

CHANGING THE GAME FOR GIRLS: IN ACTION

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FOREWORD



This story began four years ago – the year the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games promised to change the game for girls and women everywhere.

That summer, Women in Sport’s Changing the Game for Girls research project, the largest study of its kind in the UK, was conceived. The study set out to better understand the low levels of physical activity among young girls in the UK and to uncover new ideas to help more girls get, and stay, active.

The story we uncovered was shocking: we discovered that the gender gap between boys and girls playing sport begins at a much earlier age than had been thought previously. It was clear that the gap was opening at around the age of 8, and was continuing to widen as girls moved into secondary school. Furthermore, there were marked gender differences in the way girls experienced school sport too. We found that 11-15 year-old girls were less likely to play for a school team than the boys, be a member of a sports club, or take part in any kind of sporting competition. Something had to be done – so we set about designing a programme of change.

Our research showed that whilst families have the biggest impact on children’s activity levels, schools are best placed to act as agents for change in activity levels. So we designed a two year pilot programme, based in schools, using both teachers and girls themselves as the drivers of change. The Changing the Game for Girls: In Action pilot began in 2013 and was produced with funding support from the Department of Health. We set out to work with 25 schools across England, to improve girls’ engagement in PE and school sport.

Over two years, we helped schools discover what their female students thought about PE and sport and what they wanted to change. We helped them to work with the girls to implement those changes, to shape PE activities and to engage their peers. The pilot also focused on creating positive change around the transition from primary to secondary school and on decreasing the drop-off in girls taking part in sport and physical activity as they move schools.

This ground-breaking pilot concluded in 2015. Today we are publishing our findings – and this report can be read alongside our original Changing the Game for Girls research to understand the insights which led to the changes we have tested here.

This work has led to Women in Sport setting out new ambitions to tackle low sports engagement rates amongst girls aged 5 to 18 and we are now working with the Youth Sport Trust to share our learnings via schools across the UK through our partnership Girls Active initiative.

However, I remain concerned. In 2016 rates of participation in sport continue to be low amongst adult women and the gender gap persists, with only 31% playing sport at least once a week compared with 41% of men. Physical inactivity is estimated to contribute directly to 1 in 6 deaths in the UK and costs the UK economy £7.4bn a year. A third of girls age 12-15 in England are classified as overweight or obese. This is a crisis for women and girls – a crisis that needs our continued attention and resource.

At Women in Sport, we believe that getting girls active at an early age, ensuring they have a positive relationship with sport, is the key to them continuing to play sport and stay healthy through their adult lives. This, we believe, is the only long term, effective way to tackle the entrenched gender gap in sports participation – and the only way to truly transform sport for the benefit of every woman and girl in the UK – for the long term.

**Ruth Holdaway,
Chief Executive,
Women in Sport**

INTRODUCTION

“They just force us to do the same thing every year; when you are asked, they don’t listen to what people actually want to do.” (Year 10 girl)

“I remember the days when you walked in and there would be benches of girls who all had notes saying they didn’t want to do PE. Now there are very few and I think that is down to the curriculum we have devised and the fact that we have engaged the girls in talking about PE” (PE Teacher)

“The school has benefitted massively from being involved in the project. The girls are more engaged, they are better leaders, and they’re leading in lessons, not just in PE and sport. They’re also leading in maths lessons, in modern foreign languages, and in English, they’re literacy leaders. They’ve really grown as part of this project.” (Assistant Head Teacher)

