SPORTS PARTICIPATION AMONGST 14-21 YEAR OLDS

HOW DO WE ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE TO STAY INVOLVED IN SPORT?

Final Report for Sport Wales

January 2012
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1 INTRODUCTION

Sport Wales’ vision is to unite a proud sporting nation, where every child is hooked on sport for life and Wales is a nation of champions. To ensure that every child is hooked on sport for life, Sport Wales is investing in sports for young people of all ages, in schools and clubs.

From Play to Learn for the youngest, through to Dragon Sport in primary schools and 5x60 in secondary schools, Sport Wales has created a coherent package of sporting opportunities for young people, to help them experience a wide variety of sports and physical activities and take pleasure in being active.

This is essential, not only for achieving Sport Wales’ vision, but for improving the health of the population in Wales. The country needs future generations to be fit, healthy and active to minimise the costs of ill health and maximise national productivity and prosperity.

Sport Wales has been conducting surveys with young people and adults about sports participation for over ten years, and the data consistently shows that young people start to drop out of sport from the age of 14, with the trend being more pronounced amongst females. This phenomenon is not unique to Wales; there has been extensive research about barriers to sports participation amongst young women. In fact, research was recently undertaken in England to understand more about the issues that cause young women to drop out of sport. To achieve its vision for sport, Sport Wales must raise participation levels and reverse these drop-off rates. To do this requires a clear understanding about the issues faced by young people in Wales, and the solutions that would work in Wales.

Sport Wales therefore commissioned Brightpurpose to undertake qualitative research with young people aged 14-21, both males and females, to understand the issues that affect sports participation. The purpose of the research was to:

★ explore the factors that affect drop out in sport, from a Welsh perspective
★ move beyond simply understanding the issues, to find practical solutions and interventions to help retain young people in sport
★ inform a campaign by Sport Wales to influence key decision makers about why young people – especially young females – drop out of sport

This report sets out the findings of our research.
2 METHOD

An overview of our methodology is provided in the diagram below and then discussed in further detail:

2.1 Project set up

The research project started with an inception meeting with the client team to agree objectives, methodologies and deliverables.

This was followed by a phase of research design that comprised of 3 steps:

★ reviewing the contact details from the Active Adults survey to identify potential targets for our recruitment drive
★ finalising our proposed locations and samples for focus groups
★ designing our focus groups and video survey questions

The Active Adults survey, which is conducted by Sport Wales, was used to provide us with contact details for males and females in the 17-21 year old age range. It included details about their levels of sport participation over the 4 weeks prior to them undertaking the survey. We used these details to categorise ‘sporty’ and ‘non-sporty’ individuals. In developing the samples for those to be invited to focus groups we had to draw on geographic areas that had the highest proportions of sporty or non-sporty 17-21 year olds to maximise the sample sizes for recruitment to the focus groups.

In recruiting 14-16 year olds for the focus groups, Sport Wales suggested geographical areas which they knew would have the infrastructure in place to support the recruitment activity. Sport Wales initially made contact with local authority officers in each of the areas to explain the nature of the research and ask them for their help in co-ordinating the recruitment of 14-16 year olds. Their contact details were then passed over to the research team for us to take forward. These contacts also assisted the research team to recruit ‘Young Ambassadors’ who could support the delivery of focus groups and helped us to identify teachers to include in the research.

2.2 Fieldwork

The fieldwork included:

★ 1 teacher focus group
★ 3 one-to-one telephone interviews with teachers
★ 3 focus groups with 14-16 year old boys (1 mixed, 1 sporty and 1 non-sporty participants)
★ 3 focus groups with 14-16 year old girls (2 sporty and 1 non-sporty participants)
★ 2 focus groups with 17-21 year old males (1 sporty and 1 non sporty participants)
★ 1 focus group with sporty 17-21 year old females
★ 4 telephone interviews with non-sporty 17-21 year old males
4 telephone interviews with non-sporty 17-21 year old females

The original intention had been to run 3 focus groups with 17-21 year old males and 3 focus groups with 17-21 year old females. However, even though the 17-21 year olds had confirmed attendance, three focus groups (1 male and 2 female) did not have any of the young people turn up. We agreed with Sport Wales that we would instead attempt to engage 17-21 year olds in one-to-one research over the telephone though we only had limited success with this and exhausted the available sample.

We had also intended to run three teacher focus groups but it proved difficult to get teachers together at the same time, therefore only one was organised, with an additional three teachers agreeing to take part in one-to-one research over the telephone.

2.3 Reporting

Following a team analysis session we developed this report. A learning workshop was held with the client team to discuss the findings before finalising our conclusions and recommendations.
3 YOUNG PEOPLE’S PERSPECTIVES

Our research was conducted with gender-specific groups, by a facilitator of the same gender, as we were trying to understand the different issues faced by boys and girls. However, our findings revealed that in most cases the issues were the same for both boys and girls. Where an issue is gender-specific or relates to a specific age group, the narrative highlights this. Where there is no reference to a specific gender or age group, this is because the issue was experienced across both genders and all ages from 14-21.

3.1 Perceptions of Sport

We asked young people about their perceptions of sport, including asking them to tell us the words they associate with sport. This elicited information about what they thought of as sport, and their feelings about sport.

3.1.1 What constitutes sport?

When speaking to the young people, both girls and boys, the activities that they associate with sport tended to be what might be considered ‘traditional sports’, such as:

⭐ Rugby
⭐ Football
⭐ Hockey
⭐ Netball
⭐ Badminton
⭐ Tennis
⭐ Athletics

However, the ‘sporty’ boys did have a slightly wider view on what constituted sports and included activities such as swimming, running, squash, basketball, gymnastics and boxing.

There were several instances where young people that viewed themselves as ‘non-sporty’ were involved in fitness or active lifestyles but didn’t see that as sportiness. This included:

⭐ Using their bikes to get around
⭐ Going for bike rides with family
⭐ Horse riding
⭐ Going to the gym
⭐ Walking to get around
⭐ Yoga

Amongst the 17-21 year old boys, although some did ‘have a kick around’ with friends or would ‘throw a Rugby ball around in the park’ they did not see this as being sporty because it was more of a social activity and sporadic rather than something that happened on a regular basis.

