



Final Summary Report

Fit for Girls is a joint programme between sportscotland and the Youth Sport Trust which promotes physical activity among girls aged 11-16, specifically those who are least likely to be active.

Funded by the Scottish Government, Fit for Girls aims to bring about sustainable change in schools and build a positive future for girls participation in lifelong physical activity.

The programme is delivered through secondary schools and provides training for physical education (PE) teachers, Active Schools coordinators and other physical activity professionals to equip them with the knowledge, tools and skills to successfully consult, plan and implement positive PE experiences and sustainable physical activity programmes for girls in the school setting.

This report presents a summary of the key findings from an evaluation of Fit for Girls. The aim of the evaluation was to assess the impact of Fit for Girls on levels of participation in PE, physical activity and sport among secondary girls¹.

The evaluation draws upon quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a comprehensive picture of; approach and delivery at the school level, an understanding of girls perceptions, attitudes and enjoyment levels of PE, physical activity and sport and explores the participation rates for girls, low active and active girls.

The methods included:

- Questionnaire to all S2 girls in year one (baseline) with a follow up in S4
- PE staff/Active Schools online questionnaire
- Focus group discussions with disengaged girls in four case study schools
- Focus group discussions with PE staff in four case study schools
- In-depth interviews with national and local stakeholders

Findings show that Fit for Girls has clearly had a positive impact on how secondary schools approach the promotion of physical activity among girls, and low active girls in particular.

Some of the most positive aspects of the programme include improved consultation with girls, increased numbers of girls-only activities, and increased perceptions of health, fitness and physical activity levels among girls. Engaging low active girls in physical activity within the school setting is an ongoing challenge.

¹The findings presented here are indicative of the impact of the programme and provide an insight into girls attitudes and beliefs around sport. For full details of the methodology please see the main report.



Through its innovative approach, Fit for Girls provides health improvement opportunities, promotes a lifelong healthy attitude and begins the process of health culture change in our communities.

Programme reach

By the end of the three year programme:

32 local authorities had taken part in training and committed to delivery of the programme

344 mainstream schools and 15 ASN schools were engaged with the programme

106 workshops had taken place

334 schools had approved action plans



Consultation

Consultation and giving girls a voice is critical for engaging girls in PE, physical activity and sport. Evidence shows that, when low active girls were consulted about activity choice, this resulted in more positive experiences and engagement. Broadening consultation to include potential barriers to taking part in these activities may further help increase participation.

Consultation with girls was a key component of the training and implementation of the Fit for Girls programme and as a result, consultation with girls saw great improvements:

- 98.8% of PE staff and 92.0% of Active Schools staff had consulted girls about the types of activities they would like to do at school.
- 49.7% of PE staff and 43.4% of Active Schools staff said that the way they consult with girls had changed as a result of Fit for Girls. Of these, more than two-thirds felt that this change had improved girls' engagement.
- There was a significant increase in the proportion of girls reporting to have been consulted about what physical activities they would like to do at school between S2 (43.2%) and S4 (61.3%).

Impact of Fit for Girls

While changing culture is a long term process, results from the evaluation show that Fit for Girls had considerable impact at the school level and has helped to create more opportunities for girls to be active both within and outside school, thus facilitating change at an individual level. The key elements which contributed to the programmes success are summarised in this report with recommendations to support future work in this area.

It worked so well because the girls were involved in the whole process from the start. Consultations were carried out, dance came out of that, it came from girls themselves. Girls led the dance groups and had ownership and responsibility.

Physical education

One in five schools allocate two or more hours of PE a week for S1 and S2 pupils. PE allocation was typically lower for older year groups. 92.4% of PE staff and 76.0% of Active Schools staff said that their school offers enough opportunities for girls to take part in sport and other physical activities within PE. Dance, football and gymnastics were the most common girls-only activities within PE.

PE staff reported a total of 137 new curricular clubs and Active Schools staff reported a total of 73 new curricular clubs which had started as a result of Fit for Girls.

Low active girls were more likely to make excuses not to do PE, feel that boys and girls should do PE separately, and feel embarrassed during PE.

I find it a lot better because the classes have split up into boys and girls, so the fact that it's like that now has made it all girls. I don't feel as nervous so I'm enjoying it a lot more. I suppose I just feel more confident and comfortable in PE now because it's girls only. (S4 girl)

The context in which PE and extra-curricular activities are delivered is central to understanding girls' engagement.

Offering a choice of activity is important, but girls' choices are often influenced by a range of factors including relationships with peers and teachers. Girls often opted into activities based on friendship groups rather than the activity itself.

