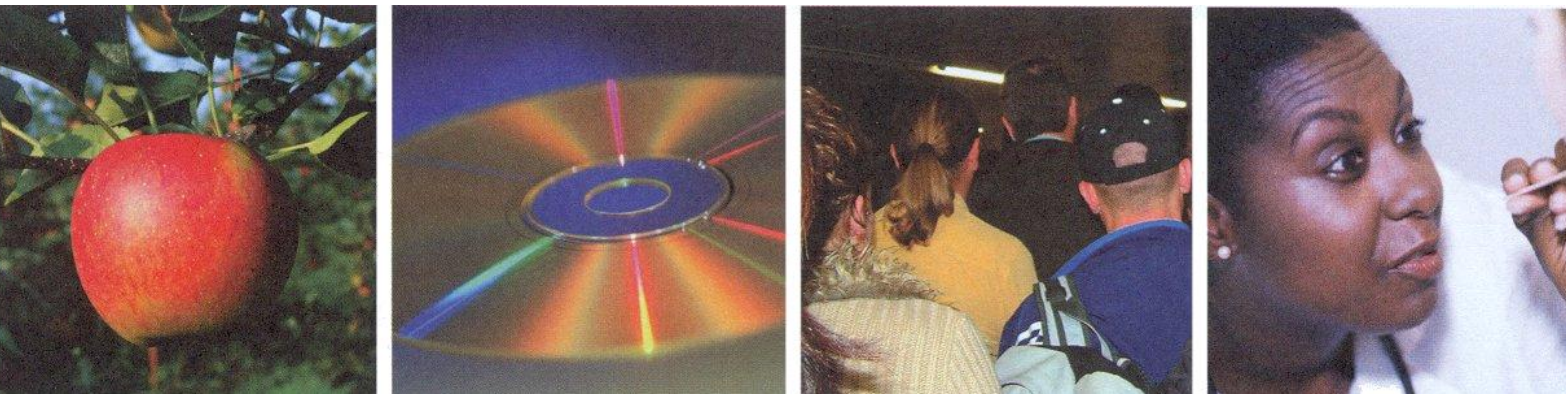


Am I Bovered?

A participative action research study to develop, implement and evaluate physical activity interventions with girls

Phases Two and Three



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1.0 Introduction

The 'Am I Bovered?' project is a two-year study aiming to develop, implement and evaluate sustainable exercise-based interventions with girls aged 11-15 years in order to improve their engagement in regular physical activity. The study took place in three phases that corresponded with the project's main aims:

1.1 Aims

The aims of the first phase of the study were to:

- Explore factors that motivate and create barriers to 11-12 and 14-15 year old girls engaging in regular physical activity (Phase One).

The aims of the second and third phases were to:

- Develop and implement activities chosen by inactive 11-12 and 14-15 year old girls with the support of a multi-agency team (Phase Two).
- Evaluate the impact of the project, examining factors associated with young girls' engagement in physical exercise (Phase Three).
- Make recommendations for policy and practice.

This report provides the findings and recommendations from Phases Two and Three. The findings of Phase One are available in the Phase One Report:

http://www.kent.ac.uk/CHSS/docs/Am_I_Bovered_Phase_One.pdf.

1.2 Background


The drive to improve physical activity among all sections of the population in an effort to counter preventable illness and disability has been reflected in international policies and briefings for a number of years (WHO 2004). Over recent years some worrying trends have emerged regarding activity levels among young people. Studies show that opportunities for children in the UK to be active are declining:

- Car journeys to school have doubled in the last 20 years with almost 30% of children going to school by car, less than 50% walking and just 1% cycling (Department of Environment 2005)
- The total time devoted to PE lessons in schools has declined in recent years, and less time is allocated to PE in secondary schools in England and Wales than anywhere else in the European Union (European Youth Heart Study 2006)
- Only one-third of boys and girls aged 2-11 achieve the recommended level of activity to benefit their health through activity undertaken outside of school (Sproston & Primatesta 2003)

It is recommended that children and young people should achieve a total of 60 minutes of moderate intensity in physical activity each day. At least twice a week this should include activities to improve bone health, muscle strength and flexibility. For a while now there have been concerns that this is not being achieved. Adolescence has been found to be a period of steep decline in physical activity and in some studies adolescents were consistently found not to be sufficiently active (Sallis 2000; Biddle et al 2004).

It is now an undisputed fact that regular physical activity of moderate intensity decreases the risk of many long-term physical ailments such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension, and this is particularly so for women (Oguma & Shinoda-Tagawa 2004). For young women, there is growing evidence that the psychological benefits of physical activity are numerous. For example, adolescent girls who participate in sport have higher levels of self-esteem, a more positive mood and are less depressed than other girls who do not participate in sport (Dishman et al 2006). In addition, athletic girls achieve higher grades in school, have lower scores on loneliness and anxiety, and a better body image (Findlay & Bowker 2009).

However, despite this, several studies conducted across many countries in the Western world have indicated that girls are less likely to take part in sport than boys (Klomstein et al 2005) and these declining levels of physical activity are becoming a cause for concern (Biddle et al 2004; Currie et al 2004). A recent Health Survey for England showed that only




about half of 13-15 year old girls were participating in 60 minutes or more activity on all seven days a week (Sproston & Primatesta 2003).

The apparent 'gender divide' in physical activity and the potential long-term health deficits that may accrue among women is an area gaining importance among researchers, who are seeking to gain a better understanding of beliefs and attitudes to inform more coherent and grounded strategies. Commentators such as Schmalz & Kerstetter (2006) argue that involvement in sport is bound by social conventions learned from early childhood that centre on constructions of gender and gender-based sporting stereotypes. These learned behaviours limit opportunities for girls to take part, either through unconscious barriers imposed by institutions through greater emphasis on masculine sports such as football and rugby, or those self-imposed through a desire not to erode femininity.

Recent government targets have acknowledged study results and aimed to increase the percentage of schoolchildren in England who spend a minimum of two hours per week on PE and sport from 25% in 2002 to 85% by 2008 (Department of Health 2004). However, the extent to which this has been achieved is not apparent. The overriding question however is how to do this effectively. While the solutions would appear straightforward in terms of increasing activity, a recent systematic review indicated that there are very few studies that have demonstrated sustainable changes in exercise behaviour among young people, and girls in particular (Sluijs et al 2007). Most interventions that focus on increasing activity levels have successful short-term outcomes but limited long term sustainability. Such programmes also tend to be prescribed by professionals with minimal involvement of participants in programme design.

In relation to girls therefore, further research is needed to look more closely at the root causes of unhealthy lifestyles in order to develop interventions that are more firmly rooted in their psychological, contextual and environmental orientation. While government agencies and other research studies are strongly recommending an increase in activity, less emphatic are suggestions about how to create meaningful engagement in activity over a period of time and what sort of activity to promote. For example, there is less known about the psychological, social and environmental barriers that could disable girls from making healthier lifestyle choices. Perhaps most importantly, given the highly professionally driven




programme development in this area, there is very little known about what constitutes an effective intervention from a young girl's viewpoint. Young people must therefore be involved in the development and implementation of new opportunities for physical activity in order that they reflect enthusiasms and preferences and encourage a high level of participation.

Further to this, the role of parents must also be considered. Several studies found that adolescents' physical activity levels were influenced by parental support for physical activity (Troost et al 2003; Fren et al 2005). Parental support consisted of providing transport, observing and encouraging, particularly in a non-authoritative style (Schmitz et al 2002). It will be interesting to explore the presence or absence of these factors among our sample in relation to current and future physical and psychological activity dimensions.

Without doubt, action to tackle these problems must be multi-faceted therefore and stem from a psychological, social and community perspective. This means not only altering accepted behavioural norms in terms of physical activity, but also encouraging community action as well as environmental and policy changes to enable people to be more active and eat more appropriately, and prevent obesity at origin.

The most comprehensive review to date of the effectiveness of interventions to promote physical activity in children and adolescents recommended 'a multilevel approach to promoting physical activity' combining 'school based interventions with family or community involvement' and 'education interventions with policy and environmental changes' (Sluijs et al 2007). Such interventions were found to be particularly effective with adolescents.

Intrinsic to the success of projects of this kind is the involvement of a number of agencies who play a leading role in helping to manage, organise and resource the identified activities. Sluijs et al (2007) found that interventions not involving schools were less effective than those which were school-based. However, they also found that interventions that were solely school-based, involving only additional lessons, improved equipment or training of teachers, were less effective than those projects which took a more holistic approach, addressing questions of attitudes, family, community and environment.



In summary, the evidence to date outlined in this background review justifies the need to develop locally relevant participatory interventions focused on girls, that have a multi-agency community involvement and take into consideration the role of the parents.

1.3 Overview of the Project

Overall, the purpose of the study was to increase our understanding of the underlying attitudes and beliefs of girls about taking part in sport and exercise. The research will help to develop local practical initiatives and guidelines to increase physical activity levels for this cohort. The insights gained into the lives and experiences of the girls can also be of benefit to services and professionals in order to identify key motivations and barriers to physical activity. The project was planned over three phases, which is discussed further below.

1.3.1 Phase One

This phase was completed in August 2008 and was an exploratory part of the study, using focus groups with girls aged 11-12 years and 14-15 years recruited from two schools in Thanet, East Kent. These same schools have collaborated in Phases Two and Three of the project. The focus groups were designed to gain insights into the girls' understandings of the relationship between health and physical activity and their attitudes towards sport both in and out of school. Findings from the focus groups were used to inform Phase Two of the study, when interventions were planned and implemented.

1.3.2 Phase Two

The second phase involved recruiting pupils from the same two schools to participate in a four-week taster-session of activities followed by an eight-week full-programme of activities. The aim was to recruit girls who identified themselves as 'inactive' (meaning little or no participation in exercise) and involve them in a series of discussions aimed at developing activities which they anticipated would be popular and sustainable. This phase was completed in July 2009.

1.3.3 Phase Three

The final stages involved evaluating the impact of the project. This was carried out via a self-completion questionnaire administered before and after the interventions. In addition, three focus groups were undertaken with the participating girls, and one parental focus group was also conducted. Telephone interviews were carried out with girls who had 'dropped out' of the programme to find out the reasons why they withdrew. This last phase was completed in December 2009.


1.4 Sites

Phase Two and Phase Three involved two secondary schools that form part of the School Sports Partnership. The schools are situated in Margate and Westgate and draw their pupils from a diverse demographic population. These schools were chosen in order to better understand levels of engagement in physical activity in girls from different social backgrounds attending schools with contrasting profiles.

1.4.1 School One

School One is a Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided comprehensive for 772 pupils aged 11 to 19. Since 2004, it has been a specialist sports college and is the hub of the Thanet School Sport Partnership. In 2007, a new sports centre was opened with a large well-equipped performance area with classrooms and changing facilities on site. The school has also acquired additional playing fields and attained the Sportsmark Gold award in recognition of its extra-curricular sporting activities. Although situated in a relatively disadvantaged area, the school has below average rates for free school meals and ethnic minority students with English as a second language and average rates of special needs.

All pupils in Years 7 to 9 have a compulsory two hour PE lesson once a week. In Years 10 and 11 they receive two hours practical PE and two hours theory. The school also offers Sports Leadership Levels One and Two, BTEC First Diploma in Dance and BTEC Higher Levels One, Two and Three. The school employs two community sports coaches: one in Outdoor and Adventurous Activities (OAA) offering outdoor pursuits and the Duke of Edinburgh Award; and the other in Basketball.



Sports available to female pupils include: Netball, basketball, badminton, rounders, gymnastics, football, tennis, swimming, dance and circuit training, and cheer leading. Outdoor pursuits include athletics and volley ball. There is also an outdoor pursuits club where activities such as canoeing can be undertaken. Although there is no swimming pool on site, pupils can be driven by minibus to Hartsdown swimming pool.

1.4.2 School Two

School Two is a larger, non-denominational secondary school for 1120 pupils aged 11 to 18. It is a specialist technology college. The sports facilities in School Two are not as well-equipped as those in School One, but there are plans for modernisation of the entire school building. Situated in a relatively disadvantaged area, the school has above average rates for free school meals, special needs and ethnic minority pupils with English as a second language.

All pupils from Years 7 to 10 have a double compulsory lesson of PE a week which lasts for one hour and 50 minutes. PE is compulsory for the pupils in Years 10 and 11, but the amount of time available each week depends upon whether they have chosen PE as a subject for their GCSEs or BTEC in Sports. Students who take a BTEC in Sport in Year 10 have three lessons per week each lasting 55 minutes long, as well as having their core PE lessons. The amount designated to theory or practical work per week depends upon the type of activities they are engaged with; however, at least one lesson each week is always practical

The school is situated very near to a leisure centre with a swimming pool. Sports available to female pupils in Year 7 include swimming, gymnastics, netball, hockey, rounders and athletics. In Year 10 the girls doing compulsory PE include activities such as netball, badminton, football, basketball, rounders and athletics. The Year 10 girls who take a BTEC in Sport do a range of activities which suit the learning objectives of their lesson.

1.5 The Multi-agency team (MAT)


A 'multi-agency' team was brought together to form a collaborative partnership of key stakeholders and professionals across Kent who had experience of working with young people in physical activity. In Phase Two the specific role of the MAT focused upon the development, planning and funding of the activities, as well as helping with devising a four-week taster session programme and an eight-week full programme of activities. The key planning stages took place between September 2008 to April 2009. The MAT developed a range of possible activities which were feasible in terms of time, resources, staffing and organisational dimensions.

The Multi-Agency Team consisted of professionals with a range of expertise:

- P.E. teachers from both schools, and the head of P.E. from School One.
- The Community Leader of Vista Leisure, a Social Enterprise with charitable status managing leisure facilities and services within East Kent. Vista Leisure also provided two specialist sports coordinators to offer additional support to the research team in supervising activities.
- Two Public Health Promotion Specialists, Dover and Thanet, including the main instigator of the research.
- Sports Development Officer, Thanet District Council.
- Extended Schools Development Manager, Kent County Council
- Workforce Development and Research Manager, Kent County Council
- Coordinator for Quartet in the Community, a partnership of schools that is extending learning opportunities for children, young people and families.
- Two Researchers and the Research Lead from the Centre for Health Services Studies, University of Kent.

1.6 Research Governance and Ethical Issues

Ethical approval and research sponsorship was gained within the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research (SSPSSR) at the University of Kent and from Kent County Council. The latter were satisfied with the project proposal and agreed to provide research governance.



This report is divided into two main sections:

- Phase Two reports on methods approaches and instrumentation used, management of the project, and outcomes of the activity choices and taster sessions. This section provides a reflective commentary and key points.
- Phase Three reports on the evaluation findings of the pre and post activity questionnaires and focus groups, and also gives commentary and key points.

The project as a whole is discussed in the context of wider literature, and recommendations are put forward.

2.0 Phase Two

This Phase consisted of two stages: namely discussion and development (Stage one) and implementation (Stage two).

- During Stage one, the first meeting with the MAT team included a discussion of the main themes raised in Phase One. The MAT built upon these themes to develop the activity programme. Consecutive meetings involved setting up and implementing the interventions.
- Stage two involved rolling-out the actual programme that was agreed in Stage one. An activity programme was organised in two parts:
 - I. a four-week 'taster session' programme, which would allow the girls to take-part in 'one-off' sessions that would introduce them to a new activity;
 - II. an eight- week full programme, that was devised based upon the girls' choices following the initial trial period.


2.1 Sampling, Recruitment and Gaining Consent

2.1.1 Sampling

The main sampling framework used was 'quota sampling'. This sampling method helped us to identify our sample by three variables: first, we sampled by gender as we only wanted to include females within the study; second, by age, as we wanted to work with Year 7 girls (11 to 12 years of age) and Year 10 girls (14 to 15 years of age); and third, by school, as the socio-demographic profiles of each school contrasted significantly with the other. Using quota sampling enabled us to isolate for each of the three variables, therefore this sampling method was deemed the most appropriate.

2.1.2 Recruitment

The focus group findings from Phase One revealed that recruiting girls who identified as 'inactive' (meaning little or no participation in exercise) was problematic, primarily because applying the term 'inactive' did not correspond with the girls' experiences or self-identities; the majority of both age groups did participate in some exercise in school and outside of school. In order to overcome this problem, P.E. teachers in both schools were asked to



identify girls who they thought would benefit overall from taking part in the activities on the basis that they were more reluctant participants in school P.E, and these girls were encouraged to sign up for the programme. In addition, girls in the appropriate year groups were able to volunteer themselves to join the programme.

2.1.3 Consent

At the beginning of Stage two, permission was gained from the parents of girls who showed an interest in participating on the project. An information sheet (Appendix 1) and consent letter including a consent form (Appendix 2) was given to each girl to gain permission from their parents in order for them to take part in the project as a whole. As the girls were minors, consent was required from their parents/guardians.

Furthermore, at the beginning of each of the taster sessions, a signed parental consent form was collected from each of the girls, in which parents/guardians gave permission for their daughters to participate in the activity. For the full-programme, permission was sought from the girls' parents/guardians in one consent letter, and they gave their permission in one overall form for participation in each of the activities. Within each consent form, parents/guardians were also asked to specify the arrangements for their daughter's journey home after the sessions.

To fulfill risk assessment criteria, information was collected on whether the girls had any serious medical conditions, the name of their general practitioner and surgery contact details, and the emergency contact details of their parents/guardians. Parents/guardians also gave signed permission for the administering of treatment in the event of any medical emergencies

2.2 Instruments and Data Collection

A number of research instruments were developed and utilized for data collection.

- During the planning and implementation stages of Phase Two, two short self-completion questionnaires were devised and disseminated –
 - the first (see Appendix 3) was distributed before the taster sessions to gauge which activities the girls wished to participate in during the sessions;

- the second was distributed at the end of the taster sessions, to find out which activities the girls wanted to take part in during the full programme of activities (see Appendix 4).
- Baseline data was also collected before the taster sessions and after the full activities programme using a self-completion questionnaire. The pre and post activity questionnaires were developed to investigate the relationship between attitude towards physical activity, and physical activity behaviour, with secondary school pupils aged 11 to 15 years. To assess these two variables, we drew upon the work of Hagger, Cale & Almond et al (1997), who used two different theoretical approaches: the children's attitudes towards physical activity (CATPA) and the theory of reasoned action (TRA). We built upon the ideas of Hagger, Cale & Almond et al that took into account these two theoretical approaches. Attitude and behaviour towards physical activity were measured using Cale's (1994) self-report measure of physical activity. In our study, the pre and post activity questionnaires were identical in content and design, and were devised so that comparative scores could be made in the pre and post intervention periods. This data sought to provide baseline evidence of the attitudes and behaviour of the girls towards physical activity, and a baseline measure of the amount of exercise they undertook during a given week.
 - The first questionnaire (see Appendix 5) was administered in School One and School Two at the beginning of Stage two during their PE classes. Each questionnaire was given a unique ID number and the corresponding name and number was recorded on a separate document. This meant that the completed questionnaire could not be easily traced to each respondent for confidentiality.
 - A follow-up questionnaire (see Appendix 5) was administered in Phase Three, after the girls had completed both the taster sessions and activities programme.


- Two focus group guides were devised to evaluate the overall impact of the project and used in Phase Three. One focus group schedule was developed to gauge from the girls what they believed were the strengths and weaknesses of the project (see Appendix 6); parents were invited to take part in a second focus group (see Appendix 7) and another focus group schedule was devised to elicit from parents what they thought about the project and what impact they felt it had (see Appendix 8). Signed consent was taken from each of the girls and the parents (see Appendix 9).
- A telephone interview guide was developed for use in Phase Three to follow-up any girls who had chosen to withdraw from the project (see Appendix 10) thus ascertaining their reasons for dropping out. The interview guide set out to identify why the girls did not continue with the activity programmes and was conducted at the end of the full-programme. The girls participating were informed at the start of the project that they would be followed up if they chose to withdraw and consented for this to happen. This was seen as important, as there are often high attrition rates within projects that recruit young people and the reasons are unknown (Sluijs et al 2007).

2.3 Management of the Project

2.3.1 Coordinating the Project, Risk assessment & Security Checks

Before commencing the taster and full-activity programmes, a full risk assessment was undertaken by the University. The risk assessment included an examination of the activity sites, assessment of transportation routes and a background and qualification check of all the instructors.

All of the sessions took place at the end of the school day. The sessions were held in each separate age group as the girls stated a preference for staying in their own age group. However, the girls participated in the activities from across both schools. Both the taster and full-programme of activities were led by qualified instructors but with the additional supervision of a researcher and/or a qualified sports coordinator employed by Vista Leisure (a social enterprise managing leisure facilities in East Kent). All four supervisors received a full Criminal Records Bureau check for working with minors.



All efforts were made to ensure that the girls attended the taster sessions and full-programme of activities. The researchers contacted the girls and their parents on a regular basis by telephone or by sending reminder letters through the post.

2.4 Transport

Due to the scope and breadth of activities provided during both the taster and full-programme, this required taking the girls off school premises to local activity providers and other schools in the area. At the beginning of the each activity, the girls were met at their respective schools by either a researcher or a sports coordinator and after establishing consent, they were escorted to the activity site on foot or by private bus. According to parental wishes, the girls were either transported back to their schools after the activity, made their own way home or were picked up by parents.

2.5 Activity Sites and Facilities

The activities organised for the taster sessions and for the full-programme took place across six sites located around the Thanet area in Westgate, Margate and Broadstairs. The sites were chosen as they were located within easy reach of each of the two schools by car, bus or on foot, and were well-known to the girls and their parents.

- In-door climbing took place in a local climbing centre, accessible by private bus. This activity was primarily instructor-led, however, the girls did have the opportunity to undertake 'bouldering' (an unstructured rock-climbing activity under supervision), alongside learning the more structured skills such as belaying, abseiling, knot tying and general safety skills.
- The first aqua-aerobics class (for the taster session programme) took place at a local leisure centre. For the full-programme, the aqua-aerobics sessions took place at a pool located in a neighbouring primary school.
- Street-dance was organised for one session during the taster programme in School Two under the instruction of an aerobics/dance instructor. This activity was not chosen for the final full-programme.
- Trampolining was organised in a sports hall located in a neighbouring secondary school. The activity was led by a fully qualified trampolining instructor. The girls learnt a variety of trampolining jumps and moves under the supervision of the

instructor and were able to work through the skills required to gain a beginner’s level certificate. This activity was very popular and was organised for both the taster and full-programme of activities.

- Ten-pin bowling was organised twice, once as a taster session activity and as a final activity on the last day of the programme. This took place at a local bowling alley. The first session was instructor led, whilst the last session was a fun session and free of any instruction.

