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# INSIGHT PROJECT

Improving engagement of young people with physical activity services and provision in Dumfries and Galloway



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH

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Version 5.0

Dumfries  
& Galloway





## 1. Executive Summary

Lack of physical activity is a major challenge in the UK, and places substantial burden on the healthcare system. Conversely, participating in physical activity is known to promote physical, mental, and social well-being. Engagement in physical activity remains low in certain places and groups in society. Dumfries and Galloway Health Public Health Team commissioned this Insight Project to try and understand low engagement in physical activity in young people aged 13-25 years, and to generate recommendations to address this.

### The project had two primary objectives:

- To use qualitative approaches to understand why young people (aged 13-25 years) in Dumfries and Galloway do or do not engage in existing PA services and provision;
- To make contextually relevant recommendations for increasing young people's engagement with PA services and provision in Dumfries and Galloway.

This project identified that enjoyment and accessibility were critical aspects that either facilitate or act as a barrier to engagement. Enjoyment can be influenced by competency, excitement, quality of social environment facilitated by staff, and choice. Accessibility can be influenced by location, travel opportunities, cost, and provision of childcare for parents.

Based on these findings, 12 recommendations have been made. These recommendations are designed to improve enjoyment and accessibility of physical activity opportunities in Dumfries and Galloway. They include recommendations for strategy, staff training, consideration of the whole family, as well as structural recommendations around booking systems, transport and cost.

## 2. Introduction and Background

There is now substantial evidence showing that regular physical activity can impact positively on health, reducing risk of diseases such as breast and bowel cancer, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and dementia. It also plays an important role in the enhancement of mental health, physical fitness, social well-being, and in the maintenance of functional independence in to old age.<sup>1</sup>

Physical inactivity - the failure to achieve the recommended physical activity levels, is widely accepted as a major public health problem, described in the Lancet in 2012 as being at a 'pandemic' level. Current UK guidelines set out by the Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) of the home nations advise 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity, or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week for adults, along with muscle strengthening activities on two days each week, and minimising sitting time. For older adults, it is recommended that physical activity that improves balance and coordination should also be completed each week. Children under 5 years should be active for 3 hours each day, and those between 5-18 years should be active (at least moderate intensity) for one hour a day. Vigorous intensity activities, including those that strengthen muscle and bone, should be incorporated at least three days a week. These groups are also recommended to minimise their sitting time.

Despite the many health benefits of being physically active, the prevalence of inactivity remains high across each life-course stage. Young people are a particular area of concern. We know that girls are less active than boys across the UK, and that to date, efforts to increase engagement have had limited success.<sup>2</sup> Less than a quarter of Dumfries and Galloway school pupils (22%) meet CMO recommendations. Girls (17%) were significantly less active than boys (26%).<sup>3</sup>

As part of a strategy to address this, The Health and Wellbeing Team in Dumfries and Galloway commissioned the Physical Activity for Health Research Centre (PAHRC) based in the University of Edinburgh to conduct this Insights Project.

<sup>1</sup> Start Active, Active Stay. "A report on physical activity for health from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers." The Department of Health (2011). [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/216370/dh\\_128210.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/216370/dh_128210.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Policy Bristol; Getting girls active: Reducing gender inequality in physical activity; 2017. Available at: [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/policybristol/documents/PolicyBristol\\_Report\\_June\\_2017\\_Getting\\_Girls\\_Active.pdf](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/policybristol/documents/PolicyBristol_Report_June_2017_Getting_Girls_Active.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Figures from 2014 Dumfries and Galloway Schools Physical Activity Survey (n=3,147) using Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey items



### 3. The Dumfries and Galloway Insights Project method and approach

#### Insights objectives

The project had two primary objectives:

1. To use qualitative approaches to understand why young people in Dumfries and Galloway do or do not engage in existing PA services and provision;
2. To make contextually relevant recommendations for increasing young people's engagement with PA services and provision in Dumfries and Galloway.

#### Insights project design

Qualitative stakeholder focus groups.

#### Ethics and informed consent

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Edinburgh's Moray House School of Education ethics committee. Participants were made aware of the purpose of the study and what would be involved prior to commencing data collection. Each participant provided written informed consent prior to data collection. Parent or guardian consent was provided for those under the age of sixteen.

#### Data Collection

A total of 11 service providers, 31 young people, and 2 youth workers participated. In all, six focus groups were undertaken, with one involving service providers and five involving young people.