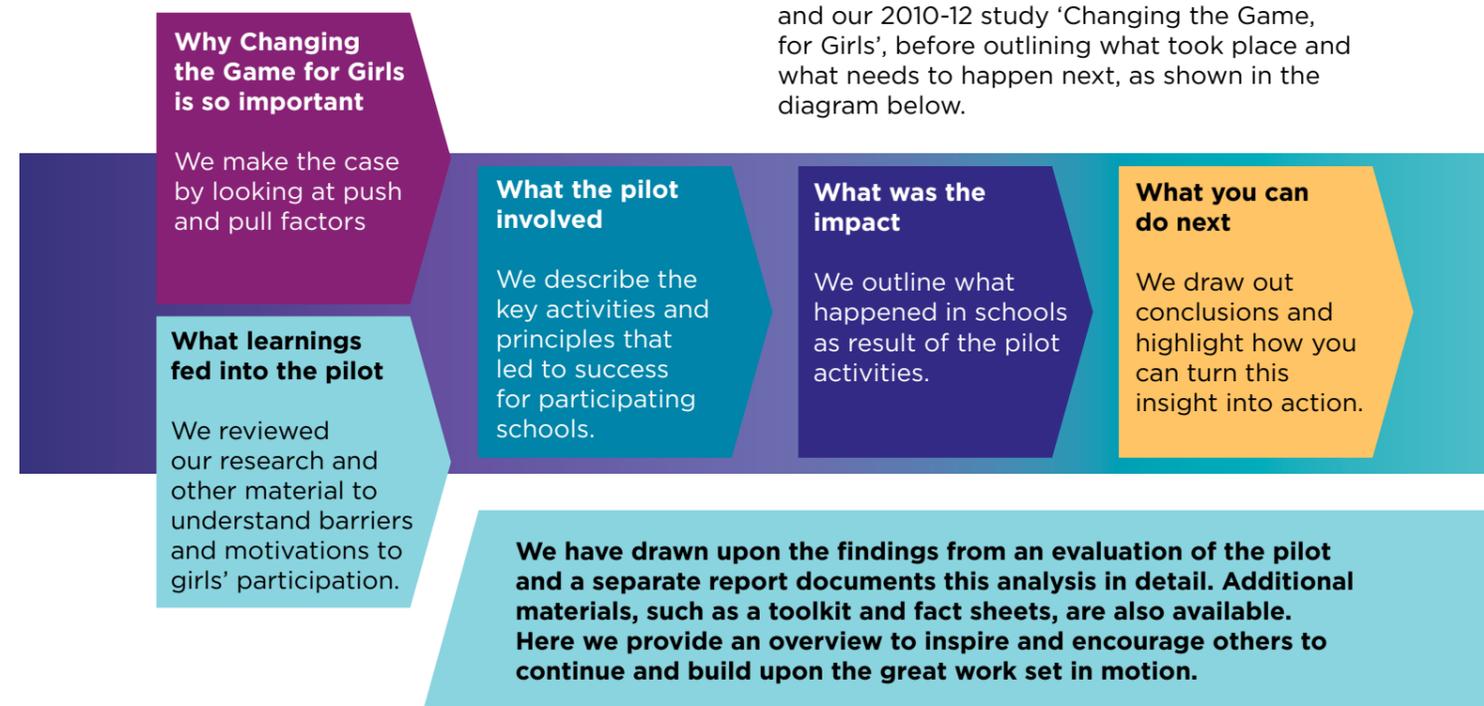
These quotes illustrate the nature of the challenge and the achievement of a recent pilot devised by Women in Sport. The Department for Health awarded Women in Sport funding for two years to carry out a programme of work encouraging schools to action the recommendations from its 2010-12 research study with the Institute of Youth Sport at Loughborough University: ‘Changing the Game, for Girls’.

Through the two year pilot programme, Women in Sport established a network of 25 schools and worked with them to help them adapt existing provision to create environments where it is ‘normal’ and aspirational for girls to be active, improving their health and wellbeing.

Women in Sport supported schools, through the work of a Schools Relationship Manager, to connect with partners, facilities and services in their local communities and promote local sportswomen as role models. The pilot also addressed deeply ingrained issues around body image and self-confidence which research by Women in Sport shows contributes to preventing girls from being more active.

In addition, the pilot work was also particularly focused on the transition from primary to secondary school, where Women in Sport aimed to have a positive impact on decreasing the drop off of girls taking part in sport and physical activity as they move schools and to sustain active lifestyles throughout their school experience.

This report sets out the journey we have been on, establishing the background need for this work and reviewing findings from research and our 2010-12 study ‘Changing the Game, for Girls’, before outlining what took place and what needs to happen next, as shown in the diagram below.



WHY CHANGING THE GAME FOR GIRLS IS SO IMPORTANT

Recognition of the need to get girls more active is not a new concern, nor is it a narrow one. It sits within a growing broader concern about the wellbeing of younger generations in the face of modern lifestyles that encourage what might be described as 'too much sitting around'. Increasing amounts of research suggest not only an association between this sedentary behaviour and obesity, but also other unwelcome conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, some forms of cancer and metabolic dysfunction. A recent report from the UK Chief Medical Officer, 'Start Active, Stay Active'¹ makes it clear that the amount of sedentary activity for girls needs to be minimised, particularly in teenage years, in order to get the diverse physical and mental longer term health benefits that come from greater engagement in physical activity.