2.6 Stage One: Results of Activity Choices & Taster Session Questionnaires

2.6.1 Taster sessions: Activity choices

Before commencing the taster sessions, the girls were asked via a short self-completion questionnaire, which activities they wanted to try-out during these ‘one-off’ introductory sessions. The results of the Activity Choices Questionnaire are given below:

Figure 1

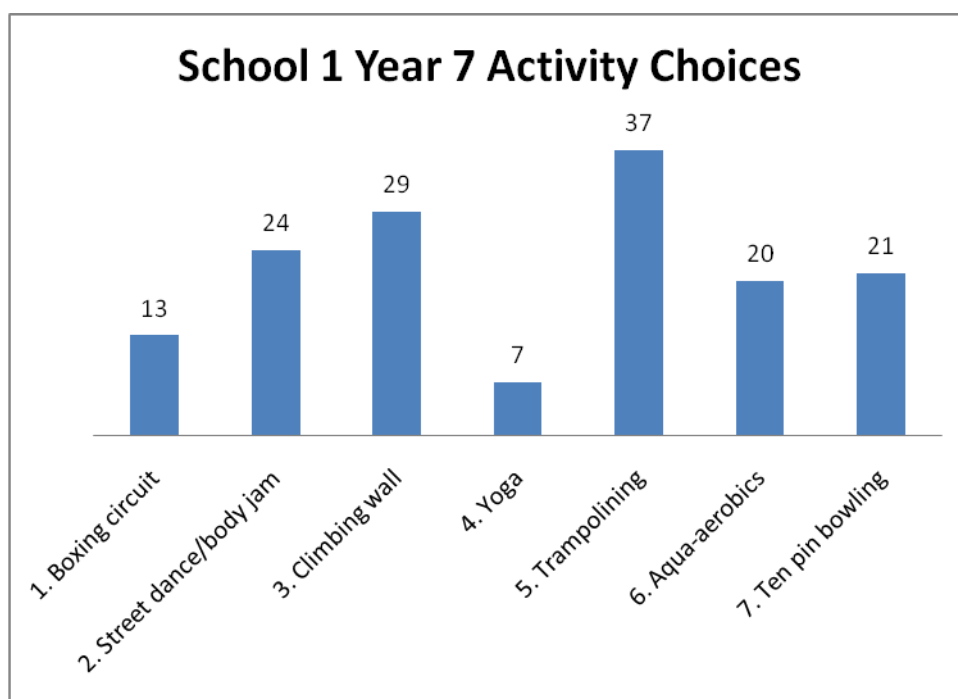


Figure 2

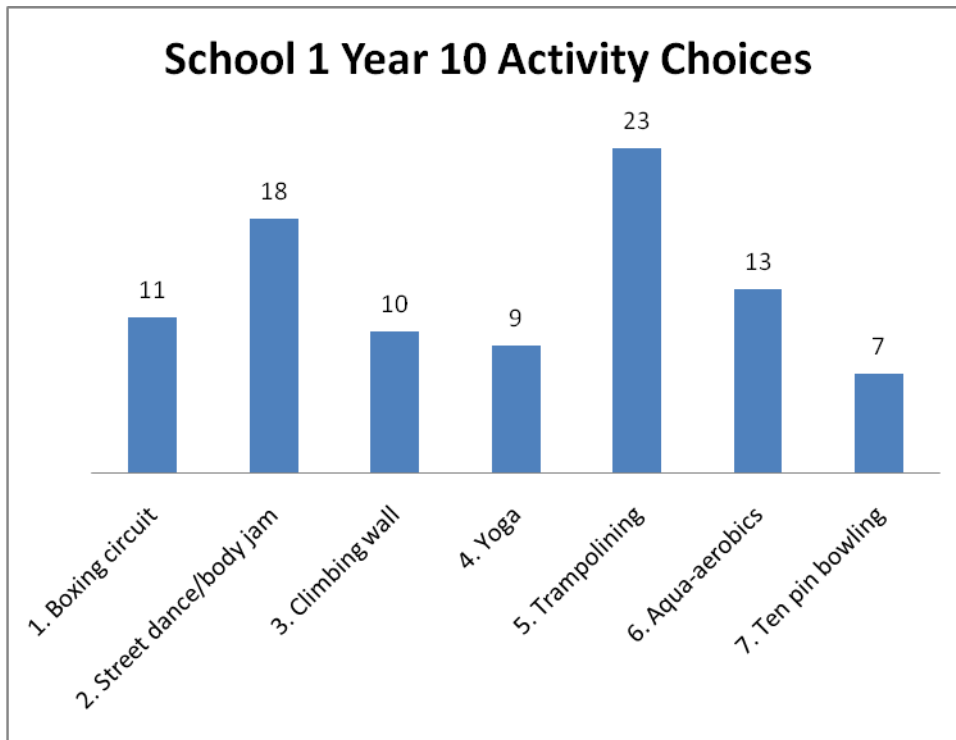
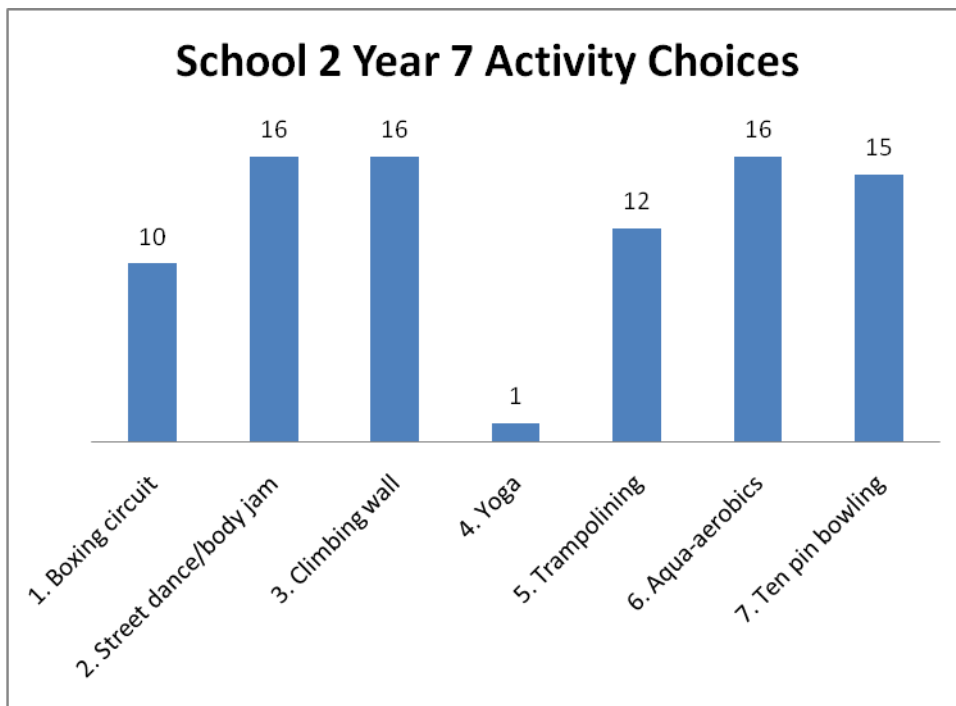


Figure 3



(NB. School Two Year 10 girls were not surveyed)

The results of the Activity Choices Questionnaire showed that overall, the Year 7 girls across both schools were keen to participate in taster sessions of indoor climbing, street-dance, ten-pin bowling and aqua-aerobics; while the girls in Year 10 in School One prioritized trampolining, street-dance, aqua-aerobics and boxercise.

2.6.2 Full-Programme: Activity Choices

At the end of the four-week taster sessions, the girls were asked, via a brief questionnaire, which activities they would like to pursue further in the full-programme. We asked the girls to record their responses in a short tick-box survey. The results of this survey are given below:

Table 1: All Year 7s Schools One & Two

| Year | Indoor-climbing | Aqua-aerobics | Street dance | Trampolining | Ten-pin bowling |
|----------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 7 | 12 | 6 | 3 | 16 | 7 |

Table 2: All Year 10s Schools One & Two

| Year | Indoor-climbing | Aqua-aerobics | Street dance | Trampolining | Ten-pin bowling |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 10 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 4 |

The results show that the first choice of both year groups was indoor-climbing (19) and their second choice trampolining (24). Their third and fourth choices were ten-pin bowling (11) and aqua-aerobics (10).

Indoor-climbing, trampolining and aqua-aerobics were the three activities that were organised during the full-programme, which ran from May to July 2009. Ten-pin bowling was organised during the final session as a 'fun' activity for the girls.


Commentary

Over the course of Phase Two, the project brought up some key methodological insights about working with adolescent girls. At other times, there emerged some challenges and obstacles concerning operationalising the interventions that the researchers sought to remedy. These issues focused upon the recruitment and engagement of the girls, survey dissemination and data collection, and the overall management of the project.

Regarding recruitment and retention, access and permission was sought through the schools and the parents but this was a lengthy procedure. Direct methods of contact were more difficult to establish with the girls, which impacted upon longer term retention levels. The impact of attrition in the initial stages affected the overall size of the sample and the amount of data that was collected and subsequently available for comparative analysis.

Further obstacles regarding use of appropriate terminology were encountered with the inclusion criteria of 'inactive' for participant selection. Phase One findings showed that the term 'inactive' was not one which the girls identified with. The research team therefore decided against using this term when recruiting the girls for the taster sessions and the full-programme of activities during Phase Two. Consequently, an alternative rationale for recruitment was used (see 'Sampling, Recruitment and Gaining Consent') to engage participants.

One of the functions of the MAT was to provide the girls with an opportunity to have participative input onto the development and implementation stage of Phase Two. The original aim was to invite the girls to a series of consultative groups to ask them to identify activities they thought would be popular and sustainable. However, it proved to be difficult to involve the girls in the meetings as despite supportive attempts to include them in the discussion, they were overwhelmed to be in an adult setting. In order to overcome this issue, the research team held a smaller number of meetings with the girls during their PE classes, and the girls were asked to complete two short questionnaires (Activity Choices Questionnaire and Taster Session Questionnaire) to find out what activities they were interested in participating in and whether they wanted to continue with the activity in the long-term.



One dataset from the Activity Choices Questionnaire could not be collected. Due to school time-tabling issues, the research team was unable to disseminate this questionnaire with the girls from School Two in Year 10. Instead, the results of the survey with the girls from School One in Year 10 were used to organise the taster activities around these choices. It was believed that due to the parity of their ages and their gender match, that the latter group's choices would be a strong predictor of the Year 10 girls' activity choices in School Two.

The researchers also encountered difficulties in organising one of the activities. Although the Year 7 girls had the opportunity to 'try-out' all four of their choices, the Year 10 girls were unable to try-out one of them. Due to a combination of concerns regarding insurance, risk assessment and public liability issues, the research team could not proceed with providing the girls' fourth choice of the boxing circuit. Even though the Year 10 girls were disappointed, this did not affect their overall engagement and enthusiasm for taking part in the rest of the programme.

Concerning organizational issues, intrinsic to the success of this phase was the presence of leadership for the main management responsibilities and important planning tasks including risk assessment, taking charge of insurance issues and establishing where public liability resided. In addition, the programme involved establishing ground-level relationships with the girls and the parents; this was a labour intensive process requiring a substantial manpower input but was vital to success. The MAT's contribution to the planning and funding of the programmes cannot be underestimated, as they were able to make arrangements for the sporting activities and provided important operational advice.

3.0 Phase Three

Phase Three of the 'Am I Bovered' project involved evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the project, in particular examining the factors associated with young girls' engagement in physical exercise. The evaluation was composed of three parts:

- 3.1 Analysis of pre- and post-intervention questionnaire data measuring participation and attitudes towards physical activity.
- 3.2 Conducting four focus groups: three focus groups with the girls and one focus group with parents.
- 3.3 Analysis of the attrition survey, conducted with the girls who had 'dropped out' of the programme to understand the reasons for their withdrawal.

3.1 Pre and Post-intervention Survey Findings

3.1.1 Sample Sizes

Number of pre-activity questionnaire responses & overall participation rates

The numbers of girls who were recruited prior to the taster sessions and who completed a pre-activity questionnaire were as follows:

Table 3

| School One | | School Two | |
|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|
| Year 7 | Year 10 | Year 7 | Year 10 |
| 15 | 19 | 16 | 17 |
| Sub-total=34 | | Sub-total=33 | |

Total = 67

The questionnaire was completed during their PE class. In total, 67 girls completed the pre-activity questionnaire: 34 girls from School One, 33 girls from School Two, and of this, 31 girls from Year 7 and 36 girls from Year 10.

The numbers of girls who participated in at least one activity during the taster sessions totaled 49.

Number of post-activity questionnaire responses & overall completion rates

The numbers of girls who completed a post-activity questionnaire totaled 25. This was completed at the beginning at the last 'fun' activity session of bowling. Although the numbers of girls who completed the full-programme was 31 (17 girls from School One, 14 girls from School Two, and of this, 18 girls from Year 7 and 13 girls from Year 10), six girls did not complete the post-activity questionnaire, as they were absent on the day the questionnaire was distributed (for further see section on 'Attrition' below).

Overall, the numbers of girls who finished the full-programme were as follows:

Table 4

| School One | | School Two | |
|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|
| Year 7 | Year 10 | Year 7 | Year 10 |
| 11 | 6 | 7 | 7 |
| Sub-total=17 | | Sub-total=14 | |

Total = 31

The primary reason for lower numbers at the end of the programme was the gradual attrition of the sample as time progressed. While 67 girls started with the taster sessions, a number did not start the full programme and about half of the original sample completed it. There was also some difficulty with the co-ordination of the data collection at the end of the school term, when researchers were competing for time with a disrupted school time-table and numerous school activities such as trips, work experience and sports days.

3.1.2 Data Entry and Analysis

Data inputting was undertaken in Microsoft Excel and analysis conducted using this programme. This package was the most appropriate to help analyse attitudes and opinion recorded by the girls on a likert scale. The other data on frequency and aggregate numbers of the amount of activity undertaken by each girl was also input into Excel and analysed according to the same method.

3.1.3 Findings

The findings from the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire allowed us to measure the girls' views of sport and exercise, to assess some of the facilitators of regular exercise according to the girls' own attitudes, and to gauge the attitudes of their family and friends, as perceived by the girls themselves. As well as clarifying these varying opinions, some changes in attitudes during the time of the intervention were also measured.

The quantitative data gave us an impression of the girls' activity levels and the range of sports available to them out of school. In the pre-activity questionnaire, 11 out of 15 Year 7s and nine out of 10 of the Year 10s reported doing a physical activity out of school in the previous two weeks. The range of activities listed by the girls included; swimming, walking, aerobics/gym, cycling, ice-skating, rock-climbing, trampolining, cheerleading, athletics, running games, horse-riding, running, tae kwon do, roller-skating, badminton and karate.

The data were not sufficiently reliable to measure pre and post-intervention activity levels for some of the items a) because some of the questions were not answered fully by a large number of respondents, b) the girls struggled to assess whether the activities in which they had participated had made them 'out of breath' and c) we suspected that the week preceding the post-intervention questionnaire, about which the girls were asked, was atypical because it was at the end of the school summer term. The findings have therefore concentrated on those variables amenable to comparison. Some of the analysis has been undertaken using year group comparisons from Years 7 and 10 and have been presented in chart format; the other analysis has been undertaken drawing comparison from Schools One and Two and have been discussed giving a commentary of findings from both school groups.

a) Girls' views of sport and exercise

Useful, Pointless, Not important

At the start of their involvement on the project, the majority of girls from both age-groups agreed that physical activity was **useful**. After the intervention, six out of 15 Year 7 girls showed a positive shift in opinion that physical activity was useful (Chart 1). Seven out of 10 Year 10 girls held a steady opinion and agreed with the view that physical activity was useful, while two girls reported a more positive change (Chart 2). These changes in opinion show that the girls reported more positive views on the value of physical activity.

Chart 1

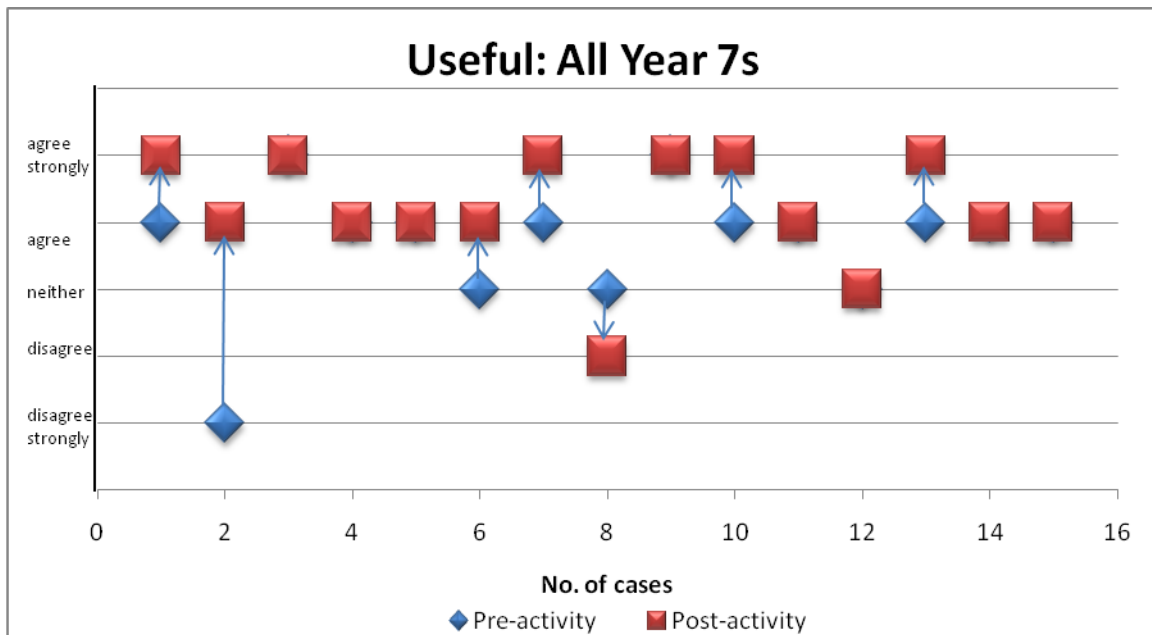
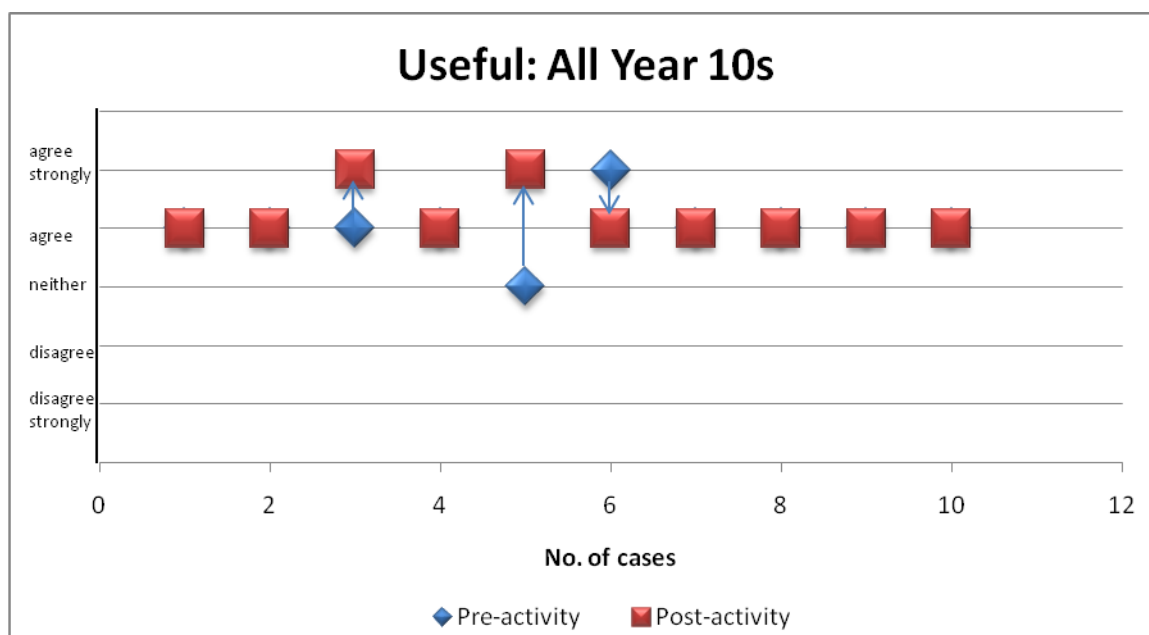


Chart 2



Drawing a comparison between the two schools showed that post intervention, half of the School One girls (seven out of 15) reported a more positive shift in opinion that sport and physical activity was useful. In School Two, there was a moderate shift; one girl reported a positive shift, while eight out of 10 girls held a steady opinion and agreed with the view that physical activity was useful.

The girls were asked whether physical activity was **pointless**. When drawing a comparison of both age groups, the majority of the girls reported that physical activity was *not* pointless following the intervention. Just over half of the Year 10 girls (six out of 10) showed a shift in their attitude, strengthening their view, that exercise was not pointless (Chart 3).

