



fit for
girls

Fit for Girls Evaluation

Interim Report 1

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Preface

In May 2009, the Scottish Government published the Experiences and Outcomes for physical education, physical activity and sport, physical activity and health within the curricular area of health and well-being (with dance in Expressive Arts). Curriculum for Excellence explicitly grouped physical education, physical activity and sport and physical activity and health as one organiser within health and wellbeing to allow for powerful connections to be developed which extend beyond physical education curriculum time.

Effective partnership working in the delivery of physical activity should ensure progressive and coherent pathways in both participation and performance for our young people. Progression and choice are key principles in the curriculum design of Curriculum for Excellence with the child at the centre – therefore the scope for consultation with our young people is integral. Children in Scotland have an entitlement to two hours of physical education as well as physical activity, sport, dance and physical activity and health experiences. There are many opportunities for partners to work with teachers to provide positive physically active experiences that will impact on the mental, emotional, social and physical health of our young people. Fit for Girls is one such opportunity.

Planning for progression with key partners should ensure that our young people develop skills for learning, skills for work and skills for life. Movement skills to develop physical competencies which allow young people to access a wide range of physical activities at school and beyond are addressed both in physical education and physical activity and sport. Curriculum for Excellence aims to develop confident individuals able to access all opportunities open to them.

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Executive Summary

The Fit for Girls programme is a joint initiative between the Youth Sport Trust and **sportscotland**, aimed at increasing physical activity participation among girls aged 11 to 16 years. The programme was launched in 2008 and is being delivered to all secondary schools across Scotland over 3 years. A core focus of the programme is to bring about sustainable change in schools that builds a positive future for girls' participation in physical activity. This is achieved through providing an interactive workshop for practitioners in order to allow them to share and exchange necessary knowledge, tools and skills to be able to successfully consult, plan and implement positive PE experiences and sustainable physical activity programmes for girls in the school setting, and build stronger links with community provision.

This first Interim Report presents findings from a survey of all S2 girls in secondary schools across Scotland, undertaken as part of the evaluation of the Fit for Girls programme. Survey questionnaires were administered in schools during 2009. The questionnaire gathers information about physical activity, physical education and extra-curricular activities, as well as girls' health and wellbeing. The findings in the interim report are baseline findings against which changes over time will be monitored as implementation of the Fit for Girls programme takes place. In total, 17,853 girls completed a questionnaire. The mean age of the girls was 13.7 years.

The findings reveal predominantly positive attitudes towards physical education (PE) and physical activity. Overall, levels of enjoyment were high and most girls said they would like to be more active. In relation to PE, the majority of girls agreed that it is an important subject at their school and felt comfortable in what they wear for PE. The social context in which PE takes place is evidently a significant issue for girls: over a third felt that having a female teacher is important and said that girls and boys should do PE separately.

Health and fitness are clearly important to girls of this age and, along with having fun, being healthy is a key motivation for being physically active. However, actual participation in physical activity remains low. Therefore there is a need to identify and address barriers to participation. Perceived lack of skill and preferring to do other things with their time were the most common reasons why girls do not take part in physical activity. The Fit for Girls programme provides an opportunity for PE staff to consult with girls and identify issues around low participation. Schools are then able to develop a range of activities they feel the girls will engage with, with the aim of increasing overall physical activity levels. Follow-up questionnaires will be administered to the same cohort of girls in Year 3 (2010/2011) of the programme to enable changes in physical activity participation and attitudes to be assessed.

Specific findings from the first Interim Report are highlighted below:

Physical Education (PE)

- 73% of girls had spent 1½ hours or more in PE during the previous week.
- 81% said that they enjoy PE *a lot* or *a little*.
- 68% agreed that PE is an important subject at their school.
- 28% said that PE is their favourite lesson.
- 73% said that PE would be better if there was a wider variety of activities.
- 28% said they often feel embarrassed in PE.
- 13% often find an excuse not to take part.
- 37% said that PE should be done separately for boys and girls.
- 35% of girls agreed that having a female teacher for PE is important.

School-based extra-curricular sport and physical activity

- 47.5% of girls had not taken part in any extra-curricular sport or physical activity during the previous week.
- 61% agreed that the facilities for sport and physical activity at their school are really good but only 36% agreed that the changing facilities are really good.
- 77% felt that their school offers enough opportunities to take part in sport and other physical activities but 25% felt that sport is too competitive at their school.
- Less than half of girls (43%) had been consulted about what physical activities they would like to do at school.

Physical activity and health

- Only 19% of girls correctly stated the current physical activity recommendation for young people their age.
- 19% had spent less than an hour in physical activity during their free time the previous week.
- 84% said they would like to be more active.
- Only 48% of girls think that they are good at sport.
- 72% said they do physical activity to be healthy and 63% take part for fun.

- Almost half of girls (48%) said they do physical activity to feel better about themselves or to lose weight.
- One in four girls (26%) said that taking part in competitions is a reason why they do physical activity.
- 44% of girls cited lack of skill and 35% cited feeling embarrassed as barriers to being active.
- 44% said that preferring to do other things with their time is a reason why they do not do physical activity.