The low level of physical activity amongst girls in the UK has significant consequences for their health and well-being, both now and in adulthood. Being physically inactive is a contributor to weight gain and obesity, and a third of girls in England aged 12-15 are now classified as overweight or obese (Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer, 2014), increasing the likelihood that they will experience ill-health and take time off school as a result. These girls are also more likely to become obese as adults, which increases their risk of developing a range of serious conditions which women are particularly susceptible to, including type-2 diabetes, osteoporosis, certain cancers, and mental health problems.

In the UK, physical inactivity directly contributes to one in six deaths, and costs the UK economy an estimated £7.4bn a year (Public Health England, Everybody Active, Every Day, 2014).

There is therefore a clear need for intervention to raise the level of participation in sport and physical activity amongst girls in order to

improve their health both now and throughout their lives, and to reduce the social and economic burden of obesity and ill health related to inactivity.

Establishing the challenge in schools

What currently takes place in schools is contributing to these issues. Our 2010-2012 'Changing the Game, for Girls' research study found that girls were not getting enough exercise and that schools hold the key to encouraging girls to be active. More recent research echoes these findings. A 2015 survey² from the British Heart Foundation (BHF) found that nine out of ten girls aged 13-15 years old don't do enough physical activity to benefit their health. This is a cause for concern itself, but all the more so given that this is significantly higher than for boys. In addition, the BHF report showed that there are also marked gender differences in school sport, with girls aged 11-15 less likely to play for a school team, to be a member of a sports club, to play sport against others in PE lessons, or to take part in a competition.

Age contributes too. According to the BHF report, the decline in girls' participation starts in the later years of primary school and continues into secondary, peaking at the 8-10 year old and 13-15 year old age bands, when there are marked differences in participation in formal sports activities between girls and boys respectively. Only 32% of teenage girls (aged 13-15) carry out any kind of formal sport compared to 46% of boys.

Seizing the opportunity

Though these figures present a bleak picture, talking to girls themselves suggests there are good reasons to believe that the situation can change. As we found in our 2010-2012 'Changing the Game, for Girls' research study, girls are positive about being active and three-quarters (76%) of 15-year-old girls say they would like to do more physical activity. The challenge is to understand the barriers that stop this from happening and to create the right environment for activity to take place.



¹(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/start-active-stay-active-a-report-on-physical-activity-from-the-four-home-countries-chief-medical-officers>),

²(https://www.bhf.org.uk/-/media/files/publications/research/bhf_physical-activity-statistics-2015feb.pdf)

WHAT PREVIOUS LEARNINGS WERE FED INTO THIS NEW PILOT?

Extensive research to explore participation in physical activity was carried out with 1,500 primary and secondary school children, as well as their parents and teachers, for our 2010-2012 'Changing the Game, for Girls' study. The findings from this work support research carried out by other organisations, such as NICE³ and Public Health England⁴. In this section, we draw upon all of this research, both our research for the 2010-2012 study as well as wider and more recent research. The understanding gained here fed into the design of the pilot programme.

A key finding was that not all girls are the same in their attitudes and levels of activity, but there is an important correlation of which we need to be aware. PE and school sport is working for some girls – chiefly the active and 'sporty' – but not for the majority, and least so of all for the most inactive and therefore at risk. Troublingly, those with the most negative attitudes are also most likely to be amongst the least active. It seems there is a vicious circle that needs to be broken: if girls don't enjoy sport, they won't engage in it.

Barriers to participation

How school holds girls back from sport

Across all the research, it is possible to see that there are factors relating to experiences at school which serve as barriers to sport or undermine the motivation to do more.

- At a very basic level, some girls claim to simply not enjoy themselves and to not find PE fun.

- The **attitude of teachers** has a role to play. In our 2010-2012 Changing the Game for Girls research study, it came across that girls feel teachers could be more encouraging and not just focus on the sporty. Over a third of all girls agreed that "my PE teacher only pays attention to the kids who are good at sport".
- The school environment and **amenities** are also important. Feeling uncomfortable in changing rooms acts as a put-off even before any sports activity has started.