Chart 3

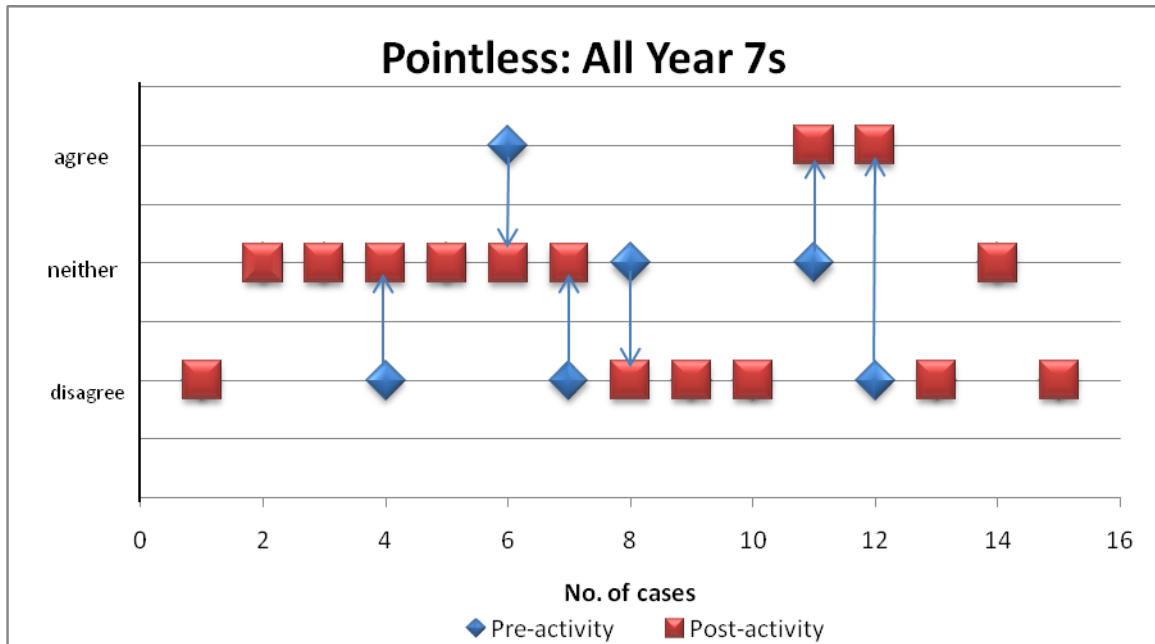
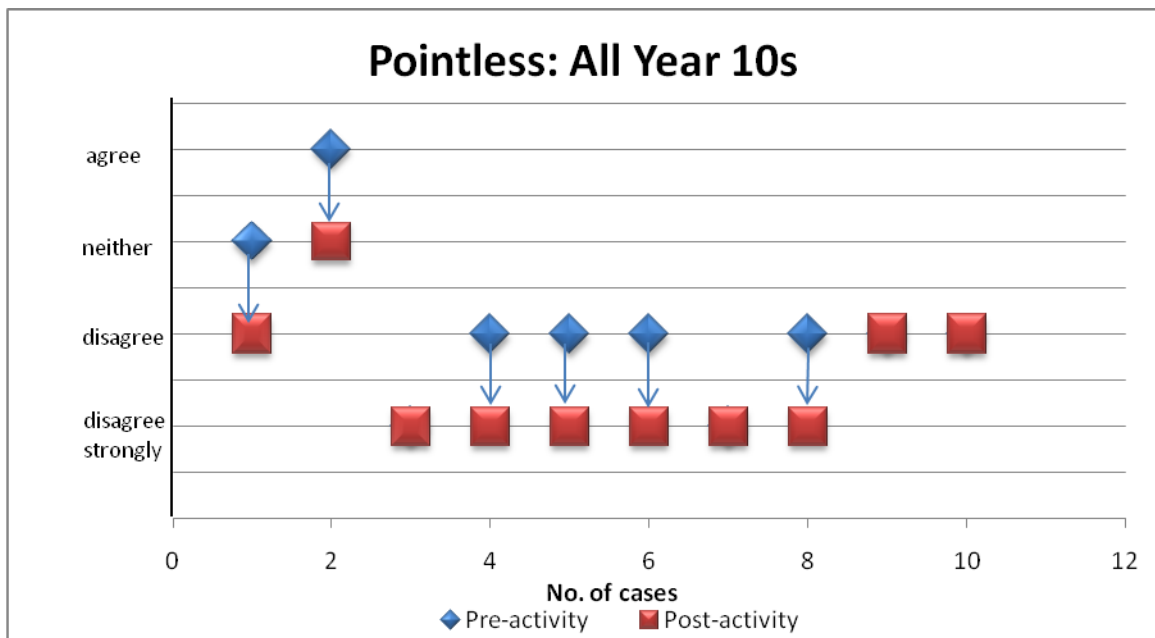


Chart 4



When comparing both schools, there were some interesting differences. The girls from School Two displayed slightly less of a positive shift than the girls in School One after the intervention. The lower number of respondents from School Two (approximately a third lower) has meant that there were far fewer girls available to report any change. Post-intervention, 14 out of 15 of the School One girls, across both age-groups, disagreed or disagreed strongly that physical activity was pointless. Eight out of 10 of the School Two girls reported the same views.

The view that sport was **not important** was widely rejected across both schools and both year-groups.

Chart 5

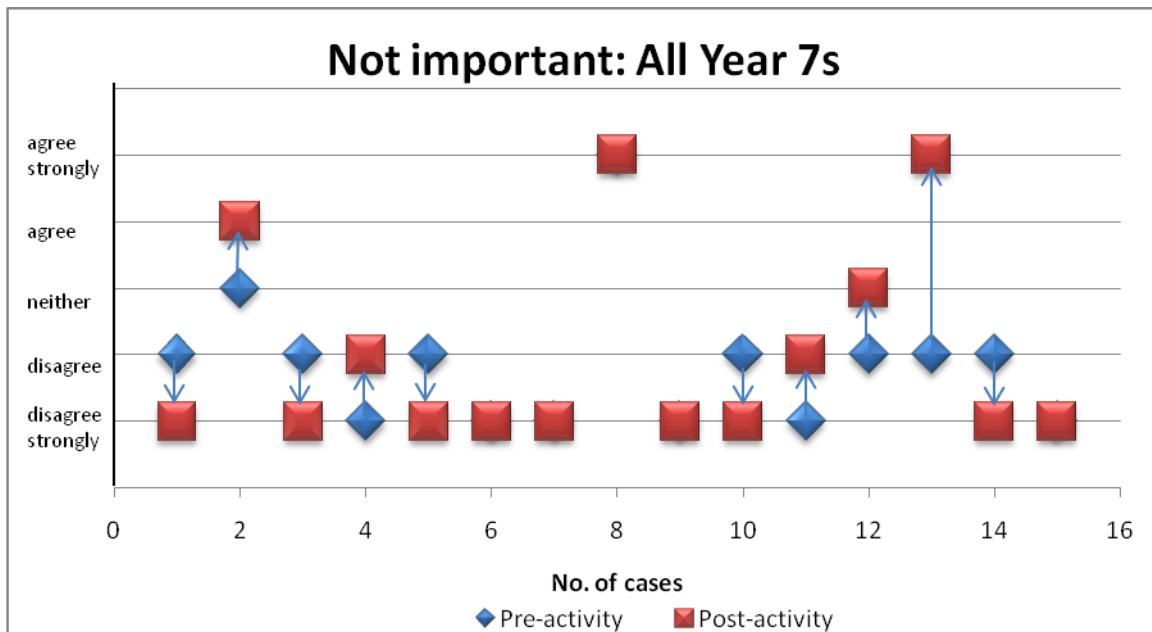
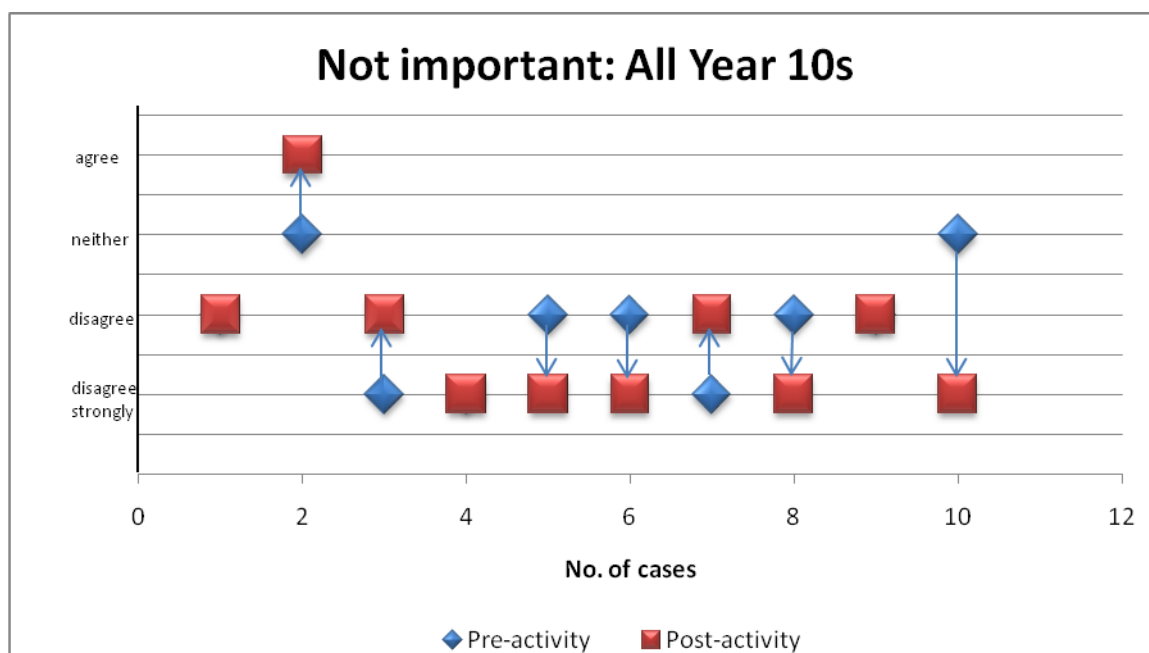


Chart 6



After the intervention, 11 out of 15 of the Year 7s disagreed and disagreed strongly that physical activity was not important (Chart 5). Nine out of 10 Year 10s reported the same views respectively (Chart 6), and the results were similarly high when looking at comparative data across both schools.

In summary, in the pre-intervention period, most girls thought physical activity was useful and few thought it was pointless; most disagreed that it was not important. These generally positive views of sport and exercise showed a further strengthening following their involvement in 'Am I Bovered'.

Enjoyable

There was an improvement in the view that sport and exercise was **enjoyable** following involvement on the project (Charts 7 & 8).

Chart 7

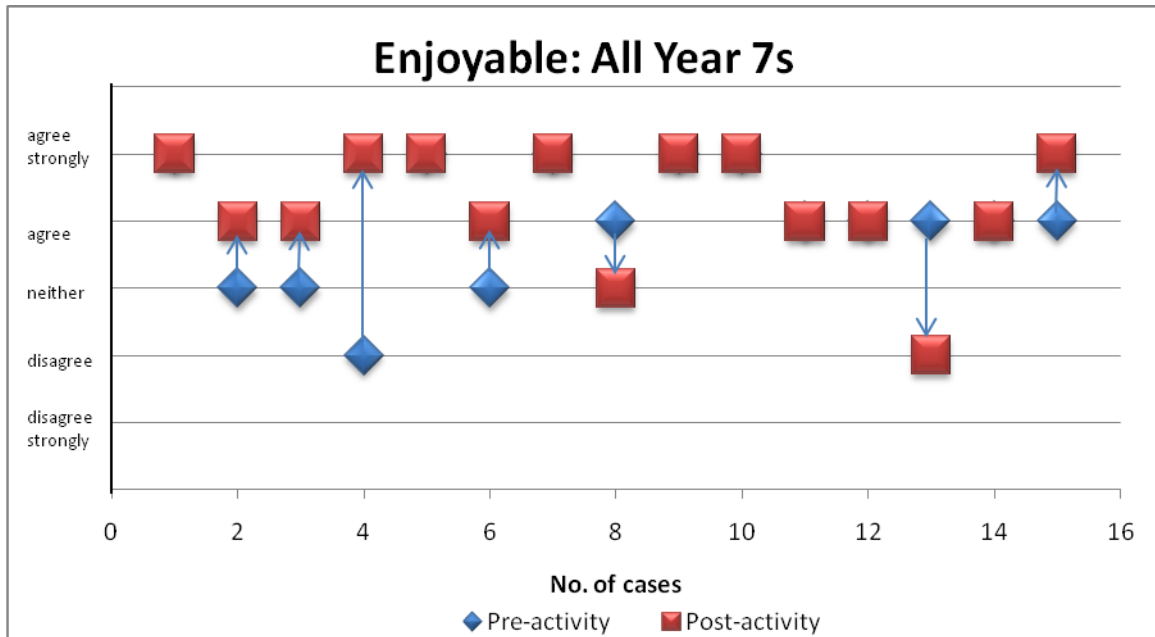
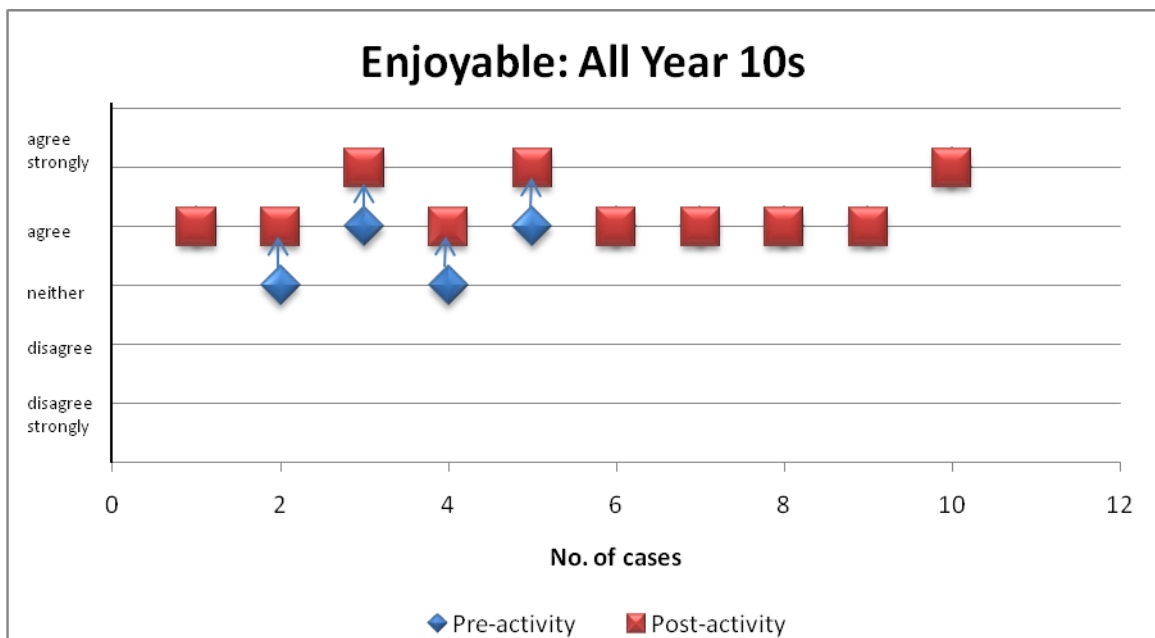


Chart 8



This improvement was also evident across both schools: eight out of 15 girls from School One showed a more positive view that physical activity was enjoyable. In School Two, there was less of a change, but opinion was already high: nine out of the 10 who replied, agreed and agreed strongly that it was enjoyable, in their post-activity responses.

Fun

Across both schools and both age-groups, most of the girls agreed that physical activity was **fun** in the pre- and the post- intervention questionnaires. However, there was also some evidence of an improvement in this respect following involvement in 'Am I Bovered': eight of the 15 Year 7 girls changed their opinion in the pre-intervention questionnaire to a more positive view of physical activity being fun in the post-intervention questionnaire (Chart 9), and four out of the 10 Year 10 girls in both schools demonstrated a more positive view in their post-intervention responses (Chart 10).

Chart 9

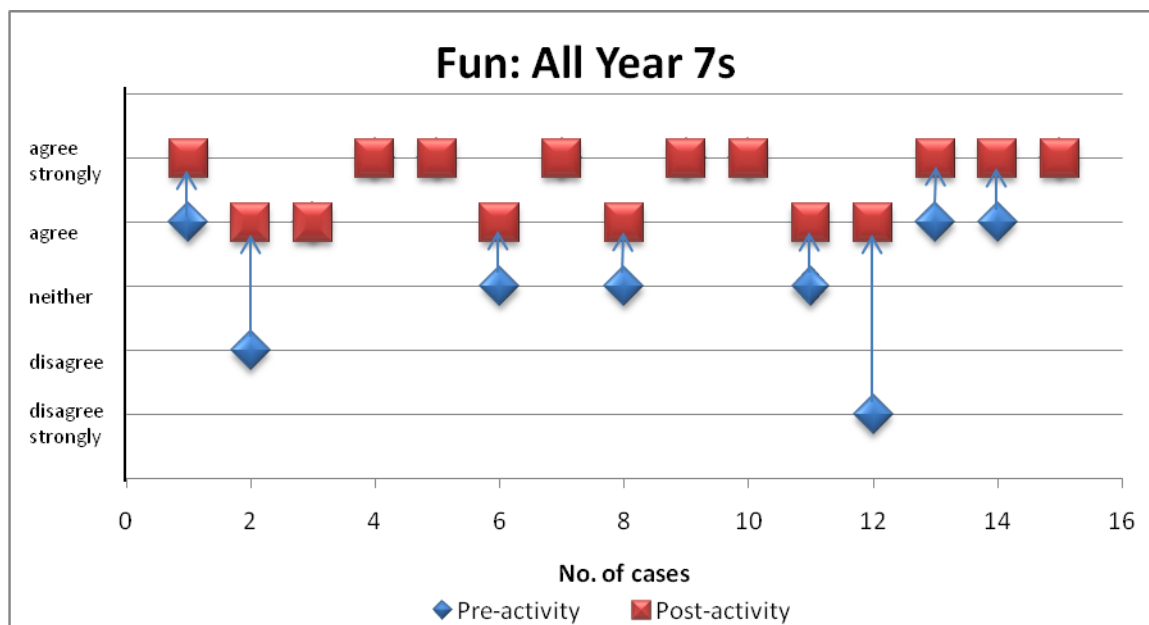
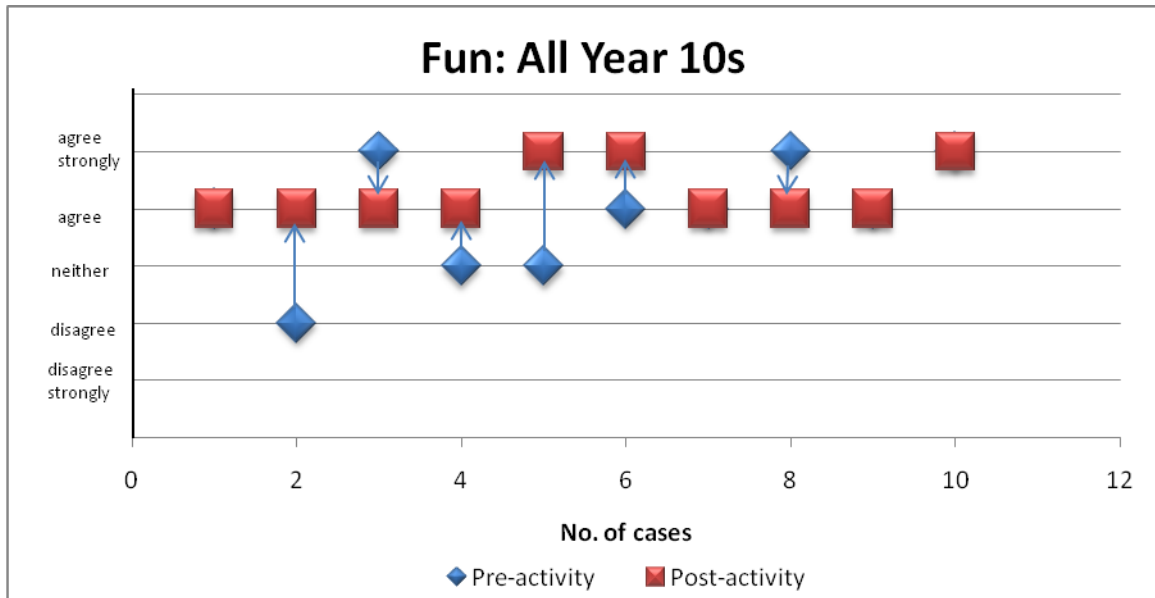


Chart 10



When looking across both schools, there was a stronger movement: six out of the 15 girls from School One moved from a negative or ambivalent view to a positive view that physical activity was fun, following the intervention. Five out of 10 girls in School Two also moved to a more positive view that physical activity was fun post-intervention.

Embarrassing

Views on whether exercise was **embarrassing** were more mixed and seemed less susceptible to change during the intervention. There was a mixture of opinion about whether physical activity was embarrassing, across both year groups and both schools, ranging from disagreeing strongly to agreeing strongly.

Chart 11

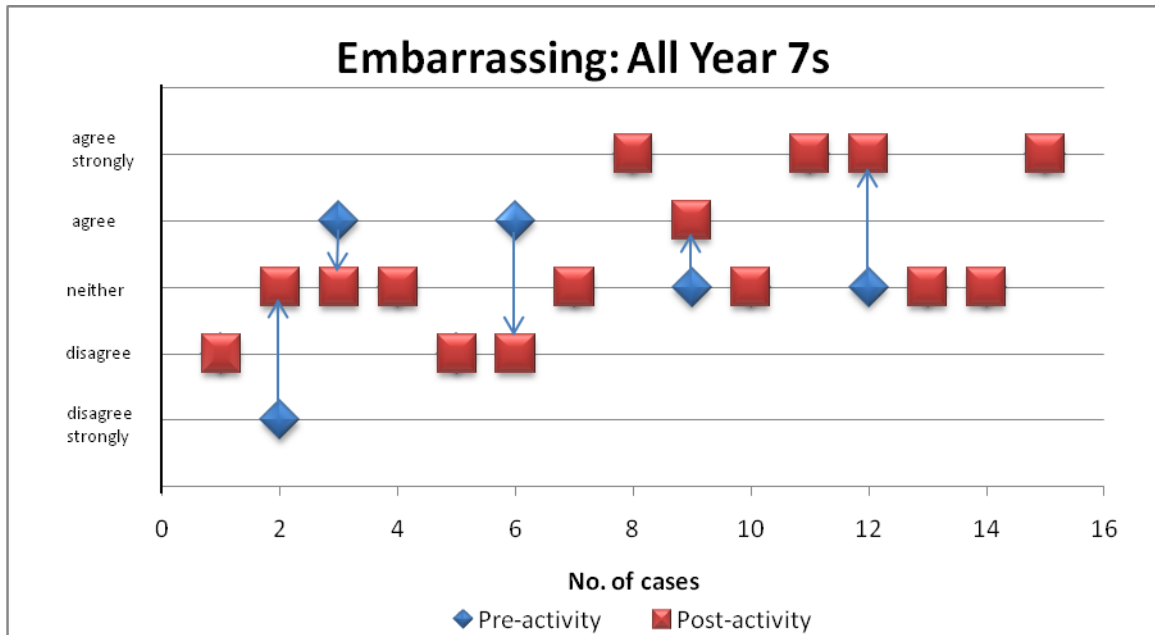
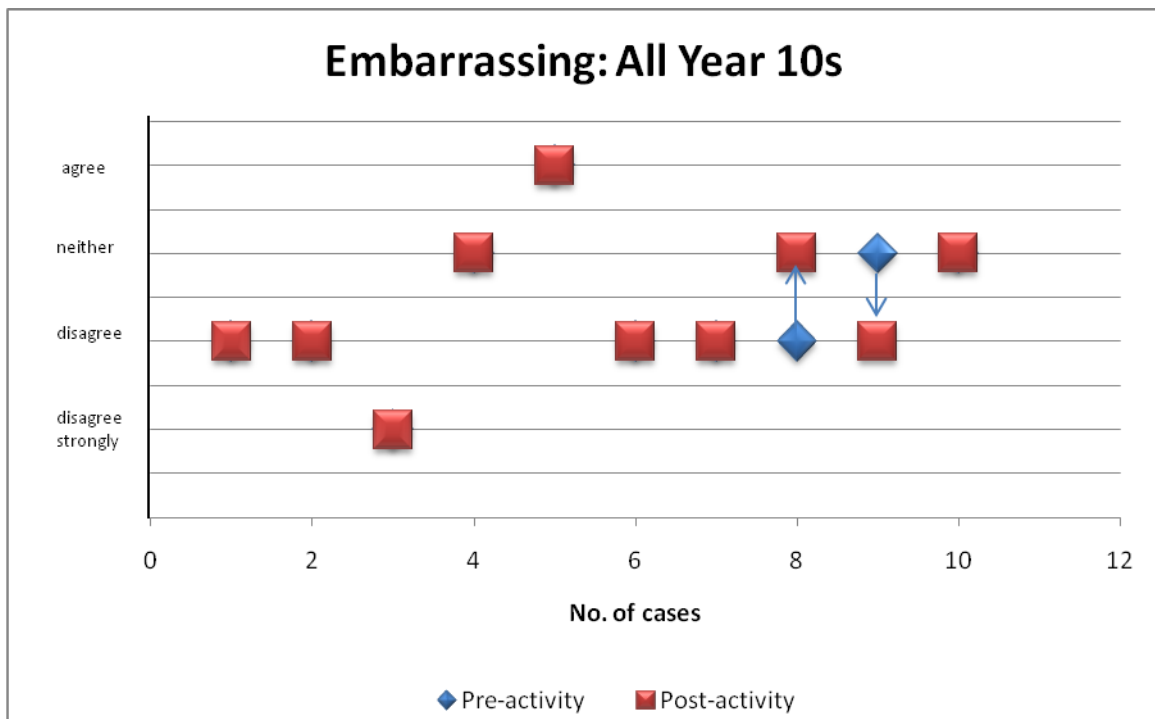


Chart 12



Interestingly, this range is reproduced in the post-activity questionnaire, suggesting that the potential for embarrassment is strong and may not be easily overcome by conducting sports and exercise in more 'teen-friendly' and more 'girl-friendly' ways.

