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## Girls Active Northern Ireland- Impact Report: 2016-2020

July 2020



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## Executive Summary

Girls Active was developed by the Youth Sport Trust as a result of a two-year research and pilot study in 2015, aimed at tackling the negative attitudes that girls have towards their body image, improve their attitude towards PE, and to work with schools to make sport more relevant to girls' lives. In addition to the programme's implementation in England, Girls Active has had a strong presence in Northern Ireland from 2016 - to which this report is dedicated to exploring. The Girls Active implementation continues to evolve and be informed by the latest research and insight gathered each year through surveys and monitoring and evaluation. From interviews, focus groups, surveys and evaluations conducted about Girls Active, we can learn from examples of best practice. Examples, further outlined in this report, include:

- Using Girls Active to develop leadership opportunities for girls can improve girls' understanding of the relevance of the skills acquired through PE, sport and physical activity in their lives.
- Acting upon an appreciation that having fun and being with friends are key motivations for girls to take part in sport, physical education and activity. An appreciation of this can lead to innovative additions to (extra)curricular provision and move away from "traditional" activities.
- Providing CPD opportunities for PE teachers serves to fill a gap in the market and can upskill teachers to be ambassadors for the Girls Active programme.
- Ensuring the programme does not exist in a silo from the rest of the school, and the wider community beyond the school. Forging connections with local authorities, community groups, universities and leisure providers can serve to safeguard the sustainability and contribute to a longer-term impact of the programme.

Furthermore, from the 2019/2020 Girls Active survey, of which was completed by 969 Year 8-14 students, we can also learn about the motivations and barriers to participating in PE, physical activity and sport. This invaluable insight from this version of the yearly baseline survey shows the challenging and rewarding work that can still be done to empower more girls to lead healthy and active lifestyles.

### Motivations to participate...



**66%**

To have fun



**62%**

To be healthy



**58%**

To spend time with friends

### Barriers to participate...



**36%**

When I have my period



**29%**

I am not confident



**27%**

I don't like other people watching me

# Girls Active 2016-2020

This summary has been produced by the Youth Sport Trust's Research and Insight (R&I) Team. It highlights the headline statistics relating to the reach and impact of Girls Active in **Northern Ireland** between 2016-2020.

## Reach



**33 schools engaged**



**11,618 girls engaged  
through Girls Active**



**470 Girls Active  
Leaders Trained**



**+100 teachers  
trained & 22 CPD  
events**

## Impact



**Impact on girls as  
participants**

Girls Active has increased participation and improved attitudes towards physical activity, attracting those not currently active and not engaging in school sport.

Behaviour, confidence and wellbeing of participants has also improved.



**Impact on teachers**

Girls Active has provided teacher training and Continuous Professional Development opportunities, in addition to catalysing a consideration of how PE is assessed.



**Impact on girls as  
leaders**

Girls Active encourages empathy and leadership qualities and provides life skills. Relationships between teachers and students have improved, with a greater empathy between both.



**Wider school impact**

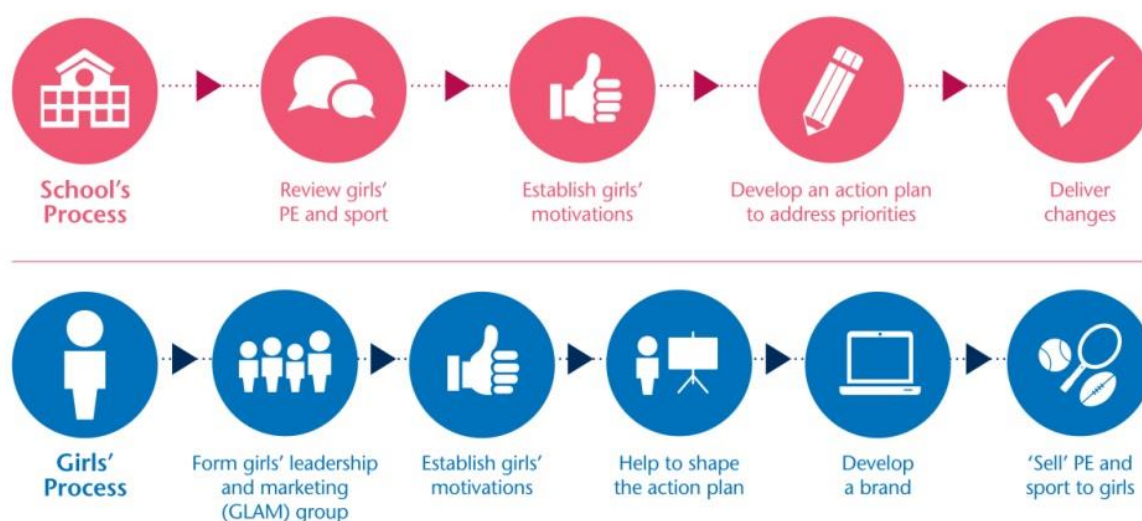
Girls Active has boosted the profile of PE departments, and helped forge further relationships with local authorities, other schools and stakeholders.

## Introduction

### What is Girls Active?

Girls Active Northern Ireland (hereon-in Girls Active) is an award-winning, school-based intervention designed to provide a support framework for schools to **review and increase participation in physical education (PE), sport and physical activity by adolescent girls**. Girls Active was developed by the Youth Sport Trust (YST) and delivered in partnership with Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council. The programme received funding from Sport Northern Ireland via the Department for Communities. It began as a pilot programme in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABC Council) area in 2016/17 when it was delivered to 10 Secondary Schools. In 2017/18, it expanded into the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC Council) area. Since then it has further expanded into new areas to encompass 33 Secondary Schools across 4 Local Authority areas.

In Figure 1, we see a summary of both the process for schools and girls involved in Girls Active.



*Figure 1: The process for action- Girls Active*

Girls Active starts with **professional development for teachers**, enabling them to reflect on practice and provision within school; supporting them to ensure that girls are integral to designing, marketing and delivering opportunities to their peers and helping them to develop relevant and attractive PE, sport and physical activity opportunities. It introduces them to the concept of a **Girls Leadership and Marketing Squad (GLAMS)** which is an integral part of the programme designed to empower girls to influence PE, sport and physical activity in their school, develop them as role models, and promote and market physical activity to other girls. Teachers are encouraged to select a range of girls to be involved within the GLAMS, including both sporty and non-sporty girls, with a range of abilities, skills and perspectives. This is to ensure that the group is reflective of the school population and that they can truly understand the barriers that some girls face to get active and can communicate and motivate a wide range of their peers. Both teachers and GLAMS receive resources in order to support them in their roles.