3.1.2 Feelings about sport

The word clouds overleaf illustrate different groups’ feelings about sport, with the most commonly cited responses appearing as larger words and phrases.
Sports Participation Amongst 14-21 Year Olds

Non sporty girls (14-16):

Non sporty boys (14-16):

Sporty girls (14-16):

Sporty boys (14-16):
Sports Participation Amongst 14-21 Year Olds

Sporty Girls 17-21:

Interestingly, two aspects commonly came up in our discussions, both with sporty and non-sporty groups though with opposite connotations:

**Hard work** – for the sporty groups, hard work was seen as a positive and linked to a feeling of achievement. Completing a hard training session and pushing themselves, for example, was something that made them feel good and was rewarding – they saw it as part and parcel of improving in their sport. For the non-sporty group, hard work was a negative; the effort involved was seen as a chore rather than something that should be embraced.

“When you’ve had a really tough training session and you’re really feeling it, you know you’ve worked hard and it just makes you feel good” *(male, sporty, 14-16)*

**Competition** – Sporty groups viewed competition as an important and positive aspect of doing sport. Their feeling was that competition helped them to improve and again linked this with achievement. Competition was viewed in its widest sense by sporty groups, seeing it as competition with others in the team,
competition with themselves to improve and get better and also in terms of tournaments playing against other clubs/teams. Non-sporty groups reported being put off by the competitive aspects of sport, as they reported that it took the fun and sociability out of the experience.

“In PE it’s not like we’re playing in a cup match but some people take it so seriously and are so competitive – it really takes any fun out of it” (male, non-sporty, 14-16)

The social aspect of sport also came across as a key theme amongst sporty groups as well as some non-sporty 17-21 year old males. For the sporty groups, and particularly those involved in team sports, being together with like-minded people who enjoy what they are doing was an important aspect of their participation.

“It’s like a family, but one you can choose” (female, sporty, 17-21)

It also gave motivation and incentive to make it along to training sessions – thinking they would be letting other team members down if they didn’t attend. For the non-sporty 17-21 year old males it goes back to the ‘having a kick around’ – it is the social aspect that has driven this rather than the desire to be involved in sport in a more structured way.

Amongst sporty males achievement was also a heavily used word to describe what they associated with sports. It gives confidence and a sense of personal pride whether it is individual or team achievement, with those involved in team sports feeling that achieving as a team made the bond between team mates stronger. When discussing best memories of sports, in most cases sporty males gave examples that involved achievement of some kind, whether it was beating a personal best or winning a trophy.

Another common theme amongst the sporty groups was that of health and fitness. This was something that was very important to participants and they linked it to feeling good. Interestingly participants in the non-sporty males focus groups also associated health and fitness with sports, but their view was that health and fitness could be achieved without being involved with sports – this view tended to be held by those that were active in a recreational way but did not see themselves as ‘doing sport’. This was echoed by non-sporty 14-16 year old girls who reported being fit and healthy because they walked everywhere.

Words like fun, exciting, and enjoyment were all used by the sporty groups to describe their perceptions of sport, whereas the opposite tended to be cited by non-sporty groups, e.g. boring, dull, rubbish.

Amongst the non-sporty groups, actual types of sport rather than emotive words or phrases were commonly used to describe sports, and as has been mentioned in a previous section these tended to be what are seen as ‘traditional sports’. A number of non-sporty group participants also fed back that if they had the choice they would rather be doing something else other than sport.
3.2  What do young people do with their time?

The table on the following page provides an overview 14 – 16 year olds' priorities for how they spend their time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Sporty boys (14-16)</th>
<th>Non-sporty Boys (14-16)</th>
<th>Sporty girls (14-16)</th>
<th>Non-sporty girls (14-16)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating in their chosen sport/s</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(training and playing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other hobbies/interests (eg playing guitar,</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riding their bikes/scooters, dancing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging out and socialising with friends</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household chores</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social networking (especially Facebook)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games consoles</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending time with family</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending time with family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
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</table>

The majority of sporty young people, both male and female, spent the bulk of their time playing sports. The majority of non-sporty boys spent most of their free time on the computer or games consoles, whilst the non-sporty girls spent most of their time with their friends, although this was supplemented by further socialising with their friends on Facebook.

The table below illustrates 17-21 year olds’ priorities for how they spend their time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Sporty boys (17-21)</th>
<th>Non-sporty boys (17-21)</th>
<th>Sporty girls (17-21)</th>
<th>Non-sporty girls (17-21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating in their chosen sport/s</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(training and playing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying and course work</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging out and socialising with friends</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending time with boyfriend/girlfriend</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending time with family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sports Participation Amongst 14-21 Year Olds

Full or part time work

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sporty girls we spoke to in this age group did very little except sport, work (where they had time for a job) and University studies. They gained their social life through their chosen sports. Interestingly, a high proportion of 17-21 year old non-sporty young people of both genders told us they used to be more involved in sports when they were younger and that it used to be something that they spent a great deal of their time doing. Why this changed is discussed later in section 3.4.

3.3 Who do they look up to?

We spoke to the young people about who their role models were and why these people inspired them.

3.3.1 Sports stars

Sporty 14-16 year olds’ (both girls and boys) and sporty female 17-21 year olds’ feedback was dominated with ‘sport stars’ – those who were highly regarded in their chosen sport and, often, were seen to be at their peak. The sporting role models tended to be in the same sport as the young people citing them were involved in as well. They were people that the young people aspired to be like – not just in terms of their sporting performance, although this was a factor, but in many cases it was also because they were perceived to:

★ be down to earth
★ have a good work ethic
★ be committed – always give 100%
★ have a desire to be the best
★ help other people – through involvement in community projects

However, the girls reported that there were fewer high profile female sports stars in the media, and so there were fewer people to look up to.

The 17-21 year old girls pointed out the discrepancy between male sport stars’ image (glamorous lifestyle, high pay, getting the girls – something that appeals to many young men, sporty or not) and that of female sport stars (not seen as glamorous or ‘sexy’, therefore not so aspirational for non-sporty young people).

3.3.2 Parents

Parents were commonly held up as role models by all groups except 17-21 year old males. Sporty boys and girls often cited a parent who was, or still is, involved in the same sport as the young person is doing now. The boys and girls also spoke of how their parents encouraged and supported them, and how they wanted to make them proud of what they were doing.