Barriers from the wider environment

There is more to it than simply poor experiences at school. In both our research for the 2010-2012 'Changing the Game, for Girls' study and other reviews looking at factors influencing female teenage participation in physical activity, it is clear that prevailing social attitudes seep through to influence how girls engage with sport.

- There is a perception that PE is not an important subject for girls to be good at. Teachers feel that PE is not valued as part of the curriculum, although it has an important role in developing valuable skills such as teamwork and self-confidence.
- Increasing self-consciousness about one's body – a preoccupation for teenage girls generally – is relevant. Getting changed and becoming hot, sweaty and dirty is viewed as unappealing and unfeminine. There is an interesting contrast with attitudes amongst boys. While sporty boys are admired by their peers (attitudes influenced by society and the media), sporty girls are not. In fact, sporty girls are sometimes viewed negatively for not paying enough attention to their appearance.
- Though many girls do enjoy competition and like the opportunity to develop their skills, they dislike some of the behaviours that can go with it such as being overly-competitive and aggressive. They also fear having to perform in public.

Drivers to participation

Reviewing our research for the previous study and other material also provided important insights into how we develop a more positive environment for sport and motivate girls to take part.

- Having a wide range of activities on offer would help, together with special times for girls-only access to equipment and facilities.
- It is important to ensure that the priority behind any activity is having fun. This can easily get lost when we focus on learning skills and challenging girls to go further. In addition, girls get satisfaction from sport

not just by improving their performance; they enjoy helping others and having the opportunity to share in their experience, through coaching, mentoring and the like.

- Social pressure is important and can work both ways. Girls may drop out of sport if their friends do, but on the other hand, being able to do something with peers can motivate. Likewise, family can provide support, playing an important function both in terms of role modelling and also facilitating activity.



³ <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph17/documents/promoting-physical-activity-for-children-consultation-on-the-evidence7>

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/374560/Whatworksv1_2.pdf

WHAT OUR PILOT INVOLVED

Using learnings from this review of research and funding from the Department of Health, we carried out a two year pilot programme with 25 participating schools in England. We provided a Schools Relationship Manager to lead support within each school.

The Schools Relationship Manager proved to be critical to engaging schools, and was particularly valued for her help in getting and developing input from the girls, supporting PE staff in linking up with kit manufacturers and facilitating visits from inspirational role models.

It was for each individual participating school to then work out for itself and the girls what exactly needed to be done to change delivery. However, there are a number of key activities and principles, building on the support outlined above, which are worth explaining in more detail as they helped to ensure a successful project experience.

- In terms of activities, this could mean thinking about a mix of provision between team sports, individual activities, competitive and non-competitive activities, as well as a mix between sport, dance and other creative physical activities. One teacher talked about “throwing as many different activities as you can at them and hoping one will stick.”

Key activities and principles

Senior support and clear leadership

Making sure the project was properly supported was crucial and this needed to be in place right from the very start. Doing so meant that the school could take risks and all those involved felt comfortable about tackling delivery in different ways. Support from the Senior Leadership Team also validated the work: it helped to give it status and raised the profile of girls’ PE across the whole school.

In addition to leadership support, a dedicated lead for the project proved to be vital. In those schools which made little progress, a clear staff lead had not been nominated and there were no staff members with the time to establish the critical girls’ voice activities. The lead individual needed to be able to drive things forward and take on responsibility for helping girls to reshape provision.

“I think a real key thing is the passion of the person leading it within the school. [Y] is an absolute ball of energy and, as with many initiatives, you really need the right person leading it.” (Head Teacher)

A comprehensive review of sports provision delivery

Changing the game for girls meant changing the departmental mind set and making a fully comprehensive assessment of what was to be altered. Looking at what the participating schools undertook, it is clear that providing variety and choice in every aspect of sports provision was often key. PE departments needed to be open-minded and ready to listen to the girls’ voices.

- The location may be on or off site.
- There could be value in offering participation across year groups, in single or mixed sex groupings, as well as delivery by female and male members of staff.
- It might be useful to think about making activities available before, during and after school to cater to different audiences. One participating school offered ‘after hours’ street dance and aerobics classes marketed at both mothers and daughters.