1. Background

A physically active lifestyle is now recognised as an essential component of healthy living. As well as longer term health gains, physical activity during childhood promotes optimal growth and development, helps prevent overweight and obesity, protects against risk factors for cardiovascular disease and enhances psychological wellbeing. However, evidence suggests that many young people are not sufficiently active to benefit their health. Sharp declines in physical activity are observed during adolescence, particularly among girls. Current guidelines recommend that all young people should participate in physical activity of at least moderate intensity for one hour per day. The national physical activity strategy, *Let's Make Scotland More Active* (Scottish Executive, 2003), set a target for 80% of all children aged 16 or under to meet this recommendation by 2022. However, data from the 2008 Scottish Health Survey show that, among 13-15 year olds, almost two-thirds of boys (62%) but only one third of girls (33%) meet the guideline and over two-fifths (43%) of girls engage in less than 30 minutes of moderate activity daily.

The Fit for Girls programme was jointly developed between the Youth Sport Trust and **sportscotland** specifically to increase physical activity levels among girls aged 11-16 years. Following a pilot, the programme was launched in February 2008 and will be delivered to all secondary schools in Scotland over a three year period (2008-2011). A core focus is to bring about sustainable change in schools that builds a positive future for girls' participation in lifelong physical activity. It aims to give low active girls and young women opportunities and choices to achieve the social, psychological and physical benefits associated with physical activity. This is achieved through providing an interactive workshop for practitioners in order to allow them to share and exchange necessary knowledge, tools and skills to be able to successfully consult, plan and implement positive PE experiences and sustainable physical activity programmes for girls in the school setting and build stronger links with community provision.

The programme is flexible in its approach, responding to the needs of the school but is typically delivered via a 4-hour workshop to secondary PE staff, Active Schools Coordinators and other relevant professionals as the school community deems appropriate. As well as knowledge and information sharing, the workshops provide practitioners with a planning process, feedback and support in implementing a comprehensive plan for increasing girls' participation in PE, physical activity and sport both in and out of school.

Within each school, the programme will vary according to identified needs, but all are underpinned by the following national objectives:

- To create and implement school development plans that reflect girls' needs
- To increase girls' enjoyment of PE, physical activity and sport
- To increase and improve opportunities for participation, both in and out of school
- To develop an integrated approach between PE, physical activity and sport
- To improve transition between primary and secondary schools in terms of participation in PE, physical activity and sport
- To improve the links between school and community sport

2. Current status of programme

The Fit for Girls programme started in April 2008 and the first training workshop was held in September 2008. In Year 1 (to end of March 2009):

- 41 workshops took place
- 161 mainstream schools and 4 ASN schools were trained
- 12 Local Authorities had finalised training
- 62 schools had submitted action plans
- 28 school action plans had been approved.

3. Overview of evaluation

The overall aim of the evaluation is to assess the impact of the Fit for Girls programme on levels of participation in physical education, physical activity and sport among secondary school girls. A mixed methods approach is being used, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative techniques, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the impact of the programme as well as the process of implementation.

The following data are being collected by **sportscotland** and will be used for the evaluation:

- National questionnaire survey to all S2 girls in Year 1 (2008/09) with follow-up to all girls in S4 in Year 3 (2010/11)
- Questionnaire survey to PE staff and Active School Coordinators in Years 1 and 3
- Ongoing Active Schools monitoring

In addition, four schools were selected as case study schools to take part in the evaluation. The four schools represent different geographical settings, socio-economic profiles and levels of participation (based on **sportscotland's** Area Variation Report, 2002). The case studies will allow for in-depth exploration of the processes of change and programme outcomes within each school. Additional questionnaires have been issued to all S2 girls (08/09) in the case study schools and in-depth qualitative work will be undertaken throughout the duration of the programme with a sub-sample of these girls who are identified as being low active. Focus groups are also being undertaken with PE staff in the case study schools and telephone interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders within each Local Authority at the beginning of 2010.

This report presents findings from the national Fit for Girls questionnaire issued to all S2 girls in all secondary schools across Scotland during Year 1 (08/09) of the programme. The questionnaire gathers information about physical activity, physical education and extra-curricular school-based activities, as well as girls' health and wellbeing. The findings in this report are baseline findings against which changes over time will be monitored as implementation of the Fit for Girls programme takes place.