Once identified and recruited, the Girls Active leaders within the GLAMS attend an annual **Girls Active Inspiration Day**. The day is designed to inspire and motivate the girls and better prepare them for their role as Girls Active Leaders and GLAMS. The girls take part in several workshops focusing on leadership, role models, marketing and action planning to inspire them and better prepare them to take on a leadership and marketing role within each of their schools to encourage more girls to become physically active. Teachers also attend further training on this day to support them to support their GLAMS groups back in school and to begin action planning alongside their GLAMS at this event.

Once GLAMS and PE teachers return to their schools after attendance at the Inspiration Day, they finalise their action plans, agree mechanisms for meeting with each other, and then start planning, marketing and delivering their ideas to get more girls active and make PE, sport and physical activity more relevant to girls' lives.

Schools are supported by a Project Officer based in Northern Ireland who is seconded from ABC Council, with regular meetings with both teachers and GLAMS to support where necessary. Further support is also provided from the Sport Development teams at ABC Council and LCCC Council who support with providing school-club links to ensure a pathway from school participation into the community or club setting as well as providing increased opportunities for leadership development through community sport development initiatives.

### Why Girls Active?

Girls Active is particularly important because of the well-known benefits physical activity has in improving health and wellbeing. A programme specifically for girls is significant because it explicitly responds to contemporary research which informs us that girls are less active than boys, for a myriad of reasons. Indeed, Sport England's Active Lives 2019 (Sport England, 2019) survey states that there is an 8% gap between girls and boys aged 5-16 with reference to which gender is most active. Further research by the World Health Organisation (2019) tell us that, globally, between 2001 and 2016, insufficient inactivity levels decreased in boys; yet there was no change in girls' activity levels over this time. In this article, the WHO's Dr Fiona Bull remarks that 'countries must...allocate the necessary resources to increase physical activity'. Therefore, the award-winning Girls Active can be regarded as leading the charge on this and could provide a template for success. Simultaneously, Girls Active follows what the medical journal The Lancet (2019) regards as key ingredients to encouraging girls to be more physically active: tackling prevailing sociocultural attitudes and providing better access and investment to girls' activities.

The benefits of improved provision of Physical Education, physical activity and sports for girls can also help to improve girls' academic attainment, with Public Health England remarking that pupils with better health and wellbeing are likely to achieve better academically (NAHT, 2014). The same document reports that pupils engaging in 'self-development activities (including sport, physical activity)' achieved 10-20% higher GCSE marks. Thus, Girls Active has the potential to make a timely contribution to participants' lives, in addition to the benefits to the teachers, and the wider school community, as will be discussed.

## Programme Reach

The table below shows the reach of Girls Active by academic year.

From Table 1, we can see the growth of the Girls Active programme between 2016 and 2020, with the number of girls developed as leaders increasing year-on-year, in addition to the number of girls engaged as participants.

**Table 1: Programme Reach**

PROGRAMME REACH BY ACADEMIC YEAR					
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
<b>Cumulative total number of schools engaged</b>	10	17	27	33	33
<b>Number of girls engaged as participants</b>	1463	2138	4017	4000*	11,618
<b>Number of girls developed as leaders</b>	65	129	136	140	470
<b>Number of girls developed as peer mentors</b>				20	20

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
<b>Total Participants</b>	1463	2138	4017	4000*
<b>BAME</b>	No information	162	183	
<b>Disability</b>	141	298	426	

*\*Due to school closures, Youth Sport Trust was unable to get full data reporting back from schools for the 2019-20 academic year and therefore data has been extrapolated based on numbers of schools engaged and previous averages per year.*

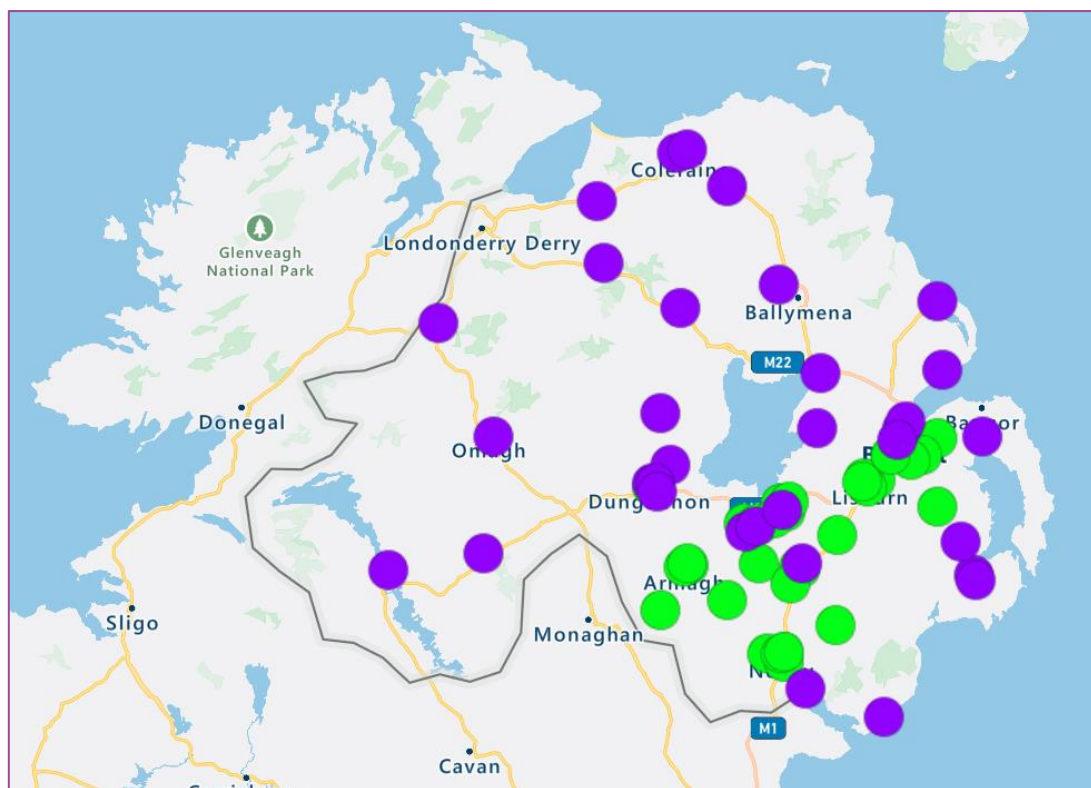


### Schools engaged:

In Figure 2, we can see the schools engaged through Girls Active (Green). Additionally, we see the schools that had a wider engagement with the Youth Sport Trust (Purple). In total, 33 schools engaged through the programme, and 66 had a wider engagement through YST.

In addition to what we learn from Table 1 and Figure 2, over 100 teachers have been trained through the Girls Active programme; with 22 Continuous Professional Development events held. Additionally, 24 students from Ulster University have been engaged through the programme.

