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Youth Sport Trusts’ Girls Active Programme, delivered in partnership with Women in Sport, is funded by Sport England to train teachers in 90 schools from 10 counties who will work with a further 90 schools. During 2015-16 these schools aim to develop a total of 540 Girls Active leaders and have 13,500 girls taking part in PE and school sport. All 10 teacher training sessions were completed during September and October 2015, resulting in 100 schools being trained within the 10 county areas.

Participating schools were sent an online pre-intervention questionnaire designed to provide school-level insight into the motivations, barriers and current levels of physical activity of girls in their school. This insight will underpin their plans and interventions, developed and delivered with their Girls Active leaders and will be followed after April 2016 with a post-intervention questionnaire to measure the impact of their Girls Active interventions. The survey is compiled under the following headings:

- overall attitudes to PE, physical activity and learning at school
- taking part in physical activity
- motivators for taking part
- barriers to taking part
- attitudes towards PE and physical activity
- behaviours linked to confidence and wellbeing.

Sixty seven schools undertook the pre-intervention questionnaire and in total over 10,000 girls completed it. This excellent response provides a strong data set from which Youth Sport Trust and Women in Sport will identify opportunities for the development of Girls Active. This paper highlights noteworthy data and in particular where there are significant differences between groups of girls.
SECTION 2: ALL GIRLS

Of the 10,216 responses received 88% were from girls in Key Stage 3 (KS3 – school years 7 to 9) with the remainder from KS4 (school years 10 and 11). 31% of respondents were from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) group and 3% indicated they had a disability.

2.1 Participation by all girls

- 79% of girls aged 11 to 16 like taking part in PE
- 24% do no physical activity outside of school
- only 7% of girls meet the Chief Medical Officer’s recommendation of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity per day.

The percentage of girls who like taking part in PE is encouraging. Nevertheless, 21% of girls say they do not like taking part in PE. Combined with the statistic that nearly a quarter of 11-16 year old girls do no physical activity outside of school it is clear that PE and school sport are not developing sufficient skills and motivation for most girls to be active enough for health benefits or an active lifestyle in the long term.

The current content of Girls Active seeks to help teachers understand and react to the barriers and motivations of girls to support them to maximise their learning whilst enjoying PE and school sport. Involving community partners at Girls Active training aims to ensure that appropriate opportunities to take part are also available outside of school.

2.2 Motivations and barriers by all girls

- the top two motivational factors for taking part in PE are to have fun and to be healthy
- the two greatest barriers to taking part in PE, sport and physical activity are not having time and girls feeling that their school work is more important
- 55% of girls indicated they prefer to be organised in single sex groups for PE
- 17% say they are not confident about taking part
- 43% of girls agreed strongly that their school encouraged them to take part in PE and sport but 6% disagreed strongly.
To have fun and be healthy are the top two reasons to take part in PE across all groups of girls, regardless of how they are grouped. This may differ from the purpose of PE communicated to girls by their teachers. As shown in the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF 2012) research into girls’ attitudes towards PE and sport¹, many girls believe PE is for ‘sporty’ girls, rather than being to develop the skills and enjoyment of physical activity necessary for a healthy and active lifestyle. There is a significant opportunity here for teachers to consider how they articulate the purpose and value of PE to students and senior leaders.

How girls are grouped e.g. by skill level or gender may significantly affect their level of enjoyment, for example by providing challenging competition where girls thrive on it or providing single sex PE where girls are embarrassed by lack of skill or body confidence. Lack of confidence is a further significant barrier with 17% indicating they are not at all confident about taking part. Placing ‘building confidence at the heart of girls’ PE and Sport’ is one of the six principles Girls Active is built on, and should remain core to the programme.

The two most frequently cited barriers to participation are lack of time and girls feeling that other school work is more important. This shows a need to promote the positive effect of PE and sport on achievement, both directly to girls through the Girls Active peer marketing process and to senior leaders so that all girls feel strongly encouraged to take part and the whole school culture is one that values participation.

Both the motivations and barriers show the need for teachers to understand the motivations and preferences of girls in their school at any given time and the value of the Girls Active process of developing Girls Active leaders, student voice and using girls as peer marketers.

2.3 Sports leadership, coaching and administration by all girls

- There is a large unmet demand for leadership, coaching and administration responsibilities. The greatest of these is for leadership opportunities, where 20% of girls are currently leaders but 63% would like to be.