Providers of physical activity opportunities and facilities throughout Dumfries and Galloway were involved in the service provider focus group. Individuals with a variety of roles and seniority were present, including stakeholders from Physical Education, Active Schools and Community Sport, community netball, and active travel.

The age of the young people involved varied between 13 and 25 years old. One group included young parents (under the age of 25). A focus group was delivered in each of the four

locality areas of Dumfries and Galloway (2 in Nithsdale including 1 in Upper Nithsdale) and conducted in a variety of settings, including in schools, youth centres and other community facilities. A semi-structured question guide, developed by the research team, based around key themes of interest was used. These key themes included finding out which physical activity opportunities and facilities the young people were aware of, motivation for using and not using opportunities or facilities, and the changes the young people felt would help themselves and others to become more active.

Two members of the research team from Edinburgh University conducted each focus group. All focus groups were audio recorded using a digital audio device with consent from participants, and participants' responses and comments were also recorded on flip charts and during activities using post-its. Focus group duration varied between 30 and 90 minutes.

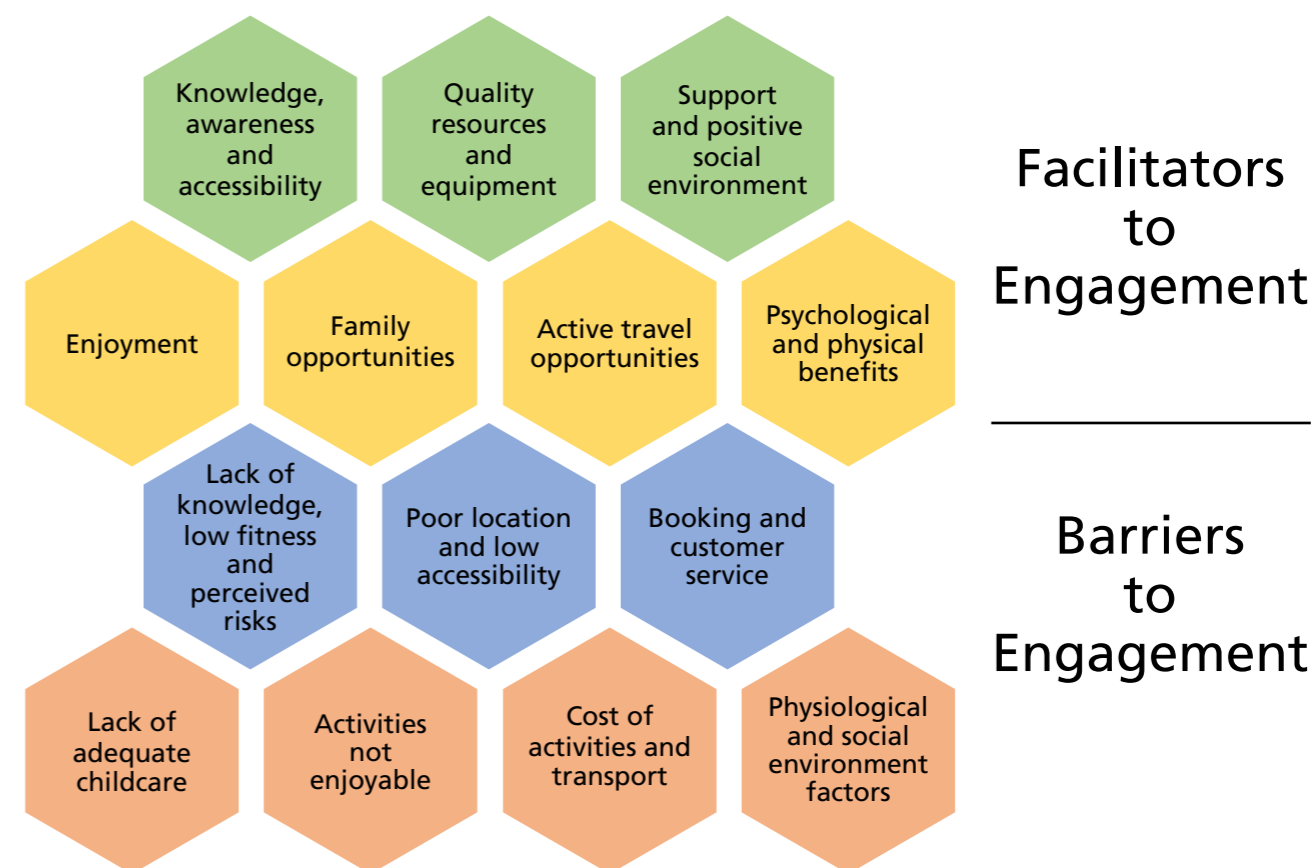
#### Data analysis

Both the researchers present at the focus groups and an additional member of the research team carried out data analysis. The questions used during the focus groups were open ended with follow-up questions and prompts used; therefore, the analysis involved both deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning (theory driven) was used to group the data based on each theme from the question guide and inductive reasoning (data driven) used to identify the key themes within each overarching theme from the question guide. The post-it notes and flip charts were the predominant sources of data used, with the audio recordings referred to where necessary for clarity or greater investigation and understanding. The results of the data analysis were used to form the basis of the recommendations made in this report.

### 4. Key Findings from the Insights project

We identified key findings around facilitators and barriers from the perspective of both service providers and young people. These are summarised in Figure 1 and detailed below.

Figure 1. Key findings around facilitators and barriers



#### Section 1. Service Providers' perceived facilitators to engagement

##### Knowledge, awareness, and accessibility

Knowledge of physical activity opportunities and facilities available to individuals was seen as a key facilitator to use. It was felt that location and accessibility was another major facilitator. Specifically, the ability to easily get to the opportunities, with "doorstep access" as the ideal.

##### Quality resources and equipment

Good equipment and resources were viewed as aspects that initially attract people to, and crucially maintain usage of, facilities and opportunities. An example of where they felt

this occurred was with the Ice Bowl in Dumfries. It was believed that the Ice Bowl was utilised frequently due to its unique nature, providing high quality facilities, which are not available in many other areas of Scotland.