Thus, it can be summarised, the reach of Girls Active in Northern Ireland has encompassed a growing number of schools, and subsequently, the numbers of participants and teachers is growing.



*Figure 2: Heat map of schools that have engaged with YST*



## The impact of Girls Active

This impact section will focus on findings from one-to-one interviews, focus groups, surveys and evaluations and will focus on the wide-ranging impact of the Girls Active programme in Northern Ireland.

There are 4 main components that can frame an understanding of the impact of the Girls Active programme.

1. The impact on girls as participants
2. The impact on girls as leaders
3. The impact on teachers and as a whole school approach
4. Wider impact as a result of the Girls Active programme

### 1: Impact on girls as participants

To date, over 11,000 participants have engaged through the Girls Active programme across 33 secondary schools. This has resulted in a range of ideas and initiatives as follows:

- Engaging with more lifestyle based activities in PE including boxercise, pilates, yoga, zumba, hip hop dance, salsa, gym, couch to 5k, walking club, glow sports
- Broader range of extra-curricular activities, including girls' football and rugby which traditionally would have been seen as "male dominated" activities. Other extra-curricular activities have included breakfast table tennis, badminton and fitness clubs, lunch time dodgeball and dance clubs and afterschool couch to 5k club, walking club and social netball.
- Multi-sport extra-curricular activities including "Fit 4 Summer" and "Funday Monday" with an emphasis on fun and variety for all involved
- Girls Active Week – A week long marketing campaign involving breakfast, lunchtime and afterschool activities, teacher/pupil challenge activities, assemblies etc
- Girls Active Inspiration Day / Health & Wellbeing Days – A full day of fun activities for girls, including an athlete role model speech, and various different activities designed to inspire and motivate girls to get more active and lead healthier lifestyles
- Alternative Sports Days – Colour Runs, Big Wipeout Course, Fitness Freddy, Dance Festivals
- Increased consultation with girls including seeking views and co-designing PE kit, increased choice of activities or options within PE
- Introduction of music in changing rooms and lessons
- Changes in assessment criteria in PE to include life skills development instead of just assessing the sporting level reached

Through these ideas and initiatives, there are myriad ways that Girls Active had an impact on the girls as participants, as Figure 3 demonstrates.

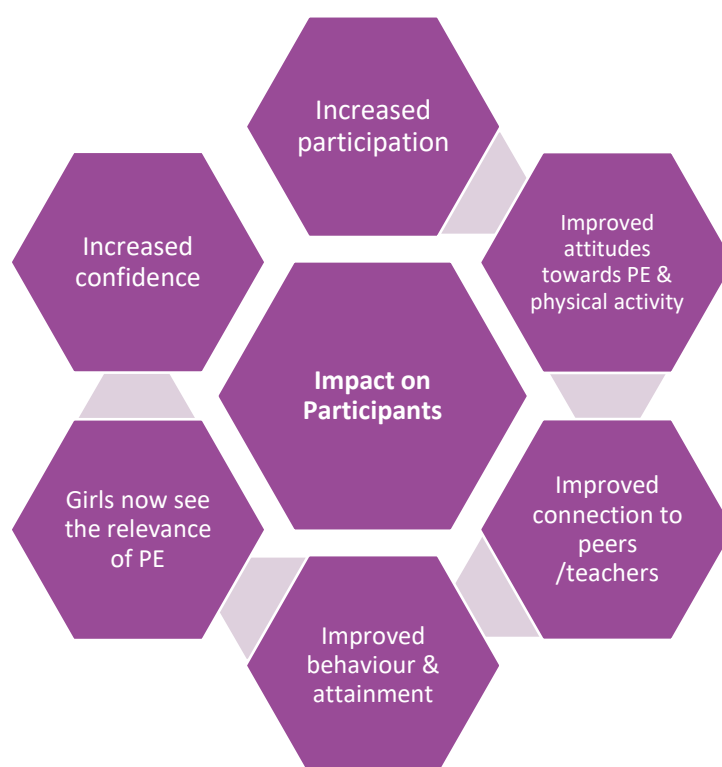


Figure 3: Summary diagram of impact on participants

### Increased participation and improved attitudes towards physical activity

*Girls Active has successfully attracted inactive girls and those who are not currently engaging in school sport:*

Teachers have reported an increase in the number of girls taking part in PE, and increased numbers of girls attending extra-curricular activities. At a number of schools, girls have been offered a wider range of activities to take part in, both during curriculum time and as extra-curricular activities. Some schools have particularly focused on the “non-sporty” or “non-participants” ensuring there is an offer for those that just want to participate recreationally e.g. morning badminton and table tennis clubs, girls soccer and rugby clubs, Fit 4 Summer club, multi-activity clubs etc.

These recreational clubs are much more inclusive as the girls know that it doesn’t matter whether they are “good” or not, and that it’s about having fun with friends.

*“Doing this [rugby] is fun. You’re not being judged on how good you are, and you don’t have to be the best at it. It’s not like the sports that you’re carrying on from primary where some girls are already really good”. (Participant)*

*“We’ve helped more girls to do PE. Before some weren’t bringing their kit in, but now nearly all take part”. (GLAM)*

Also, schools have offered special events and innovative activities such as glow in the dark sports, Zumba, Boxercise, Girls Active Inspiration Days and other lifestyle activities. Girls who might not previously have enjoyed “traditional” sports have been encouraged to participate in physical activity and have come to see PE as more interesting and fun. Through this challenging of the dominance of traditional sports, the dominance of more able girls participating becomes less significant as PE is framed as fun, modern and exciting.

Girls themselves have reported that their interest in PE and extra-curricular activities has increased, and that they have greater confidence in their abilities and so are more willing to take part.

This achievement of improving attitudes towards sport is significant, in particular in aims to improve the number of girls who complete the Chief Medical Officer’s recommendation of 60 active minutes per day. Only 9% of girls said this was the case, in the 2019/2020 Girls Active survey, which is a yearly baseline survey completed by students at partaking Girls Active schools. Key to the improved participation and attitudes to sport was “fun” activities, which, in the 2019/2020 Girls Active survey, 66% of respondents said that “to have fun” was a key motivation to taking part in sport, physical activity and PE.

### Improved wellbeing and confidence

*Girls Active allows girls to experience a competitive sport without feeling pressured to be “good”:*

Girls who have had the opportunity to participate in rugby and football as a result of Girls Active have particularly welcomed engaging in sports that are traditionally seen as “for boys”. This has increased their confidence and although the clubs are not run on a competitive basis, taking part in sports where everyone is on a more equal footing (compared to some of the more traditional clubs/sport teams), has encouraged them to express their competitiveness in a “safe” environment.