Though addressing the above may appear overwhelming, schools had a big impact by addressing small details. As mentioned earlier, body issues remain a major challenge to girls’ enjoyment of physical activity at school. Ill-fitting and uncomfortable PE kits, together with outdated changing facilities, contribute to this. Rethinking kit and checking changing rooms were often the first and most simple steps that schools took to demonstrate that issues raised by girls’ voice groups were being listened to and acted upon. This gave girls the confidence to engage and commit themselves further.

Accessing additional resource

It is undeniable that resourcing new provision could be a significant challenge. Participating schools addressed this issue through a variety of routes. For some schools, it was an opportunity to uncover hidden talents amongst staff. Others used existing coaching networks to access external staff to provide new activities as requested by the girls. Not only did new external deliverers bring in

Overview of scope

The diagram below provides an overview of what was delivered through the support provided by Women in Sport to participating schools.

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| Giving teachers a better understanding of the issues that influence girls to be active | Developed a training resource that can be delivered and disseminated through schools, and adopted by higher education institutions (HEIs) to upskill their trainee teachers and sports coaches. |
| Development of a primary / transition toolkit | Surveyed girls about their attitudes towards PE and sport and analysed the data so that schools could use it to inform/make improvements to their delivery. Developed a toolkit specifically for primary schools to help schools deliver an inspirational transition programme for girls, supporting schools in tackling the participation drop off of girls moving into the secondary environment. |
| Leadership and role models | Explored with schools the use of role models internally and externally to support work with girls to encourage participation and engagement. |
| Helping schools maximise student voice | Supported schools in the development of a voice for girls in sport group across both primary and secondary levels, bridging the gap between the two settings. |
| Ensuring the right opportunities are available to the least active | Ensured schools maximise the opportunities that are available to them outside of the school environment such as from CSPs, sport foundations and clubs, and review internal ‘offer’ in light of girls’ voice feedback. |
| Recognising the consequences of labelling girls as ‘sporty’ and ‘non-sporty’ | Worked with professionals to ensure they understand the negative impacts that particular terminology can have on girls’ attitudes and confidence towards sport. |



the missing specialist knowledge, they also brought in fresh energy.

"I'm not taking anything away from the PE staff that we've got, but it's nice for someone to come in, look at things from a different perspective and bring some new ideas. In regards to the new member of staff, her specialism has been trampolining and lacrosse. She could get the girls competing to a high standard, such as the regionals. That alone has had a positive impact on the school. It makes us raise our game even more." (PE Teacher)

For girls, by girls

Central to the success of changing provision was getting girls on board, most often achieved by establishing a way to capture the girls' voices and working with the girls. Setting up this group had to be done with due care and thought. Those that worked well had diverse representation from both the already active and the less active girls, as well as across year groups. For this group to deliver to its full potential, it needed to have credibility and show early on that it could make a difference. "We had an input and that has happened," as one Project Lead put it.

Girls each helped change the game in other roles too. A number of the schools set up young leader programmes. The girls selected provided additional unique insight into the issues facing female students, finding alternative ways of approaching non-participants, as well as acting as peer mentors. Girls found the mentors very useful in encouraging their continued participation in physical activity. In addition, these girls offered a good alternative to PE staff and, with the correct training through young sports leader programmes, could even support additional provision if overseen by staff. For the girls taking on these roles, it is clear they valued the opportunity provided for personal development.