“I look up to my dad because he used to play...............he comes to all my matches and I love it when he sees me playing”

(male, sporty, 14-16)
Sports Participation Amongst 14-21 Year Olds
3.3.3 Public figures

The non-sporty 14-16 year olds tended to cite a much wider range of people that they looked up or saw to be role models. These included people that were highly regarded in an area that the young person had a hobby or interest (e.g., musicians), but also included:

- Nelson Mandela
- Bill Gates
- Movie stars
- Stephen Fry
- David Attenborough
- Sir Alan Sugar
- Andy McNab
- John Cleese
- Michael Palin

Young people spoke a lot about the intelligence of these people, and their ability to ‘bring new things’ to the masses and to do the things that other people couldn’t or wouldn’t do. In some cases it was the dedication of these people, being committed to a cause or to achieve what they set out to achieve.

3.3.4 Impressed, but not inspired

Interestingly, the 17-21 year old males did not necessarily have anyone that they looked up to or aspired to be like. They reported that, although they could respect the achievements, skills, intelligence and work ethic of people they saw as being at the ‘top of their field’, they did not necessarily view them as role models.

When discussing role models and sports stars, 17-21 year old sporty males said that, at their age, they realised that they were never going to be as good or have the same success as those sports stars. Although they had admiration for what they had achieved, they did not look up to them per se.

Similarly, non-sporty 17-21 year old males reported that, although there were many people out there that had achieved great things, done things selflessly and had great drive and commitment, they did not relate to these people.

3.4 Why do young people drop out of sport?

Our research suggests that the vast majority of young people have a positive experience of sports and PE in their earlier years (i.e., primary school). Their comments suggest that there was a strong onus on the fun and play aspects of sports and that it was more inclusive, regardless of ability.

3.4.1 A bad experience at secondary school

The experience of PE and school sports clubs at secondary school had a very strong influence on continued sport participation, with the early years at secondary school being a key point for some in terms of disengaging from sports. We describe this further in section 3.5, but a number of non-sporty young people told us that the difference between primary and secondary school sports had put them off, when they had
been very sporty up until then. Many of the non-sporty 14-16 year olds reported that they had never tried a sports club outside of school and this was largely influenced by their experience of sports at school.

“I don’t enjoy doing sports at school so why would I try to find a club to join to do it in my free time?” (male, non-sporty, 14-16)

3.4.2 No longer fun

Non-sporty girls of all ages reported that a big factor in them dropping out of sport was that it was no longer fun for them, for a number of reasons:

★ having fewer sports available to them, so they became repetitive and boring
★ less of an emphasis on enjoyment and more on technical skills
★ competitiveness went against their preferences for enjoyment and sociability

Non-sporty boys who had previously been sporty and been involved in club sports told us that when they turned 15/16 sport became ‘more serious’, with a greater focus on training drills, fitness, and the competitive nature of sports. For many, this is the point that it becomes ‘too much hard work’ and less fun.

3.4.3 Lack of options

Girls of all ages reported that, once they got to secondary school, there were fewer sports for them to choose from, at school and in clubs. For instance they may have played mixed or girls’ rugby and football at primary age, but at secondary school there was no one to run a girls’ club or class in the sport they were interested in. Others reported wanting to play less traditional sports such as volleyball (because they were more fun) but not having anywhere to do so. Girls also reported fewer clubs for girls than for boys, especially when it came to alternative sports. This was reinforced during our discussions with teachers and 5x60 officers.

14-16 year old non sporty girls did recognise the contribution that 5x60 was making in giving them the chance to try other sports, and they welcomed this opportunity.
3.4.4 Image

Girls reported that image became a factor at about the age of 14, causing some of them, and many of their peers to stop participating in sport. Only one girl cited self-consciousness as an image issue – her sister had stopped running and swimming because she didn’t want others to see her in her kit. The main issues were actually about spoiling their appearance.

“Once they got interested in hair and makeup, they didn’t want to play netball at lunchtime any more. They didn’t want to mess up their hair and go back to class red in the face and sweaty”

(female, sporty, 17-21)

3.4.5 Travel

Another factor that had an impact on sport participation was the distance that young people had to travel and the available transport. This impacted on both participation in school sports clubs (run after school) and sports clubs outside of school. In some cases, although there were opportunities to get involved in school sports clubs/teams, the sessions would take place after school which was impractical for those that relied on a school bus that left straight after school to get them home.

This is especially pronounced for those who live in more rural/remote area of the country where they would have to travel a significant distance to get to clubs outside of school and they do not have transport available to them. There are a wide range of sports that young people would like to try, but do not have access to them in their local area.

3.4.6 Leaving school

A key drop-off point is also when people leave secondary school. There are three main factors at play here.

Firstly, there is the issue of continuity. Quite often young people’s main involvement and participation in sports was through the opportunities that they had at school, including lunch times and after school clubs/school teams. When young people leave school it breaks this routine, and often can’t find or never get round to finding an alternative way of getting involved.

“I used to play for the school badminton team but I couldn’t find a club to join after I left school”

(male, non-sporty, 17-21)

When they leave school, many young people move on to College or University, into employment, or both. For those who are working, their days are much longer than they were at school; they don’t have the same level of motivation, when they get in late from a day at work, to then go out again to training. Two of 17-21
year old males we spoke to said that the work they were now doing was very physically demanding and they just didn’t have the energy to train like they had before.

Those going to University often moved to a new part of the country and could no longer continue with the clubs they used to train and play for. In discussions with two non-sporty males they had intended to find new clubs in the areas they had moved to, though this hadn’t transpired as they had ‘got caught up’ in the social life and course work of University life. Those that we spoke to directly who were at University/College, as well as others in the focus groups that knew people that had stopped playing sport since going to University, said that a big factor was that they now had part time jobs as well as studying full time; they just didn’t have the time to commit to sports.

3.4.7 Changing social life

Having a girlfriend or boyfriend changed how many young people prioritised and spent their time.

“I stay in most nights with my partner. I feel like a hermit”
(female, non sporty, 14-16)

Alcohol and cigarettes were also mentioned by the older non sporty groups as a contributing factor in why they had disengaged from sport.