The extra-curricular clubs have helped to alleviate pressure on some girls, by giving them positive reasons to come to school and opportunities to participate in something which they enjoy and are good at. Participation in some of the activities has generated a sense of pride and girls report that this has improved their self-esteem and helped them deal with problems they may be facing elsewhere in their school life – socially or academically.

*“At primary school we didn’t do much in PE that was new... but this really encourages you, it’s helped me as if there’s something new every day to try and it doesn’t matter if it’s a boys’ or a girls’ sport”. (Participant)*

*“Between Year 8 and Year 10 PE has become a lot more fun. It’s got harder, but in a good way”. (Participant)*

*“I know I’m good at something, so it just makes me feel better about coming to school, even if I’m find the work hard”. (Participant)*

*“Girls rugby is just different, not a lot of girls do it and it’s good to give people an equal chance to do things... It makes you feel more confident to be doing something that is typically for boys”. (Participant)*

*“Going to the club after school means you don’t worry so much about your academics. It gives you another reason for coming to school”. (Participant)*

*“You feel good about yourself, it helps you get through the school day, especially if things are hard”. (Participant)*

Girls themselves acknowledge how participation in physical activity helps in reducing stress by giving them time/space away from problems with friends or academic work, and some have sought to continue this outside the school environment by joining community sports clubs to further help in managing anxiety.

*"I've joined a netball club outside school and it's really helped me stop worrying about things".  
(Participant)*

As a result of participating in a range of different activities that they may not have tried before, the girls report that they are now more prepared to try other new things and to believe that it's always good to give something a go.

*"You might try something like the high jump and find that you're not that bad. It's good to try something new and see what else you can do... Everyone should take the opportunity".  
(Participant)*

Whilst only 42% of girls said that their confidence was "good" in the 2019/2020 Girls Active survey, here, we can see the importance of physical activity, which can serve as a key mechanism for improving this score.

### **Improved behaviour and attainment**

Participants themselves report that their confidence in the classroom has been improved by participating in a wider array of sports and activities that they enjoy, and therefore has boosted their sense of self-esteem. Seeing themselves improving and developing skills through hard work demonstrates to these girls the values of perseverance, resilience and encourages them to believe they can make changes and improvements in other aspects of their life, including their schoolwork. To this end, we can understand the role, sport, physical activity and physical education can have in developing vital skills necessary for the school environment- such as resilience.

## 2: Impact on girls as leaders



*Figure 4: Impact on Girls as Leaders summary diagram*

A distinguishing feature of the Girls Active programme is the emphasis on using sport, PE and physical activity as a vehicle to develop leadership skills for girls. In Appendix A, the Girls Active Inspiration Day and Coaches Camp are explored further as key training events for girls as leaders. As visualised in Figure 4, there are many subsequent ways that Girls Active has had an impact on participants as leaders. Therefore, continuing to offer leadership opportunities may perhaps help to boost the number of girls who want to be leaders inside, or outside of the school environment.

### **Improved attitudes to physical activity and confidence to be a role model**

*Girls Active encourages empathy and leadership qualities:*

With training and increased responsibility, the GLAMS understand their position as role-models to the rest of their peers. They have developed an understanding of why some girls don't participate in sport and have actively tried to encourage them (e.g. by running alongside slower girls in cross-country, picking more mixed teams in PE lessons or passing the ball more to other girls in hockey). They recognise they have a role to play in promoting the benefits of physical activity and they talk to other girls about what difference sport can make and why it's important for your health and body image/self-esteem.

*"It's opened my eyes and made us realise that there are lots of girls who feel insecure about doing sport. We're so fortunate that we're confident, so now we try to help them a bit more. We explain why they should do it and hopefully they see us doing it and see us confident and enjoying it".*

*(GLAM)*

## Building stronger relationships with teachers and peers

Through their involvement in the range of Girls Active activities and speaking to and working with staff, the GLAMS have built their confidence in interacting with adults; they have enjoyed discovering sports that they love, in common with their teachers.

*“When the teachers told their sports stories, you could find the sports you did in common with them”. (GLAM)*

GLAMS also have a greater appreciation of PE teachers’ experiences and the challenges they face in engaging girls in PE; this further supports their sense of responsibility as role-models and in encouraging their peers to participate.

*“You realise not everyone’s the same but if you do a range of activities then you give everyone the chance to find what they like”. (GLAM)*

*Girls Active enhances tolerance and understanding of others and their differences:*

Their experience as GLAMS has helped them to realise that many girls feel insecure about their physical appearance and as a result, are reluctant to take part in sport. GLAMS are now more supportive of, and understanding towards, these girls in PE lessons and extra-curricular activities.

*“The GLAMS have understood that some girls don’t enjoy sports and they haven’t been nasty about it, but they’ve thought about what they can do to help”. (Teacher)*

*“My GLAMS squad have been amazing. They’ve blown me away. Every week/month, they come up with new ideas. They’re so enthusiastic and have such a passion to get more girls active”. (Teacher)*

*Girls Active creates opportunities to make new friends:*

GLAMS themselves recognise the value of new friendships and appreciate the opportunity to extend their networks – both with the other GLAMS in their schools, but also with peers who they might otherwise have assumed they have little in common with.

*“Some of us are moving on to new schools now and because we’ve mixed and mingled with other girls, we’ve got wider friendship groups”. (GLAM)*

### MINI CASE STUDY 1 – FILOMENA

*Filomena arrived in Year 8 as a shy but enthusiastic pupil who was always willing to get involved but had limited sporting or leadership experience. Since becoming involved in the school GLAMS group and attending both the Girls Active Inspiration Day and Girls Active Coaches Camp NI, Filomena’s confidence has flourished. She regularly leads the warm ups and cool down for her peers, both in PE and in extra-curricular activities. She always strives to do her best in any activity and actively encourages all those around her to do the same. She has found the confidence to express her opinions in front of teachers and her peers and exemplifies what a positive role model should be. Filomena has since moved on to a senior high school, however returned back to her original school to meet the new Year 8s and support them during one of their PE sessions.*



## School life: improved mental wellbeing and confidence

Girls Active promotes confidence to speak out and the experiences that these girls have had as leaders has made a very positive difference to the girls' confidence and self-belief. With just 42% of girls rating their confidence as "Good" in the 2019/2020 Girls Active survey, the below ways in which Girls Active improved confidence and wellbeing through leadership opportunities can only be celebrated:

- Sharing their ideas with other GLAMS in their school and also at the Girls Active inspiration Day with other schools, and then seeing their ideas come to fruition has boosted their self-assurance; *'We realised our ideas were good'.* (GLAM)
- Pride in the impact that their words and actions have had on other girls
- Discovering the value of their own voice and opinions and not being afraid to put their ideas forward

GLAMS report that their increased confidence means they are happier to speak up in class, as well as to take risks and put themselves forward in the sports or teams that they participate in. For those girls who are moving on from their school, they are more confident about their next steps, and have a greater depth of resilience and self-belief to draw on.

