

A black and white photograph of a woman standing with her arms crossed. She is wearing a white tank top, a black zip-up jacket, black leggings, and white athletic sneakers. She has a necklace and a watch on her left wrist. The background is plain white.

Women's  
SPORT<sup>AND</sup>  
FITNESS  
FOUNDATION

Changing the Game  
**for Girls**

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# 1

## Introduction

Girls drop out of sport and physical activity at a faster rate than boys. From year 4 to year 6 in primary school, the proportion of girls participating in the recommended amount of sport and physical activity drops sharply, whilst the proportion of boys increases. By age 14, only 1 in 10 girls are doing enough physical activity to benefit their health, compared with roughly twice the number of boys of the same age\*. The problem isn't new – but our research shows that the sports sector has a significant opportunity to better understand the issues and help to change the game, for girls.

### New WSFF research

In 2011, with funding from the Big Lottery Fund, WSFF commissioned the Institute of Youth Sport at Loughborough University to conduct a large-scale piece of research aimed at understanding why girls turn away from sport and physical activity. The research involved a survey of 1500 young people, extensive focus groups with both girls and boys, as well as interviews with teachers and parents.



***51% of secondary girls say that “girls are put off sport and physical activity because of their experiences of school sport and PE”***

*“ If you learn to do sport in school and you enjoy it, then you might want to carry it on out of school” Year 10 girl*

## Research overview

The first point to note is that not all girls are the same, and there are some girls who are really engaged in sport and physical activity both in and out of school, and wish to do more of it! Not surprisingly, our research shows that these are the most active girls – the ones who enthusiastically get involved, who want to make the team or be the best, commit to training and achieve their potential.

Interestingly, these girls are more likely than most to have active mothers and supportive families; they are less influenced by what their friends do, and they are less likely to agree that getting sweaty is unfeminine or that girls are self-conscious about their bodies. However, there are many other girls who just don't feel the same way. For a whole host of reasons, many girls are not currently engaging with sport and physical activity and, as our numbers show, are likely to drop out in school, and do very little physical activity out of school.

A comparison of the attitudes of the most and least active girls in our research is revealing. The least active girls were twice as likely to agree that “girls are put off sport and physical activity because of their experiences of school sport and PE” and the reasons for this were numerous. The least active girls were more likely to say they didn't like the activities they get to do in PE, that they felt like their bodies were on show in PE, which made them like PE less, and that they felt their PE teacher only paid attention to the kids who are good at sport. Meanwhile, they were less likely to think that PE was fun or that it was an important subject for them to be good at.

In broad terms, PE and school sport is working for some girls – chiefly the active and ‘sporty’ – but not for the majority, and particularly the least active and most at risk.

***“46% of the least active girls agreed that they “don’t like the activities we get to do in PE”***

But girls **DO** want to be active

The good news is that most girls want to be more active! Three quarters (74%) of girls say they want to do more physical activity\*.

An opportunity for NGBs and schools

The research shows that whilst families have the biggest influence on girls’ participation levels, it is schools that have the biggest opportunity to get more girls engaged in sport and physical activity – and there are many ways that NGBs can work with schools in supporting them to overcome this challenge.

The toolkit aims to:

1. Understand the key barriers that stop girls from participating more.
2. Think about the ways that the delivery of sport can be re-shaped to appeal to a broader range of girls.
3. Consider how NGBs can work with schools to increase the proportion of girls taking part in sport and physical activity. There is significant opportunity for NGBs to grow both the traditional sports market, as well as offering diversified opportunities to appeal to a broader range of girls.

# 2

## Barriers to participation

So why aren't girls participating in more sport and physical activity?

Barrier: lack of choice

46% of the least active girls said they “don't like the activities we get to do in PE”

Older girls in particular felt that PE lessons offered them insufficient choice of activities. Girls say they want choice in the type of activities they participate in and the people they participate with. They also say they want variety, to stop them getting bored of the same activities. “There's hardly any sports that our school does” (Year 8)

Barrier: overly competitive environments

45% of girls agreed that “sport is too competitive”

We know that many girls love taking part in competitive sport as much as some boys do. Many girls said that they like the opportunity to take part in competitions and have the opportunity to demonstrate their ability, but many girls said they didn't like the aggressive or 'overly competitive' behaviour that seemed to be associated with competition.