“I started smoking and it hit my fitness. My coach went mad with me, so I stomped off the pitch. That was it. I had a teenage strop and never went back”
(female, non sporty, 17-21)

“I started going out a bit more and had started smoking – I just didn’t have the level of fitness that was needed anymore and I gradually stopped going”
(male, non-sporty, 17-21)

For a small minority this was more than a contributing factor, as they reported that cigarettes had reduced their fitness to a level where they competitive anymore and they were doing.

In most cases it is not a single factor that has led to young people disengaging and remaining disengaged from sport; it is usually a combination of the factors discussed above.
3.5 When do young people get turned off?

The young people we met described three key milestones where their experiences of sport changed, and as a result either they or some of their peers dropped out of sport.

11-12 years old
At the transition to secondary school, PE and sports become very different to the experience in primary school, which was much more fun and play-focused and allowed them to try lots of different games and activities. Now the focus is on ‘traditional’ sports with limited choice of sports, so it can become repetitive. If a young person isn’t particularly good at sports or interested in these traditional sports, they can start to feel marginalised by their PE teacher at this stage. Facilities can be a turn off too – it’s the first time lots of young people have experienced large (often draughty) changing rooms, communal showers, etc.

14-16 years old
If young people have continued to progress in their sport, this is the stage where things start to get serious; especially in clubs (both school based clubs and clubs outside of school). The focus now is on excellence rather than fun, with lots of repetitive drills to ensure technical proficiency. And at the same time, other factors are competing for their time (GCSEs, social life) and there are other diversions – such as alcohol and romantic relationships. For young people who have the highest potential, they often have to make tough choices at this stage: some have to choose between two sports they’ve been doing well at, others need to choose between a social life and sport, others between academic studies and sport.

16-18 years old
Things change again as young people move on from school and the well-established structures of their lives. Some move away to go to University, others go to college, others into the labour market. Even those who have been heavily involved in sport can wobble at this stage, as they need to find new clubs and venues to take part in sport, and have to juggle the pressures of studies, working and establishing a new social life.

“My friend was amazing at sport. She played for her country. Then she went to Uni and didn’t like the people in her new club. That was it. She just stopped. For two years she did nothing. It was such a loss. She’s doing another sport now, but I couldn’t believe she just stopped.”

(female, sporty, 17-21)
Whilst the majority fitted into this series of milestones, or described examples of their peers dropping out at one or other of them, there were some exceptions.

One of the non-sporty girls we met had been turned off sport at nine, having previously loved sports and been very active. Whilst the timing was different, she described a similar experience as those usually getting turned off at 11/12.

One of the non-sporty males we spoke to had been heavily involved in rugby through his teenage years. Whilst studying for his A-levels, he was finding it difficult to balance his commitment to academic achievement and that of his chosen sport. The final tipping point was when his rugby coach suggested to him that he had to make a choice between his school work and his sport – having been forced to make a choice he chose his schoolwork and stopped training. Although he was in the 16-18 age range when this happened it is the challenges normally associated with 14-16 year olds that been present for him (i.e. conflicting priorities between school work and sport)

3.6 Who or what are the main influencers?

Our discussions with young people revealed several factors that influence their decisions to stay in sport or drop out.

3.6.1 PE teachers and classes

Even the sportiest and most committed young people we spoke to reported that PE teachers and PE classes were not always enjoyable.

Those who had dropped out of sport at an early stage or never engaged fully in it cited their experience of PE teachers and classes as being the most influential factor in their decision.

The main issues described were:

- **favouritism** – teachers were only interested in young people who are good at sport, and did not encourage everyone to participate and enjoy; this was reflected in choosing teams for PE class activities – either you were in the ‘good’ team or the ‘also rans’
- **feeling useless** – if young people were not competent at sport, they reported being made to feel useless by their ‘better’ classmates and in some cases by their teachers too, and they were not encouraged by their teachers to do their best and find something they enjoyed
- **limited choice** – few sports available in PE classes, so if a young person didn’t enjoy or excel at these sports they were stuck (often driven by a lack of facilities/equipment)
- **no fun** – PE classes and teachers didn’t focus on enjoying the sport or the physical exertion
- **tolerating excuses** – PE teachers were too willing to accept ‘excuse’ notes so it was easy for young people to get out of doing sports
- **inconsistency** – some PE teachers were reported as bowing to pressure from young people to do classroom sessions when the weather was bad, so not instilling a positive attitude about sport and activity

“I either ended up in the team with the teacher’s favourites, so I stuck out like a sore thumb because they were all so much...
better than me, or I was in the rubbish team and we never got anywhere. It was demoralising” *(female, non sporty, 14-16)*

“PE lessons were boring. We always did the same thing. Always hockey or netball” *(female, non sporty, 14-16)*

Conversely, when young people had positive experiences of PE teachers and classes, they described them as positively influencing their enjoyment of sport, regardless of how sporty they were.

“I’m not going to go out and join a club or anything but I do usually enjoy the hour of PE I do each week” *(male, non-sporty, 14-16)*

Linked to sports opportunities in school, some of the non-sporty young people spoke positively of the opportunities being provided by the 5x60 officers in their schools. For some it was giving them the opportunity to get involved in physical activity that was different to the traditional sports normally on offer to them, with one person giving fly fishing as an example of what they had had the opportunity to do. The problem for them, however, was that beyond the 5x60 sessions there was limited opportunity to follow through with anything that they did find enjoyable due to a lack of availability/accessibility.

3.6.2 Parents

When parents or other close members of the family were or had been sporty, it was more common for the young person to be sporty and remain involved in sport. Likewise, young people whose parents were non-sporty but generally supportive of their children’s preferred hobbies tended to stay involved in sport.

“It was my parents that got me trying different sports – they’ve always been in to sports” *(female, sporty, 14-16)*

In both cases, the parents and other family members helped oil the wheels that made it possible to stay involved in sport:

- providing transport
- funding club membership and kit

Girls told us that some non-sporty parents didn’t necessarily see the value of sport, and so may not encourage their children in the same way. Academically-inclined parents tended to discount sport and PE as the ‘soft’ option and in some cases actively discouraged their children from participating.
encouraging and supporting young people when they were feeling torn between conflicting priorities
simply taking an interest in what their son/daughter was doing and being involved with them

Without parental or family support, many young people found it easy to drop out of sport, and very difficult to stay in sport.