*"It's ok to have your own voice and opinions. It's important to speak out and believe in what you're saying". (GLAM)*

### MINI CASE STUDY 2– ELLIE E

*Ellie has thrived during her involvement with her school's GLAMS group, due to her enthusiasm, leadership and determination to get more girls active in her school. Ellie has been involved in creating student questionnaires to find out the barriers to participation in PE and extra-curricular activities, and utilised the results to come up with new activities such as recreational girls' football and girls' rugby, morning badminton & table tennis clubs and dance. She came up with the idea of a "Rise and Shine, it's Get Active time" morning fitness club, and helped to lead the delivery of this class to group of 30 girls. She also took a lead role in the organisation of the school flashmob designed to promote body positivity and engage more girls in physical activity. Ellie has also developed her presentation skills, delivering numerous presentations within school, as well as speaking to key stakeholders involved in the project such as Sport NI and Department for Communities and to a group from the Education and Training Inspectorate.*

## Improved life skills

The GLAMS have driven organisation of activities, helping them develop important skills around time management and organisation. They have also developed leadership skills through organising other pupils, liaising with teachers and setting a good example to younger girls. At schools which have held transition events, the GLAMS helped to support and encourage younger, primary school, pupils and worked with the primary school teachers to ensure a successful event.

The GLAMS have also gained from working together in a group – building skills in negotiating and working with others and learning the value of when and how to compromise for a common goal.

The impact of Girls Active on “girls as leaders” pushes further what we learnt from understanding the programme’s “impact as participants”. Leadership opportunities further underline how Girls Active can improve attitudes and regular participation in physical education, physical activity and sport; in addition to contributing further to broadening the skillset of girls involved. Therefore, the leadership aspect of the Girls Active programme must be considered as integral to its successful implementation, with best practice involving not just selecting “sporty” girls for leadership roles and encouraging creativity and skills development at every possible opportunity.

*“In your own sport now, you’re more confident to help the team, to speak up about what you think should happen”. (GLAM)*

*“When you’re out there playing sport, it calms you down, you don’t think about your exams, you just focus on the game”. (GLAM)*

*“We’ve had to be quite independent, organising stuff and showing younger ones around”. (GLAM)*

*“We were quite nervous about the primary schools coming in, but by the end we were chatting away to them”. (GLAM)*

### MINI CASE STUDY 3 – ELLIE T

*Ellie T as part of the school GLAMS group has been instrumental in the success of the school’s ‘Mothers and Daughters’ weekly evening class initiative. Ellie and her fellow GLAMS recognised the need to have parental involvement in an activity at the school to showcase PE, school sport and physical activity and break down barriers for their own and their peers mothers. Ellie supported the delivery of this class, organising participants into teams and officiating. She turned up every evening along with her own mother to support this class, and continually encouraged her friends and peers to do likewise, resulting in over 20 participants each week. Such was the success of the pilot 6-week programme, that it was continued into the summer term.*

### 3: Impact on teachers



*Figure 5: The impact of Girls Active on teachers*

This section explores the various ways in which Girls Active has had an impact on the teachers in schools which the programme has been implemented in.

#### **Teacher training & CPD opportunities**

Each academic year, a Girls Active teacher training day has been organised for schools as part of the network of schools involved. During this day, 2 sessions have been on offer; an initial Girls Active training workshop for new schools and a peer review workshop for existing schools.

Evaluations from these workshops have been fantastic with 100% of teachers rating these training events as either “good” or “very good”. During initial engagement with teachers, they reported having very limited access to CPD in their roles as PE teachers, as well as very limited opportunities to come together to network and share best practice.

Throughout the training opportunities, teachers have received a plethora of resources to support them throughout the Girls Active process. This has included resources for them as teachers and leads in this project as well as resources for the GLAMS to better support them in their role.

*“Very good training and resources. We had time to discuss and get ideas from teachers and those already in the programme. Very useful”. (Teacher)*

*“I found the training excellent and the tutor was very enthusiastic and inspiring, whilst being ‘real’ about the challenges we face in our jobs as PE teachers. Inspired by the levels of supporting being offered to take the programme on”. (Teacher)*

It was recognised that there was an opportunity to further upskill teachers above and beyond the Girls Active programme. Through continued funding from Sport NI and the Department for Communities, it was possible to arrange a wide array of further opportunities for teachers and senior leaders within schools. These opportunities have included:

- 3 x Power of Engaging Girls in PE Workshops
- The Power of PE Workshop
- 2 x My Personal Best Workshops
- 1 x ½ Day My Personal Best Workshop
- 1 x Youth Sport Award Training Day
- 1 x Mentoring Workshop

Through engagement with schools, it was established that there was little provision or opportunities for PE teachers to receive Physical Education CPD within Northern Ireland, and Girls Active has been the catalyst for plugging this gap.

### **New ways of approaching PE**

For teachers, Girls Active has helped to develop positive relationships with the girls involved, through increased consultation with them and actively listening to their ideas and opinions. This continuous process of consultation has meant the girls have felt valued and listened to and therefore engagement levels have been better. Furthermore, this has required trust on behalf of the teachers who have given responsibility to these girls to consult, market and deliver new activities within school.

Through training opportunities and support from the YST, the teachers have become more effective advocates for PE. Like the GLAMS, PE Teachers have also found their voice within the School, ensuring that the purpose and value of PE, school sport and physical activity is demonstrated across the whole school. Through increased awareness of the programme, this has effectively supported engagement with other teachers across the school whom have then got involved with the PE department, either through supporting GLAMS directly or getting involved in the supervision or delivery of breakfast, lunchtime or afterschool clubs.

Teachers have also reflected on the assessment and reporting for PE for their students. Some schools have completely changed their assessment criteria, moving away from measuring only physical competencies, but also assessing life skills development e.g. assessing communication, team-working skills, decision making etc. It can be said then, that both Girls Active can result in the delivery of a more vibrant and engaging curriculum, supported with career development opportunities that can added value to their responsibilities as a PE teacher.

#### **4: Wider Impact**

In addition to the impact that Girls Active has on girls as participants and leaders, and the teachers within the schools the programme is implemented in, it is important to reflect upon the wider impact the programme has; with this encompassing the wider school and community.

***Girls Active promotes the value of girls' PE amongst a wider group which positively impacts staff and girls at the school:***

The Girls Active programme has helped to create more of a “buzz” around girls PE now, and that girls who might previously have missed PE lessons are now more involved and interest in PE/physical activity.