***“We wanted to do like a fun game with friends... and they try and make it competitive and just like shout at us to pass or whatever and we were like, we just want to play about” Year 10***



*75% of girls agree that  
“girls are self conscious  
about their bodies”*

### Barrier: confidence

Over a third of the least active girls didn't think they had “the skills to do well in sport”

Many girls, particularly those who are least active, lack confidence in their ability in sport, which makes them more reluctant to participate. Environments where the focus is on winning rather than enjoyment, therefore, can be off-putting because they fear feeling like they're the 'worst' at the activity, or letting the rest of the team down.

“Obviously he or she is better than me, there is no point me playing against them or trying” (Year 8)

### Barrier: body image

75% of girls agreed that “girls are self-conscious of their bodies”

As they get older, girls start to become more self-conscious and concerned with the way they look. Many girls dislike the thought of getting their hair messy and getting sweaty.

“When you're at home you don't really care what you look like because it's your family who see you in the morning with your hair all messy and things, but when you're at school you just want to look nice for your friends” (Year 7)

## Barrier: boys

Girls can be put off participating in sport because of boys for two reasons:

36% of least active girls agreed that they felt like their body was on show in PE, and that this made them like PE less.

First of all, linked with the above barrier, girls become increasingly self-conscious participating in sport with or alongside boys as they get older. Any setting where sport is delivered in mixed groups should consider giving the option of girls-only sessions. For settings where girls do participate in single-sex groups, it's also important to think about the girls feeling 'on show' in front of the boys if they are participating close by.

52% of all girls agreed that "boys enjoy competitive sport more than girls"

Boys are associated with the type of aggressive competition that many girls said they found off-putting. Some girls talked about boys being too 'rough'.

"[What do you think puts girls off at the minute?] "More boys doing it. And they might feel embarrassed, and they don't want to show themselves up" (Year 8)

"You've got the football and a herd of boys come running towards you, like, oh my god!" (Year 7)

## Barrier: sport is undervalued

59% of the least active girls didn't think it was important to be good at PE

As girls get older, they place more value on schoolwork than on PE and sport. As a result, sport gets pushed lower down the list of girls' priorities. Many girls think that continuing to participate in sport "won't get them anywhere" and is less valuable to their future. Furthermore, research shows that both girls and boys think that boys are given more support and encouragement to participate in sport. For boys, being 'sporty' is seen as a favourable trait, whereas being a 'sporty' girl is often more negatively perceived.

"It's not as valuable in terms of your education..." (Year 8)



# 3

## Reshaping the delivery of sports for girls

There is significant opportunity for NGBs to get girls more involved in sport and physical activity...

Girls want to be consulted and offered a choice of activities

They want the activities made available to them to be diversified and varied

Whilst some girls enjoy competitive sport, many girls do not like competitiveness. Alongside traditional competitive opportunities, many girls would like to participate in competition which is more informal, relaxed and with an emphasis on fun and enjoyment rather than winning.

Only a small minority of girls will reach the talent pools, so there is a need for informal and inclusive offers where, again, the emphasis is on fun and fitness as opposed to skills and competition.



*Over half of girls agree that “There are more opportunities for boys to succeed in sport/physical activity than girls”*

We need to work together to bring sport and physical activity higher on the agenda for all girls.

The benefits of participating in sport and physical activity need to be emphasised to those outside of the talent pathway for instance:

- the range of sports related careers
- the positive benefits of physical activity, such as health and confidence
- the transferable skills gained from participating in a team environment, and the appeal of extra-curricular activities to employers

By making slight changes in delivery of sport, NGBs can help to prevent issues around body image and confidence from being a barrier.