“None of my family are sporty. They just weren’t interested. But it was all I wanted to do. I did two paper rounds to pay for my kit and club fees. I had to walk everywhere. I had to be so determined” (female, sporty, 17-21)

3.6.3 Facilities

The facilities in schools play a significant role in enjoyment of sport and willingness to participate. Facilities dictate the range of sports that can be played – for example, if there are no facilities to support a particular sport, it simply can’t happen.

“We have to travel over an hour for a home match, because there’s no decent pitch nearby. There’s nowhere you can play on a proper pitch” (female, sporty, 17-21)

Variety and choice is important, and lack of facilities can narrow the options available. In addition, the quality of facilities such as sports halls and changing rooms can actively turn young people off. The changing rooms issue was particularly important to the girls we spoke to, but less so for the boys.

“I used to love swimming, but now I hate it. I hate coming out into the changing room after; it’s freezing. You’re all damp when you put your clothes back on, and you’ve got cold, wet hair for hours. Urgh, it’s awful” (female, non sporty, 14-16)

3.6.4 Friends

Not surprisingly, young people aged 14-16 reported that their friends had a big influence on their willingness to continue playing sport. If they had friends who were also involved in sport, either in their club or at school, they were more likely to remain involved. Boys’ social circles tended to be more influenced by those they participated in sports with and those who shared their passion for sport.
However, those young people (both boys and girls) with wider circles of friends, that included both sporty and non-sporty people, could sometimes feel torn between playing a sport they enjoyed and spending time with their less sporty friends.

“I sometimes miss a training session if my friends are doing something interesting” (female, sporty, 14-16)

This was confirmed by the 17-21 year olds who had remained involved in sport. They tended to have built their social lives around their club, and most of their friends were equally sporty. A number reported having sacrificed a social life for the sake of sport, but instead got their social support from their clubmates.

“They’re my family. If I was in trouble, they would help me out” (female, sporty, 17-21)

“You can’t have a social life. It’s training, matches, Uni – that’s it. But the social life in the club is great” (female, sporty, 17-21)

Some did have a range of friends and managed to combine their love of sport with a social life. These tended to be young people whose sport matches were not played at the weekend.

“I do have friends who are not sporty. They have other hobbies and I have sport” (female, sporty, 17-21)

3.6.5 Exams and studies

For the 14-16 year old group, GCSEs were a huge factor in their lives. The 14-16 year old girls reported feeling stress and pressure about them, and although the boys did not report this to the same extent they did talk about the difficulty they sometimes had balancing the two commitments.

The 17-21 year old group often had exams and studies to juggle too. Those at school were studying for A levels and/or the Welsh Bac. Those at University or College had ongoing assignments to complete, and many needed to fit in a part-time job too.
“After I’ve finished college, I work as a waitress. It keeps me fit, on my feet all night, but there isn’t time for anything else”  
(female, non sporty, 17-21)

Some of the sportiest young people we met in this age group reported that sport always came first, but most felt that they had to prioritise their studies and their work.

“If I have to choose between playing a match and doing an assignment, I’ll always choose the match”  
(female, sporty, 17-21)

“I’m sponsored at Uni, so if I don’t pass my assignments I lose my sponsorship and I lose my gun, so Uni work has to come first”  
(female, sporty, 17-21)

3.7 Does it really matter if they are sporty?

We asked the young people who’d dropped out of sport whether they thought it mattered if they were involved in sports and physical activity.

At 14-16 both the boys and girls didn’t think it mattered if they were sporty, but the boys did think that that exercise and general fitness did matter. All reported having other hobbies and interests that they enjoyed and got other benefits from, and had other outlets for reducing stress. What is interesting is that these young people felt that the benefits and development that can be gained from participating in sport could be achieved through other activities. They believed that their other hobbies and interests helped them to develop things like teamwork, self-discipline, drive and determination and leadership – skills and aptitudes that are generally associated with sports.

Neither boys nor girls in this age group thought that, because they did not participate in sport, they were unfit; rather they saw themselves as getting their physical activity in other ways such as walking or cycling everywhere. A small number spoke fondly about times when they had enjoyed sports in the past, but didn’t feel sufficiently motivated to give it another try.

Interestingly, the 17-21 year olds, and especially the 19+ group, saw it differently. They tended to report that it mattered to them that they weren’t involved in sport, with many saying that they did miss various aspects of their involvement and the benefits they had gained through participation.

Those who had given up wished that they could get back into it, but either felt that they were no longer fit enough to do it or cited time pressures and competing priorities as a
I really wish I could get back into it. I tried running with a friend, but I was so out of breath that I couldn’t do it. I’m not fit enough anymore, so I don’t feel that I could do it again." (female, non sporty, 17-21)

These young people described having given up sports or physical activity several years ago, but felt they couldn’t get back into sport unless they were back at the same level of fitness and/or ability. Rather than attending a club as a means of building their level of fitness or ability back up, they would rather try to regain that level of fitness/ability before going back to a club setting. Some of the girls we spoke to reported that they did not believe they could get back to their former level of fitness, and instead felt that they were now forever excluded from a sport they had enjoyed.

“One of the girls from my school was brilliant at netball, but since we went to Uni she’s given up. She keeps saying she really wants to get back into it, but she’s worried she won’t be fit enough anymore.” (female, sporty, 17-21)

3.8 What would encourage them to get involved again?

For those that were currently turned off sport, and who weren’t yearning to get back into a sport they’d previously loved, the big messages were:

Let me try lots of different things

Variety and
Young people were interested in trying a wide range of options, so they could find the activity they enjoyed and/or were good at. In many cases they wanted to try less traditional sports such as volleyball, and girls wanted to try traditionally male sports such as rugby and football. Adventure and ‘extreme’ sports/activities were also popular suggestions, such as gorge-walking, rock climbing and Zorbing. Girls were also interested in physical activities that were not sports per se, such as street dance, yoga, and Zumba.
Young people who are currently turned off from sport suggested that events where they could socialise with friends whilst trying different sports would appeal to them.

One of the suggestions from 14-16 year old non-sporty boys was for clubs to be ‘more welcoming and friendly’ suggesting that regular open days be held, geared specifically towards people wanting to try it for the first time or come back after a period away.

Another suggestion was for schools to bring in elite Welsh athletes to speak about their particular sport and experiences to inspire people to give it a try. They also suggested that it should be co-ordinated so that whichever elite sports person was in, this could be followed by representatives of local clubs for that sport to speak about their club, what the average sessions was like and how to join. The young people suggested that this would minimise or remove some of the fears and apprehension that people face when thinking about joining a club.