*“A pupil has stopped bringing notes all the time and therefore has increased her participation. She now enjoys most activities because she had self-confidence issues and negative attitudes towards PE, but the fitness week and glow-sports has brought her out of her shell because she enjoyed it and no one made comments. Therefore, this has carried her forwards and made her attitude switch towards a more positive attitude and enthusiasm for sport”. (Teacher)*

*“One pupil who never did PE and was usually unable to participate due to medical issues, was involved in the walk and talk each week and absolutely loved that she could do PE with her friends again. She came to class smiling and ready to go, was happy and excited, and not her usual quiet, sulky self”. (Teacher)*

PE teachers also feel that participation in Girls Active means that their department is increasingly recognised by the rest of the school as engaged, innovative and as having a broad impact on pupils' education and development of life skills.

*“It's raised the profile of sport in the school and as a department it sets us apart...” (Teacher)*

***Girls Active enhances the perception of the school amongst prospective pupils and parents.***

Teachers are pleased that Girls Active has helped to increase positive perceptions of the school among prospective parents and pupils. Competition between schools is keenly felt, and particularly so in Northern Ireland where families can opt into a grammar school system. Parents are often interested in understanding PE provision and sporting success in the schools they are considering, and schools are able to provide positive stories about girls' PE as a result of Girls Active. Many schools now have their own school PE social media pages, which help showcase the range of activities going on within school to engage with pupils, parents and the wider community.

*“Hopefully it will help to boost the numbers of people choosing to come to this school. There's so much competition and you do find on open nights that parents are interested in what sports there are, and clubs and what competitions the school plays in”. (Teacher)*

Many schools have involved their GLAMS in transition events with feeder primary schools. The GLAMS have been involved in the planning and delivery of these events, supporting younger prospective students. This has helped to showcase the school's commitment to girls' PE and to establish early positive attitudes towards physical activity with the new intake of girls and their parents.

***Girls Active has helped develop partnerships with local councils and community clubs:***

Developing partnerships with Local Authorities, Everybody Active 2020 Coaches, National Governing Bodies (NGBs), local sports clubs has enabled a greater range of activities to be delivered including girls' football, girls' rugby, table tennis, glow sports and hip-hop dance. Also, linking with local gyms and leisure centres has enabled the girls to visit local facilities and try out new exercises with qualified instructors. Girls tend to enjoy these sessions delivered by external providers. It also helps to build links with these external providers to provide the girls a pathway from school sport to the community so they can develop lifelong participation in sport and physical activity.

Working with Disability Sport Northern Ireland, several schools took part in the "My Sport, My Story" workshop, helping them to understand the life of a local Boccia athlete, and allowing them to try out various disability sports. Working with Table Tennis Ulster and support from ABC Council through the Every Body Active 2020 Small Grant, leaders from 3 Girls Active Schools came together to complete their Foundation Table Tennis Award which then enabled them with support from their teachers to set up girls only table tennis clubs within their schools and deliver 8-10 weeks of activities.

***Girls Active has helped develop partnerships with Local Authorities:***

The Youth Sport Trust (YST) have developed excellent links with both ABC Council and LCCC Council through their Sport Development Departments. They have been fully committed and supportive of the Girls Active programme. The programme aligns itself very well with the key aims and objectives of both Councils with teenage girls 14+ years being a major focus in terms of participation. Both Councils have willingly provided staff members to assist with the Girls Active Inspiration Day and the support of the Every Body Active 2020 Coaches has been invaluable in delivering extra-curricular activities. The Sports Development teams have excellent links with the local community including sports clubs, leisure facilities and community groups and this has been instrumental in providing exit routes for the girls to link in with the local community and ensure lifelong participation.

***Girls Active has helped develop and strengthen partnerships with Active, Fit & Sporty Partners:***

YST have engaged extensively with the Active, Fit & Sporty Partners, strengthening partnership working within the Northern Ireland network and delivering and supporting organisations in delivering shared outcomes.

YST have supported the Female Sports Forum in their conferences with keynotes from former Chair, Baroness Sue Campbell and current CEO Ali Oliver, both focusing on leadership and embedding cultural change within organisations. National Programmes Director Emily Reynolds has also delivered



a workshop for delegates sharing research from YST and looking at how we can best engage girls in sport, physical activity and PE.

A fantastic partnership with the School of Sport at Ulster University has been developed throughout the programme. YST has delivered two “Power of Engaging Girls in PE” workshops to over 100 students undertaking the PE, Theory and Practice module. This interactive workshop introduced students to the key insights and proven principles for engaging all girls in physical activity. These workshops were supported by teachers from the Girls Active programme who shared their experiences of teaching, as well as how they have applied their learning from the Girls Active programme to engage more girls in PE, sport and physical activity.

Another important element of the partnership with Ulster University has been the leadership development of their students. Twenty-four students within the university have had opportunities to volunteer at each of the 4 Girls Active Inspiration Days. This has involved mentoring younger girls throughout the day, checking and challenging them, as well as providing logistical support on the day, therefore enhancing their mentoring skills as well as learning about event management and logistics. One student has availed of the opportunity to take part in the full YST Team Leader programme, which has seen her attend multiple training workshops in England and volunteer at UK wide events such as the Girls Active Coaches Camp in Loughborough as well as the Girls Active Coaches Camp NI in Jordanstown.

#### *Girls Active has helped develop partnerships within the Education Sector:*

Productive links have been developed between YST and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). YST, along with our partners ABC and LCCC Councils and Sport NI had the opportunity to share the Girls Active and My Personal Best work with senior officers within the ETI , promoting the purpose of PE in the curriculum, and how we can best engage with girls in and through PE. Girls Active Leaders from Killicomaine Junior High School shared their Girls Active leadership journey and why the programme had been so important to them.

#### *Sharing best practice with key stakeholders and schools:*

Two conferences have been delivered to share best practice with a range of key stakeholders. The first insight session in Craigavon in January 2018 was well attended by over 50 delegates from a range of key stakeholders including Sport NI, Department for Communities, Local Authorities, National Governing Bodies, Ulster University and the Education Authority. This event focused on the launch of the Girls Active NI Impact Report 2016/17, sharing key insights and research from the Girls Active pilot project, as well as developing new partnerships with organisations such as Ulster University and NGB's who YST subsequently worked with through its Girls Active Coaches Camp NI and a girls leadership programme with Table Tennis Ulster.

The “YST School Sport & Physical Activity in Education Conference” took place in Craigavon in September 2019 and brought together Headteachers, PE Teachers and Local Authorities with each having their own dedicated focused workshops. In total, over 50 delegates attended involving schools from across Northern Ireland. The Headteacher and PE sessions focused on the purpose, and more

importantly the value of PE, physical activity and school sport within schools, incorporating health and wellbeing, developing life skills and contributing towards a whole school vision of physically and mentally healthy learners.

