

The benefit of regular exercise is recognised by both boys and girls, with over eight out of ten understanding the importance of being active. Although this declines very slightly for both genders with age, it still remains at a high level.

<b>I understand the importance of an active lifestyle</b>		<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
<b>Very/ mostly true</b>	ALL	<b>86%</b>	<b>82%</b>
	11-14 years	<b>86%</b>	<b>82%</b>
	14-16 years	<b>82%</b>	<b>78%</b>

However, although girls recognise the importance of an active lifestyle, there appears to be a disconnect between attitudes and behaviour.

Fewer girls place importance on being active compared to boys, with only just over half stating that physical activity is currently 'an important part of my life'. This becomes even more pronounced when looking at the results for older girls aged 14-16 years.

<b>Physical activity is an important part of my life</b>		<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
<b>Very/ mostly true</b>	ALL	<b>72%</b>	<b>56%</b>
	11-14 years	<b>73%</b>	<b>59%</b>
	14-16 years	<b>64%</b>	<b>42%</b>

**Boys are happier with the amount of physical activity they take part in and enjoy it more.**

The girls who are less happy with current activity levels are more likely to be older (14-16 years), and also 'less active' girls\*, who will probably be doing the vast majority of their physical activity in PE lessons at school. If we are to increase levels of physical activity of girls we need to help them understand the relevance of physical activity to their own lives.

\*Less active definition = one day per week or less outside compulsory PE lessons.

<b>I am happy with the amount of physical activity I do</b>		<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
<b>Very/mostly true</b>	ALL	<b>71%</b>	<b>56%</b>
	11-14 years	<b>72%</b>	<b>60%</b>
	14-16 years	<b>64%</b>	<b>41%</b>

I like taking part in physical activity		Boys	Girls
Like a lot	ALL	54%	40%
	11-14 years	54%	42%
	14-16 years	48%	28%

## Competition in PE

**Competitive PE lessons generally appeals less to girls than boys.**

While competition is clearly important to a significant number of girls (50%), it is valued more by boys. PE lessons need to be varied to appeal to girls who value competition as well as those who don't value it as highly.

I like it when PE lessons are competitive		Boys	Girls
Very/ mostly true	All	70%	50%
	11-14 years old	71%	52%
	14-16 years old	63%	40%

## Barriers

**Dissatisfaction with body image is an underlying issue.**

Satisfaction with body images for girls declines with age. 1 in 4 are unhappy with their body image at 11-14 and this figure increases to 1 in 3 girls by the time they reach 14-16.

I am unhappy with the way my body looks		Boys	Girls
Very/ mostly true	All	16%	27%
	11-14 years old	16%	25%
	14-16 years old	17%	36%

**Issues with confidence and self-consciousness is more prevalent for girls than for boys.**

While boys tended to emphasise practical restrictions to taking part in physical activity at school such as injury, girls identified low confidence and dislike of being watched as significant barriers, particularly in the 14-16-year-old age group.

<b>What stops you taking part in physical activity inside school?</b>		<b>Girls</b>		
<b>Very/ mostly true</b>		<b>All</b>	<b>11-14 years</b>	<b>14-16 years</b>
	I am not confident	<b>28%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>35%</b>
	I don't like other people watching me	<b>27%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>34%</b>
	When I have my period	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>42%</b>
	I am not good at it	<b>24%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>29%</b>
	I don't like boys watching me	<b>21%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>21%</b>

<b>What stops you taking part in physical activity inside school?</b>		<b>Boys</b>		
<b>Very/ mostly True</b>		<b>All</b>	<b>11-14 years</b>	<b>14-16 years</b>
	I am not good at it	<b>13%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>14%</b>
	I am not confident	<b>12%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>13%</b>
	I have an injury	<b>12%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>13%</b>
	I don't enjoy it	<b>11%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>14%</b>
	I don't like the activities on offer	<b>9%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>13%</b>

**Pressure of school work and low confidence are much bigger barriers for girls than boys.**

Outside of school, the main barriers to participation for girls are schoolwork and confidence. Schoolwork becomes the dominant factor when girls are 14-16 years old - more than double the number of girls from this age group cite this as a barrier compared to boys. This suggests girls are prioritising schoolwork at this stage in their lives and need encouragement to stay active.

	What stops you taking part in physical activity outside of school?	Boys			Girls		
		All	11-14	14-16	All	11-14	14-16
Very/ mostly true	Don't have time because of school work	13%	12%	16%	24%	22%	37%
	I am not confident	10%	10%	9%	22%	21%	25%

**Encouragement to be active from both the school and from parents is slightly lower for girls.**

Reported encouragement coming from the school and from parents is certainly slightly lower for girls than it is for boys. This feels like a contributory factor, particularly amongst the older 14-16 year olds and less active girls in the sample, which, if addressed, would help encourage girls to continue an active lifestyle.

Encouragement		Boys	Girls
True	My school encourages me to take part in sport and physical activity	72%	64%
True	My parents encourage me to be active and take part in sport	76%	67%

## Life Skills

**Girls do not relate PE to their everyday lives as much as boys.**

When girls were asked specifically about their attitudes towards PE and school sport, less than half (45%) said that it teaches them skills relevant to their day-to-day life in contrast to 60% for boys. Once again, we see that once girls get to age 14-16 years PE becomes even less relevant. We need to investigate further whether this requires more messaging around the broader benefits, as well as reviewing the curriculum themselves.

The skills I learn in PE are relevant in my day to day life		Boys	Girls
Very/ mostly true	ALL	60%	45%
	11-14 years old	63%	49%
	14-16 years old	47%	29%

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for schools as a way to engage girls in PE and physical activity. These recommendations are based on the principles of the Girls Active programme.

1. Make PE and physical activity relevant to girls' lives.
2. Empower girls through involving them in design and delivery of PE and physical activities.
3. Develop role models by using girls as positive influencers and advocates with their peer group.
4. Place developing self-confidence at the heart of PE and physical activity.
5. Recognise the power of friends to drive progress.
6. Take a long-term approach to engaging girls.

## About Women in Sport

Women in Sport is the leading UK charity dedicated to transforming sport for the benefit of every woman and girl in the UK.

Our vision is a society where gender equality exists in every sphere. The charity works to advance gender equality by empowering women and girls through sport, from early years and throughout her life and by transforming the sport sector itself; making sure women and men have equal opportunities in sport, from the field of play to the boardroom.

## About Girls Active

The Girls Active programme aims to make a positive difference by improving girls' attitudes to school, raising girls' confidence and self-esteem and increasing levels participation in PE, sport and physical activity among girls. Funded by Sport England National Lottery and delivered by the Youth Sport Trust in partnership with Women in Sport and This Girl Can, it aims to tackle declining participation in physical activity by adolescent girls and its associated implications for health, wellbeing and academic attainment.

## About Youth Sport Trust

The Youth Sport Trust is a charity on a mission to build a brighter future for young people through PE and school sport. We believe that every child has the right to be physically active through high quality PE and school sport, with a huge body of evidence showing it has the power to improve young people's health, wellbeing and potential in life. Through more than 20 years of expertise and partnerships with schools we've developed unique solutions to maximise the power of sport to grow young people, improve their wellbeing and enhance their life chances.