

Children and Young People's Participation in Sport in Wales

What do we know about children and young people in Wales?

As of 2016, there were 418,616 children aged 5-16 living in Wales (Stats Wales, 2017). While only 2% of these children live in Merthyr Tydfil, 11% live in Cardiff (Stats Wales, 2017). Based on recent data, we know that children are the age group most likely to be in relative income poverty in Wales. Indeed, 30% of children living in Wales live in relative income poverty (Welsh Government, 2017a).

The Chief Medical Officer Physical Activity guidelines suggests that all children and young people (aged 5 to 18) should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes and up to several hours every day (Department of Health, 2011). However, data from the National Survey for Wales suggests that only 51% of children (aged 3 to 17) are active for at least an hour seven days a week, and that the proportion of children doing at least one-hour activity every day decreases with age (Welsh Government, 2017b). Conversely, 81% of children in Wales have at least 2 hours of screen time on a weekday, and 92% of children in Wales have at least 2 hours of screen time on a weekend day. The data also suggests that screen time among children increases with age (Welsh Government, 2017b).

The Wales Child Measurement Programme suggests that 12% of 4-5 year olds in Wales are obese, with levels varying from 18% in Merthyr Tydfil to just 8% in the Vale of Glamorgan (Bailey, 2017). By the time children reach secondary school, data from the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Survey suggest 18% of children are overweight or obese (Welsh Government, 2015). This figure is higher among boys and those in the lowest family affluence group.

Participation in sport can contribute to keeping children and young people in Wales physically active. This paper summarises children and young people's participation in sport in Wales, explores some of the research which attempts to explain why participation levels vary and makes recommendations for questions that need to be considered further.

What do we know about children and young people's participation in sport in Wales?

Our School Sport Survey data indicates an upward trend in sports participation among children in Years 3 to 11 (Sport Wales, 2015). In 2015, 48% of pupils in Years 3 to 11 in Wales took part in extracurricular or club sport on three or more occasions per week. This suggests an increase in sports participation since 2013 when 40% of pupils in Years 3 to 11 took part in extracurricular or club sport on three or more occasions per week.

By overall school stage, there is little overall difference in participation levels; our 2015 data suggests 48% of secondary and 49% of primary pupils took part in extracurricular or club sport on three or more occasions per week. That said, we know participation levels vary by gender, age, ethnicity, disability and relative level of deprivation. Of particular note, our 2015 data suggests:

- 52% of boys took part in extracurricular or club sport three or more times a week, compared to only 44% of girls;
- 49% of children without a disability or impairment took part in extracurricular or club sport three or more times a week, compared to only 40% of children with a disability or impairment; and

- 54% of pupils from the least deprived schools took part in extracurricular or club sport three or more times a week, compared to only 43% in the most deprived schools.

What do we know about why children and young people's participation levels in sport vary?

Sport Wales has undertaken and commissioned a wide range of research to advance our understanding of why engagement in sport continues to vary so significantly across our population. Five themes consistently come up. We call these five themes the 'Elements of Engagement'. The five Elements of Engagement are 1) Motivation, 2) Confidence, 3) Awareness, 4) Opportunity and Resources, and 5) The Experience. Each of these themes are unpicked in the context of children and young people's participation below.

What do we know about children and young people's motivation to take part in sport?

Our 2015 School Sport Survey data suggests that 62% of pupils in Years 3 to 11 think PE lessons and school sport help them 'a lot' to have a healthy lifestyle. When asked what would motivate them to do more sport, the most commonly selected options included:

1. 'If my friends went with me' – 40% (31% of males and 48% of females);
2. 'If I had more time' - 36% (32% of males and 40% of females); and
3. 'If there were more sports that suited me' - 35% (34% of males and 35% of females).

The desire to do more sport appears to have gone up between 2013 and 2015. We can tell this through the proportion of children who think they already do enough sport – it was 15% in 2013 and 8% in 2015, with boys more likely to think they already do enough sport than girls.

Bright Purpose research commissioned by Sport Wales suggested that one of the primary reasons for girls dropping out of sport is because of changing social habits and motivations (Bright Purpose, 2012). 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 (Bright Purpose, 2012).