From the qualitative data, it is clear that concerns about making mistakes, trying new things and making a fool of themselves in front of adults and peers loom large in the minds of teenage girls, even in a girl-friendly, low-pressure atmosphere created in the programme and designed to be more supportive than school.

b) Facilitators of regular exercise

The girls were asked, through a number of differently-worded questions, how **easy** they felt it was for them to participate in regular exercise. Following the intervention, five out of 15 Year 7 girls reported a positive change in opinion (Chart 13). There was a moderate shift in opinion for Year 10 girls with two out of 10 girls reporting a positive change (Chart 14). In general, the girls felt positive that it was easy for them to take part in exercise after the intervention.

Chart 13

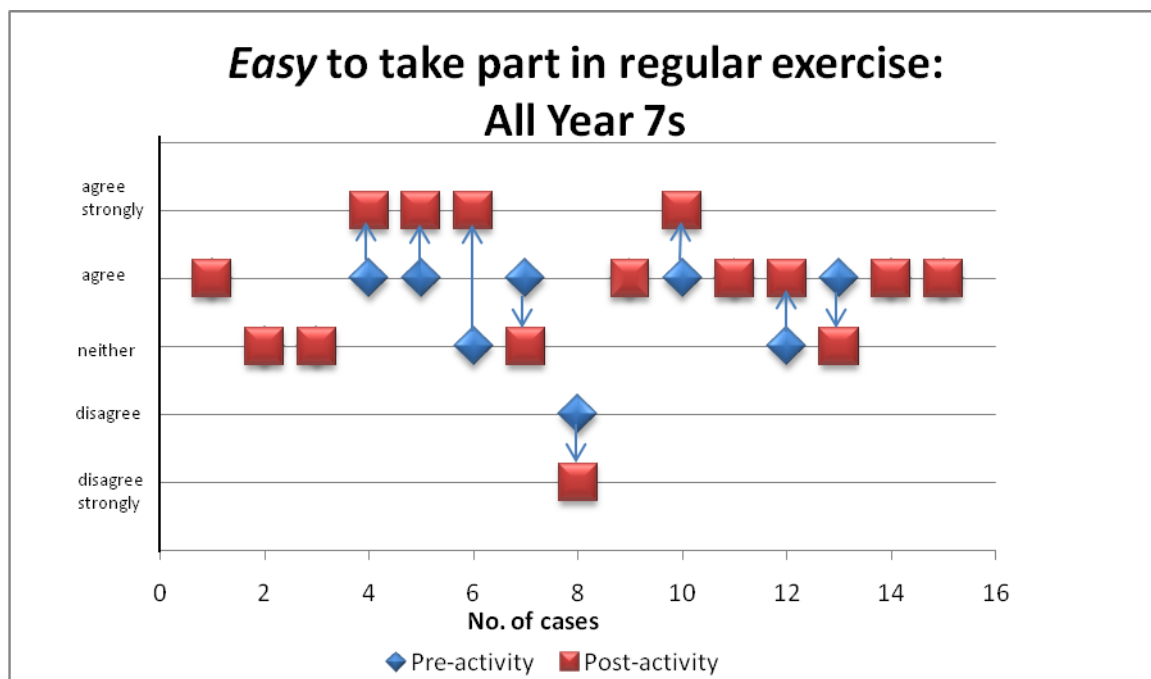
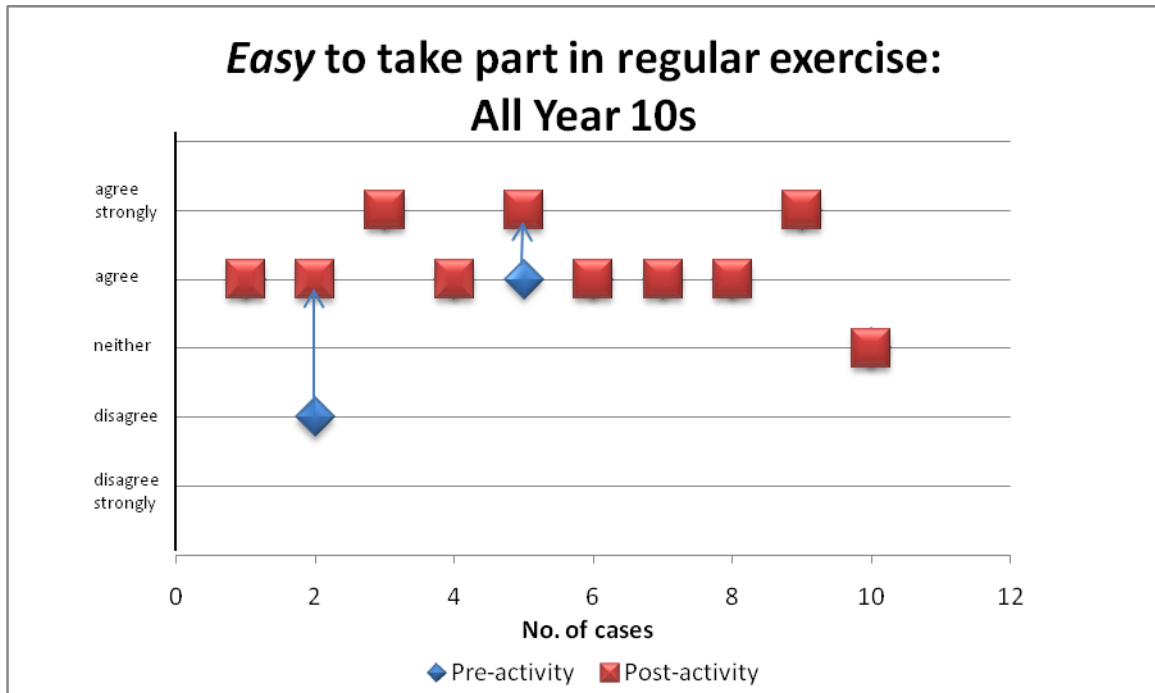


Chart 14



When looking at the results across both schools, there was a stronger movement in opinion with the girls in School One: six out of 15 girls reported a more positive shift in opinion, whereas there was a slight shift in opinion with the girls in School Two with one girl showing any significant change.

Most of the Year 7 girls were **confident** that they could do regular exercise, and five out of 15 reported an even more positive shift in their view following the intervention (Chart 15). Similarly, most of the Year 10s were *confident* that they could do regular exercise, and four out of 10 girls showed a positive change (Chart 16).

Chart 15

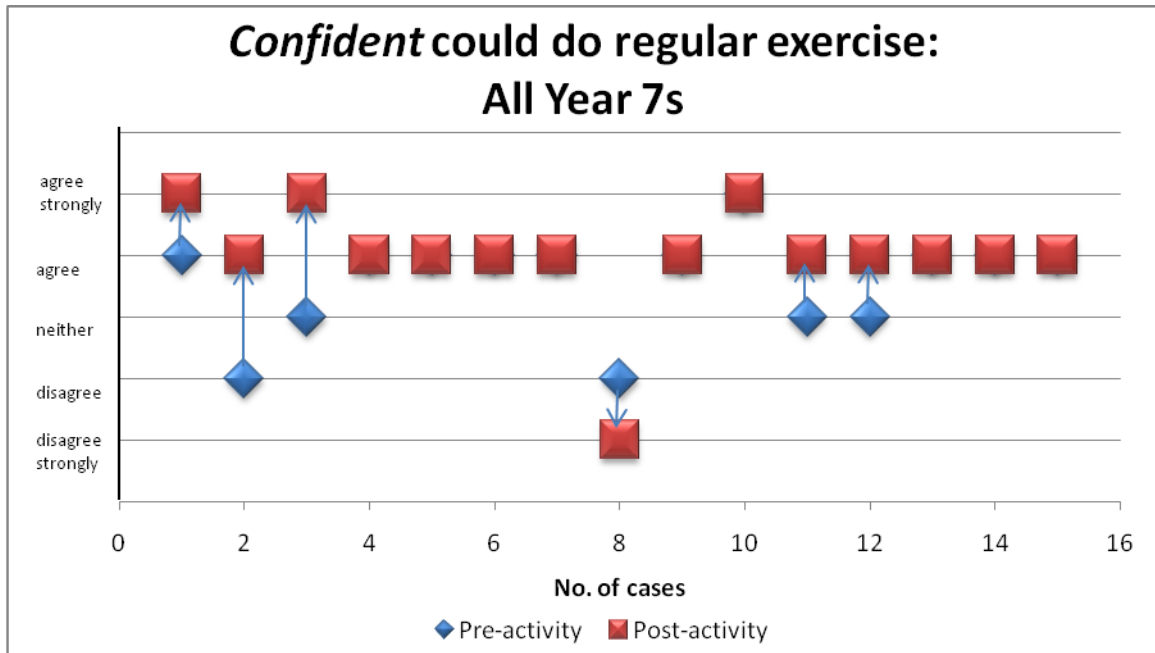
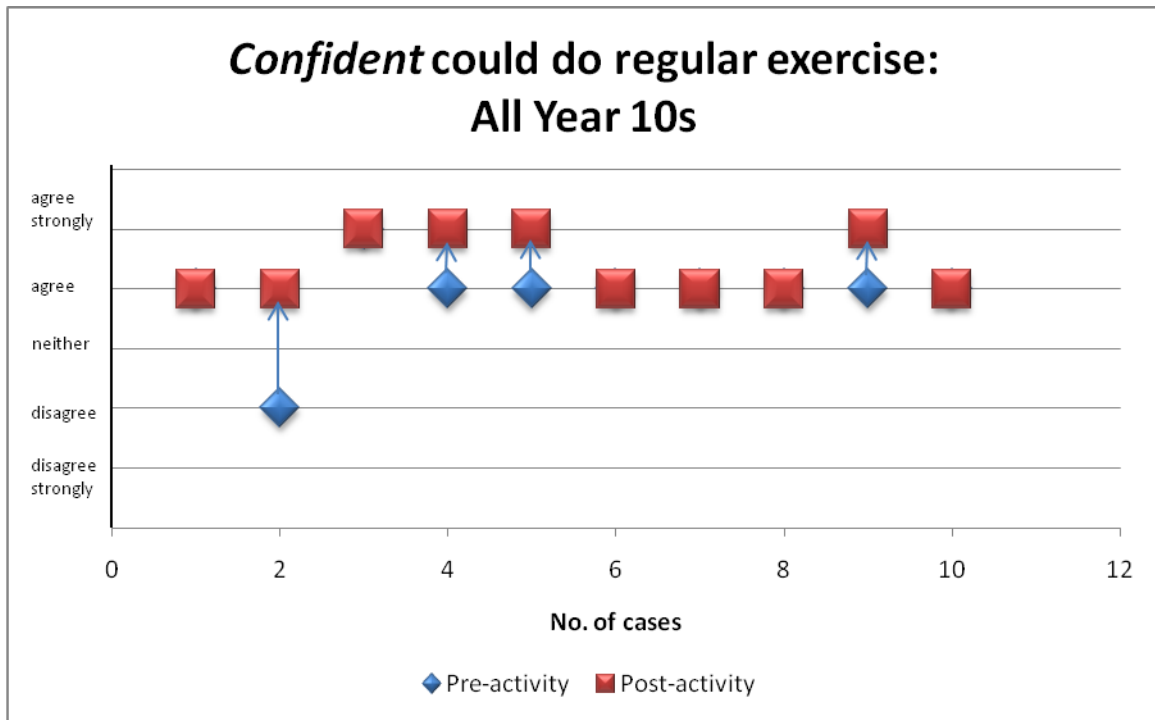


Chart 16



Across both schools, in School One six out of 15 girls reported a positive shift in opinion, that they were confident that they would do regular exercise. In School Two, there was a moderate shift in the number of girls who reported a positive shift (three out of 10). Overall, the girls reported that after the intervention, they did feel more confident about participating in regular exercise.

c) Influence of Peers and Family

One of the factors the study was designed to explore was the influence of peers and family on girls' perceptions of regular exercise. The girls were asked whether their *friends* exercised regularly. Among the Year 7s, only a very small number disagreed that their *friends* exercised regularly and seven out of 15 displayed a positive change in their opinion following the intervention (Chart 17), perhaps indicating that their friends had also been involved in the programme or that they were more aware of their friends exercising.

Chart 17

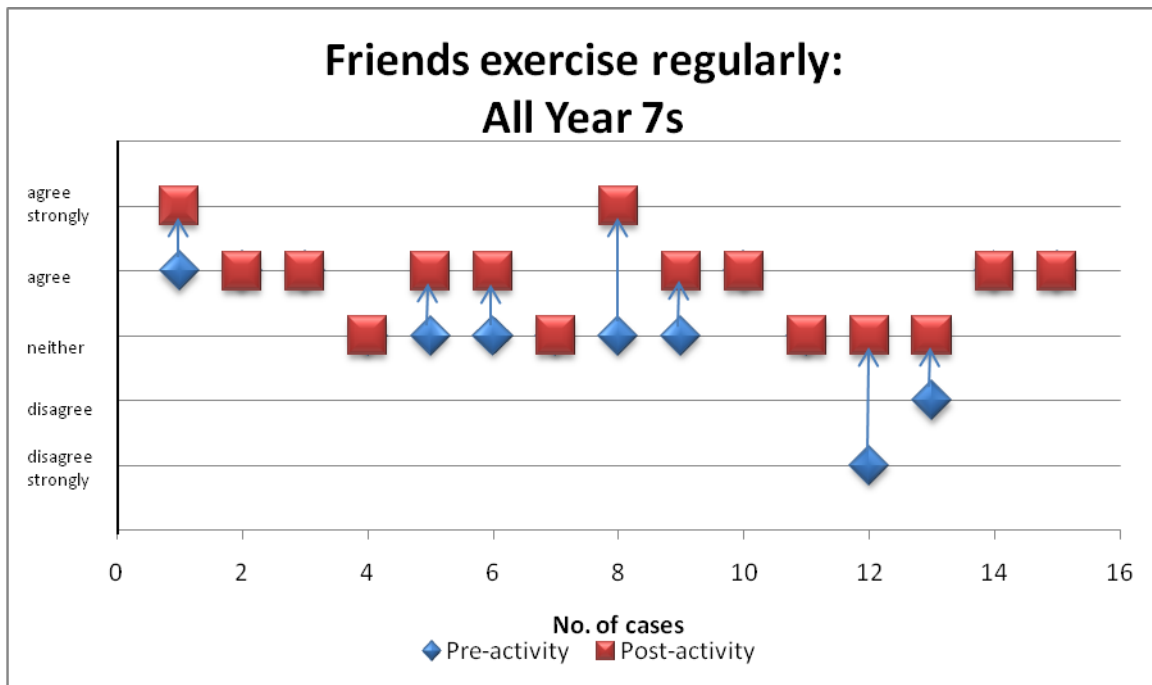
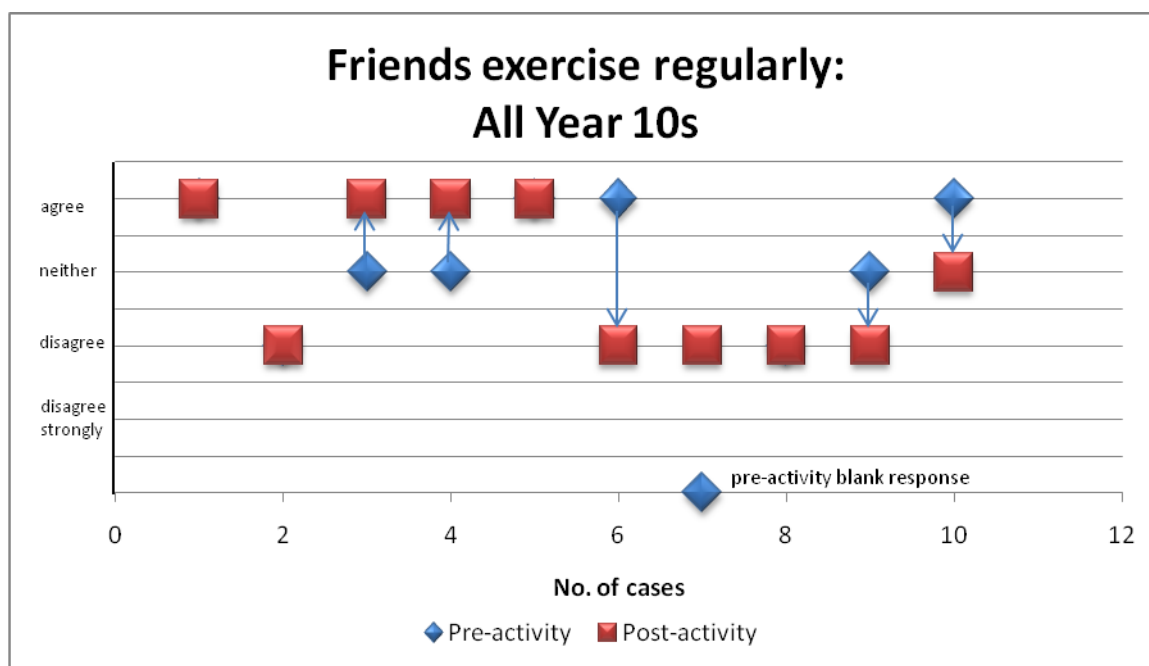


Chart 18



Amongst the Year 10s: there was a polarisation between those who agreed and those who disagreed that their *friends* exercised regularly, perhaps indicating evidence that some girls tail off in activity as they get older (Chart 18).

Across the schools, in School One, seven out of 15 girls reported that they agreed and agreed strongly that their friends exercised on a regular basis after the intervention. In School Two, there were far fewer girls who reported any increase in opinion in response to the question (two out of 10).

The pre- and post-intervention questionnaires were also designed to gauge parental involvement in and support of sport and exercise. Interestingly, the results from the first question were surprising. The post-intervention results display more mixed responses showing a variation in opinion on whether their parents exercised regularly. Perhaps the impact of participating on the project challenged what the girls considered what encompassed regular exercise, thus they found it difficult to decipher types and ranges of exercises.

Chart 19

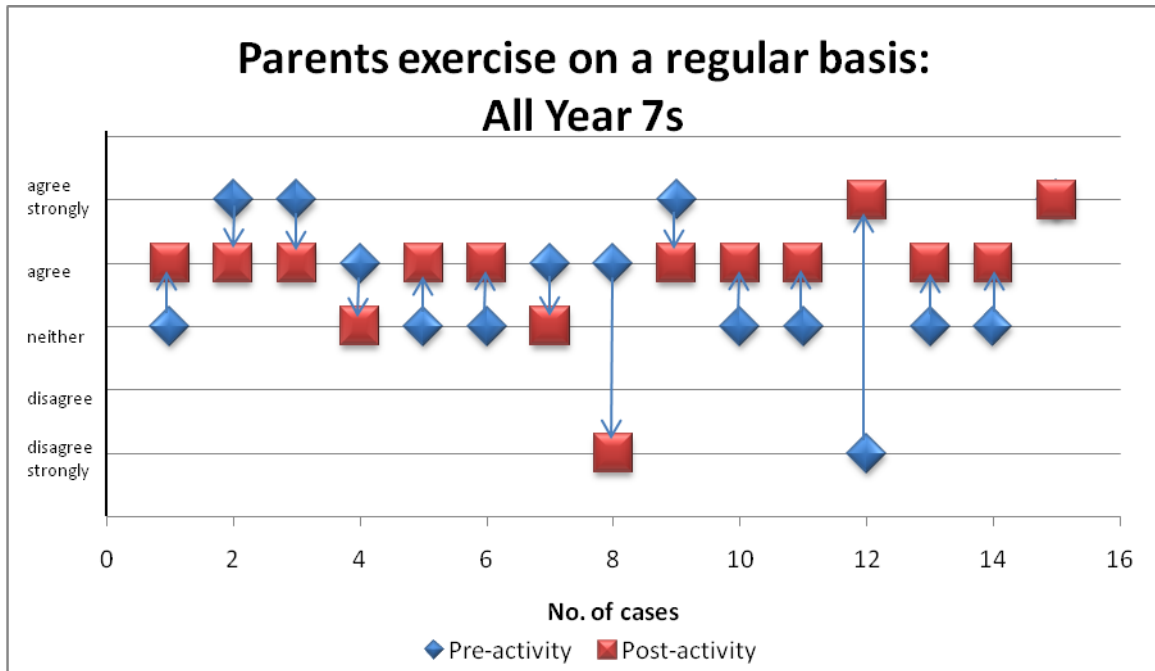
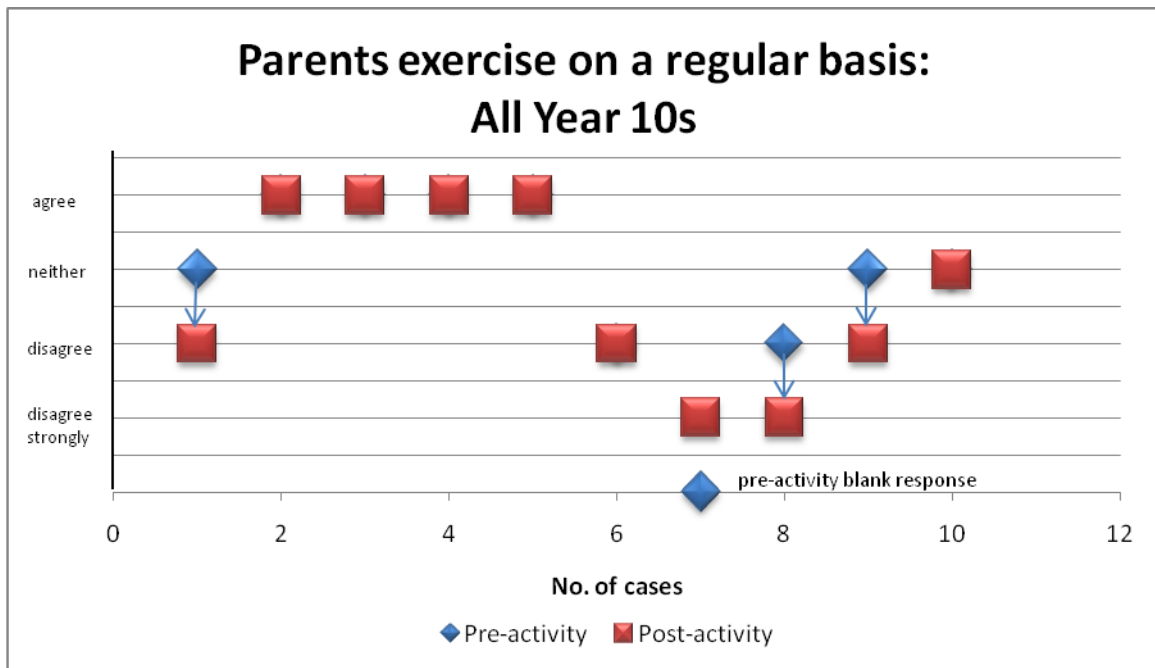


Chart 20



Drawing from the post intervention questionnaire, eight out of 15 Year 7 girls changed their opinion, reporting that their parents exercised regularly: seven moved from 'neither agree nor disagree' to agree (Chart 19). Among the Year 10s: there was a greater spread of whether parents did or did not exercise, and there was less change than was evident in the Year 7 responses (Chart 20).