4. Research findings

4.1 Sample profile

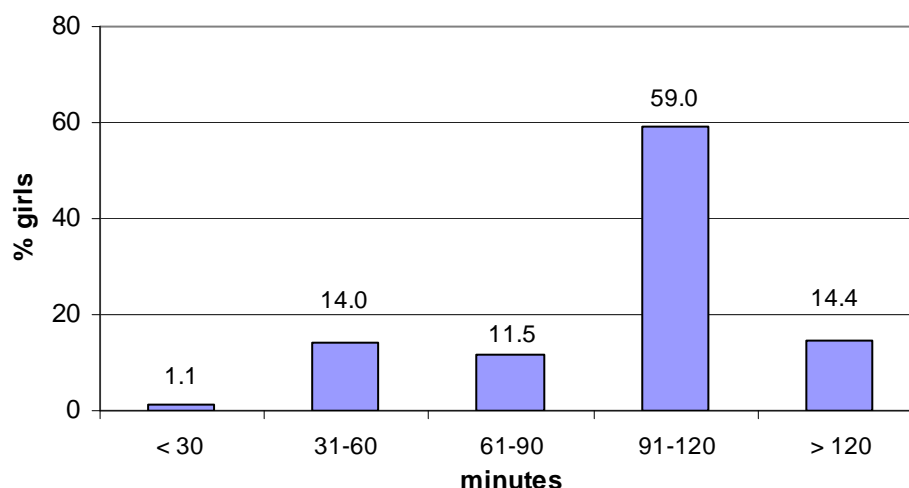
- Questionnaires were sent to S2 girls in 372 mainstream secondary schools and 26 ASN schools across Scotland.
- A total of 17,853 girls completed a questionnaire and are included in this report. Of these, 81.8% were in S2 and 18.2% were in S3 at the time of the survey¹.
- The mean age of girls in the survey was 13.7 years.
- The vast majority of respondents (93.8%) described themselves as white.
- 8.1% of girls considered themselves to have a disability². Of these, 27.9% have a physical disability, 26.7% have a sight disability, 22.8% have a learning disability, 12.8% have a speech disability, and 9.7% have a hearing disability.

4.2 Physical Education (PE)

Time spent in PE classes

Girls were asked how much time they spent in PE classes at school during the previous week (Figure 1). The majority of girls (59.0%) had spent 1½ to 2 hours in PE in the last week. A very small proportion (1.1%, n=181) had done less than 30 minutes of PE.

Figure 1: Minutes spent in PE classes during previous week



¹ The survey was undertaken with all girls who were in S2 during the school year 2008/09. In some schools, the questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the Autumn Term 2009/10 by which time the girls had moved into S3.

² 'Disability' was defined as a physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long-term effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Girl's perceptions of PE

Figure 2 shows girls perceptions of PE at school. Over two-thirds of girls (68.0%) agreed that PE is an important subject at their school and over a quarter (28.2%) said that PE is their favourite lesson. Almost one in five girls (17.4%) said that they would like to work in PE or sport when they leave school.

Choice of activities was an important issue with almost three-quarters of girls reporting that PE would be better if there was a wider variety of activities. More than a quarter of girls said they often feel embarrassed in PE and over one in ten often find an excuse not to take part in PE. Over a third of girls agreed that having a female teacher for PE is important and that boys and girls should do PE separately.

Figure 2: Perceptions of PE

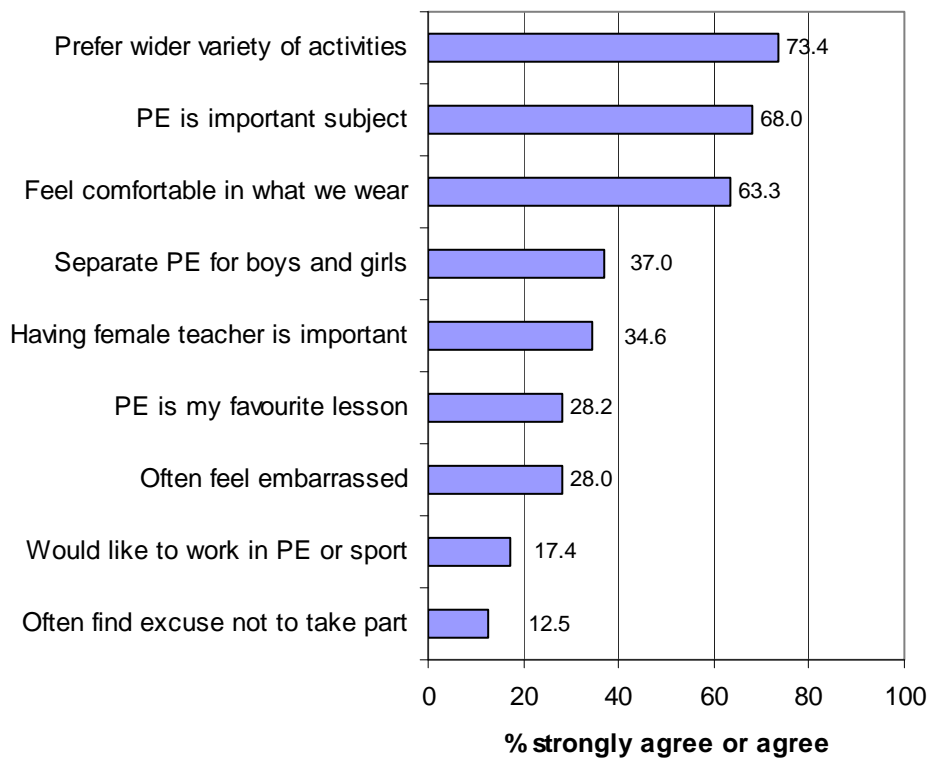
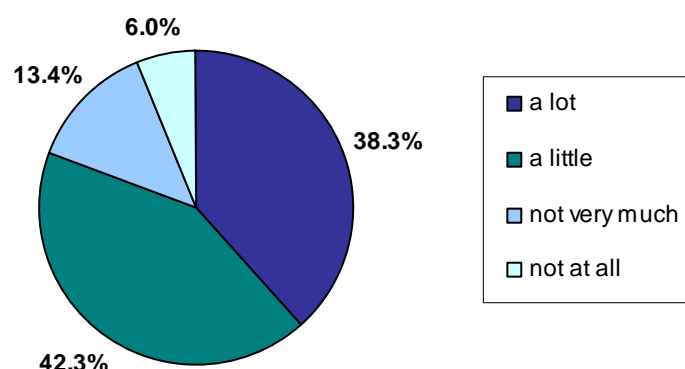


