

# Evaluation of **sportscotland** supported activity: schools and education

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## Executive summary May 2018

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# Executive summary

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## About this report

This evaluation explores the impact of the blend of **sportscotland** supported work in the schools and education environment. The evaluation was undertaken at the same time as:

- an evaluation of **sportscotland** supported work with clubs and communities; and
- research exploring **sportscotland**'s contribution to the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework (ASOF): schools and education and clubs and communities environments, which included a large scale survey with almost 15,000 responses from school pupils across Scotland.

Key findings from the ASOF survey have been highlighted within this report.

This evaluation is part of a series of **sportscotland** wider evaluations being undertaken from 2017 to 2019. These look in depth at how the programmes **sportscotland** deliver alongside partners support the sporting system. They provide insight into what is working well and what can be improved. These will be used to inform **sportscotland**'s next planning cycle.

## The **sportscotland** blend of support

**sportscotland** support in the schools and education environment includes:

Programme	Aims	Scale in 2016/17
Active Schools	To provide more and higher quality opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity before school, during lunchtime and after school, and to develop effective pathways between schools and sports clubs in the local community.	All schools in Scotland More than 400 Active Schools Managers and Coordinators More than 23,000 deliverers Almost 294,000 participants
Active Girls	To increase opportunities for girls and young women to participate and lead in sport and physical activity	780 Active Girls participants
School Sport Award	To encourage schools to continuously improve PE and school sport	632 schools with School Sport Awards

School sport competition	To support the development of secondary school sport competition	17 School Sport Competition Officers across Scotland, linked to Active Schools networks
Competition organiser training	To equip young people with the skills to undertake the role of an event or competition organiser	300 participants
Young Ambassadors	To develop young people as leaders in sport, motivate and inspire others and influence school sport	643 Young Ambassadors
Young People's Sport Panel	To represent the views of young people nationally	15 young people
Facilities support	To develop high quality places for sport and activity	20 schools, £5.4 million - between 2003 and 2017

## Participation

In 2016/17, almost 294,000 children and young people took part in Active Schools activity. This is an average of 43 per cent of the school roll. Levels of participation are highest at primary schools (53%) and schools for children with additional support needs (51%), and lower for secondary schools (30%). In 2016/17, over 1,700 young people were involved in **sportscotland** supported leadership opportunities.

## Quality of opportunities

Generally, young people, parents, teachers and the Active Schools network rated the quality of **sportscotland** supported opportunities in schools highly. It was seen to:

- increase the number and variety of sport and activity opportunities;
- build the capacity of deliverers;
- support a culture of activity in schools and communities; and
- be well organised and informed by young people's views.

Teachers felt that Active Schools provided inclusive and wide ranging opportunities which increased the participation of young people in sport and physical activity, including non-sporty pupils. Teachers also largely felt that Active Schools work responded to the needs of schools and pupils, taking targeted approaches as required – for example for girls or young people with additional support needs.

## Quality of people

The Active Schools programme was seen by many as underpinning the other **sportscotland** supported work in schools. Pupils and teachers believed Active Schools teams to be enthusiastic, responsive, innovative and organised.

The skills of Active Schools deliverers were generally rated highly. However, there were some concerns about the reliance on volunteers creating a cycle of deliverers, and a lack of consistency in deliverer skills. Active Schools teams largely felt effective at recruiting and retaining volunteers, but some found this challenging – particularly in rural or disadvantaged areas.

## Inclusion

Active Schools was largely seen to provide inclusive opportunities which were accessible to a range of young people. Active Schools teams have worked hard to engage girls and young women, people with additional support needs and young people from areas of socio-economic disadvantage. In schools for young people with additional support needs, the proportion of pupils participating has increased since 2011 to over 50 per cent – which is higher than the national average. Schools with high levels of deprivation are also slightly more likely to have high levels of Active Schools participation than those with low levels of deprivation.