There was a difference between the two schools, with 11 out of 15 girls in School One reporting that they agreed with the view that their parents exercised regularly in the post-intervention questionnaire, but fewer (five out of 10) girls in School Two.

The second question of parental support in sport and exercise was explored further when the girls were asked whether they felt their parents would *encourage* them to exercise.

Chart 21

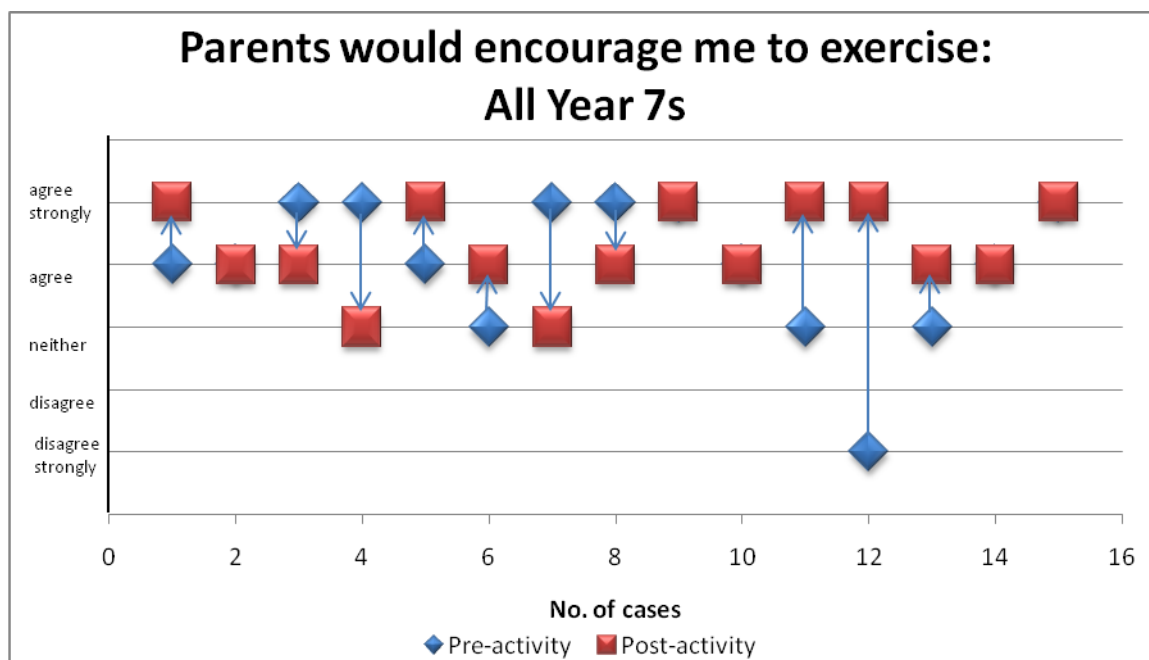
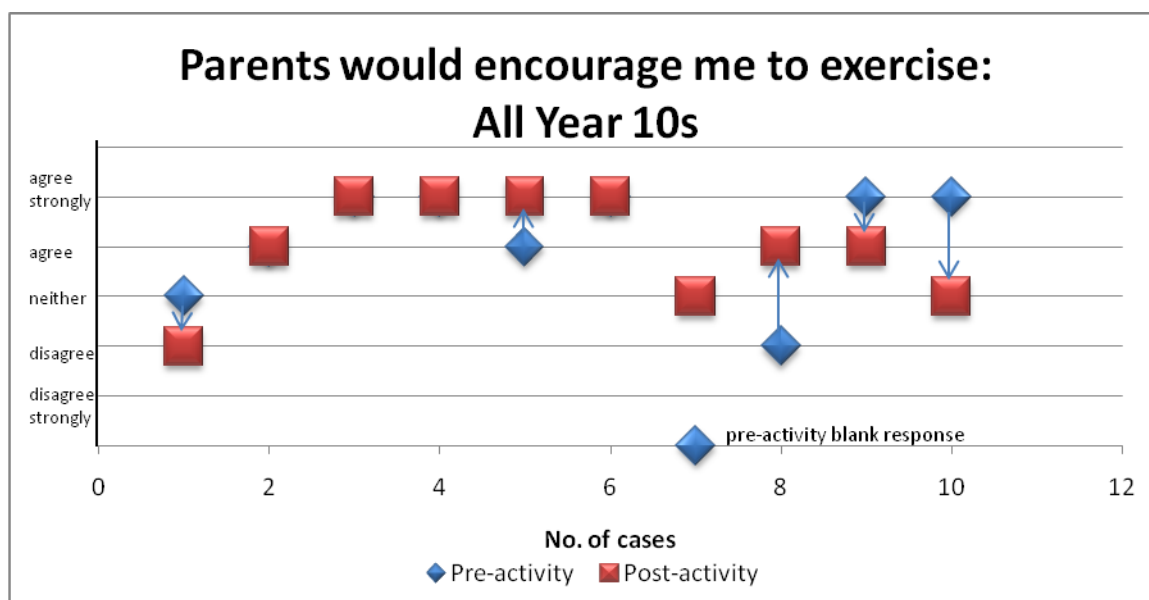


Chart 22



Most of the 15 Year 7 girls reported in the pre-intervention questionnaire that their parents would *encourage* them to exercise and four of them, who had more negative or ambivalent responses, had become more positive by the post-intervention questionnaire (Chart 21). Just over half (six out of 10) of the Year 10 girls held a steady opinion that they agreed or agreed strongly that their parents would encourage them to exercise after the intervention (Chart 22).

Across both schools, the girls in School Two reported a stronger change in their parents' encouragement than the girls in School One post-intervention. Also, following the intervention, most of the girls agreed that their parents would support them to participate in exercise.

d) Commentary

The pre- and post-intervention questionnaire findings show that overall, the girls reported a positive shift in opinion in response to questions gauging attitudes towards physical activity. The girls held much stronger views on how **useful**, **enjoyable** and **fun** they thought physical exercise was. They also felt it was **easy** and felt more **confident** to take part in regular exercise. In addition, they reported that the support of **friends** and **parents** did influence their decision on whether to participate in sport and exercise.

e) Key Points

- The girls reported a positive change that taking part in physical activity was *easy* and they felt more *confident* to participate in regular exercise after the intervention.
- The influence of friends impacted on the frequency the girls exercised; the Year 7 girls showed a more positive view that their friends exercised regularly, whereas the majority of Year 10 girls disagreed with this view.
- The intervention seemed to affect the frequency of parental exercise reported by the girls.
- The majority of girls in School One reported that their parents exercised on a regular basis, but there were far fewer girls who reported this view in School Two following the intervention.
- Most girls reported a much more positive change in opinion after the intervention that their parents would encourage them to exercise on a regular basis, with more School Two girls reporting a stronger view than the girls in School One.

3.2 Focus Groups

3.2.1 Sample

The size of the focus groups varied greatly between the two schools, with a total of seven girls being interviewed in School One, but only four being interviewed at School Two, and seven participants taking part in the parental focus group (five mothers and two fathers). Turn-out throughout the programme was smaller for School Two than for School One, but the recruitment and attrition problem was exacerbated by the difficulty of scheduling focus groups at the end of term, when we were competing with numerous school trips. For recruitment to the parents' focus group, parents were asked to indicate an interest in attending a focus group via the consent forms they were returning on their daughter's behalf.

3.2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The School 1 Year 7 girls were interviewed separately from the Year 10 girls, whereas, due to the smaller number, the School 2 girls were interviewed together. The responses across the age-groups show no noticeable differences. Although the older School 2 girls were more vociferous than the Year 7s, this could have reflected differing personalities as much as simply age. The girls' focus groups were run immediately after school on the respective school sites to enable ease of participation. The parental focus group was organised to take place during the final session of the full-programme, at the local bowling alley. As the parents would be coming to collect their daughters at the end of session, they were asked to arrive early to take part in the discussion.

All focus groups were digitally recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were then analysed with a straightforward thematic analysis using Flick's (1998) approach – themes were identified by a close reading of the transcripts and discussed by the research team. The focus group schedule was used as an initial pre-determined structure, but all emergent themes were also included, not just those which corresponded to the questions asked.

3.2.3 Findings

The qualitative data obtained through running focus group discussions with the girls and their parents enriches the findings from the quantitative survey. First we will report on the findings from the three focus groups held with the girl participants, then we will move on to the findings from the parental focus group.

a) Girls' Focus Groups

The findings are discussed over three themes: (1) Attitudes towards engaging in physical activity; (2) The impact of Am I Bovered; and (3) Differences between the two schools.

Attitudes towards engaging in physical activity

Girls identified themselves and their relationship to physical activity both directly and through their responses. They revealed the potential barriers to trying new activities – such as shyness about new situations and anxieties about the potential embarrassment of failure - but also their motivations for engaging with physical activity and the appeal of the Am I Bovered programme.

Differing responses: 'Sporty' and 'Ambivalent' girls


Across both schools and both age-groups, the girls' responses could be divided into two categories: those who identified themselves as already sporty and those who were more ambivalent about sport and exercise. The sporty girls spoke of how their involvement in 'Am I Bovered' had provided *additional* opportunities to take part in sporting activities, rather than changing their attitude towards it. The girls who were more ambivalent or negative about sport, described how previously they had found sport to be '*boring*', '*embarrassing*' or '*pointless*', but that being involved in the programme had made them more positive about it.

Within the category of girls who described themselves as sporty, there was a division between those who experienced P.E. in school positively and pursued the Am I Bovered programme as an additional way of getting greater access to sport, and those who were more negative about school-based P.E. For these girls, Am I Bovered offered an *alternative* way of fulfilling their interest in physical activity.

Before I started doing the AIB project, I used to love sport...what I got out of it, it gave me the opportunity to do new things and find out more things and make new friends in a way. Some of the girls who go who are in Year 7, I didn't really know that well. Also, I didn't even know what aqua aerobics was, and I found out what it was and it was really fun.
(School One, Year 7)

I like sport anyway, it was an extra thing to see what I could get out of it really. I have got out of it quite a lot really.
(School One, Year 10)

I thought P.E. was boring, but I like P.E. much more now because it's started to be more fun.
(School Two, Year 10)



Two older girls from School Two described themselves as '*sports buddies*', always on the look-out for new activities to try. However opportunities for pursuing their interests outside school were limited, primarily by cost. Within school, they were enthusiastic about P.E., but were frustrated by the lack of choice on offer and by the attitude of some of their fellow pupils who disrupted lessons. They were self-motivated, bold about trying new things and seemed to be looking for adventures. They described how they made their own fun by playing basketball in the park for free, but as they got older, opportunities to be active, for example by roller-skating in the street, were becoming more limited. Organised activities were increasingly their only option, but this came at a price.

For one of the younger girls from School Two, being involved in AIB had helped her to get through a difficult year of P.E. lessons where, due to staff shortages, she and a small number of girls had had to do P.E. with an overwhelming number of boys. The alternative activities offered by 'Am I Bovered' therefore enabled her to maintain an interest in sport and exercise to counter-act the discouraging experience of school-based sports.

The wide range of activities offered through the 'Am I Bovered' programme was described as having broadened their perception of what sport could be and reintroduced the idea that sport and physical activity could be fun to those who had developed more negative attitudes towards it.

I basically didn't think of things like aqua aerobics and things like that. I didn't think about doing that as a sport. (School One, Year 10)

We don't really see it that we did a sport though, fun, physical activities, but I wouldn't have thought of it as sports. (School One, Year 10)

Barriers and inhibitions

It was apparent from the girls' comments that having friends around significantly built upon their willingness to try new activities. Most of the girls said they would be worried and apprehensive about trying new activities where they might not know anybody. In fact, a number of them said they would not go along on their own to something new. The parents confirmed this view. 'Am I Bovered' smoothed the transition between school and out-of-school activities by taking girls, within their year-groups, from school to other venues with external instructors. This made the girls much more confident about taking part in out-of-school activities.

Socially, many of the girls were nervous of going to an unfamiliar venue or going into a room full of strangers to participate in a new activity. Most would not do this alone. This impacted on their willingness to try new things, especially if they did not have the company of friends to embolden them.

No offence to you lot or anything... but when we first heard of the thing, it was really nerve-wracking because we didn't really know. Like with the teachers...you know the teachers already and you know how they are towards you, you can joke about with them, with new people you can't, so first it was like, what are they gonna be like.

(School One, Year 10)


It's horrible when you're new.

(School One, Year 10)

Trying new things at school, although familiar, carried with it the risk of failure and humiliation. Girls worried about making mistakes, not knowing the rules or not being good enough in the eyes of teachers, but also feared potential embarrassment in the presence of fellow pupils.

(At AIB) If you're not good at something, you don't have anyone laughing at you. Whereas at school, if you try something new and you're never done it before, people just laugh at you.

(School One, Year 7)



At school, the people you see everyday might get an opinion of you. But some of us didn't see each other everyday at school, which gave us a bit of a relief to think that even if you made a mistake or were not as good as somebody else, no one knew that.

(School One, Year 7)

Outside school, they worried about not being good enough to join new clubs or sign up for classes.

I think if AIB weren't there, I don't think we would have done it at all, I wouldn't have done it. If you went to trampolining clubs, all the people look at you saying that you're rubbish.

(School One, Year 10)

This response has implications for the way in which activities are promoted to young people and indicates the importance of overcoming these anxieties in the way young people are engaged with, for example, by bridging the gap between school and out-of-school activities, by providing a lot of reassuring information 'upfront' so that girls know what to expect and by appealing to groups of friends rather than to individuals.

Motivators

Having fun and being sociable

Taking part in 'Am I Bovered' was overwhelmingly described as being 'fun' by the girls in both schools and both age-groups. We will go on to explore in greater depth what the girls found so enjoyable, but the expectation that sport should be fun echoes the findings from the Phase One focus groups.

The use of the word 'fun' suggests that sports and physical activity are categorised as play rather than work, and as such, should be energetic and enjoyable. As we found in the Phase One focus groups, the opportunity to have fun with friends is an important reason for taking part in physical activity. Through the 'Am I Bovered' programme, the girls had the chance to hang out with their close friends, to get to know other girls better and to meet girls from another school.

It was really good to hang out with school mates and also good to meet new people.
(School One, Year 10)

There were three or four AIB girls, I knew them and had seen them at school but hadn't got to know them.
(School One, Year 7)

Many of the girls seemed to value fun and the opportunity to socialise above the benefits of learning something new or being active for its own sake. They sometimes complained that instruction detracted from their enjoyment by limiting their time for having fun with friends.


I hate that when you know what you're doing but people just stop you.
(School Two, Year 10)

The activities they most enjoyed engaging in with friends were things such as ice-skating and roller-discos, which, although active, are primarily an opportunity to hang out with friends and have fun.

It seems that children's expectations of sports may be different to those prevalent in the school setting, where other requirements are central, such as gaining knowledge and skills, discipline and assessment. Although the girls in the Phase One and the Phase Three focus groups described school-based P.E. as 'fun', they also complained that is often not as much fun as they expect it to be, notably when they have to listen to instructions, when they feel their abilities are below expectations or when there is what they perceive to be a negative, critical and unsupportive atmosphere.

The results of this study suggest that even girls who have been 'turned off' by P.E. can be engaged in physical activity as a fun thing, provided the conditions are right and factors which detract from the fun aspects are minimised.

I think it's better because the P.E. teachers know what to expect from you...they know what your capabilities are and they know if you're working hard or not, in P.E. it's different, it's work. But there it's more fun.
(School One, Year 10)



I don't normally do these sort of activities, so a bit of freedom for me, cos I find I get stressed really easily. It was also a chance to relax, because after a long day at school, you get to have a bit of fun, like chill out with your friends and have a good time.

(School One, Year 7)

The girls from School Two agreed that being involved in AIB had been fun, even though they were less effusive than the girls from School One:

It's better than sitting at home really. Like most of the time, you just sit at home on the computer or watching TV.

(School Two, Year 10)

It's been quite fun....with some really funny moments.

(School Two, Year 10)

Later on in the report, we will discuss further the differences in attitude between the girls from the two schools.

The attitudes of others

Although girls were highly motivated by the sociable dimension of Am I Bovered, they did not talk more widely about the attitudes of other people beyond the project, such as their peer group and families. The exception to this was two older School Two girls' description of their concerns about being seen by others in their community doing something potentially embarrassing, such as aqua-aerobics.

There were loads of people watching...we got well terrorised when we went back, it was like, I saw you doing your aqua-aerobics...I know they was joking about.

(School Two, Year 10)

Talk about parents was noticeably absent from all the girl focus-groups. The girls from both schools stressed their own self-motivation as key to their involvement in AIB, downplaying the importance of parental encouragement.

I encouraged myself to do it as it would be better for me to try it and not give up. Cos I know how much I enjoyed it, but there were dilemmas, like I might not get my homework done or do as well...I get a lot of pressure from home...from doing what I want to, I've got a little sister who copies all the time. It was nice to do something for myself. (School One, Year 7)

I chose to do it...I just wanted to do it really. (School One, Year 10)

The School Two girls reported that their parents had asked them how things had gone, but denied that they had been any more involved than that. However, some of the School One girls did say that their parents had been proud of them.

Because I've never really done anything like that outside of school...she was actually quite proud of me that I reached the top, because I was very triumphant about climbing the wall. (School One, Year 10)

Overall, there seemed to be a desire to present themselves as being 'their own people': self-determining and self-motivated.

Weight and body issues

There was little spontaneous talk of weight and body issues and the researchers made the judgement that this was too sensitive a subject to probe further in a group setting. Only one girl mentioned weight or body-size and she was not overweight in any way.

AIB helped me relax... and to do more sport and lose weight... there were actually two girls who were better than me and slimmer, and it was embarrassing when you go to aqua-aerobics and you've got your swimming costume on.

(School One, Year 7)

However, the researchers observed that some of the girls were very self-conscious about their bodies, for example, getting changed separately, continually adjusting their clothing to make sure they did not reveal too much or wearing t-shirts over their swimming costumes for aqua-aerobics. The parents confirmed this observation in their focus group (see below).

The impact of 'Am I Bovered'

The programme was seen as an opportunity to do more sporting activities, but in a non-school setting, to try new things in a non-competitive environment, or to further pursue things they had tried before, build skills, meet new people and strengthen friendships.

Sense of achievement

It was clear from the focus groups, that some of the girls gained a great deal from those activities which were challenging to their abilities and required them to take a risk and led to a change in their sense of themselves. The more 'risky' activities seemed to have a greater impact.

I rock-climbed 20 metres and abseiled back down again...I like doing anything extreme sports. Rock-climbing was really fun...you feel that adrenaline rush and you feel like you still want to do this. Like when you go on a rollercoaster you feel that it's fun but scary.

(School One, Year 7)

I thought it was hard going upside down, but I managed to get it in the end. I was stuck up there for ages. I had to find out how to do it.


(School Two, Year 10)

As well as the thrill of trying the more vigorous and demanding activities such as trampolining and rock-climbing, some of the girls welcomed the chance to develop their skills in a particular activity, making progress over the four weeks of the programme.

I was able to do a seat jump and a hop. I attempted the front jump and grazed my chin!

(School One, Year 10)

Some of the girls liked the consistency of having the same instructor from one week to the next, as this built their confidence enabled them to gauge their progress. However, the girls in School Two were less keen on 'being told what to do' and saw the programme as being primarily about having fun rather than learning a new skill.



She kept on stopping us when we knew what we were doing, it was quite annoying...I hate that when you know what you're doing but people just stop you.

(School Two, Year 10)

To be honest, like we could have done that anyway, if we had one of them mat thingies we could have done that anyway...I wanted to do somersaults.

(School Two, Year 10)

However, they also wanted to be challenged and for the activities to become more difficult.

So the climbing, would you quite happily carry on with that?

If it was more higher...I like a challenge...hanging above the sea or something.

(School Two, Year 10)

We knew the basics after one week. Like on the first week we could have learnt the basics and on the second week we could have climbed up the wall, then up higher.

(School Two, Year 10)

I would have liked it if we had just done it one time, but three times was just boring.