This data is a clear message from the girls that they would like more opportunities to be leaders, coaches and administrators.

¹ Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation. Changing the Game, for Girls (2012).
SECTION 3: GIRLS BY KEY STAGE

Girls Active is targeted at 11-14 year olds so schools were encouraged to work with their KS3 girls to complete the questionnaires. Nevertheless, 12% (n.1,132) of respondents were from KS4, producing some interesting results.

3.1 Participation, barriers and motivators by key stage

- 36% of girls at KS4 do no physical activity at school outside of PE lessons compared to 30% at KS3
- 71% of girls at KS4 like PE compared to 80% at KS3
- over a third more girls at KS4 feel they don’t have time for physical activity than girls at KS3, and more than half as many at KS4 value other school work more than at KS3
- 21% of KS4 girls don’t like the activities on offer compared to 14% at KS3
- girls in both key stages rated netball as their most popular sport in PE but generally KS4 girls prefer more ‘social sports’ in PE such as rounders, badminton and dodgeball as they get older
- more girls are motivated by looking and feeling good as well as social factors as they become older
- twice as many girls in KS3 feel the skills they learn in PE are highly relevant to their daily life than the girls in KS4 (32% vs 16%).

As girls move from KS3 to KS4, their participation and engagement with PE and sport both within and outside of school decreases. At the heart of this is the value they place on them at a time when they are under pressure to achieve in their end of KS4 exams. This is reflected in how many don’t feel they have time for PE and sport and how much less they value it compared to other school work. This is summed up by the responses showing only 32% of girls at KS3 feel PE is relevant to their lives, which drops to just 16% at KS4. This perhaps is unsurprising when 15% of KS4 girls don’t feel encouraged to take part by their schools.

One of the core principles of Girls Active is to make PE and sport more relevant to girls’ lives through all aspects of participation, emphasising the life skills developed. The responses show just how important this is. Girls Active will continue to focus on this through direct contact with girls at the Girls Active Camp, through the teacher training and training resources, and in media communications.
Positioning PE and sport so it appeals to girls’ motivations in both the activities offered and the way they are delivered are further important factors in better engaging girls. At KS4 more girls are motivated by looking and feeling good, so this should not be overlooked when promoting the benefits of participation. An example of this is the ‘Fit for Prom’ extra-curricular sessions set up by Kingshill School, Cirencester following the Girls Active Camp in 2015. These appealed to girls who wouldn’t normally take part in sports clubs and gave them a meaningful goal for being active. The survey responses also showed how activity preferences change with age as sports such as dodgeball, badminton and rounders were more popular in KS4 than in KS3, possibly due to the opportunities they provide to communicate with friends and their lower intensity compared to other sports (US Girls, 2015).

3.2 Attitudes by key stage

- **half as many girls at KS4 are happy with the way their body looks as at KS3 (24% at KS3 and 12% at KS4)**

- **46% of girls at KS4 feel confident compared to 58% at KS3**

- **47% of girls at KS4 feel they can do anything they want to do compared to 58% at KS3.**

The greatest differences between girls’ attitudes at KS3 and KS4 are shown above, but it is notable that across all the ‘life skills’ questions in the survey assessing creativity, aspirations, resilience and empathy the girls in KS4 had lower scores than at KS3. While it cannot be assumed that the relatively lower levels of physical activity among girls in KS4 is the single cause of this, it is well documented that increasing participation in PE and sport can improve life and employability skills (character education), demonstrating the importance of continuing to develop ways to increase physical activity as girls move through their secondary education.

Body confidence and confidence to do anything decline with age. The positive effect of regular physical activity on confidence is widely acknowledged but not widely promoted in and through PE. The pilot research for Girls Active showed a strong desire for greater confidence among the girls interviewed and emphasis will be maintained on increasing confidence as a motivational factor for girls in promoting PE and sport directly to them and in engaging senior leaders in the whole school benefits of physically active students.

2 US Girls, HOW TO... understand the impact of girls’ friendships, enhance them in a physical activity setting and use them to engage and retain female participants (2015).
SECTION 4: GIRLS BY ACTIVITY LEVEL

4.1 Participation by activity level

Of the girls surveyed, 54% were ‘less active’ (active in school but outside of PE on one or fewer days per week), 42% were ‘active’ (active in school but outside of PE on 2-4 days per week) and 5% were ‘more active’ (active in school but outside of PE on 5-7 days).