Figure 3 shows girls' enjoyment of PE. Overall, 38.3% of girls reported that they enjoy PE *a lot* and a further 42.3% enjoy it *a little*. Around one in five girls (19.4%) said that they do not enjoy PE *very much* or *at all*.

Figure 3: Enjoyment of PE



Girls who said that they *enjoy PE* were more likely to:

- Agree that PE is an important subject
- Feel comfortable in what they wear for PE
- Want to work in PE or sport when they leave school
- Agree that girls sport is as important as boys sport at their school
- Agree that their school facilities for sport and physical activity are really good
- Agree that the changing facilities at their school are really good
- Want to do more team games at school
- Report their health as good or excellent

Girls who said that they *do not enjoy PE* were more likely to:

- Find excuses not to take part in PE
- Often feel embarrassed in PE
- Agree that boys and girls should do PE separately
- Agree that sport is too competitive at their school
- Report their health as fair or poor

4.3 School-based extra-curricular sport and physical activity

Time spent in after-school or other extra-curricular activities

Girls were asked how many days and how much time they spent taking part in extra-curricular sport or other physical activity at school or organised through school during the previous week.

Figure 4 shows participation in extra-curricular sport and physical activity during the previous week. Almost half of girls (47.5%) had not taken part in any school-based extra-curricular sport or physical activity. Around a fifth (22.3%) took part once, a further 15.5% took part on two days, and 14.7% had taken part on three or more days.

Figure 4: Participation in extra-curricular sport and physical activity last week

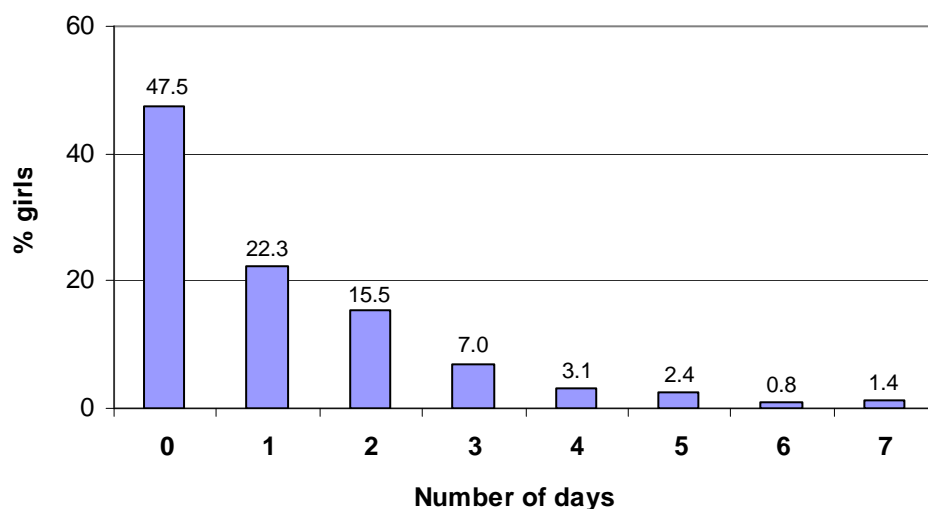
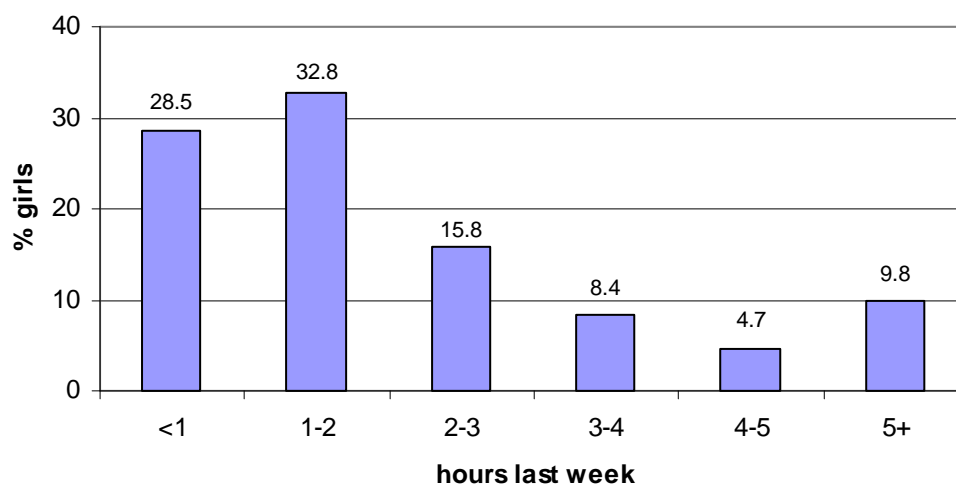