Two 17-21 year old non-sporty boys also mentioned that money was sometimes an issue and that if they had free passes to the local leisure centre facilities they would be much more likely to play five-a-side, use the gym or swimming pool more regularly.

We asked girls in the 14-16 age group (sporty and non-sporty) to come up with ideas for how to promote sport to other girls their age who might not currently be interested. Their ideas ranged from events to marketing campaigns. The photos overleaf capture their suggestions far better than we can write them:
Get set. Get motivated!

Everyone is feeling it, get ready!

Beginners -
Why get involved:
there are many health benefits
eg. less risk of obesity.
Making friends & working as
a team can brighten your day.
Self pride! achieving! winning!

It's fun!

Too expensive?
No worries! Get your
Free Swim Card!

Not confident?
No worries! Most people
are best by playing, then you'll
be gaining confidence in no
time!
Get involved in sport!...

If you are not involved in sport you are missing out, there are many ways you can get involved in sport like:

• Find clubs!
  
  You can always find clubs on the internet, you can ask back to your PE teachers and friends.

• You’re missing out!

• Sport keeps you fit, it is very enjoyable and can often make friends.

• It helps!

• You can lose weight, keep your fitness up.
Sports Participation Amongst 14-21 Year Olds

Sports Day for Non-Sporty People

Come along and join in!

Get active, don't be lazy!

Meet new people and have fun while keeping fit and healthy when doing sports!
Sports Participation Amongst 14-21 Year Olds
Sports Participation Amongst 14-21 Year Olds
Sports Participation Amongst 14-21 Year Olds

Don’t knock it till you try it!

Fun, friends & keep fit!

Running, Tennis, Hockey, Football, Swimming

You will feel much better after doing some kind of sport.
4 TEACHERS’ AND 5X60 OFFICERS’ PERSPECTIVES

We conducted a focus group and a small number of telephone interviews with teachers and 5x60 officers, to explore their perspectives on what affects young people’s participation in sports. In many respects their comments mirrored those of the young people themselves. They also had some comments on the culture of the school and how this can affect participation.

4.1 Variety

In common with the young people, staff recognised the importance of being able to offer a wide range of sports and physical activities – so that everyone could find something they enjoyed and/or were good at. They commented that not all teachers are motivated to offer this variety, and can get in a rut of delivering a small range of ‘traditional’ sports that are in their comfort zone. The staff we spoke to also recognised the appeal of non-traditional sports in engaging young people who wouldn’t normally be drawn to sports.

“There’s something out there for everyone, but you need to give them the opportunity to find their thing; the thing they are good at”

Staff reported that 5x60 was beginning to make an impact, offering more variety to young people in schools and giving them the chance to try different activities in a fun environment. However, they noted that the majority of young people who attend 5x60 sessions tend to be engaged in sports anyway, though some schools have had particular success focussing on encouraging participation amongst those who

“I’ve just come from an afternoon of playing ultimate frisbee with a group of disengaged boys. They loved it”
4.2 Facilities and kit

Staff echoed young people’s views that the availability and quality of facilities and kit make a big difference to whether young people want to get involved.

*We only have a dining hall for indoor sports. When your facilities don’t support five-a-side, the biggest male participation sport in the country, it’s a problem.*

4.3 School culture

The attitude of the head, and the extent to which the school leadership values sport, were reported as crucial factors in determining whether facilities and kit were available, and whether PE teachers were encouraged to offer the variety and choice that would improve young people’s participation.

*I would love to take my class out to a local leisure centre to try new and different things, but there is no way I could get the headteacher to sign off on it. If I can’t say how it is going to improve grades then there won’t be any money available.*

Where schools had a culture of inclusion, rather than sporting excellence, the staff reported it being easier for them to be able to offer all young people a fun and engaging sports experience.
Any lad who wants to play in my team can. They’ll always get half a game. If we get to the semis, then we have an adult conversation about trying to win – we put the best lads in the team for that. But up until then, everyone gets a game.

Some heads were reported as being focused on excellence – either sporting or academic – only, and therefore only supported sports if they contributed to this goal.

Some heads are like “bring me trophies or deliver me grades, otherwise I’m not interested.”

Staff reported that PE and school sports can help deliver one of the key inspection criteria from Estyn: Wellbeing. They suggested that teachers use this as the ‘sell’ for PE in the school. They also noted that sports can offer experience and qualification in leadership through coaching, which contributes to the Welsh Bac and helps with UCAS applications. In their experience, non-sporty young people often make brilliant coaches and it’s a great way of keeping them involved in sports.

Also related to the culture of a school is the willingness of teachers (not just PE teachers) to run and support after school activities and clubs. Often there is no real incentive for teachers to do this and it is purely reliant on the passion and commitment of individual teachers.
4.4 The school day

Staff reported that the structure of the school day has changed, to create a shorter lunch break (often 40 or 45 minutes). This has made an impact on what teachers and 5x60 officers can do during lunchtime.

“By the time they’ve eaten, changed, and you’ve factored in time for changing at the end, there’s only 10 minutes for doing anything...if that”

The effect of this is particularly compounded in schools where students travel to and from school by bus, for instance in schools with large catchment areas. The buses only run at school finish times, so if young people stay on for sports after school they are reliant on parents for transport.

4.5 Clubs

Staff reported that there is significantly more club provision for boys than girls, which can make it more difficult for girls to stay in sports. This is particularly the case outside the metropolitan areas. Consequently, they are not sure where to signpost girls to if they want to get more involved in a sport. One teacher also suggested that where there were strong links between the school and local clubs, participation amongst young people tended to be higher.

A couple of teachers also recognised that clubs tend to have more a ‘serious’ focus on sport and those that were passionate about sport enjoyed this, whereas others just want the ‘fun’ aspect of sport participation. These teachers suggested that part of the problem is that there is very little that sits between ‘nothing’ and ‘club sports’ outside of school, for those more interested in sports for fun.

They also reported a perception that boys’ clubs tend to be friendlier and have more of a sense of community than girls’ clubs. Both are very competitive environments, but staff believed that the boys’ clubs still managed to retain the community spirit alongside this, whilst girls clubs didn’t.