- just 24% of less active girls feel that their school encourages them to take part in PE and sport
- while netball and dance are favourite activities in PE for both the less and most active, there is a significant difference in the preference for football. 18% of less active girls like football compared to 26% of more active girls
- 30% of less active girls preferred to work in girls-only friendship groups in PE compared to 19% of more active girls.

There are many reasons why girls choose to be more or less active but the data highlights three areas where there are strong differences between the less and more active girls. Less active girls feel less encouraged by their schools to take part in PE and sport, have differences in opinion on the types of activity they like to do and far greater numbers would prefer to work in girls-only groups than their more active classmates.

The Girls Active approach of developing young leaders and giving all girls a voice to influence what and how activities are delivered in PE and sport has been shown to work successfully through the pilot to address these challenges. The addition of the pre-intervention questionnaire and individual school report to the post-pilot phase of Girls Active will give schools useful insight so they can identify and deal with these issues on a school by school basis.

4.2 Motivations and Barriers by activity level

- less active girls perceive more barriers and fewer motivators for participation in PE and sport than more active girls across all themes
- the three greatest differences in motivating factors between the least and most active are to win competitions (18% gap – nearly half as many less active girls are motivated by competition as more active girls), set myself a goal (15% gap), and develop new skills (14% gap)
- the four greatest differences in perceived barriers are lacking confidence to take part (8% gap), being self-conscious (7% gap), finding other subjects more important (7% gap) and not liking the activities on offer (7% gap).

PE teachers are themselves ‘more active’ by type so have a tendency to try and encourage less active girls by providing the experiences in PE which they find motivating. Understanding the motivations of all girls is a key part of the Girls Active teacher training and this new set of data
highlight the importance of this approach. Lacking confidence to take part and feeling self-conscious are linked to perceived abilities and body image. Even among the most active girls 13% feel body-conscious and lack confidence to take part. These issues highlight the need for Girls Active to maintain a focus on ‘putting building confidence at the heart of PE and sport’ (one of the six underpinning principles of Girls Active).

4.3 Sports leadership, coaching and administration by activity level

- greater numbers of more active girls are already administrators, leaders and coaches and more would like to take on these roles, e.g. 19% of more active girls are leaders in school, but 55% would like to be
- there is a large unmet demand among less active girls to become administrators, leaders and coaches of sport and physical activity which, although not as great as for more active girls, is still significant.

Understandably, there is a greater enthusiasm among more active girls to become sports and physical activity leaders than among the less active girls. It is, however, notable that the unmet demand among less active girls is still very high, e.g. 5% of less active girls are leaders in school but 31% would like to be. The framework of Girls Active encourages teachers to identify less active as well as traditionally ‘sporty’ girls to become Girls Active leaders, thereby giving less active girls the opportunity to take on leadership responsibilities which are less commonly available to them through sport. This approach has the advantage of developing a student body which can effectively represent the preferences of all girls.

4.4 Attitudes by activity level

- less active girls rate themselves significantly lower than their more active peers in all the life skills questions (see 3.2): the greatest difference is in creativity where 34% of less active girls feel they are likely to come up with and apply new ideas as opposed to 62% of more active girls
- more active girls are more likely to agree they are confident than less active girls (67% vs 50%).

The differences in responses to the ‘life skills’ questions between less and more active girls are striking. This demonstrates the potential of sport and physical activity to impact on girls’ wellbeing, leadership and achievement and the need to articulate these messages strongly to senior leaders, teachers and girls themselves to raise the profile of PE and sport and ensure girls are clear about the relevance of them to their daily lives.
SECTION 5: GIRLS WITH A DISABILITY

Three per cent (n.321) of the girls surveyed indicated they had a disability, giving sufficient numbers from which to evaluate responses. A large proportion of the girls with a disability who completed the survey attend special schools so may have a different experience of school sport to those from mainstream schools. The data does not, however, make this distinction.

5.1 Participation by girls with a disability

- 39% of girls with a disability do not take part in any school sport (not including PE) compared to 31% of non-disabled girls
- girls with a disability do on average nine minutes less physical activity per day than non-disabled girls
- while 75% of girls with a disability like taking part in physical activity, 11% dislike it compared with only 5% of non-disabled girls
- 35% of girls with a disability would prefer to be grouped in PE lessons by friendship groups compared to 25% of non-disabled girls
- swimming is the most popular sport for girls with a disability, whilst for non-disabled girls this rates in fifth place behind netball, dance, football and gymnastics
- 54% of girls with a disability feel strongly encouraged by their school to take part in PE and sport compared to 45% of non-disabled girls.