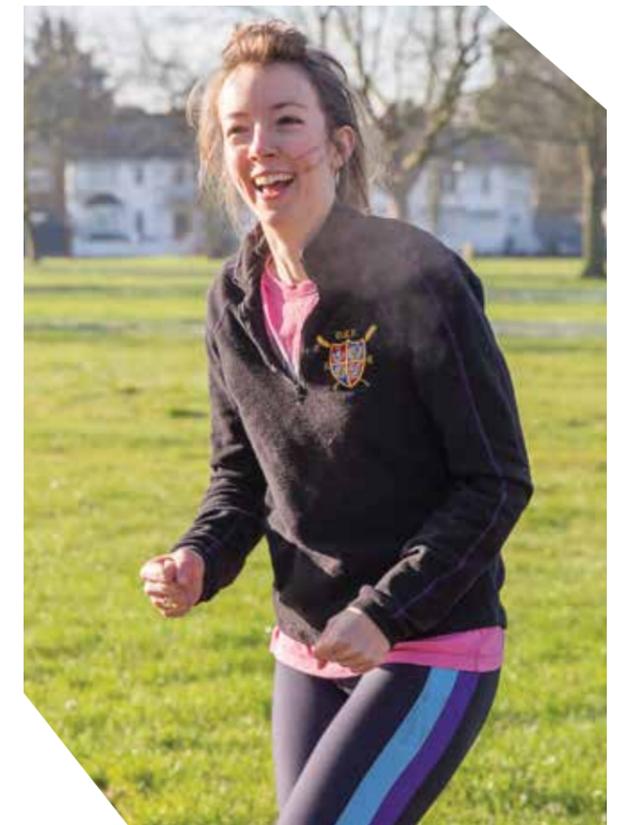
At a more basic level, girls helped each other as they wanted to be together. Positive peer pressure was used to encourage participation, especially in additional activities outside of the PE curriculum. As one PE teacher observed, *"Yes, I think it is like with a herd of sheep: once one person does it, the others will start to follow."*

Addressing issues at an early age

Some of the participating schools developed support for girls' PE in the neighbouring primary schools. This allowed the primary schools to improve their offer. They could now access more specialist PE staff and work towards increasing the overall physical literacy of pupils.

More importantly, this work with primary schools created the opportunity to address issues with girls' participation before they became a genuine problem at secondary school. Not only did taking this approach give the girls a chance to try out different and exciting activities, they could also be inspired by the great role models they encountered and started to build up a positive attitude towards sport.

"If you can get the mind set right from early years, Reception, Year 1, Year 2, Year 3 etc and get that love of sport and passion for being active, you are going to keep it." (Head of Year)



WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

Our evaluation research shows that the pilot is proving to be a success for the groups of girls involved. To understand impact in more detail, we commissioned a series of qualitative interviews with girls and staff as well as an online survey. The survey also allowed girls' views to be gathered and fed into delivery of the activities.

Our interviews and case study visits showed that participating schools felt the pilot had brought about many positive changes at different levels: not just for the girls themselves, but also the staff involved, as well as delivering knock-on impacts for the whole school.

The benefits showed an important dynamic – they flowed from the process of working through the programme and were cumulative, building on the positive momentum created by the changes that were already taking place. This is illustrated in the simple diagram.



Reflecting and reviewing

The first phase of carrying out the pilot involved a simple and thus often overlooked activity: for the PE department to stop, take stock of what they currently offer and to think about whether it actually met the needs and desires of the girls. In one school, a newly qualified teacher joining a traditional PE department managed to get the 'Girls' Voices Group' on the agenda at each faculty meeting. Male colleagues were particularly concerned at the data collected over one term, which highlighted the problem around 'non-doers' in girls' PE. This information, although readily available, had not been collated before.

Staff talked about learning and gaining much in other ways from taking this moment to reflect.

"I could never see why girls didn't want to be active or why girls didn't want to be involved, whether it was just girls or with boys. Coming from a side that has always been active, I really wanted to understand why they didn't want to. Once I'd done a little bit of research, I was able to bond with the girls that normally within lesson time I may not have any contact with. From a personal point of view, it's allowed me to engage with kids on a different level." (Project Lead)

Without the pilot, the opportunity to make this valuable assessment would not have been presented and the critical catalyst to kick start change would have been missed. This moment of reflection challenged staff to think about why they had chosen the existing activities on offer.

"A lot of the time, it is the PE teacher picking stuff out of the sky and what they might think the young people want to do, isn't necessarily the case. You tend to find that many of the activities are the sports that the PE teachers are interested in." (Head of Department)

It also challenged staff to revisit their notions of what they thought the girls were looking for.

"Sticking to traditional stuff, were they really engaged in that? Do we need to be more varied in what we are offering? Yes! We're having more successes in non-traditional sports which says maybe our cohort of girls wanted that competitiveness, maybe they thrive in that environment." (Head of Department)

Consulting and empowering

Changing the game for girls involves getting the girls on board and finding ways for them to say what they are interested in. Many of the participating schools carried out surveys amongst girls, often taking particular care to ask amongst those with low extra-curricular participation rates.