Figure 5 shows time spent in extra-curricular sport or physical activity last week, as measured in hours³. Over a quarter of girls (28.5%) had taken part in less than an hour of extra-curricular physical activity and around a third (32.8%) had taken part in 1-2 hours. Around one-in-ten girls (9.8%) had taken part for five or more hours.

Figure 5: Time spent in extra-curricular sport or physical activity last week



³ Girls were asked how many minutes they took part in sport or other physical activity at school or organised through the school (not including PE). Responses were recoded as follows: <1 hour (≤ 60 mins), 1-2 hours (61-120mins), 2-3 hours (121-180mins), 3-4 hours (181-240mins), 4-5 hours (241-300mins), 5+ hours (> 300 mins).

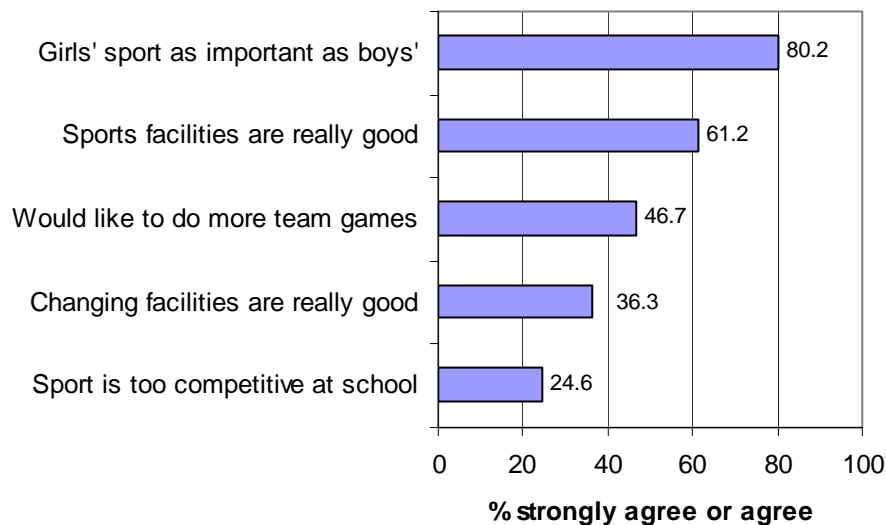
Girls' perceptions of sport and physical activity at school

Figure 6 shows girls' perceptions of sport and physical activity at their school. The majority agreed that girls' sport is as important as boys' sport at their school and that the facilities for sport and other physical activity in their school are really good.

Less than half of girls said that they would like to do more team games at school and a quarter said that sport is too competitive in their school.

Only around a third of girls agreed that the changing facilities were really good.

Figure 6: Perceptions of physical activity and sport at school



Opportunities for sport and physical activity at school

Around three-quarters of girls (77.4%) agreed that their school offers enough opportunities to take part in sport and other physical activities.

Consultation

Around two-fifths of girls (43.2%) said that they had been asked what physical activities they would like to do at school.

Travel to and from school

Walking was the most common form of travel to and from school; 44.4% of girls said they usually walked to school and 51.1% usually walked home from school. Just over a third of girls travelled by bus or train. Travel by car was more common on the way to school (18.1%) than on the way home (11.0%). Less than 1% of girls said they usually cycle to and from school.

4.4 Physical activity and health

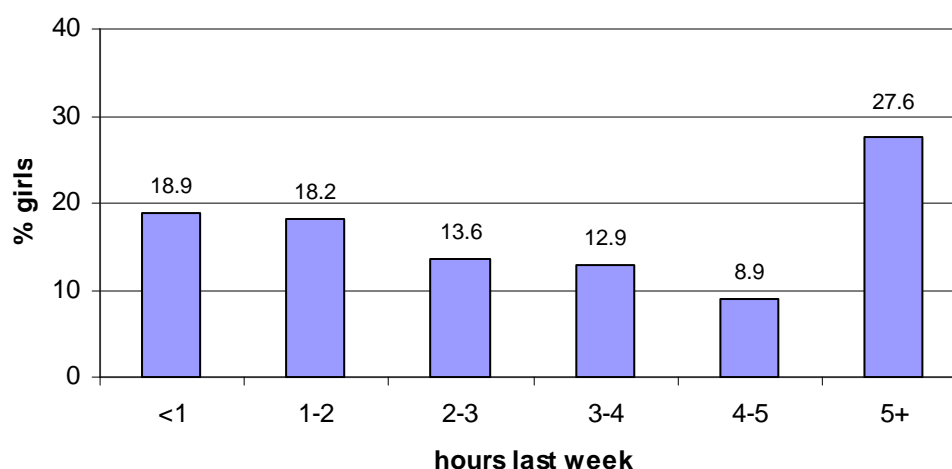
Current physical activity recommendations

- Around a third of girls (32.3%) said they knew the recommended amount of daily physical activity for someone their age.
- Less than one fifth of the total sample (18.9%) correctly stated that the current recommendation is 60 minutes of physical activity per day.
- Only 13.2% of girls reported that they took part in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day during the previous week⁴.