Sports Development Officers from 7 Local Authorities attended this conference with this workshop focusing on how ABC & LCCC Council have engaged with and benefitted from a relationship with YST to date, as well as exploring how the YST portfolio, strategy and approach can support them with Community Planning. From this meeting, it was established that 4 further Local Authorities would like to become involved in the Girls Active project across Northern Ireland alongside our existing Council partners, ABC Council and LCCC Council. These further 4 local authorities would be interested, conditional upon the same funding model being repeated for the Girls Active programme.

### *Emerging Tutor Scheme:*

Two PE Teachers successfully completed a one-year bespoke training and professional development opportunity to develop their tutoring and mentoring skills. The “Emerging Tutor” programme was designed to support both teachers, through a comprehensive programme working with a Senior Tutor within the YST. This involved an initial self-review to benchmark strengths and weaknesses so that an individual focus area could be agreed upon for development.

Both teachers had the opportunity to shadow and co-tutor with the senior YST tutor at three CPD events including co-tutoring at the Girls Active teacher training day, tutoring the GLAMS workshops at the Inspiration Day and tutoring the Power of Engaging Girls in PE workshop with Ulster University Students. The programme also included regular Skype review meetings to check and challenge and to review learning to date.

Both individuals now have excellent knowledge of the Girls Active training and would be in a position to deliver standalone training for schools in future.

### *Engaging principals and senior leaders within schools:*

Three specific engagement and professional development events have been delivered attended by 20 school Principals and Senior Leaders involving both Girls Active schools and a wider network of schools.

The focus of these sessions was twofold:

- To develop a national network of Principals that inform local and national policy makers in education, sport and health as well as contributing towards the future direction of YST in Northern Ireland
- To provide professional development and support to principals and senior leaders, ensuring PE, sport and physical activity is at the heart of the school.

From these sessions, a strong emerging group of Head Teacher Ambassadors and PE Catalysts committed to the mission of improving young people’s lives through the improved physical, social and emotional wellbeing has been established with great potential to continue to build upon this

momentum. Headteachers have committed to champion the importance of PE, physical activity and sport within their own schools and have an appreciation of the impact that high quality PE, regular physical activity and sport can have on young people and whole school outcomes.

### *Girls Active - National recognition:*

The Girls Active programme was heavily featured at the Female Sports Forum “Active, Fit & Sporty Awards” in March 2020 with 6 shortlisted nominees/partner schools across 10 categories. This success demonstrates the impact the programme is having, both on developing girls, young volunteers and teachers as leaders, as well as the high levels of engagement from schools in implementing Girls Active as a whole school approach. Shortlisted nominees were as follows:

- Chloe Jordan – YST Team Leader – Inspiring Young Person Award (Winner)
- Rebecca Hillis – Killicomaine Junior High School & YST Trainee Tutor – ‘Leadership Award’ (Winner)
- Killicomaine Junior High School – Champion School (Shortlisted Nominee)
- St Patrick’s College – Champion School (Shortlisted Nominee)
- Ellie Eakin – Killicomaine Junior High School – Rising Star Award (Shortlisted Nominee)
- Youth Sport Trust – Research Award (Shortlisted Nominee)

The wider impact of Girls Active is therefore considerable. The impact on the whole school that the programme can have; in addition to the plethora of connections with organisations beyond the school environment can safeguard the sustainability of the programme for the years to come, and promote the benefits of continual implementation, year-on-year.

## Recommendations: Top Tips for Engaging Girls

The following recommendations and “Top Tips” have been created to support schools to fully embed a Girls Active whole school approach to engaging girls in PE, physical activity and sport across Northern Ireland.

The below diagram summarises the key components of these top tips and encapsulates how involving the whole school is integral to boost the engagement of girls in PE, physical activity and sport. Further, central to this achievement is building strong relationships with the girls themselves.

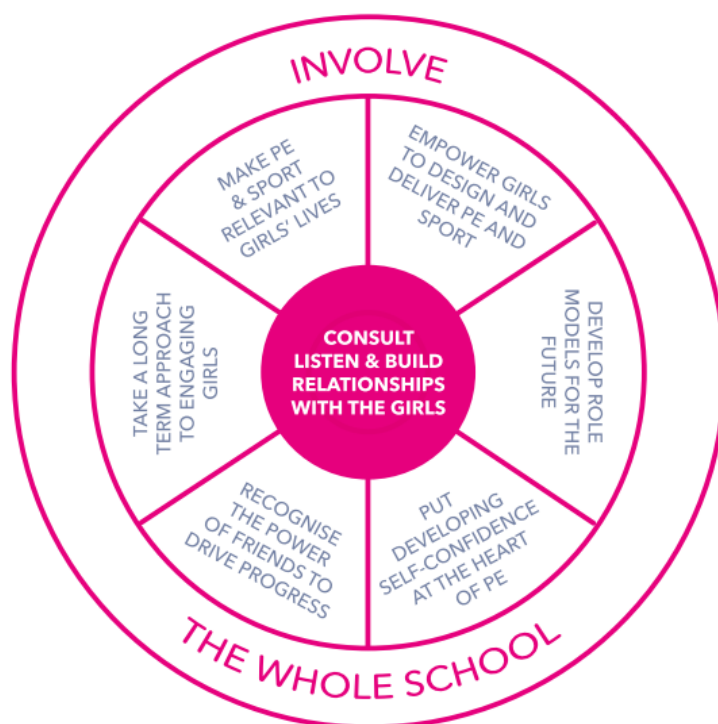


Figure 6: Diagram of best practice for Girls Active

### Making PE, physical activity and sport relevant to girls' lives

Girls have different motives for taking part in physical activity e.g. making friends, having fun, getting fit. This has been reflected in the annual Girls Active surveys. Helping girls to see a purpose in participating increases the value they place on PE, sport and physical activity. Meaningful consultation with girls is essential to the process of making PE, physical activity and sport relevant to girls' lives. Therefore:

- Seek to understand girls' motivations as well as what activities they would like to do through meaningful consultation. Show that you have listened to them – and acted upon what they have said.
- Focus on girls being active for life.
- Make explicit the development of girls' wider life skills. Leadership opportunities through Girls Active can help highlight the skills learnt.
- Yet, all the while, allowing activities to be fun!

## **Recognise the power of friends to drive progress**

Friends are a powerful influence and so this should be used as a force for good.

- Provide and promote the social aspects of PE and sport. Don't underestimate the importance of being with friends as a motivator; especially for those with disabilities.
- Enable girls to motivate their peers to take part. This report has indicated the successful GLAMS model, which allows girls to empathise, motivate and encourage their peers.
- Organise PE learning groups around friendship groups and encourage girls to share goals.
- Use social media to promote positive messages and recognition.