Staff also reported that dads tend to get involved in boys’ clubs, either volunteering or coaching, whilst mums tend to drop their daughters off at a club and come back for them. They also noted that women tended to do sporting activities that their daughters couldn’t participate in together. They wondered if these two factors contributed to girls dropping out more than boys.

“Mums tend to do solitary things like go to the gym, which their daughters can’t really join in”

However, one member of our focus group highlighted that, in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the data suggests that the difference between boys’ and girls’ participation is not significant.
4.6  Costs

Staff highlighted the costs of participating in club sport, and that this was prohibitive for some families. Not only do club members need to pay subscriptions, but also need to the have the ‘right’ kit.

4.7  Role of parents

In common with our findings from talking to young people, staff reported the pivotal role played by parents in supporting their children to participate in sports.

If they’re keen and involved, it happens. If they’re not, the kids drop out.

“I had one parent that I was speaking to at a parents’ evening and I was raising the issue of her daughter’s resistance to participate in PE.

The parent said to me “I used to hate PE at school so I’m not surprised that my daughter does” and has continued to write her notes excusing her from PE ever since”

4.8  Provision for 14-16 year olds

Staff reported that young people aged 14-16 often found themselves in limbo if they wanted to play sport for fun. Apart from clubs there wasn’t much for them, as they are too young for ‘turn up and play’ sessions at local leisure centres. Once they reach 16, more is available, but by then staff reported that they might already have dropped out.
5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Sport versus physical activity

It’s important to note at the outset that whilst many of the young people we spoke with had dropped out of organised sport, they remained physically active. The majority either walked or cycled to get around, and some of the older respondents kept active through their jobs and occasional recreational activities with friends. A small number also participated in activities that didn’t necessarily need club or sports centre membership or were not ‘organised’ sports, for example running, horse riding, cycling, yoga, using the gym.

Therefore we conclude that many of the young people we spoke to were still physically active, albeit not usually with the same frequency and regularity as those who were sporty.

5.1.1 Terminology

This raises an important issue for Sport Wales about future campaigns and promotional activity to encourage greater participation in sports. The term ‘sport’ has negative connotations, and acts as a turn-off and disincentive to some of the young people we met; more acceptable terms for those young people are ‘being active’ or ‘keeping fit’. Therefore using the term ‘sport’ in promotional campaigns might create a bigger obstacle for those young people than if the message focused on ‘being active’.

5.2 Is this a gender issue?

Our findings indicate that both girls and boys drop out of sport at the milestones described in section 3.5, and for very similar reasons. The available quantitative research data indicates that the drop-off is more pronounced for girls than boys, but that the issue exists for both genders. The reasons for girls dropping out of sport are compounded by two factors:

5.2.1 Changes in social habits

The move to secondary school heralds an extreme change in socialising habits for girls. Whilst it’s still socially acceptable for boys to kick a ball around during break times at secondary school, this is not the case for girls. Image also becomes an issue: girls become more interested in style, hair and make-up, and are therefore less willing to get dishevelled at break and lunch times; in some cases they will also avoid PE for the same reason.

5.2.2 Club provision

There are notably fewer clubs for girls than boys, making it less easy for them to pursue a preferred sport outside of school.

5.2.3 Messaging

Apart from the two additional challenges described above, the reasons why boys and girls drop out of sport are broadly the same, and therefore many of the solutions will be the same regardless of gender.
Consequently much of the action to address drop-off does not need to be gender-targeted. However, the messages that will convince girls to reengage with sport and physical activity will be different to those that will persuade boys. Therefore campaigns aimed at young people would need to be gender-specific.

5.3 Non-sporty for life?

None of the young people we met who described themselves as non-sporty, or were not currently involved in sports, had been non-sporty forever. They all reported having played and enjoyed sports and games a lot when they were younger. We explore the milestones at which young people commonly drop out in section 3.5. For those that enjoyed but weren’t particularly good at sport, the transition from primary to secondary tended to be the drop-off point, as sport changed dramatically at this point. For those who were better at sports, the later milestones were the drop-off points.

Given that it seems most young people are keen on sports before they get to secondary school, this provides a strong foundation for Sport Wales to build on. They start off hooked on sport, so the challenge will be keeping them hooked rather than getting them hooked in the first place.

5.4 So what are the hooks?

If young people start off hooked on sport, how does Sport Wales and its partners:

★ keep them hooked so they don’t drop out?
★ re-capture the enthusiasm of those that have dropped out?

Our research shows that there are three key factors that would influence young people who would otherwise have dropped out and make them want to stay involved in sport. There are other enablers that make it possible, and we tackle those in a later section, but first let’s look at what could keep them interested.

★ Variety – the opportunity to do a range of sports and find activities that they enjoy or are good at
★ Fun – it’s got to be enjoyable; when the fun stops, they drop out
★ Sociability – friends and socialising are vital to young people; combining social aspects with physical activity will make it more appealing

Young people suggested tasters and events that would give them the chance to try different sports. However, these would need to be backed up by the right infrastructure: if they try and love a new sport, but then can’t find a local club or leisure centre where they can do it, then they are not able to follow through with it and the opportunity is lost.

5.5 Enablers

As well as the intrinsic qualities that will appeal to young people (described above), we identified a number of factors that can either enable or prevent them from acting on any impulse to play sport.

5.5.1 School culture

Schools are a hugely important enabler as, for many young people, this will be their only exposure to sports in their early teenage years and will form their belief system and perceptions of sport and in relation to
sports participation. If they build a negative opinion of sport through their participation in school it is unlikely that they will have the motivation to seek sporting opportunities outside of school.

School culture influences:

- whether a school values PE and sports
- the status sports and PE are given alongside other subjects and activities
- the level of investment in facilities, kit and range of activities on offer
- whether school sport is inclusive or elitist
- PE teachers’ attitudes and approach
- other teachers’ involvement in after school activities (sporting and otherwise)

If we think about the three hooks from section 5.3, we can see that school culture and the factors influenced by it can determine whether sport in the school is varied, fun and sociable.

Our discussions with teachers and 5x60 officers indicate that the business case for inclusive, fun school sports is not universally well-articulated or understood. Not all heads understand the potential contributions PE and sports can make to a successful Estyn inspection and to the wider life and vibrancy of the school. Culture starts at the top, so if heads don’t see the value of sports then the school culture and climate will not be conducive to keeping every child hooked on sport.