(School Two, Year 7)

In the focus group discussion, the older School Two girls come across as somewhat negative. Their projected identities as competent risk-takers who know what they are doing and who require little adult input made them appear more difficult to engage. However, these same girls had participated enthusiastically in the activities and one of them had recruited friends into the project. Their bravado was borne out by their willingness to get stuck into the activities and so perhaps they would have benefitted from more challenging activities.

Changed perception of themselves

Some of the girls described how, through pushing themselves in new activities, they had changed their expectations of themselves. They also described 'Am I Bovered' as providing an opportunity for a fresh start because they could try new things away from the school environment. Within school, some felt that they were already categorised by teachers as being poor at P.E. either through perceived lack of effort or lack of ability. Trying daring activities such as rock-climbing, which were perceived as risky, boosted the girls' self-confidence. Climbing to the top of the wall or lowering themselves off the top while abseiling was not necessarily a matter of skill but of a willingness to have a go.

I've never done trampolining before and after that I thought that I'd done quite well, like learning new tricks. When we first did the climbing wall I thought I wouldn't be able to do anything but in the end I did some things. (School One, Year 7)

Choice

It was important to some of the older girls that they were consulted in drawing up the programme of activities and that participation was voluntary. After the initial taster sessions, the girls were asked to vote on the activities they wanted to pursue for a further four weeks. They contrasted this degree of choice with the relative lack of autonomy they felt was involved in school P.E. Even those who enjoyed P.E. and who described an impressive range of sports on offer at school, liked the fact that they could choose for themselves in which 'Am I Bovered' activities to participate. The girls seemed to appreciate that while the AIB programme had actively recruited them, had made participation easy, and had made them confident about trying new things, participation was not compulsory. These features were contrasted to the strong compulsion and lack of control they experienced at school. It is important to note, however, that they also welcomed the 'push' they received from the active recruitment strategy compared with the totally voluntaristic joining of extra-curricular or out of school activities.

It was treating us as our own person as well because at school you're treated as if...your opinion doesn't count. (School One, Year 10)

We're here at school because we have to be but we done this because we wanted to. (School One, Year 10)

Our P.E. teachers...they don't split us up, we had an option out of tennis and rounders and some of us wanted to do rounders and some of us wanted to do tennis...I don't mind doing track but if we keep on doing it week after week, then it gets a bit boring. (School Two, Year 10)

Interestingly, when they were asked whether they saw 'Am I Bovered' as an in-school or an out-of-school activity, the School Two girls replied that they saw 'Am I Bovered' as a school activity whereas the School One girls saw it as an out-of-school activity. We are not able to explain why this difference in perception arose.

The gender dimension

There were mixed views about the all-girl character of 'Am I Bovered'; for some of the girls it was more important than for others. Some said the appeal of mixed-sex activities would depend on which boys were involved. For others, the all-girl environment had made them more confident. They described boys as tending to denigrate girls' efforts and abilities, teasing them and making them feel very self-conscious. These comments echoed those from the Phase One focus groups. The younger girls seemed to be more bothered by boys than were the Year 10 girls, but the older School Two girls also described how the presence of boys was embarrassing. They were said to laugh at and tease girls if they made mistakes. They also described how boys have low expectations of girls' abilities.

It's really good and it's just girls. When we were doing archery in P.E., I wasn't too good when I started. The boys were saying, 'ha ha you suck', I was like ok then. (School One, Year 7)

Because some of the boys are really intimidating. (School One, Year 10)

In contrast to the School One girls, the School Two girls were tougher in the way they talked about dealing with boys 'I would have beaten them up', said one.

In some of the replies, their wariness of boys seemed to be the direct result of boys' behaviour, but in others, there was a more abstract significance to gender differences.

I always thought sport was more for boys than girls. Everything that I've done that's more sporty – the boys have been more successful, the teacher has been more passionate about the boys' team, not the girls, so it was nice to do the activities that I might have done mixed, separately. Because I have always got on well with boys as people, but the ability of boys and girls are different and they have different attitudes towards them. That's changed my opinion in the way that girls do enjoy sports as much as the boys... (School One, Year 7)

I like sports but I've always been embarrassed because the boys are always better. And being just girls, it doesn't matter if one of us is better than you because you're all girls. (School One, Year 7)

These comments suggest that the decision to make AIB an all-girl programme allowed the some of the participants to re-think their perceptions of their own abilities and those of girls in general.

Different to school

There were a number of positive aspects to AIB not being a school programme. For some, it was just the fact that the activities did not take place at school and offered different activities:

Off site makes a difference as well, doing things just different. Not doing the same boring things like football and that. Like every year you do football or rounders or netball again. (School One, Year 10)

As discussed earlier, in contrast to school, the AIB activities were seen as 'fun not work'. Others spoke of the attraction of AIB as being that teachers were not there to 'judge' them.

What I find is that the teachers always give more attention to the people who are better at it than you. So you try your best and think you're quite good and they

completely ignore you, because that person does better than you. That was what was nice about not being judged. (School One, Year 7)

In P.E. they say like this person can't be bothered to do it but actually we do. We have these 'working at levels' and it's like I've really actually tried...if they can't be bothered to notice, why should I be bothered. (School One, Year 7)

But if the teacher's there, they have a thing where, 'yeah she don't do much...she can't do that much'... (School One, Year 10)

Some of the girls described how within school, there could be an atmosphere with a high risk of embarrassment if they were trying something new or if they failed, whereas at Am I Bovered, there was a more supportive atmosphere amongst girls and staff.

Everyone encouraged you to the top with the rock-climbing, to go up...and the trampolining with helping people, they'd tell you what to do. When I'd try the trampoline, I'd fall off. But then the others would help, and you'd keep laughing together. (School One, Year 10)

Facilitating participation: Free and easy

All the girls said the fact that the activities were free of charge made their participation easier.


As it was free, my mum wanted me to do it, because she knows I don't do sports very much. (School One, Year 7)

And if you had to start paying for it, would you still do it?

I wouldn't do it, No. (School Two, Year 10)

However, a small number of the School One girls said they would have been willing to pay if necessary.

I wouldn't have minded paying for it though, it was good. (School One, Year 10)



The girls from School Two raised the issue of cost much earlier in the discussion and went on to talk about it at greater length. In their words, sports activities are usually '*really expensive*'. They said they would not have attended the programme if they had had to pay. They described how their parents would pay for things, but that this would force the girls to choose between spending money on sports activities and other leisure activities such as shopping, going to the cinema or to a roller-disco.

They would pay for you, but they would say like choose, you're not getting money for shopping. You can only do one, you would have to like, not do it.

(School Two, Year 10)

There's a basketball court down the park and that's free and football obviously you just buy your own ball. If it's swimming we've got a swimming pass, aqua-aerobics we wouldn't do anyway, rock-climbing, well that's quite expensive.


(School Two, Year 10)

The provision of free transport meant that parents were not inconvenienced and the girls felt more confident going to new places and trying new things. Parents' time resources and financial resources were mentioned in the focus groups. With both parents working, transporting children to and from activities was complicated.

The girls said that the programme was easy to get involved in – information was readily available and they did not have to seek it out. The fact that the programme was a research activity, with the researchers motivated to build a sample meant that there was pro-active recruiting to the activities.

It's nice to be able to rely on someone and for it all to be sorted out and us just to come along.

(School One, Year 7)



The School One girls remarked that the whole programme was well-organised and they had felt confident that activities would happen when and where they were planned. They contrasted this to their experiences of other sports clubs being less well-organised, with sessions cancelled at the last minute, leaving the girls 'stranded'.

Differences between the two schools


The School One girls talked about the difficulty of fitting more sporting activities into their busy schedules. Other hobbies such as girl guides, dancing classes, music activities and other sporting commitments competed for their time with homework. In contrast, the School Two girls described being bored, or stuck at home and they did not seem to have a similar number or range of activities available to them.

The School Two girls were noticeably less effusive about AIB during the focus group, displaying a 'cooler' approach and being more critical of the sessions. They described some of the activities as 'boring', 'embarrassing' or 'old-ladyish', and were more ambivalent about the instructors, who they described as old or as getting in the way of their freedom to have fun. However, these same girls had been observed participating enthusiastically in most of the activities. Although participation levels for School Two were lower and less consistent than for School One, there was a core of girls who attended regularly, one of whom attended even on weeks where she was the only girl from her school to turn up.

A couple of the younger School Two girls had been less enthusiastic about the most difficult activity, climbing, and had taken considerable persuasion to keep trying. This behaviour was commented on by some of the School One girls in their focus group, who read it as a 'slackness' which impacted on other girls in the session.

They put me off a bit. I don't mean to be rude, but they were a bit chavvy. They look down on us... like posh. They also looked like they had loads of slack, they didn't want to join some of the activities and I thought that pulled us down. We could have done more if it was just us.

(School One, Year 7)



However, the researchers and the sports instructors assisting with the activity interpreted their reluctance to join in as the product of a lack confidence and a fear of embarrassment rather than of 'not being bothered', not least because they continued to attend the programme for subsequent sessions. Climbing genuinely did pose some difficulties for larger girls who had more weight to lift up the wall, but who also faced additional problems such as finding a harness to fit and ensuring that their clothing stayed in place and did not reveal their bodies.

One or two of the School Two girls tended to put on a 'tough' demeanour when they felt defensive, disengaging and claiming they were bored, whereas the School One girls tended to have a 'softer' response. In the same circumstances, they were more prepared to admit that they were fearful (even crying at some points) and were more 'open' towards adult supervisors. The School Two girls' toughness was also expressed in their enthusiasm for the idea of trying boxing. They liked the idea of the violence and 'getting your anger out' and the fact that it would be energetic. The older School Two girls identified themselves as risk-takers, who used to play out in the road, on their roller-skates and bikes. They saw themselves as enjoying risks and challenges and wanted to get the chance to do rock-climbing outside on higher, more risky routes. They complained that the trampolining was too rigid, with not enough opportunity to choose the moves they wanted to do.

If we'd done flips and stuff and we could do what we wanted. If they could teach us what we wanted to do...it's just that she just like told us what to do, she didn't give us an option. (School Two, Year 10)

However, they did concede that it was good to learn properly and to progress.

The School One girls were, in some ways, more straightforward to manage than the School Two girls, particularly with their regular attendance and their consistent willingness to get stuck into activities. However, some of the School One girls required fairly intense intervention from the researchers to keep their emotions and anxieties in check. Those facilitating or leading activities need to be able to deal with girls from different social backgrounds and with differing levels of emotional maturity and independence.

Commentary

The focus groups provide us with deeper insights into the girls' experience of the project and their views of sport and exercise both within and outside the school environment. Recruitment to the girls' focus groups was uneven across the two schools with many more girls from School One than School Two participating. This reflected the uneven engagement in the project as a whole between the two schools.

Recruitment was also hampered by the fact that this phase of the research coincided with the end of the school term, when the girls' were engaged in school trips and other end of term activities. Maintaining access to the girls after the end of the activities was also difficult, given that the researchers were reliant on contact via letter or on school staff to mediate contact. It could also be construed that the girls were motivated to attend the activities because they enjoyed them, rather than because they were keen to be part of a research project. There was a slight difference between the schools in this respect, with the School One girls more aware of their role as participants in the research than the School Two.

The small sample size in School Two means that the findings cannot claim to represent the full range of School Two pupils' views and experiences, however, some of the pupils who did attend the focus group had been identified by teaching staff as having problems with school P.E. and had proved to be more challenging to engage throughout the programme and so their views can offer useful insights into the project's original target group.

a) Key Points

- Those who were sporty and enjoyed school P.E. described AIB as an opportunity for engaging in additional activities. Those who were sporty but less positive about school P.E. saw AIB as offering alternative opportunities for physical activity.
- Those who were more ambivalent about sports and exercise seemed to be re-introduced to the idea that sport and exercise could be fun and something they could do by:

- Doing sport in a different context
 - Being offered a wider and novel choice of activities
 - Engaging in activities rather than sports
 - Engaging in non-competitive activities
-
- Shyness and the fear of embarrassment or failure are very significant factors affecting girls' willingness to engage in physical activity.
 - The desire for fun outweighs other considerations in girls' motivations to exercise.
 - The attitudes of other people may be important, but girls like to feel that they are making their own decisions.
 - Weight and body issues are significant to girls' confidence and willingness to engage, but they are resistant to drawing attention to this.
 - Doing sport in a single sex environment helped to overcome fear of ridicule and embarrassment, and combated the male bias felt by some of the girls in current school sport provision.
 - The organisational factors which facilitated participation were the fact the activities were free of charge and the provision of free transport, proactive recruitment and intensive organisation 'on the ground'.
 - Am I Bovered was described as sociable and fun, which fitted with the girls expectations of what sport should be.
 - Engaging in activities with friends but away from the school environment was seen as constructive and free from the risk of judgement.
 - An important feature of AIB was that it bridged the gap between school and external activities, making the girls more confident about trying something new and reassuring parents that they could trust the organisation of the activities.
 - Most of the girls liked the girls-only dimension of Am I Bovered because it reduced their self-consciousness and lessened their fear of embarrassment. It also allowed them to see sport as something that girls could do well, rather than being in second-place to boys.
 - The main differences between the two schools were in the range of activities available to the girls and in the way in which they could be engaged. Girls in School Two for example were more keen to give the impression of a 'tough' exterior and engage more readily in the activities seen as 'risky' such as rock climbing.

b) Parental focus group

The parents' focus group confirms and adds further detail to the findings from the girls' focus groups. The parental responses will be discussed through three themes: 1. Attitudes towards sport and exercise; 2. The impact of Am I Bovered; and 3. Concerns about safety and freedom.

Attitudes towards sport and exercise

Views of P.E. at daughter's school

Parental comments about P.E. were generally positive from parents of both schools. They thought there was an adequate range of activities on offer. However, some of the parents felt that their daughters were getting left out or left behind by P.E. at school because although they were keen, they were not particularly good at sport. There was a view that the more able pupils were favoured and received greater attention from teachers in lessons, but also by being repeatedly picked for school teams.

As an example, a number of the School One parents complained that the school sports day had been insufficiently inclusive of all pupils as participants but also of parents as spectators. This reflected a broader sense that once children move to secondary school, parents know far less about what goes on in school but more specifically parents commented on a further difference between primary school, where everyone has a go, and secondary school, where pupils decide whether or not they want to be involved.

*I think that at junior school they all get a go don't they, everything, everyone gets a go at but at senior school it tends to be more, their choice or there's so many people per race, per class, and if you're not one of the best, you don't to do it. I mean **** got to do tug of war, because that's all that was left.*

Views of their daughter's relationship to sport

In accord with the girls' focus groups, a few of the girls were identified as very sporty, and always looking out for more activities, but most were described by their parents as enjoying sports, but lacking sufficient confidence to try new things. For those who lacked confidence, school was a less supportive place. They were more keen to try things out of school.

She tries hard but she's not very good and I think often at schools you get, you know the people who are better are picked for everything aren't they? And she's not. I think she just wanted to have a go at some other things really. I mean she likes to have a go but it's just that she's not very good.

One parent described the AIB activities as appealing to her daughter even though she was not particularly sporty and neither was her family. The activities were seen as offering an alternative to the team-sports and competition on offer at school, while still being very active. Trampolining and climbing were mentioned as being particularly attractive options. The parents said their daughters were aware of the connection between exercise and fitness, but that the appeal of exercise was mainly in its fun and sociable aspects. Parents of inactive daughters were concerned about their daughters' social lives as much as by their levels of exercise.

Daughter's lack of confidence

In school

A number of the parents spoke about their daughter's lack of confidence which inhibited her from enjoying P.E. in school and made her unwilling to try new out of school activities. In school, parents spoke about their daughters wanting to 'have a go', but being aware that other pupils were better at sport than they were. Fearing embarrassment, these girls were reluctant to put themselves forward.

I was going to say similar, sort of lack of confidence as well, she wants to have a go but there's other people that are obviously better than she is, so I think she just doesn't want to do it because she doesn't want to show herself up. So she sits in the background.

They were afraid of humiliating themselves by performing badly in front of other pupils, but also of teachers judging their ability. Being 'knocked back' by not getting picked for teams, or by struggling to succeed at an activity despite being keen was said to make girls reluctant to put themselves forward again.

Out of school

There were varying levels of participation in out-of-school physical activities. Parents described their daughters' as needing a push to try new things because of their lack of confidence. Those girls who did not think they were good at ball games or who disliked running were more motivated by the fun aspect of organised activities, but they were unlikely to sign up to a new activity without the companionship of a friend to go with them. Some of the girls did nothing at all outside of school, but their parents described this as the product primarily of their lack of confidence, rather than a lack of motivation. The importance of trying new things in the company of at least one friend came through very strongly. Some girls signed up to Am I Bovered only once they were certain that their friends were also signing up.

She wouldn't have come to this if her best friend hadn't been coming. She made sure they came together, initially.


If her friends aren't doing what she wants to do, she wouldn't even entertain it. I've had that all through her childhood...that's why I thought, do this and perhaps it could lead to something, you know?

Parents whose daughters were not very active out of school hoped that participating with AIB would increase their willingness to try other things. They talked about the AIB activities as being non-competitive and therefore more appealing to their daughters.

It's just enjoying it without feeling conscious about being competitive I guess.

I would say it's not about winning and losing is it, trampolining, it's about having a go, it's not a competition. Because with athletics, I don't know, it's who did come first, you know?

The kind of activities available through AIB gave the girls the opportunity to feel that they had achieved something, for example by reaching the top of the climbing wall. Repeating the activity over a number of weeks allowed them to progress, increasing their confidence each time. The atmosphere was also described as supportive, with team-work required



when climbing and trampolining, and the lack of competition reducing the girls' self-consciousness. The fact that the activities were 'not about winning or losing but about having a go' added to the supportive context the programme provided.

she was frightened of doing the wall but she felt like she'd achieved something, even though she didn't get right to the top, just going up far, didn't she.

because you did a few weeks of that she gained confidence each week.

The organisation of the girls into much smaller groups than would be the norm in the school environment was also described as being supportive of less confident girls.

Body self-consciousness

There was agreement that from as young as year 6 or year 7, girls were very conscious of their bodies and some parents thought that this inhibited their daughters from participating in physical activities.

*if they go swimming, ****'s always like 'I need shorts', no you don't, you've got your swimming costume, but she has to wear shorts over it and a lot of her friends will not go swimming because they want to wear shorts or a t-shirt.*

I think it's about what they wear to cover up, bits that they don't want to display.

When you think about it, a swimming costume is quite revealing.

The girls in both age-groups were described as being extremely self-conscious about their bodies. Parents who had both sons and daughters described boys as being much less inhibited about their appearance. The girls were self-conscious about their bodies and about what they wore. Activities like swimming, where revealing clothes are required, could be off-putting and girls were described as wanting to cover themselves up by wearing short or t-shirts over a swimming costume. The parents did not mention that the girls' self-consciousness was due to weight or size, but they did say that the girls were aware that exercise might help them to control their body-size and appearance.

The impact of Am I Bovered

Availability and accessibility of activities for girls

Even those girls who were keen on team sports found it difficult to locate out of school clubs to pursue their interests. In contrast to the way boys' football was described – as highly visible and ubiquitous – girls clubs were more difficult to find out about. They talked about a lack of sustainable clubs and activities for girls that would be the equivalent of football, as opposed to short-term courses.

Parents commented that schools could do more to bridge the gap between in-school and out-of-school clubs and activities, with greater advertising and perhaps even the organising of taster sessions within P.E. of activities available in the local area.

School should advertise what's available because, as I say it's only through a friend of a friend that you find things out.

I think also like an introduction in school just to get them familiar with it...Because if they don't know what it's about then they shy away from it.

One mother pointed out the difficulty of re-engaging girls in sports once there has been a gap in activity.

If you catch them early enough as well, if there's a gap and they're not doing it and then all of a sudden you're trying to get them involved it's just even harder.

The parents were very pleased about their daughters' involvement in the programme, primarily because they knew that their daughters wanted to keep active, but felt that some were becoming disillusioned with sports at secondary school and this combined with a reluctance to experiment with new groups, clubs and activities out of school.

Money

The cost of out-of-school activities was more of an issue for some parents than for others. Most agreed that parents tend to find the money necessary to support the things their children want to do.

It's got to have some effect...you're going to have some people it's going to be a big issue for a few pounds and some people it's not an issue.

The trouble is we all do, we all find the money for our children, we all do it, even if you can't afford it we still do it. And although we might moan, we still find the money. Because if they want to do it, we find the money.


They did, however, say that the cost of their children's hobbies could be problematic, in particular the additional costs of uniforms and gradings for martial arts, costumes and exams for dancing.

Time

Time was universally spoken of as an even more difficult resource to negotiate than money. The burden for both parents of working full-time while running a home and caring for children was spoken of as being added to by the additional demand of transporting children to organised activities. Parents don't want their children to do too many things, because parental time can end up being 'spread too thin'.

Actually I think that was the bigger issue, not so much finding money for your kids but trying to find the time sometimes is awkward, because if you're at work or whatever and if you (AIB) have organised to take them somewhere that's a lift less. You have to work out, because you don't want them to do too many things because you're spreading yourself too thin, so you say, pick a couple of things.

Transporting children to and from activities was spoken of as particularly onerous if there was more than one child in the family. The parental 'taxi service' could end up in use every night. The bus transport provided by AIB was highly appreciated, mainly because it saved parental time, but also because it assured the parents that their daughters were safely



getting to and from out of school activities. There was unanimous agreement that activities which took place directly after-school rather than later in the evening or at weekends made life much easier for parents.

Especially at the end of the school day, because often people aren't home, are they and by the time your kids get home then you're home as well but to come and pick them up from school and then get them somewhere else straight away...

Safety concerns and freedom


An important element of AIB's appeal was that although it was an out-of-school activity, it was coordinated with the schools, girls were recruited through P.E. staff, the programme was constructed in consultation with the schools, and the girls were picked up and returned to the school premises at the end of the sessions. Few of the parents would let their daughters make their own way to after-school, off-site activities. Their main concern was that their daughters might get lost. Some would be happy for their daughters to travel by bus, but usually only if accompanied by a friend. This applied across both age-groups.

I wouldn't let her get on a bus. Unless she was with a friend maybe.

When there's two or three of them you don't mind so much, because even if they got lost, at least they're lost with somebody.

Only one of the girls, who was 15, was allowed to travel by bus by herself. Her mother allowed her because she lived some distance from the school and had older sisters who had made the journey before her for a number of years. A condition of being allowed out on foot with their friends, was that the girls kept their mobile phones switched on and in some cases, had to call their mothers when they reached their destination.

My daughter, touch wood, has never ever, ever let me down. Always been on time, she knows the consequences if she's late.



*If **** didn't answer her phone, I'd phone her friend and that would be really embarrassing, so she started answering.*

Walking, yeah, she goes out with her friends. But, I'm still very cautious. She has to have her phone on.