Consultation is a key method to tap into the range of factors that may impact upon girls participation. A supportive PE environment, including good relationships with PE teachers, is critical for engaging adolescent girls in PE classes.

Provision of clubs and activities for girls

In relation to extra curricular provision 68.4% of PE staff and 59.1% of Active Schools staff agreed their school offers enough opportunities for girls to take part in sport and other physical activities.

Football, dance and netball were the most common girls-only extra-curricular activities. Over three quarters of girls agreed that their school offered enough opportunities to take part in sport and other physical activities and this figure did not change over time.

Although the majority of girls agreed their school offers enough opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity this was not reflected in actual participation in extracurricular activities. Only one in ten (11%) S4 girls reported regularly attending a physical activity or sports club session at school which 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.

558 The total of new extra-curricular clubs as a result of Fit for Girls

- 72.5% of PE staff and 71.7% of Active Schools staff said that involvement in Fit for Girls had influenced the provision of extracurricular clubs and activities for girls.
- PE staff reported a total of 250 new extra-curricular clubs and Active Schools staff reported a total of 308 new extra-curricular clubs which had started as a result of Fit for Girls.
- 78.9% of PE staff and 74.0% of Active Schools staff said that, as a result of Fit for Girls, their school had started new girls-only clubs. Of these, over two-thirds of PE and Active Schools staff felt these clubs had been very successful or successful in increasing girls' participation.

Participation in PE, sport and physical activity

Girls as well as PE and Active Schools staff reported improvements in physical activity participation during the time the Fit for Girls programme was delivered.

- 59.9% of PE staff and 53.0% of Active Schools staff said that Fit for Girls had helped to increase girls' participation in PE, sport and physical activity.
- 47.5% of PE staff and 42.7% of Active Schools staff said that the programme had specifically helped increase participation among low active girls.

Between S2 and S4:

- 62.2% of girls had taken part in a physical activity they had not done before.
- 49.2% had taken part in a girls-only physical activity.
- 37.3% had taken part in physical activity outside of school as a result of trying it at school.

Physical activity and health

- 60.9% of PE staff and 53.4% Active Schools staff said that involvement in Fit for Girls had led to a greater focus on the benefits of physical activity among girls at their school.
- Staff felt that Fit for Girls helped them to increase awareness of the benefits of physical activity to girls. This is demonstrated by the higher proportion of girls in S4 compared to S2 who correctly stated the current recommended level of physical activity for their age group, from 18.9% to 30%.

Out of school activities

Girls' reported participation in physical activity and sports clubs outside of school increased between P7 and S4. During this same period, participation in school sports clubs decreased.

It is not clear from the research why girls prefer to participate in clubs outside of the school environment. It appears that school is an ideal place to introduce new activities, as reflected in the number of S4 girls who had taken part in a new activity since S2. However this needs to be followed up with links to clubs in the local community.

A quarter of PE staff (26.4%) and a third of Active Schools staff (33.5%) felt there were not enough opportunities for girls within the local community. There was perceived to be a lack of clear pathways for girls from school activities into community clubs. Challenges were greater in areas which were more isolated geographically.



Girls' participation outside of school increased between P7 and S4

This highlights the need for community based clubs and activities to cater for the needs of adolescent girls, particularly those who are currently low active. Partnership working is critical to success in terms of maximising opportunities and pathways for girls participation.

Motivations and barriers to participation

The most commonly cited motivator for girls to participate between S2 and S4 was 'to be healthy'. The proportion of girls reporting losing weight and looking better as reasons for doing physical activity increased with age and this was supported by qualitative data.

Girls reported lack of skill and preferring to do other things as the most common barriers to participation at S2 and S4. Between S2 and S4 there was an increase in almost all reported barriers to participation. The largest increases were preferring to do other things, lack of time, limited choice of activity and costs.

Low active girls were more likely to say that they would rather do other things, or that they lacked skill or interest, felt embarrassed or lacked time than more active girls.

I think with girls of this age, there are many other things they would rather do with their friends, so I guess it's about changing their mind set of sport and trying to get them to prioritise it. (PE teacher)

There is a need for better understanding of the reasons for disengagement among girls. PE and Active Schools staff reported lack of interest as the main barrier to girls participation in physical activity; whilst this is a key barrier for low active girls, girls in general were less likely to report this as a barrier. Girls commonly cited lack of skill as a barrier, but this was not picked up by PE and Active Schools staff, who acknowledge this as a problem, but not necessarily as a barrier. Staff recognised that girls priorities change with age and that other things become more important than sport. Similarly the importance of peers increases with age and this can have a negative impact on participation.