But this is about more than completing questionnaires; it also involves developing student voice and empowering the girls to be more actively involved in what happens next. In one school, the girls were able to have a major say in designing a new PE kit. As the girls had chosen it and were proud of their new modern image, participation rates improved significantly. In another school, new activities specifically requested by the girls were introduced. These aerobics, self-defence, Bollywood dance and girls-only sessions in the fitness suite were all over-subscribed and subsequently extended as after-school clubs.

Increasing enjoyment

Taking a different approach to sport should mean girls view the experience positively.

"My teachers are funny and it makes me want to take part. When PE's over, we think we can't wait until next week because you know the teachers are going to make it fun." (Year 7 girl)

Indeed, the most basic test of whether a change is a success is that participants enjoy themselves. Once this occurred, we found that other benefits followed through, such as girls putting more into what they were doing.

"We had music on, and they were enjoying it. They didn't necessarily think they were doing sport, they were just working with their friends and creating something that they wanted to show. For me, we probably had our highest number of ones for effort from the girls in that unit of work because they wanted to do this and because it was something they thought that they could do. It didn't matter if they were bad at it, they were still having fun." (PE Teacher)

Growing participation

With increased enjoyment, it is not surprising that participation also increased and our pilot schools did find that girls took part more. This took place in different ways.

- There was increased participation in standard day-to-day activities with fewer girls 'forgetting' their PE kit or sitting out for lessons.
- Girls participated more by taking part in the new activities that came to be offered out of the changes to provision. One school ran days specifically targeting Year 9 girls in which taster sessions for current and new extra-curricular activities were launched, with an athlete mentor present to provide inspiration and encouragement.
- There was also an increase in more committed take-up with a rise in the numbers of those who chose PE as an exam subject. *"We have made an impact this next academic year. In the last cohort, there were only 11 girls that did PE GCSE; in September there will be 25. Now we want this to knock on through into the A Level in the next two years."* (Head of Department)
- Increased participation might be 'invisible', with more physical activity taking place outside of the school environment. PE teachers talking to parents found that some girls had become more willing to go for runs, swims or cycle rides by themselves, as well as join external clubs after taster sessions in school.

Building confidence

Staff interviewed for the pilot evaluation were pleased not only with the fact girls were positively engaged in sport and more active, but were also more confident in what they were doing.

"I used to get held back and I used to be quite shy so I didn't want to do much. Now it has made me think 'Yes, I can do that' and I will." (student)

This 'can do it' attitude is vital as a foundation for increasing the likelihood of take-up of new sports and in different environments outside of the carefully planned ones developed as part of the pilot. It is about converting confidence into resilience and the ability to feel comfortable and excited about venturing into the unfamiliar. Once the primary objective of making sport fun and enjoyable had been achieved, girls acknowledged they were ready and willing to be competitive and be challenged.

"They encourage us to push our boundaries. I do pretty much every single sport apart from rugby. All the teachers are always going, 'Oh, you should do rugby.' I'd never really given it a chance." (girls' voices member)

Developing broader halo benefits

Participating schools found that being involved in the pilot delivered impacts which spread beyond the sports department. These positive impacts included those relevant to the wider school environment, such as increased concentration and improved behaviour, as well as important transferable skills useful for better negotiating day to day living, such as personal growth and increased self-esteem.

"[Being a young leader] helps my confidence. It has given me life skills and it gives you something to put on your CV. Plus, it is going to really help me to get into University, so yes, leadership has been amazing." (young leader)

Staff noticed these welcome changes too.

"It has had a massive impact around the school. We've had teachers noticing that they're coming out of their shell a bit more. They're asking more questions. They're asking for help. We're allowing these girls to blossom - we're allowing them to be who they want to be, which is really important." (Head of Department)

Increased self-confidence, taking more responsibility and having ownership of any changes being proposed came through time and time again in our interviews with pilot schools as being particularly significant and key drivers to the success of the project. As highlighted earlier, part of the reason

this sense of empowerment came through so clearly is down to the way in which the pilots were rolled out. Developing student voice in order to understand sports experience gave impetus to wider student voice work across many schools. Girls saw that they could make a difference for themselves and benefit from it, all the while having fun. As one head teacher observed, *"If we empower the children to do that, who knows, where it will go."*