The relatively lower level of participation by girls with a disability highlights the need to provide additional support to teachers working with them. Despite lower participation rates, a greater percentage of girls with a disability feel strongly encouraged by their school to take part in PE and sport than their non-disabled peers. This brings into question whether the PE and sport on offer is appealing and accessible, so understanding the motivations and activity preferences of individual girls with a disability is perhaps even more important.

The 10% difference between disabled and non-disabled girls who would prefer to be grouped in PE lessons by friendship group (girls only) is noteworthy and may help participation. It is not clear from the data why this is the case as there are no great differences in confidence levels but is important for teachers to understand in order to influence their practice.
5.2 Coaching and leadership by girls with a disability

- a higher percentage of girls with a disability (who were surveyed) are coaches, leaders and sports administrators than non-disabled girls, e.g. 16% vs 9% are currently coaches
- 12% of those with a disability are Girls Active leaders compared to 7% of those without a disability
- 49% of girls with a disability feel strongly that they would like a say in the activities they do in PE and after-school clubs compared to only 39% of non-disabled girls.

The relatively high proportion of coaches and leaders among girls with a disability may be due to the high levels of engagement among the special schools involved in delivering Girls Active so should be viewed with some caution. However, there is a theme of girls with a disability wanting to have a say in their PE and sport activities and the percentage who are either currently or would like to be coaches is higher than girls without a disability.

Gaining representation from girls with a disability in mainstream schools in Girls Leadership and Marketing groups (GLAMs) and other leadership roles is an important part of ensuring representation of differing perspectives on PE and school sport and helping to meet the latent demand for leadership opportunities.
Girls from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups made up 32% of respondents. The largest ethnic group was Asian/Asian British at 41% of the total, followed by girls from multiple ethnic groups (27%) and Black African/Caribbean/British (23%). Ten per cent of girls preferred not to state their ethnic origin. The data is presented as all girls from BME groups so may mask differences between groups.

### 6.1 Participation and attitudes by girls from BME groups

- 31% of BME girls don’t take part in any sport outside of school compared to 20% of white girls
- BME girls do on average 12 minutes less physical activity per day than white girls
- 30% of BME girls say their school work is more important than taking part in sport and physical activity compared to 20% of white girls.

The significantly lower rates of participation in sport and physical activity by girls from BME groups highlights a strong need for some focussed work in this area. This can be partly explained by one third more girls from BME groups feeling that their school work is more important than doing sport and physical activity. Girls from BME groups are slightly more confident than white girls, and more driven by learning new skills and taking part in competition, but there are no other significant differences in the responses.

Promoting the benefits of PE and sport to achievement in schools will remain a priority focus for Girls Active moving forwards but especially in schools with a large proportion of girls from BME groups.
6.2 Coaching and leadership by girls from BME groups

Responses to the question: Would you like to be a coach, leader or administrator for sport and physical activity?

Participation in coaching, leadership and administration roles by BME and white girls is very similar with marginally more girls from BME groups currently taking on these roles. There is, however, a large difference in the latent demand for these responsibilities with significantly more BME girls indicating they would like to be coaches, leaders and administrators. This may point to a way of increasing physical activity by girls from BME groups - by using the incentive of leadership and employability skills.
7.1 Girls Active

The pre-intervention questionnaire results confirm the relevance of the six principles which underpin Girls Active:

- make PE and school sport relevant to girls’ lives
- develop role models of the future
- empower girls through design and delivery
- place developing self-confidence at the heart of PE and sport
- recognise the power of friends to drive progress
- take a long term approach to engaging girls.

The data does, however, flag areas where greater emphasis or provision should be made to maximise the impact on all groups of girls. For Girls Active the following actions will be undertaken:

- differences in motivations, barriers and attitudes between groups of girls will be shared with all Girls Active schools with case studies identifying different approaches to addressing the needs of target groups
- materials will be developed to help Girls Active lead teachers make the case for girls’ PE and school sport within their schools. A Girls Active training day for middle managers in PE will be developed
- the value of PE and sport will be emphasised to girls at the Girls Active camp through speakers, social media and workshop activities
- support will be given to Girls Active schools to develop links with community providers of sport and physical activity to encourage better take up of physical activity outside of school. Good practice will be shared through case studies and the Girls Active newsletter.