When asked what they worried about, one parent listed, 'accidents, other people, drivers, just everything really'. Although the parents did not feel that 'paedophiles' were more of a threat today than in the past, they were worried about other children being unkind to their daughters.

It's other children, my daughter is very, very sensible, very sensible, I've got no problem with her with roads or anything, I trust her implicitly, it's just other people.


It's just, you just want to protect the children don't you, you don't want to put them in any situations.

Roads and traffic were another area of concern. A mother of a 15 year old did not trust her daughter to ride a bicycle safely on the roads. Most said that they were happy for their daughters to cycle only if they followed car-free routes.

*I'm worried about bikes. Definitely, **** doesn't go out on the bike...and that's me, not her, that's not because she hasn't wanted to, it's because I'm not letting her. And you haven't always got the time to go with them.*

There was some discussion about whether there are greater dangers today than in their own childhoods, when, they all agreed, children had enjoyed much greater freedom. There was mixed opinion about whether other people are more threatening, roads are more dangerous or whether we simply know more about bad things that happen today because of media attention.

We've always had paedophiles, we've always had people with knives, but we know about it now, whereas before, when we were young, we didn't.



Like when I was kid you know, my mum would say, don't talk to strangers and that's where you said you're going and don't go anywhere else, if you're going somewhere else, come back and tell me. And that sort of thing, and I think as long as you educate them to the same degree, because that's what I say to mine, if you want to go somewhere just phone me, tell me.

Some parents described their daughters as lacking the confidence to go out and about by themselves, and said it was difficult to strike a balance between protecting their daughters while not instilling in them a sense of fear.

I think the worry is you can impose your fears upon them.

Absolutely.

It's hard to get a balance.

It is hard.

*But I wouldn't say no to ****, but she's never asked me and I'm not going to encourage her.*

Parents were also aware of being more protective of daughters than of sons. One family allowed their 13 year old son to do a morning paper round, but would not consider allowing his sister to do the same.

I was just thinking the same, my son I feel confident in because he's confident, my daughter, because she lacks confidence, swings and roundabouts, you want to give them the confidence.

Children were allowed to go to their local parks, but although this was not supervised, it was restricted.

It's funny isn't it, cos I wouldn't dream of letting my daughter go to the park. Because, I just, I think if she asked me I'd probably have to say yes, you've got 30 minutes, only because I've got to let her go. Gangs of boys and generally people can be so horrible, she might see someone that she knows and they're horrible to her, and shout abuse at her and I'm not there to help her.

They were only allowed out for a certain amount of time and had to be home when agreed. Although for the younger girls, going to the park meant an opportunity to ride their bikes or play in an active way, older girls were described as going to the park to chat and socialise with their friends.

Commentary

Recruitment to the parental focus group was uneven across the two schools, with the majority of parents coming from School One. This reflected the higher level of participation by School One girls in the project as a whole. The views and concerns expressed in the parental focus group are undoubtedly those of the School One parents, which limits the scope of the findings. For example, the group prioritised parental time rather than cost as the key barrier to physical activity overcome by the Am I Bovered project, but had the group included more School Two parents, the views may have been more diverse.

An interesting methodological question about recruitment and retention is raised by the possible differences across social groups in their understanding and valuing of research agendas. Perhaps, like their daughters, the School Two parents saw Am I Bovered more as an opportunity to access sporting activities not otherwise available than as a research project which could benefit from their daughter's involvement. Differing views of the purposes and benefits of the project could be hypothesised to produce different levels of involvement in the research aspects of the project.

a) Key Points

The parental perspective

- Parents were generally happy with school P.E. but felt that less sporty girls were left behind and left out of activities.

- Parents felt that the non-competitive, supportive environment of Am I Bovered was more encouraging to their daughters who lacked confidence and were shy of new situations.
- Am I Bovered bridged the gap between school and the activities available in the wider community. Good communication by the organisers was appreciated and built confidence and trust,
- The provision of free transport and free activities were appreciated as very helpful to parents with competing demands on their time and money.
- Parents were concerned with their daughters' safety and found it difficult to allow them the freedom to be active in their local areas either by travelling independently to formal activities or by informally hanging out with friends.

3.3 Attrition Data

Across both schools, some girls were followed up for an interview to ascertain the reasons why they withdrew from the programme. The criteria of selection was particularly those participants who had 'dropped out' (defined as unexplained non-attendance for three consecutive times). As the actual number of girls who completed the programme (n=31) was much lower than the numbers originally recruited (n=67), the research team established that attrition only affected this core group of 31. Thus, out of 31 girls, it was ascertained that six girls dropped out of the programme. An attrition survey was undertaken with five of the six girls (one girl could not be contacted despite several attempts). The girls were interviewed on the telephone by a researcher who the girls had grown acquainted with during the project. Consent for the attrition survey was taken at the beginning of the programme when the girls agreed to take part and they were asked to leave their contact details for this follow-up research. The PE teachers at both Schools One and Two acted as advisors to the research team about the suitability of following up participants in case it was due to unforeseen traumatic/other events.

3.3.1 Attrition data collection and analysis

The attrition data was collected via telephone interviews. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were analysed using the same method as the focus group data – using thematic analysis, and a discussion of the key themes by the research team.

3.3.2 Findings

The findings from the attrition interviews provide us an insight into understanding why some of the girls withdrew from the project. It gives evidence of the range of factors – both related and unrelated to the project, of the reasons why they dropped out. It also helps gauge the girls' experiences of the activities, where there is capacity for improvement, whether the programme impacted upon their physical well-being and overall fun and enjoyment. These interviews support the findings from the qualitative focus groups providing an accompanying set of data to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the programme.


a) Reasons for withdrawing

The explanations the girls gave for dropping out of the programme, were in the main, unrelated to the actual activities, but were reasons that related to their own personal circumstances. Two girls stated that they had forgotten about the activities, and of these girls, one mentioned that she had been ill.

*I forgot about some of the first ones and I was ill for some of them
(School Two, Year 10)*

One girl mentioned that she had lost interest and objected to taking part in the activities with the girls from another school.

*I didn't really like doing it with the (name of school) ... No it's just that I would have been more comfortable with the (name of school) girls
(School One, Year 7)*



This comment does contradict the findings given in the focus group data, as the girls mentioned that they liked being given the opportunity of meeting and 'hanging out' with girls from another school. Whether or not the presence of girls from another school did demotivate her is questionable, as the overwhelming evidence suggests a finding contrary to this.

One of the older girls stated that her commitments were already over-stretched, and she found it difficult to find the time to attend.

...well it was Fridays and I normally go to my dad's sometimes, he lives far away so it varies what Fridays I can or can't come to... I'm normally busy everyday of the week, like Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays (School One, Year 10)

It would appear that the older girls had far less time for the activities, which was evident as fewer Year 10 girls attended the programme. It is possible that older girls were allowed by their parents to undertake activities on their own, thus the activities programme had less appeal to the older girls who may have had the time, freedom and money to do other physical or recreational activities of their choice.

The girls were asked whether the actual programme of activities could be further improved. The girls had few suggestions; one girl mentioned that the programme could take place closer to school, or for the Year 10s, nearer to the time when school ended (School Two, Year 10). Generally, the girls felt positive about the general level of organisation and management.

...it was all relatively easy. Like there was a coach, it was whether I had the time to or not (School One, Year 10)

A consistent theme that emerges from the qualitative focus groups, that was also borne out of the attrition interviews, was that the programme was fun and enjoyable.

...it's been really really fun (School Two, Year 7)
It was a good experience (School Two, Year 10)
I liked it, I enjoyed it (School One, Year 7)
Yeah it was really fun, I enjoyed it a lot (School One, Year 10)

The majority of the girls (four out of five) stated that the programme was about having fun, as well as having the opportunity to do sport. One girl mentioned that the programme enabled her to make friends with girls from the other school.

Some of the people who went to AIB I don't really talk to...and the girls who come from (School One), I've become friends with them... (School Two, Year 7)


The fun and sociability aspect of physical activity, as noted previously, is a fundamental factor in motivating, engaging and retaining the participation of girls in sport. This comment also shows that for some of them, the girls were not deterred from taking part in the activities with another school.

Three of the five girls felt that they had participated in more sport during the programme than before.

I think I'm doing more things...well I did start doing...after school outdoor skiing...Now I stopped, I'm gonna start doing a tennis club (School One, Year 7)

It would seem that the programme did help to increase levels of physical activity in girls who were less active. One of the more 'sporty' girls felt that she was already achieving quite high levels anyway, and that the programme did not impact greatly on her.

I kind of do the same as I did before, I did quite a lot before so I kinda haven't (School One, Year 10)



As shown in the focus groups, it was found that in fact the more 'sporty' girls did want the opportunity to try-out more challenging sports; this view is re-affirmed by the attrition data, as this particular girl felt that although she enjoyed the programme, it had not contributed significantly to an increase in her levels of physical activity. This opinion was however held by only one girl interviewed for the attrition survey.

The programme enabled another girl, who had from time to time opted-out of PE at school, to re-engage with undertaking physical activity.

Like in PE I was in a mixed group full of boys and girls, but there were few girls and loads of boys and I didn't like that, that's why I didn't do PE at school

(School Two, Year 7)

Clearly, this girl felt embarrassed about taking part in a mixed-gender sports group. Her comment further strengthens the importance of an all-girl environment in PE – dependent upon the type of physical activity they undertake and the gender dynamics between girls and boys at a school.

b) Key Points

- The personal circumstances of the girls affected their attendance: these included illness, over-stretched time commitments or 'forgetting' about the programme
- Older girls tend to have more control over how to spend their time, which may have impacted upon their decision to participate regularly on the programme.
- There were mixed views about whether undertaking the activities with girls from another school deterred them from participating.
- Most girls said that the programme had increased their levels of physical activity and they felt the programme was fun and enjoyable.

c) Discussion


The aim of the study was to further understand the motivations to exercise among teenage girls and to develop a potentially sustainable way of engaging girls in regular physical activity. As mentioned earlier in this report, previous research has indicated a lack of understanding, particularly in relation to girls, where declining levels of physical activity are becoming a cause for concern (Biddle et al 2004; Currie et al 2004), with only about half of 13-15 year old girls from a UK sample participating in acceptable levels of sport (Sproston & Primatesta 2003). Hence this study is timely in order to bridge knowledge gaps and to assist with local planning.

The discussion will focus initially on the extent to which this aim was achieved and within this, critically review issues surrounding gender and sport in the context of the role of the school, and consider what lessons have been learnt from this project regarding sustainability. An important cross-cutting aspect of this project related to methodological issues with this population group. Further critical commentary concerning participation, organisation and attrition will be provided from this perspective, including suggestions for improving rigour in research design with young people in interventions of this nature.

d) Gender and the Role of the School

When it comes to physical activity, it is clear that schools are pivotal to the provision and education of children from the onset, and have a key role to play in developing a life-long sporting 'habit'. It is of concern therefore that the total time devoted to PE lessons in schools has declined in recent years, and less time is allocated to PE in secondary schools in England and Wales than anywhere else in the European Union (European Youth Heart Study 2006).


In our project, the schools were selected particularly to reveal differences in demographic profiles as well as sporting investment and 'ethos', in order to investigate and compare attitudes and behaviours. There were clear differences in this respect, which made for some interesting comparisons. School One had an obvious advantage in its high grade facilities and status as a sports college; conversely there was a recognised need for modernisation in School Two. With respect to attitudinal and behavioural comparisons, participants from School Two were more difficult to engage and retain in the project, tended to be more



apathetic, and displayed an impression of 'toughness'. These girls also seemed to enjoy the more risky sports such as climbing. School One participants on the other hand were unconcerned about showing their enthusiasm or fear, or seeking assistance. Issues of differing self-image emerge here, with girls from School Two perhaps wishing to project a more strong and 'dangerous' persona that may more keenly resonate with ideas of being 'cool'.

Yet despite this, there were some cross-cutting similarities with respect to fulfilling the needs of girls, and themes identified in Phase One of this project were also evident in Phases Two and Three. For example, from the participants' perspectives, more needed to be done to take account of the heightened sense of self-consciousness and embarrassment experienced through physical activity. In both Phases, while these feelings were associated with body exposure as in swimming or unfavourable changing and showering facilities, they were predominantly brought on by boys' comments. A number of sociologists have explored the cultural and structural forces that influence derogatory, sexist and anti-feminine sporting attitudes among boys and men towards girls (eg Anderson 2008). Messner (2002) puts the blame squarely at the feet of team sports such as football, hockey and basketball that tend to segregate males into a homophobic gender regime, particularly in the USA. Boys are socialised into a form of masculine 'sport orthodoxy' that is bolstered by strength and competition, and is critical of weakness, failure and being 'risk-averse'. As a consequence it is almost logical that girls become the natural targets for disparaging remarks, resulting in avoidance in sport and reduced participation. Of note is some earlier commentary by Vealey (1988) who argued that elite female athletes possess masculine traits that counterbalance feminine roles, suggesting that extreme success in sport may necessitate a compromise in gender identity.


The issue of competitiveness was of particular interest in our study. Parallel to Messner's analysis, sport was also seen as highly competitive and 'risky', essentially characteristics favoured by boys, but our participants generally viewed this in a negative light and tended to thrive less well in a mixed-gender setting. In a safe environment however and without the disruption of boys, girls were prepared to take risks, especially those from School Two, and felt a strong sense of personal achievement in this. In addition, parents thought that the single gender experiences delivered non-competitively and in a supportive manner



improved confidence. This suggests that in single sex groups for sports, girls can be challenged with positive effects.

These findings may support the arguments for separating the genders for sport. Commentary concerning gender segregation in sport is mixed; while some authors report favourable results when the sexes are integrated (Anderson 2008), other studies show that the integration of men and women does not significantly deter gender stereotyping (eg Jackson & Warren 2000) but these studies have largely focused on adults and are small scale. Schmalz & Kerstetter (2006) however provide some insights about segregation in sport from a child's perspective using the concept of 'stigma'. They argue that integration is self-limiting due to fear of gender stigmatisation; for this reason boys will not willingly engage in stereotypical girls' sport and vice versa. As a result, it could be argued that sustainable engagement and enjoyment of gender-integrated sport would not take place. Cultural stereotyping of gender and behaviours that are considered more appropriate for one sex or the other limits young people in their expression of attitudes and interests. Schmalz and Kerstetter's investigation revealed that boys are more concerned about stigma in sport than girls, with a greater tendency to shun the notion of integration in any physical activity in case their identity was compromised.

While these commentators appear to make a case in favour of segregation in sport, a more radical perspective is put forward by feminist writers McDonagh & Pappano (2008), who argue strongly against segregation. They state that sport is a powerful institution where attitudes about gender are constructed from an early age and reinforced. For girls, they claim that sport is a critical forum for achieving sex equality and that sex segregation in sport is detrimental as it relegates women to permanent second-class citizenship. This viewpoint is however powerfully refuted, especially by academic authors who are heavily involved in women's sport: Griffin (2008) for example criticises this stance as over-theoretical and not based in the 'real world' of sport. She states that conversely, not segregating would induce a 'second class' relegation as it would drastically reduce the numbers of girls in many sports through physiological reasons such as stamina and strength. She adds that many top young female athletes would be demoted to junior divisions or the benches if they had to compete with boys for team positions, and questions whether this is the best way to achieve sex equality.




Returning to our findings, a further impediment to participation in physical activity at school was revealed by the perception that either consciously or unconsciously, there seemed to be limited opportunities for girls to take part in their sports preferences, and that physical activity at school tended to be biased towards boys in terms of what was offered and the attention given to them by teaching staff. Nicaise et al (2007) built upon previous work in this area and revealed a significant gender bias in PE teacher-student interactions with higher rates of interaction for boys, suggesting that this may be an institutional problem.

The transition of young people from primary to secondary school was also highlighted as a potential area for development. A singular finding throughout this project has been the important relationship between sport, sociability and fun. Yet there were clear indications among our sample that this connection was lost as soon as participants entered their new schools. With this transition, school life takes on a more serious academic orientation and alongside the other potential barriers, it can be understood how enthusiasm and motivation for physical activity could dwindle. So there is an opportunity here for schools to capitalise upon; interest in physical activity could be prolonged through greater attention to heightening the enjoyment aspect as girls enter secondary school.

e) Sustainability


From this project, there are a number of factors to consider regarding the issue of sustainability. The extent to which participation in 'Am I Bovered' has injected a sense of longevity in the participants' attitude and engagement in physical activity is difficult to ascertain and would require further longitudinal investigation, but it certainly appeared to have a behavioural impact in the short term. Sluijs et al (2007) conducted a comprehensive systematic review of the effectiveness of interventions to promote physical activity in children and adolescents, and indicated that there are very few studies that have demonstrated sustainable changes in exercise behaviour among young people. Most interventions that focus on increasing activity levels have, like this project, indications of short-term success in changing attitudes but on the whole limited long term sustainability. What this project has revealed however are a number of important associated factors or 'ingredients' that should be taken into consideration and included in any long-term and sustainable developments with girls. Aside from the gender component discussed previously,



our findings indicated that the appeal of sport improves when activities are sociable, fun, and girls have a degree of choice in what they participate in. Being involved in sport outside of the school environment is an added factor. While sport within school was seen by our participants to be biased towards boys, it was also noted that within the community there are fewer affordable sporting opportunities for girls, and this needs to be rebalanced. In addition to this, the management of activities is key: the provision of information, low cost or free transport and leadership to co-ordinate activity is essential and there is certainly a role for a community-based sports facilitator in this respect.

It was the role and engagement of the Multi-Agency Team however that appeared central not only to the short-term outcome, but must be considered in the sustainability of longer-term activity for girls. The project took heed of Sluijs et al's (2007) recommendation to include a multilevel approach to promoting physical activity in the planning stage, and therefore involved a number of agencies to play a leading role in helping to organise and resource the identified activities with the schools. This was certainly effective in allowing the research team to implement and manage a greater variety of sport using local experts external to the teaching staff. This in turn served to motivate and encourage sustained engagement during the project, as well as maximize the sporting experiences of the participants. The educational element of the exposure to new sport, again advocated as important by Sluijs et al, was maintained through this inclusion but in a manner that was wrapped around the social and fun aspects that predominated as key variables in the girls' evaluations.

In addition to the above factors, the parental dimension needs to be considered in the context of a multilevel sustainable approach to increasing adolescent engagement in physical activity. Other studies have found that physical activity levels were influenced by parental support (Troost et al 2003; Fren et al 2005), which involved providing transport, observing and encouraging, particularly in a non-authoritative style (Schmitz et al 2002). With reference to our pre- and post intervention questionnaire data, it was of particular interest that parental attitudes towards exercise among girls from School Two became more positive, implying that the project may have had some small impact on parents.




It was however the inclusion of our parents' focus groups that was important in providing views that underpinned and added to the 'ingredients' already outlined. For parents, an overarching factor perhaps more urgently attached to the female gender related to safety, an issue becoming increasingly challenging in the context of out-of-school activities. Gender is portrayed in the literature as the single most important determinant of perceptions of safety (Starkweather 2007). Parental, and more specifically maternal fear is often explained in terms of gender role socialization: girls and women are encouraged to view public spaces and strange men with suspicion by their parents' warnings, movies and television programmes, sensationalist news reports, and safety advice from public agencies (Pain 1991; Stanko 1996). Whatever the reasons for this fear, scholars have pointed out that it can have a significant negative impact on young girls' quality of life because it restricts their spatial freedom (Starkweather 2007). Putting this in the context of our study, parents are naturally 'risk-averse' and impose protective and even restrictive conditions on what their daughters can and cannot do after school, and their views must be taken into consideration if sustainability is to be realised. Hence activities that took account of this were supported and encouraged by parents, such as trust and consistency in the leadership and co-ordination of activities, provision of clear information and reliable transport.

f) Methodological Issues

Conducting and coordinating research with teenage girls internal and external to the school setting and within a multi-agency context requires considerable planning. In addition to ensuring sample adequacy, sustained involvement and parental support, it is inevitably dependent upon the 'buy-in' and engagement of busy professionals over a lengthy period. In addition to this, researchers must be prepared to accept that well-validated design methods are not always the most practical when applied in the field, and constant reflection is needed in the strive for rigour. The research process therefore highlighted some strengths and shortcomings which will serve to inform the design of similar projects in the future.


Firstly, at the intervention stage the sample required the recruitment of 'inactive' girls and this called into question the study premise that girls who are disengaged from exercise identify themselves as such and are identifiable as a discrete group. This was in fact not the case, so researchers sought the assistance of teachers who helped in the purposeful recruitment of the sample, identifying those girls who were less motivated. This resulted in a



selection of girls who were more variable in their activity that would otherwise have been the case, particularly so with respect to the differences between the schools, as there was a tendency for there to be more sporty girls from School One. This variability however still served to highlight some important cross-cutting gender issues.


Conducting research in the school environment brought to light a number of potential issues for the future conduct of research of this nature. There were problems associated with the fluctuation of school timetables which impacted on meetings and data collection with pupils, making demands of busy staff and establishing reliable, independent contact with girls and their families. At times, the sports programme was altered so a dependable method of communication was paramount. The research team spent considerable time early on developing relationships with staff, participants and parents, through identifying and using preferred forms of communication – usually mobile phone. This proved to be vital in developing trust and ensuring continued involvement.

Despite this there were high levels of attrition, with less than half finishing the project (n=31). Although an attrition interview was built into the study, this was administered to girls who left the 12 week programme, and most 'drop-out' occurred following the taster sessions. A recommendation for the future would be to collect attrition data from the onset of the programme, as this may have revealed some important reasons for disconnecting so early. In the light of this, the timing of the pre- and post intervention questionnaire could have been improved; while 67 completed the initial questionnaire before the taster sessions, only 25 completed it post-12 week intervention and this made meaningful comparison difficult. With hindsight, the pre-intervention questionnaire could have been administered at the start of the eight week full-programme. Additionally, there were difficulties with the terminology and understanding of some of the items on the questionnaire, despite being a seemingly validated instrument, which raised questions as to the shared meaning and hence reliability and consistency of the data collected. These factors, coupled with the small numbers when divided into schools or age, impacted considerably on our ability to measure pre- and post-intervention activity levels with any degree of validity or accuracy, which was disappointing. With hindsight, the difficulties with interpretation by the participants may have been reduced through some local piloting and greater supervision during completion.