Similar to the School Sport Survey data, the Bright Purpose research also shows that there are three key factors that would motivate young people who would otherwise have dropped out and make them want to stay involved in sport (Bright Purpose, 2012). These factors include:

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

What do we know about children and young people's confidence to take part in sport?

From analysis of our School Sport Survey data, we know that children who are very confident in trying new activities without worrying are twice as likely to participate in sport on three or more occasions a week. The 2015 School Sport Survey data suggested that boys were more likely to express confidence when they are trying new activities – with 85% being 'very confident' or 'confident' compared with 73% of girls. Indeed, when asked what would encourage them to do more sport, 28% of girls said they would do more sport 'if they were more confident'.

What do we know about children and young people’s awareness of sporting opportunities?

Children and young people’s awareness of sporting opportunities has not been well researched. This is probably because children’s awareness of sporting opportunities depends to a large extent on their schools’ and parents’ awareness and provision of sporting opportunities.

What do we know about children and young people’s opportunities and resources to engage in sport?

On average, children and young people in Wales have 101 minutes allocated to PE in schools per week. This ranges quite significantly from 72 minutes in Merthyr Tydfil to 115 minutes in Monmouthshire. Research commissioned by Sport Wales which explored participation and non-participation in sport among black and minority ethnic groups in Wales suggested that schools have a significant role to play in getting children to play more sport (Long, 2015). Their focus groups with children and young people found that the offer of extra-curricular activities was vital for those who did not participate in a club environment beyond school. The importance of having a variety of sport opportunities available was also emphasised, as was having a choice over what those activities are. The research also suggested that individuals whose parents were engaged in sport were also likely to participate. The vast majority of respondents, irrespective of ethnicity, said parental support was vital.

Similarly, Bright Purpose’s (2015) research identified a number of factors that can either enable or prevent young people from acting on any impulse to play sport. These factors included three factors to do with opportunities and resources:

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. If they build a negative opinion of sports through their participation in school it is unlikely that they will have the motivation to seek sporting opportunities outside of school;
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 including encouragement, transportation, money and involvement; and
3. Sports infrastructure - We heard reports of there being 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).

What do we know about children and young people’s experience of taking part in sport?

From analysis of our School Sport Survey data we know that children are five times more likely to take part in extracurricular or club sport three or more times a week if they enjoy it. Our 2015 School Sport Survey suggested that at all stages (primary and secondary) and in all environments (sport during PE, school clubs and sport outside of school) boys enjoy sport more than girls. This difference in gender-based enjoyment of sport is greater in secondary school than in primary school (see the table below).

Table 1. Enjoyment of sport – percentage of pupils who answered ‘a lot’

	Years 3-11	Primary		Secondary	
	All pupils	Male	Female	Male	Female
Enjoy PE	65.2	79.3	77.3	64.5	43.3
Enjoy sport in school clubs (extracurricular sport)	53.0	71.1	67.8	46.5	31.7
Enjoy sport outside of school	68.4	75.8	72.7	68.2	58.6

Vision for sport in Wales

As we create the vision for sport in Wales we would be interested in your answers to any of the following questions. You can respond by emailing feedback@sport.wales or by the following link.

1. The majority of children in Wales want to do more sport. How can we increase the number and variety of opportunities for children (in particular for girls, those with a disability and those from the most deprived areas) to engage in sport in Wales?
2. We know that the drop off in sports participation after primary school is more pronounced for girls than boys. How can we make sport more appealing to secondary school aged girls?
3. We know that for many children, parents are critical enablers in their participation. However, not all children and young people in Wales have 'sporty' parents. How can we provide sporting opportunities for children whose parents don't have the enthusiasm, transportation or money to support them?
4. We know that girls are less confident than boys to engage in sport, and that confidence is a big determinant of participation. How can we increase girls' confidence to engage in sport?
5. We know that there is a vast inequality in children and young peoples' opportunity to engage in sport in Wales. How can we reduce this inequality in opportunity?

References

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