Staff were positive that Fit for Girls was helping to address the barriers to taking part in physical activity and sport. In particular it was noted that the programme had helped address lack of interest, over emphasis on team games and PE kit and lack of skill.

Enjoyment

Enjoyment of physical activity is central to engagement.

83.9% of S4 girls reported that they enjoy physical activity a lot or a little. This finding was more likely for active girls (91%) compared to low active (74%) and represents a slight decrease compared with in S2 (89.1%), but is similar to previous findings among girls this age in Scotland.



Enjoyment increases when girls are consulted and given a choice of activities

However, qualitative data revealed more positive changes in attitudes and enjoyment among some girls during this period. Enjoyment increased when girls felt they had some autonomy, were given a choice of activity, and felt at ease with their peers in the class.

The social context in which PE, physical activity and sport are delivered is clearly important for girls. PE and Active Schools staff may benefit from the strength of girls existing peer networks in order to enhance enjoyment and engagement.

Perceived skills are also important as research has consistently shown links between higher levels of competence and greater enjoyment. We also know this is a key barrier to girls taking part.

When girls are listened to and empowered levels of enjoyment and engagement increase.

Partnership working

One third of PE staff (34.2%) and around two-fifths of Active Schools staff (42.6%) said that existing partnerships had improved since implementation of Fit for Girls. The findings suggest that partnership working around girls participation is improving. Although Fit for Girls was not necessarily the main driver in creating these partnerships, it was certainly instrumental in maintaining and strengthening existing links.

Fit for Girls has definitely helped build relationships between physical education, Sports Development and Active Schools. The resources that go with the programme are absolutely imperative to make this happen, and the training was a big part of it too. (local stakeholder)

Where there had been improvements in partnership working as a result of Fit for Girls, 33.5% PE staff and 46.7% Active Schools staff reported that these partnerships had a positive impact on engaging with low active girls.

Generally speaking, there was reported improvements to partnership working since the Fit for Girls programme started. This was more likely to be reported by Active Schools staff than PE staff. A key area for improvement was the partnership working between primary and secondary schools.

Partnership working is essential for the development of effective and sustainable physical activity programmes within and beyond the school setting.

The findings suggest that work around girls participation is improving and the resources and training provided by Fit for Girls were thought to have had an impact in terms of bringing different partners together.

Integration and sustainability

23.2% of PE staff and 25.9% of Active Schools staff reported that their School Development Plan explicitly identified promoting physical activity among girls as a priority.

These findings are encouraging as they suggest that around one quarter of schools nationally have embedded physical activity promotion among girls within the ongoing work of the school, leading to more sustainable outcomes.



If you invest quality time, girls will feel supported, valued and have self belief

The success of individual programmes was often attributed to certain individuals or groups of individuals who had a key role in driving it forward. Concerns were expressed about the programme not continuing if this person were to leave. This further emphasised the need to integrate Fit for Girls within schools as an important step in sustainability.

Active Schools were seen as critical to the future sustainability of the programme, but shared ownership was seen as necessary to facilitate success.

Recommendations



Ensure that adolescent girls' physical activity is included in School Development Plans.

Continue to consult with girls about the types of physical activities they would like to do and their preferences for how physical activity is delivered.

Include strategies to enhance participation such as: offering choice, providing single sex PE classes and clubs, offer girl friendly activities, allow girls to opt in to activities with their friends, provide a supportive PE environment, develop good relationships between girls and PE teachers and establish pathways to community sport.

Improve communication and consultation with girls about reasons for disengagement and barriers to participation.

Establish links between school and community sport to support girls who prefer to take part outside of school.

Continue partnership working to maximise opportunities and pathways for girls participation.

Specifically, partnerships between PE staff and Active Schools coordinators and Sports Development are essential for ensuring that pathways exist for girls to follow up activities tried at school.

Continue to improve links between primary and secondary schools.

Provide a supportive PE environment, which is critical for engaging girls in PE lessons.

Provide opportunities for PE and Active Schools staff to share good practice.

Capitalise on the strengths of girls' existing peer networks in order to enhance enjoyment and engagement.

Acknowledge the differences between low active and active girls by offering girl friendly activities and addressing barriers to participation.

Prioritise girls' physical activity, with particular focus on low active, disengaged girls.

Bring staff together out of the school environment to review action plans and continue to plan for the future delivery of girls physical activity and PE.



If you would like to view the full report, please visit www.sportscotland.org.uk/ffg-finalreport or for further information please contact:

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