## **Empower girls to design and deliver PE, sport and physical activity**

- Involve girls in the design of PE, sport and physical activity programmes through consultation, setting goals, action planning, making decisions, advocating, reviewing, and evaluating.
- Involve girls in the delivery of PE, sport and physical activity through communicating, marketing, organising, leading, fundraising, reporting, designing kit and motivating others. This report has shown this to improve relationships between teachers and pupils.
- Develop and deploy girls in a variety of leadership roles.

## **Put developing self-confidence at the heart of PE**

Create a climate that enhances girls' confidence in their skills and body image. Consider flexible PE learning groups, appropriate competition, comfortable PE kit, recognition and rewards for a range of attributes, progress measured against personal goals, and peer support.

- Self-confidence is a key target for development, with this being significantly more the case for less active girls. This has been reinforced through yearly Girls Active surveys.
- From the qualitative findings from the programme, confidence in sport is a catalyst to thriving in other life skills, such as enjoyment of school, resilience; reducing anxiety.

## **Being aware of potential challenges that stem from some already being more active than others**

- Research conducted throughout the Girls Active process suggested that confidence is often greater amongst those more active, and so activities must not just recycle the interest and enthusiasm of those already enjoying the benefits of physical education, physical activity, and sport.

## **Be aware that those with disabilities face greater barriers to participation**

- This only serves to underline the importance of inclusively empowering girls to deliver and design PE and ensuring GLAMS empathise with the myriad barriers faced by those with disabilities, which can be sensitive and complex.

### Deploy girls as positive role models for other girls

Enable girls to become role models for their peers and/or younger girls. Create a rolling programme of ambassadors, mentors, leaders and organisers so new role models keep coming through.

- Role models have been a crucial component to enhancing the benefits of the Girls Active programme.
- More work is required to encourage more diverse role models.

### Take a long-term approach to engaging girls

Sustainable change requires planning across all aspects of PE and school sport. Developing and regularly reviewing a staged plan with input from girls and senior leaders will help to create commitment from both and develop a culture that supports and values girls' participation as an important part of school life.

- Make girls' engagement an explicit objective in PE plans.
- Involve all PE staff in addressing the issues.
- Incorporate the whole school to ensure that the "buzz" around the programme is experienced.
- Connect with partners beyond the school environment eg. Local primary schools, local authorities, NGBs, community clubs, local leisure providers and gyms. This can improve the longer-term impact of the programme.



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## Appendix A: The Girls Active Inspiration Day

The annual Girls Active Inspiration Day has been an important event to inspire, motivate and develop the next cohort of Girls Active Leaders. These events have supported the development of girls as leaders, role models and marketeers back in their schools through the development of GLAMS groups. To date, 4 Girls Active Inspirations Days have taken place involving over 250 girls.

At these events, the girls have taken part in workshops focusing on leadership, marketing and action planning to inspire them and better prepare them to take on a leadership and marketing role within each of their schools to encourage more girls to become physically active. The final workshop of the day focused on GLAMS and teachers coming together to collaboratively come up with innovative ways to get more girls active within their schools through the creation of an action plan. In order to inspire and motivate the girls, they also took part in physical activity sessions delivered by the Every Body Active 2020 Coaches from our Council partners, ABC & LCCC Council.

In order to sustain and embed the programme within schools, it was recognised that existing GLAMS needed further development and support so they could further engage with and mentor new and younger GLAMS, as well as provide further support alongside the PE department and lead teacher for Girls Active. Therefore, peer mentoring training was developed and delivered to a cohort of 20 girls from 10 schools at the 4<sup>th</sup> year of this event. This has proved to be very successful, with those girls taking on additional responsibilities within their own schools, chairing GLAMS meetings and providing support and guidance to younger GLAMS. This has benefitted both the GLAMS and peer mentors, with the GLAMS being supported by their older peers, and the peer mentors further developing their leadership and mentoring skills. It has also had a positive impact for the teachers, who feel better supported as they can give the girls increased responsibility to deliver against their actions on their action plans and support where necessary.

*“It was very inspirational. It has inspired me to help girls in PE and bring in new sports. I learnt new things”. (GLAM)*

*“I found it enjoyable and it built my confidence to become a leader, and I had a good fun, active day”. (GLAM)*

*“It showed us how fun PE can be and that inspired me more to help others and encourage them to take part”. (GLAM)*



*Figure 7: Image of participants at Inspiration Day*

### Girls Active Coaches Camp

Thirty-two girls from six secondary schools attended the Girls Active Coaches Camp NI which was a 3-day residential camp held at Ulster University in February 2019. The Coaches Camp was designed to develop the girls' leadership and coaching skills, specifically in regard to how they could best get their peers active and begin their journey into coaching and sports leadership.

Excellent feedback was received from the girls attending, with qualitative comments including:

*"Thanks for the once in a lifetime opportunity"*

*"This was very inspiring, and my confidence has boosted a lot since I got here"*

*"I enjoyed all of the activities, and I have built up so much more confidence. I am now able to inspire others"*

*"I got to build up a lot of my skills such as confidence"*

This qualitative feedback was strengthened by exceptional quantitative feedback, demonstrating the value of this Camp:

- **100%** of girls attending strongly agreed/agreed said that they had been inspired and motivated to improve the delivery of PE, physical activity or sport.
- **100%** strongly agreed/agreed that as a result of the camp, they felt more confident in their ability to market PE and physical activity to their peers.
- **100%** strongly agreed/agreed as a result of the camp, they felt more confident in their ability to influence changes in PE, sport and physical activity at their school.
- **97%** of girls reported they had greatly increased/increased their overall confidence as a result of attending the camp.
- **97%** of girls reported they had greatly increased/increased their confidence in leading & influencing their peers.
- **100%** of girls reported they had greatly increased/increased their skills as a leader and as a coach.
- **97%** of girls rated the camp as "very good". The remaining 3% rated the camp as "good".



Figure 8: Participants at Girls Active coaches camp

## YST RESEARCH

The Youth Sport Trust (YST) is a national children's charity passionate about creating a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits that come from play and sport. YST Research offers research, analysis, insight and evaluation services to organisations with an interest in the wider children and young people's sector. Our research expertise is focussed on improving the wellbeing of children and young people through sport and physical activity.

Our specialisms include:

- Education, PE and school sport
- Community sport / clubs
- Early years settings
- Life skills and employability
- Activism and volunteering
- Health (physical, social and emotional)



For our latest research findings, visit <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/research-news>

By working with us, you are supporting us to achieve our mission to improve children's lives and their future.

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