However, more young men than young women take part in Active Schools activity, and young men also generally take part more often. Over time, the gap in participation between young men and women has remained broadly stable. Between 2011 and 2016, young men visited Active Schools sessions 16 per cent more than young women – although this varies by local authority. This is the equivalent of 8,600 more visits by young men than young women each week, over six years. Local authority areas with high levels of Active Schools participation overall were more likely to have higher levels of young men participating than young women.

In contrast, more young women than young men take part in **sportscotland** leadership opportunities. More than half of Young Ambassadors, competition organiser training participants and members of the Young People's Sport Panel were young women.

Successful approaches to engaging under-represented groups often included:

- speaking to young people to find out what they want to do;
- accessing data and information about needs;
- having strong role models;
- introducing less competitive activities;
- having targeted sessions or small group work;
- building deliverer skills to support everyone – particularly pupils with ASN;
- Active Schools Coordinators with a specific role around tackling inequalities;
- removing any financial barriers to participation; and
- working jointly with others, including public and third sector organisations.

The large scale survey of school pupils found that levels of participation in Active Schools activities were broadly similar across different equalities characteristics. However, secondary pupils, disabled pupils and young men spent a marginally

higher average time at Active Schools activities. The survey found that Active Schools has a positive contribution to the physical activity levels of disabled participants in mainstream schools and people living in the most deprived communities.

## Leadership

The Young Ambassadors programme was viewed positively, with ambassadors seen as great role models and an excellent resource for schools. Young Ambassadors broadly had a positive experience, and felt well supported both locally and nationally. Some Young Ambassadors already held other leadership roles, and may have been less likely to benefit from the role than some other pupils. Young Ambassadors often found it hard to balance their role with their other responsibilities – particularly in S5 and S6.

Potential future improvements to the programme included:

- more sustainability – involving young people earlier in their school lives, and sustaining this into the community;
- more accessibility – with more opportunities and clearer application and selection processes within schools; and
- better links – some areas had developed broader leadership programmes which they felt were more accessible, sustainable and impactful.

## Profile and connections

Most felt that **sportscotland** supported work in schools had helped to build the profile of school sport. Active Schools was largely seen as a high profile programme, with Young Ambassadors and the School Sport Award also contributing to the school ethos and culture around sport and activity.

Most felt that **sportscotland** supported work in schools, particularly Active Schools, aligned well with wider outcomes in the schools and education environment – particularly health and wellbeing priorities. However, some felt that with so much going on within the education environment, the Active Schools agenda could get lost, and that there was scope to look more closely at how Active Schools could be linked to wider learning.

It was also felt that there was a good fit with sport and physical activity strategies at national and local level. However, some felt that there was a need to focus more clearly on national priorities around supporting inactive people to become more active.

## School to club links

There were mixed views on the effectiveness of school to club links. While deliverers and strategic stakeholders were largely positive about links, some Active Schools teams found that there were barriers to building links – such as a limited number of local clubs, lack of interest from local clubs, cost, travel and challenges quantifying links and connections.

While most felt that **sportscotland** struck a good balance between supporting school and club sport, some felt that there was more of a focus on schools than clubs.

## Places for sport and physical activity

Based on a small number of interviews, the experience of schools and local authorities which had accessed funding through the Sport Facilities Fund was broadly positive, and most were content with the support provided by **sportscotland**. Recipients of funding were very positive about the impact of the new facilities. This included greater use and access; better health and safety; enhanced school to club pathways and links; development of more sustainable sport clubs; development of interest in new sports; and supporting a more vibrant school PE department.

More generally, some areas for improving facilities to enhance activities in schools were identified, including:

- availability – with halls often being in other usage or unavailable outside school hours; and
- changing facilities – which could put some young women off participating in school sport activities.

## Impact on young people

Young people felt that Active Schools had enabled them to try new sports, have more choice of activity, and feel more confident about trying new activities. Pupils said that without Active Schools, they may have done other sports, spent time on other interests or been more sedentary. Active Schools participants who responded to the school survey were also positive about the development of their sporting and physical activity skills through their involvement in Active Schools.