WHAT YOU CAN DO AND NEXT STEPS

Key learnings

- The wheels of change have been set in motion - it has become clear that the status quo is no longer sufficient. PE staff and their departments in participating schools are now demonstrating more awareness of the challenges girls face in engaging in physical activity and with input from girls, are shaping new opportunities for positive participation.
 - Participating schools clearly valued being involved in the project and reported signs of more positive attitudes towards physical activity and that participation by girls improved in different ways: from reduced sitting out in PE lessons, to take-up of new activities, as well as increased numbers taking GCSEs in PE. Participation outside of school increased, with girls being motivated to do exercise by themselves, for themselves.
 - We have fed in our learnings into other projects such as Girls Active⁵, a Youth Sport Trust programme that aims to inspire young women to be more physically active. Funded by Sport England, in partnership with Women in Sport and This Girl Can, Girls Active offers a simple flexible action planning framework to help teachers and girls work together to address their individual needs.
- The main objective of Girls Active is to help teachers and teenage girls understand what motivates them to take part in PE and sport; developing an action plan based on their feedback on how it should be delivered. In addition, we help some of the girls to become role models within their school, setting up leadership groups which focus on how they could make PE and physical activity more appealing to their peers.
- There are clear rewards to reap. These go beyond the immediate goals of increasing engagement and participation in PE. The whole school can benefit from improved behaviour and the increase in self-confidence girls get when they have the chance to evaluate and act on their particular desires and learn new skills.

Turn insight into action

- To get started on your own journey of changing the game for girls, make use of the resources and help on offer from Women in Sport.
- Consider getting involved with Girls Active from the Youth Sport Trust, which includes a three-day residential camp for 150 girls who are not naturally interested in sport and doing physical activity, as well as further guidance, training and support for schools. The aim of the camp is to create a network of girls who are inspired to take part in more PE and sport and to develop their leadership and influencing skills so they can become role models back in their schools to encourage their peers to become more active.
- These guidelines outline a set of simple steps to get the ball rolling, together with example case studies for inspiration.
 - o Review and consult: get the senior leadership team on board and consider how you can improve your whole school approach to PE; look more closely at the approach of the PE department; consult with girls themselves to understand their preferences and opinions more fully.
 - o Make active attractive: find an 'owner' of the project to create the right cultural environment across the school; tailor provision to meet the girls' wants and needs in terms of not just activities but also timings and format; create extra-curricular opportunities and links to the wider community.
 - o Role models and leadership: use female role models to inspire; and create leadership opportunities for the girls themselves as coaches, peer mentors and young leaders.
 - o Monitor and evaluate: collect quantitative and qualitative data; monitor participation as well as absences; evaluate which activities have worked and why.
- In our 'What Sways Women to Play Sport' report published in 2015, we set out the different stages of behaviour change.
 - o It is useful to review these as it is easy to overlook the challenges you might be starting with (a girl may have accumulated negative arguments as to why she does not carry out a behaviour).
 - o It is also good to remember that the process does not end with making the girl do something once (if undertaken, a behaviour needs to be normalised in order to ensure it is a sustainable and lasting change).
- In 'What Sways Women to Play Sport', we have also laid out a model of influence which establishes six 'sway factors' that affect female sporting behaviours. Plot what needs to be done in order to address each of these sway factors to encourage participation:
 - o Possibilities: Open eyes to what she can do, e.g. use a girls' voice group to identify interesting and engaging new activities and forms of delivery.
 - o Togetherness: Together she is stronger, e.g. encourage peer/friendship group participation and opportunities for single sex groups where desired.
 - o Support: Ensure she has behind the scenes support, e.g. use young leaders to foster and facilitate engagement.
 - o Belonging: Make her feel included and valued, e.g. use external coaches and the expertise of PE staff to provide a more wide-ranging offer that girls can easily see they have played a role in shaping.
 - o Progression: Give her a sense of direction, e.g. use young leaders and peer mentors to offer appropriate encouragement to improve in personal performance.
 - o Internalise: Help her to reflect on her achievements to bring out the internal rewards of taking part, eg find ways to highlight the benefits of participation.
- Be bold and expand your horizons to look beyond what happens within school years. Think about how to create sustained engagement in physical activity which lasts throughout life. Together we can change the game for girls forever.



⁵ <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/girls-active>

WOMEN IN SPORT

womeninsport.org

General Enquiries
020 3137 6263
info@womeninsport.org

Registered charity no. 1060267



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