Delivery staff have a really important opportunity to create a positive and encouraging environment for girls to participate in – this is true of both delivery staff within NGBs, and the teachers delivering your sport within schools.

NGBs have an opportunity to provide girls with more role models by making female role models in your sport more visible and accessible.

# 4

## Change the Game, for Girls

10 ways that NGBs can work with schools to help to Change the Game, for Girls.

NGBs have a huge opportunity to work with schools to increase girls' participation. There are already many elements of good practice in the way NGBs are working with schools to help to address some of the issues outlined above, but this needs to become common practice rather than good practice.

There are various routes and channels through which NGBs can work with schools to help to make the delivery of sport more appealing to girls. The following pages give specific examples of how NGBs can adapt current programmes to work with schools.

***Nearly half of all girls agreed that “girls don’t take sport as seriously as boys”***



## 1. Teacher training

First and foremost, NGB teacher training programmes provide a vital opportunity to educate teachers about the barriers to girls' participation, and provide them with the inspiration and information they need to make a difference.

NGBs could be equipping teachers with information about how to deliver not only the traditional sport, but also modified or alternative versions of the sport, with an emphasis on fitness and fun, which may well be more engaging for a number of girls.

Ideally, there would be a number of ways in which teachers can access support from NGBs, through face to face training sessions with an NGB representative as well as through teaching aids and resources which help them to deliver on an on-going basis.

## 2. School competition

Whilst it is really important that NGBs continue to support schools in delivering competitive sporting opportunities, this type of competition is only appealing to a minority of girls. More inclusive competitions, where the emphasis is on fun and enjoyment rather than on winning, can provide an opportunity for all girls to get involved in competition. Level 1 of the School Games, for instance, is just as important as the higher levels.

### *Volleyball England's 'Let's Play Volleyball' festivals*

*"Let's Play Volleyball (LPV) Festivals are aimed at 7-18 years olds. Any level from complete beginner can compete at these fun outdoor festivals and they provide an excellent opportunity for young people to improve their volleyball skills in a competitive environment."*

### 3. Modified and alternative offers

Girls want to be able to choose from a variety of activities. For many girls, the traditional delivery of the sport is unlikely to engage them – but small tweaks to the sport can make it feel more ‘fun’ and ‘inclusive’.

#### *England Hockey's 'Quick-sticks'*

*“Quick-sticks’ is fun, fast, safe and exciting and has been designed so that teachers with little or no hockey knowledge or background can deliver the game. Quicksticks is a 4 a side introductory game of hockey, designed especially for 7-11 year olds to play. It can be played on any surface, and uses a larger, lighter and safer ball.”*

### 4. Developing more ‘inclusive’ offers

All girls are different, and NGBs face a big challenge in supporting schools to be able to adapt their approach to deliver sport for all. Not all girls are ‘sporty’, and very few will reach the talent pathways. Working with schools to ensure that there are appropriate offers in place for all girls, including those who don’t necessarily want to become sporting athletes, will broaden the appeal of your sport to a bigger proportion of girls.

#### *The Cricket Foundation's 'Chance to Shine' campaign*

*“Now in our sixth year, we recognise the power of cricket to help young people acquire important skills, values and attitudes for their future lives. The campaign does not aim to develop the cricketing stars of the future. And although it’s possible we might find the next Andrew Strauss or Charlotte Edwards, our main aim is development through cricket.”*

Furthermore, inclusivity means that minority groups should also have equal opportunities to participate in sport. NGBs could provide guidance to teachers on ways that sport can be adapted to be successfully delivered, for example, for girls with physical disabilities, or girls with learning difficulties.

## 5. Equipment packages

NGBs will benefit from making it as easy as possible for schools to delivery your sport. Offering schools “packages” of equipment – so they can make one purchase and effectively deliver your sport without having to spend time shopping around . This will make it much easier for a teacher to bring your sport in to the school.