Young people responding to the survey reported feeling healthy, confident and interested in new things because of taking part in sport and physical activity. Active Schools participants felt more positive about all of these areas than pupils who did not take part in Active Schools. This was reflected in interviews with young people, particularly those with additional support needs.

Pupils involved in leadership roles learned many life skills around confidence, leadership, organisation, communication, decision making, team working and public

speaking. Some felt more confident at school or more confident going on to further learning opportunities. Many teachers felt that, Active Schools participation and leadership activity helped some pupils to become more involved in and engaged with learning, with behaviour improving and a consequent impact on attainment. Some went on to volunteer, coach or officiate and some found an interest and passion for sport that they wanted to carry through into their career.

## Programme specific findings

This evaluation explored the whole schools and education portfolio. The strengths and weaknesses of the Active Schools programme and associated leadership work have been explored above. The strengths and potential areas for development of other **sportscotland** supported work in schools include:

- **Active Girls** – This programme is helping to raise the profile of sport for young women, and providing leadership opportunities and role models. However, there is potential for more follow up after Active Girls events, to encourage sustained participation.
- **School Sport Award** – This programme is having a positive impact on the quality of opportunities and building a culture of sport and activity in schools. However, there is potential for more work to encourage buy-in from schools, and greater consideration of how to ensure the Bronze and Silver level awards are accessible to all schools, while still having robust standards in place.
- **School Sport Competition** – Competition opportunities were highly rated and seen as well supported. However, they were seen as of variable quality and some felt more could be done to introduce more structured opportunities and pathways.
- **Sports Facilities Fund (schools)** – Funding recipients were positive about the support provided, and the impact that new facilities had for schools, clubs and communities.

## Issues for consideration

### 1. Active Schools performs a critical role

The Active Schools programme is providing a range of high quality opportunities for young people to be active. It is achieving its aim of providing more and higher quality opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity before and after school, and at lunchtime. The Active Schools network of staff is also providing a key role in holding together the range of **sportscotland** supported programmes in the schools and education environment, and creating a real sense of a blend of support.

**Recommendation:** The Active Schools programme, and associated blend of supported programmes in the schools and education environment, should be continued.

## 2. Scope for more focused and targeted activity

The Active Schools programme involved a high proportion of young people – an average of 43 per cent of the school roll. Much work has been done to engage a range of different young people in Active Schools. Teachers valued that the programme could adapt to needs, and target as required.

However, the programme involves more young men than young women. And young people who are already active may find it easier to become involved in Active Schools activities than those who are not active. There is a risk that a continued focus on growing participant numbers increases the gaps between young men and women, and those who are active and those who are not.

There is scope to consider a stronger focus on ensuring that Active Schools provides opportunities for people less likely to be active or more likely to experience poor health outcomes. This could include young women, young people from disadvantaged areas, young people who are not active and young disabled people in mainstream schools.

It could be possible to balance both the universal and targeted components of the programme. However, it is important to recognise that a stronger focus on targeted activity may result in a reduction of the overall number of young people involved in Active Schools.

**Recommendation:** sportscotland should consider refocusing the aims of the Active Schools programme to be less focused on overall participation numbers, and more focused on the range of participants involved – particularly those less likely to be active.

## 3. Contributing to wider education outcomes

The Active Schools programme is seen to link well with wider education outcomes, particularly the health and wellbeing priorities embedded within Curriculum for Excellence and the national priority of closing the poverty related attainment gap. However, the connections being made at local level vary between local authorities and schools – and can be complex for Active Schools teams to negotiate.

There is scope for **sportscotland** to clearly articulate the potential contribution that sport and physical activity can make to attainment – focusing on health and wellbeing and engagement with learning. This would help Active Schools teams to articulate this at local level, with teachers and local authorities. This message would fit well with a more targeted approach, particularly for young people from



disadvantaged areas, articulated above. It would also require careful consideration of approaches to any charging for Active Schools activities at local level.