From the onset of Phase Two, insights were gained into the management issues involved in engaging girls, working with professionals from a range of organisations to activate local resources, dealing with schools and negotiating risk assessment issues. As previously mentioned, the value of the partnership cannot be overstated and was intrinsic to the project success. However, with competing priorities and professional time at a premium, it was soon evident that the responsibility for the leadership and co-ordination of these issues needed to rest primarily with the research team, despite striving for equality of decision-making and involvement. This meant that the team became quickly adept at ensuring the safety of participants not only to and from the activities, such as organising reliable and trustworthy transport and verifying 'pick-up' arrangements, but also overseeing activities with trainers. This level of involvement resulted in a very positive and confident relationship with participants and parents. These outcomes do however reflect the true nature of collaborative research with different institutions and agencies, as there will understandably be an unbalanced participation due to many factors. Aside from the time commitments, the length of the project for example meant that there were inevitable changes of personnel with changing expectations and motivation around involvement, and this was particularly so with school-based staff. For a project to be successfully delivered on time with risks minimised, these important operational issues must be recognised at the planning stage.

A feature of the project was its participatory nature, in that the design was intended to involve girls in decisions about the project activities and the research process in general. It is being increasingly recognised that children and young adults are entitled to participate in making decisions that affect them (Lansdown 2001). A number of projects in recent times have involved young people in participatory research methods (Save the Children Fund 2000; Bostock and Freeman 2003; Cooper 2005; Cahill 2007). Bostock and Freeman (2003) demonstrated that action to address young people's needs within a community was particularly effective when young people worked together with a multi-agency team. It resulted in more user-friendly models of healthcare and improved their access to existing services. Our research team drew on the levels of participation as outlined by Cohen and Emanuel (2000), and aimed to involve young people in developing ideas and proposals at all stages and encourage them to lead discussions supported by adults.



The task of developing the programme with the input of the participants allowed the research team to learn lessons in the most effective ways of consulting girls of this age. For example, the Multi-Agency Team meetings to which girls were invited were found to be very intimidating and inhibiting to the girls and so the team made the decision to consult informally by conversations during the taster programme and by a formal questionnaire which allowed the girls to state their preferred activities. The research team's presence at the activities provided repeated informal opportunities to talk to girls and find out more about their views and experiences, which was recorded in field notes and used to inform Multi-Agency meetings.




4.0 Conclusion

This project has demonstrated that gender is a significant factor when it comes to engagement in physical activity and under the right circumstances girls can be 'bovered' to take part in and enjoy sport in a (albeit limited) sustainable way. A singular message must be that gender issues must be supported from a multi-level perspective when developing sports programmes, particularly for younger girls, if the decline in activity is to be halted. The project suggests that sport tailored towards girls has the potential to improve participation, increase confidence to succeed and develop new skills, and at the same time decrease embarrassment and negative perceptions of body image.

Action to address recommendations must be multi-faceted and stem from a psychological, social and community perspective. This means not only altering accepted behavioural norms in terms of physical activity, but also encouraging community action as well as environmental and policy changes to enable young girls to be more active.


5.0 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

- Gender issues must be championed when developing sports activities and programmes, especially for younger girls. It must be recognised that sport tailored for girls improves participation, increases confidence to achieve and to develop new sports-related skills, and decreases embarrassment and perceptions of negative body image.
- Participation and sustainability in sport are improved when activities are designed to appeal to girls' sociability and desire to spend time with their peers. Ideally activities should be enjoyable and fun, and be conducted in peer or friendship groups. Organising activities outside of the school adds to the sociability and enjoyment.
- The way in which activities and participants are managed and supervised has a significant impact on levels of enthusiasm and sustainability. Activities must be well-planned and co-ordinated with all professionals, trainers and organisers in advance, and clear information must be provided for participants and parents. Transport to and from activities is an additionally vital component. Costs should be kept to a minimum.
- Sport that is conducted in mixed gender groups should develop strategies to counter a potential male gender bias and create ways of increasing equal opportunities for girls to participate. Diversity and choice of activity are important factors in sustaining interest. Teachers and trainers should make efforts to engage girls by taking into account increased shyness and embarrassment felt by girls, as well as being aware of the impact of negative comments from boys.
- Involving girls in decisions about activities is important, in order to ensure relevance and commitment, however this works best within their own peer groups rather than working together with professionals.
- Practical issues surrounding participation in sport should be considered. This includes adequate and private changing facilities and sportswear that girls feel comfortable wearing.

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- The role of a multi-agency team in the successful implementation and funding of activities cannot be overstated, therefore their continued involvement in programme development is vital. There is a need to develop a sports facilitator role within this team which should include the promotion, management and co-ordination of activities for girls within schools and communities.

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Appendices

1. Girls' information sheet/letter
2. Parent information & consent letter
3. Activities choices questionnaire
4. Taster sessions preference survey
5. Pre & post-intervention questionnaire
6. Girls' focus group schedule
7. Parent focus group invitation letter
8. Parent focus group schedule
9. Girls' & Parent focus group consent forms
10. Attrition survey

APPENDIX 1: Girls' information letter/sheet

Are you bovvered? Help us to make a real change to the health and well-being of girls: Your ideas and involvement on physical activity in Kent

Our names are Ferhana Hashem and Jan Macvarish and we are a part of a team at the University of Kent who have been asked to carry out a project by the Big Lottery Fund on physical activity, health and fitness in Kent.

We would like to invite you to take part in the project 'Am I bovvered?'. Before you decide if you want to take part or not, it is important that you understand what the project is about.

What is the project about?



This project is about how to get girls like yourselves involved in exercise. Your answers will be used to find out what we can do to make physical

activity better in Kent so that it is more appealing to girls like yourselves. So your views and experiences are very important.

If I take part what do I have to do?

There are two parts to the project, and we are looking for about 15 volunteers in your year. In the first part (September – December 2008) we will share some ideas about physical activity. Then we will ask a smaller group of you to go to 4 more meetings that will last about an hour with other girls and professional people working in sport. The purpose of this will be to come up with ideas about different types of physical activity you would like to do.

Through the activities you choose, we would like you to help us get girls more interested in sport.

In the second part of the project, all of you will be asked to take part in some of these sporting activities which will take place over two terms from January to July 2009. The professionals will put on 'taster sessions' so you can try out the activities before you agree to join.

We would also like to record your activity levels and your attitude towards activity. So we will ask you to complete a questionnaire before you start the activity, and at the end. Also, we will ask you to join a group discussion at the end so we can talk through your experiences and ideas. We will tape-record this discussion with your permission.

We have a letter for your parents we would like you take home so they know you are taking part. We will want you to sign a consent form that you are happy to take part.

What if I drop-out?

Because we want to help young girls, if you drop-out for a reason, we would like to know why. So we will ask you for your contact details at the beginning with your permission – so we can get in touch with you if you leave.

What happens to the information?

We would like you to know that anything you tell us



will stay with us, and your information will be completely confidential. Your answers will be coded, which means that they will not have your name with them

and so they cannot be traced back to you.

Any information we have taken, such as tapes or documents, and your personal details will be destroyed when the project is finished.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you if you take part or not, but if you don't want to take part, this will not affect you in any way. If you decide to take part you can also change your mind at any time during the project.

How can I find out more?



If you would like to know more about the project or if there is anything that is not clear, you can contact us (Ferhana Hashem or Jan Macvarish) on 01227 824887 / 823666 during office hours, or leave a message and we call you back. You can also contact us via email on F.Hashem@kent.ac.uk

or J.Macvarish@kent.ac.uk

or by writing to the following address:

Centre for Health Services Studies
George Allen Wing
University of Kent
Canterbury Kent CT2 7NF

Centre for Health Services Studies
George Allen Wing
University of Kent
Canterbury CT2 7NF
Email: F.Hashem@kent.ac.uk
J.Macvarish@kent.ac.uk
Tel: 01227 824887 / 823666

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Your daughter is being invited to take part in a research study about physical activity, health and fitness at her school. The school is fully supportive and committed to this project. The title of this research is:

The Big Lottery Fund Project: 'Am I Bovered?'


Before you decide whether you want your daughter to take part, it is important that you understand what the research will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you want to.

What is the research study about?

Physical activity, health and fitness are an important issue for all young people especially girls, who are in general less active than boys. Our project aims to raise awareness about well-being and promote physical activity in girls from Years 7 to 10. There are two main parts to the project. The first part involved an exploratory study of girls' attitudes and perceptions of health and activity. This work has now been completed. We would appreciate your daughter's involvement in the next part of the project which is about developing and taking part in activities to encourage regular physical fitness and sport.

If I want my daughter to take part, what does she have to do?

We will be asking your daughter to join a group of girls her age (no more than 15) and a team of professionals involved in physical activity and sport. In this group your daughter will help us to develop some activities that will encourage girls to become more active on a regular basis. This will take place from September to December 2008 at your daughter's school and will be organised during school-time. After this, your daughter will choose an activity and do it once a week for two terms with the support of the team of professionals attached to this project. 'Taster sessions' will also be put on so that the girls can try out the activities before they agree to join. The project will finish in July 2009. During the time your daughter is in the project, we will be asking her to complete two



questionnaires and take part in a group discussion. This will help us to find out about her activity levels and feelings about exercise.

What if my daughter drops-out?

If your daughter decides to drop-out of the project, we would really like to know why. Therefore, we will ask your daughter for her contact details at the beginning with her permission – so that we can contact her even if she does drop-out for any reason. We will however be working with her teachers and will consult with them before we make contact.

We would like to reassure you that any information collected about your daughter will be strictly confidential. Once the study has finished, we will destroy any data collected about your daughter and she will not be identifiable in any written report.

If you would like her to take part, please complete the form attached and return it in the envelope to ***** PE Department, School One & *****, PE Department, School Two.

Does my daughter have to take part?

It is entirely up to you/your daughter whether or not you would like her take part, but if she does not want her to take part, this will not affect her in any way. If your daughter decides to take part but changes her mind, she is free to do so. We have included an information sheet to give you a better idea about what the research is about.

If you would like some more information about the study or there is anything that is not clear, please do not hesitate to contact us on 01227 824887 / 823666.

Yours sincerely,

**Ferhana Hashem
Research Fellow**

and


**Jan Macvarish
Research Associate**

'AM I BOWERED?' Questionnaire

We would like to find out from you what activities you wanted to try out for next term when taking part in the 'Am I Bovered?' project.

Here is a list of activities. Please TICK 4 activities you would like to try out:

- 1. Boxing circuit
- 2. Street dance / Body jam
- 3. Climbing wall
- 4. Yoga
- 5. Trampolining
- 6. Aqua-aerobics
- 7. Ten pin bowling



Now please put a **SMILEY FACE** against the activity you would **MOST LIKE** to do

and a **SAD FACE** against the activity you would **LEAST LIKE** to do

'AM I BOWVERED?' Questionnaire

TASTER SESSIONS PREFERENCE SURVEY

We hope you have enjoyed participating in the 'Am I Bovered?' Taster Programme. Thank you for all the enthusiasm and energy you have shown during the activities.

The aim of the Taster Programme was to give you the chance to try a variety of activities. After the Easter holidays we will be putting on another 4 week programme but to do this we need to find out which activities you liked the best and which you would like to try again. We will build the programme around the most popular activities.

Please tick below the TWO activities you would most like to do after Easter, you may tick an activity you have not yet tried. Please complete this questionnaire by yourself – we want your honest opinions!

Thanks again,

Ferhana and Jan

Name:.....

School & Year:.....

Please tick two of the boxes next to the activity you would most like to do after Easter and tick one box next to your second favourite. Please choose only two activities.



- Indoor climbing
- Aqua-aerobics
- Street-dance
- Trampolining
- Ten-pin bowling

Please tell us whether you took part in each session and write in any comments.

Indoor Climbing Did you participate in this activity? Y / N
Comments:.....
.....
.....
.....

Aqua-aerobics Did you participate in this activity? Y / N
Comments:.....
.....
.....
.....

Street-dance Did you participate in this activity? Y / N
Comments:.....
.....
.....
.....

Trampolining Did you participate in this activity? Y / N
Comments:.....
.....
.....
.....

Ten-pin bowling Did you participate in this activity? Y / N
Comments:.....
.....
.....
.....

Questionnaire

Am I Bovered?

Funded by the Big Lottery Fund

Please contact:

Jenny Billings, Senior Research Fellow
Dr Ferhana Hashem, Research Fellow
Dr Jan Macvarish, Research Associate

Centre for Health Service Studies
University of Kent
George Allen Wing
Canterbury
Kent CT2 7NF

Email: F.Hashem@kent.ac.uk or J.Macvarish@kent.ac.uk
Tel: 01227 824887 or 01227 823666

IDENTITY CODE NO.: XXXXXX
SCHOOL CODE: 01 / 02



Instructions

- Most of the questions can be answered by ticking one or more boxes.
- If you feel none of the boxes really allows you to give the answer you want to give, you can write in your answer.
- Please try to give the most accurate answer you can to each question.

Please remember we will not show your answers to anyone – only Jan and Ferhana who are involved with the project will know your answers and nothing that you write will be shown to anyone else.

Date.....

Which year are you at school?

Year 7

Year 10

The University of Kent is registered with the Office of the Information Commissioner as a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 1998. The University procedures are designed to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Principles.

YOUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

These questions all ask about how you feel about exercise. Please tick the box which most describes the way you feel in response to the question.

1. For me, taking part in regular exercise would be:

| | Disagree strongly 1 | Disagree 2 | Neither agree or disagree 3 | Agree 4 | Agree strongly 5 |
|------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|---|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Useful | | | | | |
| Embarrassing | | | | | |
| Enjoyable | | | | | |
| Pointless | | | | | |
| Pleasant | | | | | |
| Not important | | | | | |
| Hell | | | | | |
| Fun | | | | | |

2. It would be easy for me to take part in regular exercise:

| Disagree strongly 1 | Disagree 2 | Neither agree or disagree 3 | Agree 4 | Agree strongly 5 |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|--|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | | | |

3. If I wanted to, I *could* take part in regular exercise:

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Disagree strongly 1 | Disagree 2 | Neither agree or disagree 3 | Agree 4 | Agree strongly 5 |
| | | | | |

4. I am confident that I could do regular exercise:

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Disagree strongly 1 | Disagree 2 | Neither agree or disagree 3 | Agree 4 | Agree strongly 5 |
| | | | | |

5. Most of my friends would *want* me to exercise regularly:

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Disagree strongly 1 | Disagree 2 | Neither agree or disagree 3 | Agree 4 | Agree strongly 5 |
| | | | | |

6. Most of my friends exercise regularly:

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Disagree strongly 1 | Disagree 2 | Neither agree or disagree 3 | Agree 4 | Agree strongly 5 |
| | | | | |

7. My parents exercise on a regular basis:

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Disagree strongly 1 | Disagree 2 | Neither agree or disagree 3 | Agree 4 | Agree strongly 5 |
| | | | | |

8. My parents would encourage me to exercise on a regular basis:

| Disagree strongly 1 | Disagree 2 | Neither agree or disagree 3 | Agree 4 | Agree strongly 5 |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| | | | | |

9. My parents would be able to support me to do the exercise of my choice (e.g. paying for activities, providing transport):

| Disagree strongly 1 | Disagree 2 | Neither agree or disagree 3 | Agree 4 | Agree strongly 5 |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| | | | | |

ACTIVITY AT SCHOOL

10. What was your *main* mode of transport to school yesterday?

WALK

BUS

CAR

CYCLE

OTHER

TRAIN

If other, what was it?

11. How long did the journey to school take?

minutes

12. Did you do PE in the last week?

Yes

No

If no, please give the main reason why?

13. If yes, did you do any of these activities?

| | | Did you get out of breath? | |
|------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| | | Yes | No |
| swimming | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| netball | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| hockey | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| gymnastics | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| rounders | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| basketball | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| athletics | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| football | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| rugby | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

14. Any other activity?

If so, what? _____

Did you get out of breath?

Yes

No

15. How often did you do these activities in the past week altogether at school?

Once
a week

Twice
a week

Three
times
a week

More than
four times
a week

ACTIVITY AT HOME AND AT THE WEEKEND

These next questions ask you about physical activity that you have done out of school such as in the evenings and at the weekend.

16. Did you do any sport or physical activity out of school in the past TWO weeks?

Yes

No

17. If yes did you do any of these activities?

| | | Did you get out of breath? | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| | | Yes | No |
| swimming | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| walking for 15 mins + | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| aerobics/ gym | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| cycling | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ice-skating | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| rock-climbing | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| dancing | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

18. Any other activity?
If so, what?

Did you get out of breath?

| Yes | No |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

19. How often did you do these activities in the last TWO weeks?

Once

Twice

Three
times

More than
four times

ACTIVITY TAKEN PART IN DURING THE PROJECT

20. Since joining the project 'Am I Bovered?' have you taken part in any of the following activities:

Did you like/dislike these?

Like

Dislike

aerobics/ gym

cycling

ice-skating

rock-climbing

dancing

PROJECT TITLE: AM I BOVERED?

GIRLS' FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

AIM: To evaluate the impact of the project, examining the factors associated with the young girls' engagement in physical exercise


NB: Ground rules

1. Changes in general feelings about engagement in physical activity

- a. What did you think of sport and exercise before (beginning the project)?
- b. Have your opinions of sport and exercise changed in any way?
- c. Do you think you are more interested in sport/exercise in either of the following areas now:
 - Outside school
 - Sport in school

2. Key motivation and facilitators towards physical exercise

- a. How did the project actually help you to take part in more sport and exercise?
 - cost
 - Transport
 - out of school
 - straight after school
 - not teachers
 - vouchers
 - hanging out with the group/friends
- b. What did you get out of the project?
- c. Were there any things you were particularly proud of or pleased with yourself about?
Did you surprise yourself at all?



3. Other people's attitudes

- a. Did other people encourage you to take part/stick with it? [i.e. friends, family, being in a team, teachers]
- b. Were any of these people pleased with you/proud of you/surprised by you?
- c. Did anybody else not encourage you/put you off in any way?

4. Future intentions towards physical activity

- a. What are your plans for continuing with sport and physical activity (after the project has ended)? [i.e. join a team, take up the activity after school or in leisure time]
- b. What advice would you give to other girls in the future?

5. Support

- a. If you want to continue with physical activity – will you need the help of others?
 - Ideas for school input that might help.
 - Ideas for other input that might help.

Outside school:

(iv) What would help you to continue your interest in sport and exercise:

- Cost?
- Transport?
- Parents?
- Time?
- What is available locally?
- Personal safety/freedom (e.g. going out running, out on bikes)



**Centre for Health Services Studies
George Allen Wing
University of Kent**

Canterbury CT2 7NF

Email: F.Hashem@kent.ac.uk

J.Macvarish@kent.ac.uk

Tel: 01227 824887 / 823666

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

We are writing to thank you for supporting your daughter's involvement in the 'Am I Bovvered?' project. It has been a pleasure to work with the girls and we hope they have enjoyed the activities in which they have participated. The study has already produced many useful findings that will help us to better understand girls' attitudes towards sports and physical activity.

So far, we have spoken only to the girls about their views and opinions but we would now like to invite you, as parents/guardians, to take part in the research. We will be running Focus Group discussions on (DATE) at (VENUE) starting at (TIME) to get the parental perspective on girls' involvement in sport and physical activity. The discussions will be for groups of approximately eight parents at a time and will last approximately 40 minutes. Subjects we would like to explore include:

- Sport in school
- Sporting opportunities in the local area
- What motivates and holds girls back from exercising?
- Issues of health, body image and participation in sport

It is up to you if you take part or not, but if you don't want to take part, this will not affect you or your daughter in any way. If you do decide to take part you can also change your mind at any time during the group. Anything you tell us will stay with us, and your information will be completely confidential. With your permission, we would like to record the session, but the recording will not include names, so any comments you make cannot be traced back to you. Any information that has been recorded in the project, such as sound recordings or documents, will be destroyed when the project is finished. If you are willing to take part in the Focus Group, please return the form attached, email us or text us on *****.

Yours sincerely,

**Ferhana Hashem
Research Fellow**

and

**Jan Macvarish
Research Associate**

‘Am I Bovered?’ Parent Focus Group

I am interested in taking part in the Focus Group on (date).

Name:.....
.....

Contact number:..... telephone

Address:.....
...
.....
...
.....
...
.....
.....

Daughter's name:.....

Daughter's school and year group:.....

PLEASE RETURN TO US IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED.

PROJECT TITLE: AM I BOVERED?

PARENTAL FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

AIM: To elicit the parental perspective on girls' relationship to physical activity.

Attitudes

What do you think of sport at your daughter's school?

Does your daughter do as much sport/physical activity as you would like?

What do you think your daughter thinks about sport and exercise?

What do you think motivates her?

What do you think puts her off?

Body Image

Do you think she, or girls her age, are self-conscious about their body image?

Does this affect her enthusiasm for sport?

Do you think it is more difficult for girls to remain keen on sport?

Support

What would make it easier for your daughter to be involved in sport and exercise?

- In school
- Outside school

Sports facilities available locally

- What do you think of the sports/leisure facilities available to under 16s in this area (around Birchington, Westgate, Margate)?
- Do you think the local facilities available reflect the choices/needs/interests of under 16s?

Cost

- Does your daughter take part in any activities out of school? Is this expensive? Costly? Sustainable?
- What activities would your daughter like to do if cost wasn't an issue?

Transport

- Would you be happy for your daughter to travel using public transport to sports clubs/leisure facilities?
- Do you think improvements in local public transport (i.e. more buses, a regular service, buses on leisure centre routes) would help to encourage your daughter in taking part in physical activity?

Parents

- What do you find gets in your way when supporting your daughter in doing sports/exercise?

Time

- Personal safety/freedom (eg going out running, out on bikes)

Do you or other family members take part in sport/physical activity, if yes, what kinds of things do you do?

The Big Lottery Project
'Am I Bovvered?'

Jenny Billings
Senior Research Fellow

Centre for Health Services Studies
George Allen Wing
University of Kent
Canterbury CT2 7NF

Ferhana Hashem & Jan Macvarish
Research Fellow & Research Associate
Tel: 01227 824887 / 823666

The Big Lottery Fund Project: 'Am I Bovvered?' - Consent Form

Please read through the questions and tick the boxes if you consent.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the 'Am I Bovvered?' study and have had the chance to ask questions.

Please initial box

2. I understand that taking part in the project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Please initial box

3. I agree to the discussion being recorded.

Please initial box

4. I agree to take part in the 'Am I Bovvered?' project.

Please initial box

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Person Taking Consent: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

PROJECT TITLE: AM I BOVERED?

ATTRITION SURVEY

AIM: To explore the reasons why girls no longer wanted to participate in the project

(To be conducted over the telephone, after speaking to the SSSCo/school-based support staff)

Reassure them that they are not in trouble, why people stop is as much a part of what we are interested in as why people continue.

1. When did you stop going to the project activities?
2. Why do you think you stopped?
3. Is there anything that could have been to make it easier for you to carry on?
4. Do you think being part of the project has made any difference to you views of exercise?
5. Has it been a positive or a negative experience?
6. Have you spoken to your teacher/SSCo?