Time spent in leisure-time physical activity

Girls were asked how many minutes they spent doing physical activity in their free time last week, including running, walking, dancing, cycling, heavy housework and gardening as well as sports (Figure 7)⁵. Almost one in five (18.9%) girls spent less than an hour doing physical activity in their free time. However, over a quarter (27.6%) reported that they spent more than five hours being physically active.

Figure 7: Time spent in leisure time physical activity last week



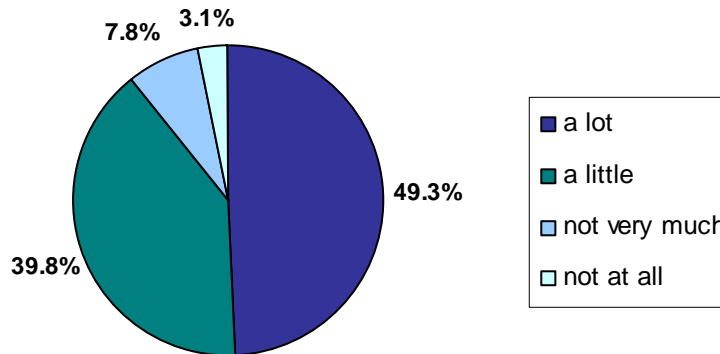
Perceptions of physical activity and health

Around half of girls (49.3%) said they enjoy physical activity *a lot* and a further two-fifths (39.8%) said they enjoy physical activity *a little* (Figure 8). One in ten girls (10.9%) said they do not enjoy physical activity *very much* or *at all*.

⁴ The following definition was used: “Physical Activity is anything that makes your heart beat faster and makes you get out of breath some of the time”.

⁵ Responses were recoded as follows: <1 hour (≤ 60 mins), 1-2 hours (61-120mins), 2-3 hours (121-180mins), 3-4 hours (181-240mins), 4-5 hours (241-300mins), 5+ hours (> 300 mins).

Figure 8: Enjoyment of physical activity



Attitudes towards physical activity and health

- 87.8% of girls agreed that being healthy is important to them.
- 83.7% of girls agreed that being fit is important to them.
- 73.4% said they intend to be physically active when they are older.
- 84.2% of girls said that they would like to be more active.
- Only 48.3% think that they are good at sport.

Motivation

Girls were given a list of reasons why some people do physical activity and asked how much each statement is true for them. Figure 9 shows the percentage of girls who responded that each statement was ‘very true’ for them. Being healthy and having fun were the most common reasons for taking part in physical activity. Almost half of girls also cited spending time with family and friends, feeling better about myself and losing weight as reasons for being active. Girls were least likely to do physical activity in order to take part in competitions or as a means to alleviate boredom.

Perceived barriers

Girls were given a list of reasons why some people do not do physical activity and asked how true each statement is for them. Figure 10 shows the percentage of girls responding ‘very true’ or ‘quite true’ to each statement. The most common reasons for not doing physical activity were perceived lack of skill (“I am not very good at physical activities”, 43.7%) and preferring to do other things with their time (43.6%). Over a third of girls cited feeling embarrassed (35.3%) or difficulty getting to places to do physical activity (34.0%) as barriers. Family responsibilities and financial costs were the least common barriers to physical activity participation.