**Recommendation:** sportscotland should consider developing information which supports Active Schools teams at a local level to clearly articulate the potential contribution that sport and physical activity can make to attainment – focusing on health and wellbeing and engagement with learning.

#### 4. Building consistency in quality

Active Schools delivery relies strongly on volunteer deliverers, with support and management from the Active Schools network. This enables the programme to have its reach and range. However, there is some evidence that deliverer turnover and differences in skills levels between deliverers can impact on the quality of experience. sportscotland may wish to consider:

- clearly articulating a clear focus on quality of experience rather than quantity – which would fit well with the targeted approach suggested above;
- a clear definition of a quality experience – building on existing work exploring what makes a quality deliverer, but also exploring what makes a quality experience for participants and other stakeholders such as schools;
- support and encouragement for Active Schools teams to gather feedback from young people during and after sessions – in a simple way; and
- an increased focus on qualitative information about quality and impact of Active Schools.

Some rural areas face particular barriers to delivering a range of quality opportunities – with challenges around transport, timing of sessions, access to facilities and access to skilled coaches. It is important to recognise that these barriers exist, and that innovative and smaller scale approaches may need to be taken.

**Recommendation:** sportscotland should consider clearly articulating the focus of Active Schools on quality rather than quantity, and clearly defining what makes a quality experience within the schools environment.

#### 5. Opportunities for young leaders

The young leaders' programmes are viewed positively. However, sportscotland should consider:

- accessibility – some schools still need support with developing clear selection processes, with guidance on target groups and intended outcomes;
- sustainability – it is worth considering whether schools should be encouraged to select young people as Young Ambassadors earlier in their school lives, and how young people can be supported to sustain this into the community (potentially through links to the clubs and communities environment); and

- the intended outcomes – including intended outcomes for young people (such as enhanced confidence and skills development) and intended outcomes more widely (such as developing a pool of skilled deliverers to achieve Active Schools objectives).

**Recommendation:** sportscotland should consider the accessibility, sustainability and intended outcomes of the young leaders opportunities.

## 6. School to club links

Views across both the schools and education and clubs and communities evaluations have been mixed in relation to the effectiveness of school to club links. There were examples where it worked well.

But some in the schools environment found it hard to engage and involve clubs, and some in the clubs environment found it hard to engage and involve schools and others in the schools environment. It was also not always clear where responsibility for developing and sustaining these links lay. There are opportunities to do more to:

- clearly define what is meant by a school-club link;
- refresh and clarify roles and responsibilities for developing school-club links;
- enhance joint working arrangements between sportscotland supported staff in the clubs and communities and schools and education environments;
- connect the focus on getting active and physical activity within the school environment through into the work in the clubs and communities portfolio;
- support clubs to cope with increased demand from school pupils, generated through Active Schools; and
- connect leadership work between the schools and clubs environments.

**Recommendation:** sportscotland should work with stakeholders involved in both portfolios to clarify and strengthen work in developing school-club links, building on the strong network of staff in both environments with good relationships with schools, clubs and community groups.

## 7. Wider areas for development

There are a number of other ways in which sportscotland supported programmes could be further developed, in light of the above recommendations:

- there is potential to link targeted Active Schools work with girls and young women more clearly with the Active Girls brand – to give a clear sense of a link between events, role models and activities within schools;
- there is potential to profile the real value of the School Sport Award to schools – perhaps through very short case studies on the impact on schools – and consider a more streamlined approach to Bronze and Silver awards;
- consideration could be given to a more consistent approach to developing and supporting competition opportunities across the country, to ensure that pupils

in all areas have access to structured opportunities and pathways which are suitable to their local area; and

- stronger linkages could be made between evidence about the facilities related barriers to Active Schools work and the investment decisions made in relation to Sports Facilities Fund awards in schools.

We recognise that development around some of these areas is already ongoing.