### *Rounders England's equipment packages*

*From the NGB website, Rounders England signpost customers to their preferred suppliers from their website, where various different full 'rounders sets' can be purchased. These sets include all of the equipment needed for a game – balls, bats, posts, bases, safety caps and a rules booklet.*

## 6. Cross curricular support

Teachers are notoriously time-poor, and as such can be very grateful for ways to incorporate a theme across various different parts of the curriculum. This is a significant opportunity for NGBs to increase awareness and understanding of your sport, and thereby raise its profile amongst girls.

### *England Athletics' cross curricular resource publication*

*This resource includes 11 fun, cross-curricular lesson plans that bring athletics into the classroom. The resource's lesson plans may be used as discrete one-off lessons or expanded into a sequence of related lessons. As well as the lesson plans which include pupil and teacher sheets, there are pages containing 6 extra curricular games and activities. Lesson plans are included for literacy, numeracy, science, PE, art, drama, music and history.*

## 7. Emphasising local opportunities

By working closely with schools to emphasise the local opportunities to participate in sport, you could help to reduce the number of girls who stop participating in sport when they leave school. Girls stop participating in sport when they leave school for a number of reasons. For instance, they often feel that the logistics of participating become more complicated, and many are unaware of the opportunities available for them to continue taking part.

Establishing effective School Club Links is vital – so that girls have an exit pathway to continue participating in sport once they leave school. But girls also need to be made aware of more recreational and informal ways of continuing to participate in sport, if the club environment is not right for them. Doorstep Sports Clubs, for instance, may be a significant opportunity for NGBs to retain girls in sport.

### *British Cycling's 'Go-Ride'*

*Go-Ride - is British Cycling's development programme for young people. The programme provides a fun and safe way to introduce young riders to the world of cycle sport. A British Cycling Go-Ride Coach, supported by coaches from a local Go-Ride club, visits schools and delivers structured coaching sessions. This is the first step in creating a long-term, sustainable link between a school and a local Go-Ride club.*

## 8. Providing access to role models

It is often argued that more girls would participate in sport if the profile of women's sport was increased. We know that there is far less coverage of female athletes than of male athletes in the media, meaning there are very few sporting role models for girls to be inspired by. One way that NGBs could help to overcome this is to have players visiting schools to either coach sessions, or talk about their experiences.

*England Cricket Women coaching ambassadors for Chance to Shine*

*Since April 2008, members of the World Cup winning England women's squad, including captain Charlotte Edwards, have worked as Chance to Shine coaches, encouraging more young girls to play cricket.*

## 9. Leadership and volunteering opportunities

Leadership in sport is one of the measures in which we see a higher proportion of girls participating than boys. Girls' participation in leadership activities, however, starts to decline from year 11 – so NGBs can help to keep girls in leadership roles and involved in sport by ensuring that there are engaging opportunities at all ages. These opportunities might be in coaching or officiating, sports events leadership, or ambassadorial roles.

*Badminton England award programmes and youth forums*

*The Badminton Junior Helper Award and Badminton Young Officials Award provide children aged 13 to 19 the platform to gain the knowledge and confidence to help deliver Badminton. Badminton's Young Officials then go onto officiate at Sainsbury's UK School Games each year. Badminton England also provide an official structure at regional and national level to give young Badminton participants a voice within their sport.*



## 10. After school clubs

NGBs can also support schools in delivering sport outside of the school day, in after school clubs. Teachers are often very under-resourced, so NGBs can play an important role in providing support, advice and guidance around setting up after-school clubs.

### *England Hockey's after-school club support*

*"Why not set up an after-school or lunchtime In2Hockey club?! Use the session plans or mix the challenges to create your own activities for a weekly club. Coming soon will be a guidance pack on how to set up an after-school or lunchtime club including advertising posters, certificates and much more!"*



**Policy report –**

WSFF's full report on research and our recommendations for policy-makers

<http://www.wsff.org.uk/publications/reports/changing-the-game-for-girls>

**Teacher toolkit –**

a tool for teachers which provides practical advice and guidance on engaging more girls in sport and physical activity

<http://www.wsff.org.uk/publications/fact-sheets/changing-the-game-for-girls>

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