Figure 9: Motivation for physical activity

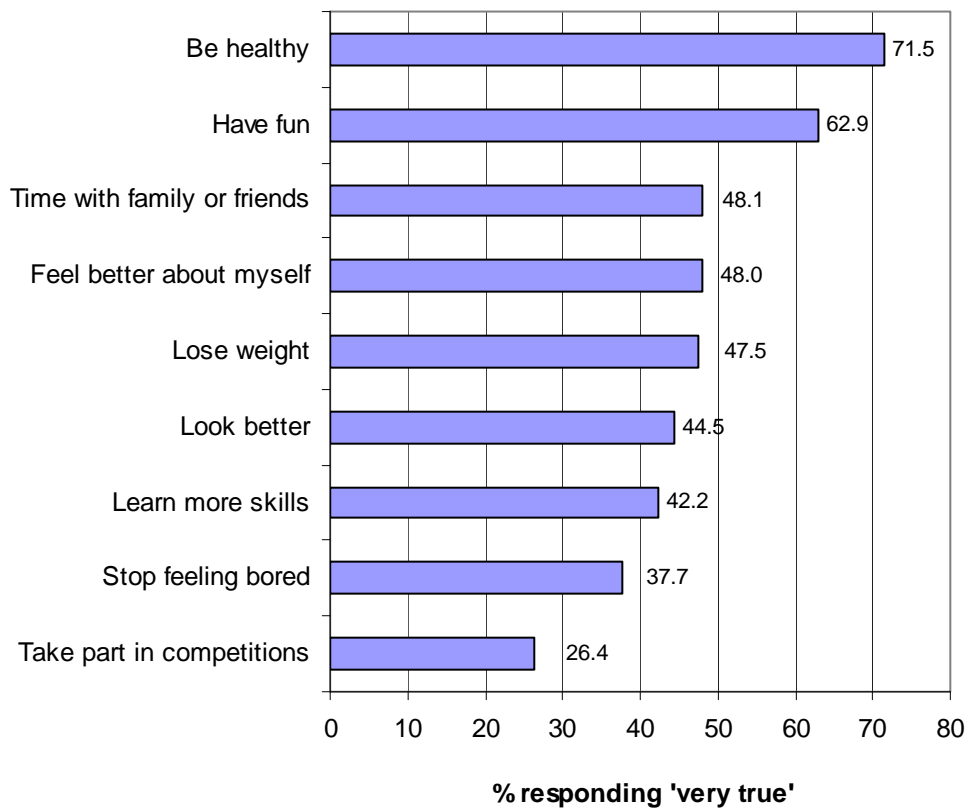
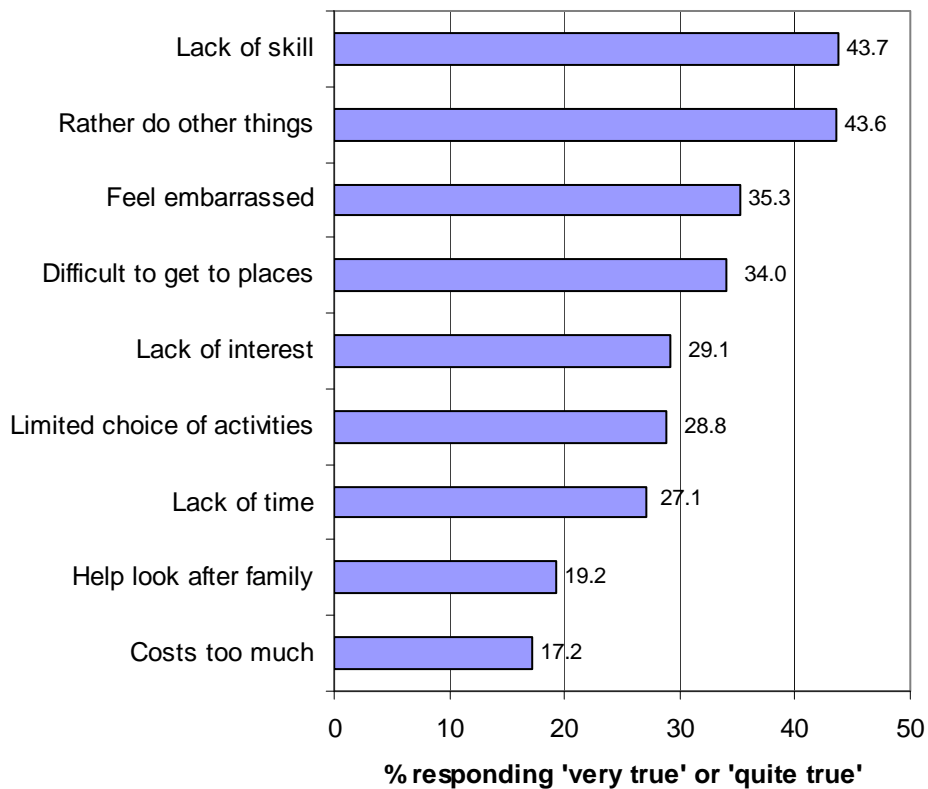


Figure 10: Barriers to physical activity participation



5. Conclusions

This report highlights a number of positive findings in relation to girls and physical activity. The vast majority of girls say they enjoy physical activity *a lot* or *a little* and would like to be more active. Being healthy and having fun were more common reasons for taking part in physical activity than losing weight or looking better. The majority of girls also agreed that being healthy and being fit are important to them, and that they intend to be physically active when they are older.

However, there appears to be a discrepancy between attitudes towards physical activity and actual behaviour. Almost half of girls did not take part in any extra-curricular school-based activities and only 13.2% of girls said that they took part in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day during the previous week. Knowledge of current physical activity guidelines was low, with less than one in five girls correctly stating the current recommendation.

In general, the findings reflect largely positive attitudes towards PE at secondary school, with the majority of girls saying they enjoy PE *a lot* or *a little* and agreeing that PE is an important subject at their school. Over a quarter said that PE is their favourite lesson. However, over a quarter also said that they often feel embarrassed when doing PE and over a third said they would prefer it if boys and girls did PE separately. Almost three-quarters of girls said they spent at least 90 minutes in PE lessons during the previous week which suggests that many secondary schools are moving towards the 2 hour recommendation. However, 15% of girls said they took part in an hour or less of PE.