5.5.2 Parents

Parents, regardless of whether they are sporty, are critical enablers. They set the context and tone for children’s lives and if they support their children’s hobbies and interests it is easier for the child to continue to participate. Parents can influence in several ways:

- general encouragement and support – a positive attitude towards sport and physical activity makes it easier for young people to pursue it (indeed this applies to any hobby)
- transportation – a practical consideration for young people who need to travel to take part in their chosen sport, especially in rural areas
- money – sport can often cost money (club fees, kit, travel) and whilst many families have limited disposable income, supportive families are more willing to support financially (where this is possible) than those who are not supportive of their child’s sporting pastimes
- involvement – by getting involved in whatever sport their child is participating, they provide additional support and motivation; a lot of young people look at their parents as role models and want their praise and encouragement

Sporty or formerly sporty parents tended to be very supportive of their child being involved in sport. The picture was more mixed amongst non-sporty parents. In some cases they supported they child’s chosen hobbies enthusiastically, but some who’d had bad experiences of sport were ambivalent, and those who prized academic achievement were sometimes actively hostile. Ambivalence and hostility from parents makes it harder for young people to stay involved.

5.5.3 Sports infrastructure

We heard reports of fewer clubs available for girls than boys, which influences the opportunities girls have to play the sports they’re interested in. Geographically, there is also disparity in the range of activities that are available from one area to the next (for girls and boys). There are also challenges with leisure centre
provision, especially for 14-16 year olds who would like to turn up and play for fun, but are too young to attend without an accompanying adult.

Sports clubs have an elitist image which does not fit with many young people’s desire for a fun experience without the element of competition. The club focus on excellence is appropriate; they are the channel for creating a nation of champions. However, there is a gap in provision for those who want to play for fun.

Leisure centres may have a role to play in this, but there is always an opportunity cost – whenever a leisure centre puts on one activity, it is not providing another activity. If leisure centres increased play for fun provision, there is a risk of excluding those who already use the leisure centre for other activities.

5.6 Life gets in the way

It is really important to recognise that there are some factors that will act as barriers regardless of what Sport Wales and its partners do to try and overcome them:

★ juggling studies and work – there’s just no time to fit in sports as well, in anything other than an ad hoc, recreational way
★ moving away from home and away from established structures – finding and settling in to a new club can be too much when coping with a new place, new people and new time pressures

Our findings indicate that these life transitions are inevitable and that Sport Wales and partners need to accept that some young people will drop out of sport because of this. However, we also found that those who drop out because of these factors tend to want to come back to sport within a few years. The trick will be to make it easy for them to come back to sport and rebuild their fitness when life has calmed down.

5.7 Implications of the research

The research was originally commissioned to inform a campaign to encourage more young women and girls to remain in or re-engage in sport. Our findings, and discussions with key teams within Sport Wales, indicate that a range of activities may be needed. A campaign aimed at young women and girls should be part of the mix in the longer term, but there are other steps that will be needed first, to lay the right foundations for encouraging young people of both genders to stay hooked on sport for life.

5.7.1 Cultural issues

School culture is clearly a major enabler or barrier to continued enjoyment of (and therefore involvement in) sports. Head teachers are the drivers of school culture, therefore they should be a target for Sport Wales and partners to influence their thinking about the value of sport. Wales is in the fortunate and somewhat unusual position of having an inspection regime (through Estyn) that values student wellbeing. This could be a powerful lever in convincing heads that sports and physical activity should have a central place in all students’ education.

5.7.2 The role of clubs
Our findings indicate that clubs are not seen as appealing to young people who want to play for fun. Some of the club members we spoke to contested this and told us that their clubs welcomed beginners and ‘leisure’ participants. Therefore it would appear that in some instances the issue is one of perception.

However we also heard some anecdotal feedback that, whilst clubs wanted to be more inclusive, when they were successful in recruiting a wider range of members they then struggled to cope with the varied demands and aspirations of members.

Clubs have the potential to welcome and encourage more young people, but at the moment are often perceived by those ‘on the outside’ as being elitist, exclusive and unfriendly. Many also currently lack the capacity to handle an influx of members with differing aspirations.

5.7.3 Turn up and play – the role of leisure centres

The opportunity to ‘turn up and play’ for enjoyment is one that young people would welcome, but provision is very limited. Leisure centres have an important role in providing opportunities for young people to play sports for fun in a sociable setting, therefore this needs to be explored with local authority partners and commercial providers of local leisure centres.

5.7.4 Where to focus effort and resources

There are three clear milestones where young people drop out of sport. Dealing with the first (transition to secondary school) would go some way to addressing the second (14-16 year old) by retaining more young people during that ‘wobbly’ period and reinforcing the value and enjoyment of sport. Many of the external factors influencing young people at the 14-16 year old milestone are unavoidable: social life, exam pressures, desire for fun rather than yet another ‘serious’ pursuit. However, tackling school culture might eliminate some of the difficult ultimatums presented to young people by their clubs and teachers about choosing sport or academic pursuits.

The third milestone (transition from school to working/student life) also needs attention, as many motivated and talented young people are lost at this stage as they struggle to balance the competing demands of adult life. Some drop-off is inevitable here too, as life becomes somewhat chaotic for a time, but action is needed to support and encourage young people back to sports and physical activity at the point where they realise they miss it.

We therefore recommend that Sport Wales and partners focus on the tackling drop-off at the following two milestones as priorities:

★ 11-12 year olds – transition to secondary school – focus on improving fun and enjoyment element of school sport and addressing school culture
★ 19-21 year olds – transition to adult life – focus on encouraging and supporting young people back into sport and physical activity at the point where they realise they regret giving it up; this is where a public campaign would fit, provided the necessary infrastructure was also in place

5.8 A partnership approach

When discussing the findings of the research with staff from Sport Wales, it became clear that addressing the issues highlighted in this report is not one agency or team’s job alone. Reducing drop-off in sports
Sports Participation Amongst 14-21 Year Olds

participation will require action by people and teams across Sport Wales, national governing bodies, clubs, education providers, local authorities and policy-makers. Therefore the first step should be to gain consensus from a range of partners about the issues and the plan of action, so that each partner can then do their part in changing mind-sets and culture in the sporting and educational infrastructure.