Overall, the findings suggest that there is scope to increase participation, given the right environment. A number of issues are identified which secondary schools involved in the Fit for Girls programme may wish to address in order to increase physical activity participation among adolescent girls. In particular, almost three quarters of the girls stated that they would prefer a wider variety of activities in PE and a quarter felt that sport is too competitive at their school. Less than half of girls reported that they had been consulted about what activities they would like to do at school, indicating scope to improve consultation work with girls. Although the majority of girls agreed that their school offers enough opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity, almost half had not taken part in extra-curricular activities in the last week. This suggests that the number of activities on offer may be less important than the types of activities available and the context in which they are provided. For example, initial findings from the qualitative focus groups that have been carried out with girls reveal that dance tends to be particularly popular and can transform girls' attitudes towards PE when it is an option available to them.

Lack of skill was reported as a major barrier to girls' participation in physical activity highlighting a need to further develop girls' competence, confidence and physical literacy. This has been reported previously in other studies and is more likely to be cited as a barrier to participation among girls than boys (e.g. Inchley *et al.*, 2008; Wallace & Homes, 2007). Similarly, among schoolchildren in Scotland, perceptions of sports competence have been found to be lower among girls than boys and these gender differences are apparent in the upper primary school years (Inchley *et al.*, 2008). Perceptions of competence are important because young people with high perceived competence have higher expectations of success and therefore invest more in their pursuit of an activity (Harter, 1978). Previous research has shown a consistent relationship between high perceived competence and increased physical activity participation (Sallis *et al.*, 2000). Furthermore, low perceived competence is

associated with feeling self-conscious and anxious about participating in physical activity (Biddle *et al.*, 2005). In relation to the Fit for Girls programme, developing girls' skills and confidence is clearly an area of need. Promoting stronger links between primary and secondary schools across the transition could help ensure that the girls are better equipped for taking part in physical activities by the time they reach secondary school.

6. References

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7. Appendix: data tables

Perceptions of physical education						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	base n
I often find an excuse not to take part in PE	3.5	9.0	15.7	31.6	40.2	17741
PE is an important subject in this school	23.0	45.0	20.9	7.5	3.5	17767
PE would be better if we did a wider variety of activities	30.2	43.2	19.5	5.6	1.5	17741
What we wear for PE makes me feel comfortable	27.1	36.2	18.2	11.8	6.7	17762
I often feel embarrassed in PE	9.4	18.6	23.7	29.6	18.7	17762
PE is my favourite lesson at school	13.9	14.3	21.7	25.2	24.9	17681
Having a female teacher for PE is important	15.3	19.3	40.6	15.9	8.8	17753
Boys and girls should do PE separately	20.5	16.5	25.6	19.1	18.4	17761
I'd like to work in PE or sport when I leave school	7.3	10.1	24.9	30.3	27.5	17770

Perceptions of physical activity at school						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	base n
Girls' sport is as important as boys' sport in this school	44.9	36.3	13.2	4.2	1.4	17767
The facilities for sport and other physical activity in this school are really good	14.5	46.7	26.7	9.3	2.9	17698
Sport in this school is too competitive	7.0	17.6	44.2	26.0	5.2	17714
The changing facilities in this school are really good	8.3	28.0	30.4	21.8	11.4	17672
I would like to do more team games at school	13.6	33.1	36.6	11.7	5.0	17706

Attitudes towards physical activity and health						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	base n
Being fit is important to me	38.4	45.3	13.8	1.7	0.8	17652
I intend to be physically active when I'm older	31.0	42.4	19.3	5.2	2.1	17593
I think I am good at sport	13.5	34.8	29.9	14.8	7.0	17620
Being healthy is important to me	44.6	43.2	10.2	1.4	0.7	17606

Reasons for taking part in physical activity						
	Very true	Quite true	Not very true	Not at all true	base n	
To be healthy	71.5	24.7	2.8	1.0	17518	
To have fun	62.9	31.3	4.5	1.4	17558	
To spend time with family or friends	48.1	36.3	12.7	2.9	17546	
To feel better about myself	48.0	36.2	12.1	3.7	17491	
To lose weight	47.5	28.9	14.3	9.3	17575	
To look better	44.5	32.7	16.2	6.6	17546	
To learn more skills	42.2	39.7	14.5	3.6	17532	
To stop me feeling bored	37.7	40.6	17.2	4.5	17494	
To take part in competitions	26.4	31.8	29.5	12.3	17506	

Reasons for not taking part in physical activity						
	Very true	Quite true	Not very true	Not at all true	base n	
Rather do other things	15.5	28.1	32.1	24.3	17390	
Lack of skill	15.0	28.7	35.6	20.6	17479	
Feel embarrassed	13.8	21.5	33.6	31.1	17466	
Lack of interest	9.0	20.1	31.7	39.2	17488	
Difficult to get to places	8.9	25.1	40.9	25.0	17451	
Limited choice of activities	8.0	20.8	40.0	31.2	17390	
Lack of time	7.5	19.6	36.7	36.1	17469	
Have to help look after family	6.2	13.0	31.5	49.2	17463	
Costs too much	4.7	12.5	37.2	45.5	17488	