##### Social support and positive social environment

Social support in the form of committed volunteers and coaches and parental engagement was seen as a strong facilitator to continued use of opportunities and facilities.



## Section 2. Young Peoples' perceived facilitators to engagement

### Enjoyment

Enjoyment was seen as the most critical aspect influencing engagement with physical activity services and provisions. There were a number of factors that positively influenced enjoyment. The social element was reported as a key factor with individuals enjoying being physically active both with family and friends. Specifically, "banter" with friends was mentioned as a significant reason for participating in certain activities. Another key factor influencing enjoyment was competency. The opportunity to learn new skills and the challenge and sense of achievement that comes with mastering skills were reported as significant influences to continued participation. Lastly, excitement and adrenaline were mentioned as key factors, particularly in relation to activities such as mountain biking and climbing.

### Family opportunities

Being able to conduct activities as a family was another fundamental component of engagement with services and provisions. The young parents specifically mentioned activities such as being able to go walking with their children and dogs, taking their children swimming, and gymnastics where parents accompany their children around the course. A key factor influencing parents to engage with these physical activities with their children was to tire the children out. This allowed them to have some time to themselves, or get other tasks and jobs done.

### Active Travel opportunities

Active Travel was seen as a key facilitator of overall physical activity. Many of the young people, particularly those who had finished secondary school, reported that they relied on active travel to get around. There were a number of reasons why young people used active travel including that it was cheaper, that combining walking with public transport was often quicker, and that walking made them feel better.

### Psychological and Physical Benefits

The psychological and physical benefits of being physically active were also mentioned as influencing factors. The young people felt that being physically active had psychological benefits helping them to clear their mind and get rid of negative thoughts. Specifically, they went walking in order to de-stress, with the pleasant scenery in Dumfries and Galloway influencing this. The desire to become stronger, or achieve a fitter body shape was mentioned as factor influencing them to be active.

## Section 3. Service Providers' perceived barriers to engagement

### Lack of knowledge, low fitness and perceived risks

As previously mentioned, knowledge of opportunities and facilities available was viewed as a facilitator. Conversely, lack of knowledge of what is available to individuals was seen as an important barrier. Several other cognitive factors including lack of awareness of and perceived danger of cycling networks and concerns about safety were also mentioned as barriers. Lack of fitness as both a physical and psychological barrier to participation was also discussed.

### Poor location and low accessibility

Physical barriers arose as a main theme preventing usage and engagement. A key physical barrier was location, with both environmental and financial barriers part of this. Specifically, lack of facilities and resources in certain areas, the need to travel to opportunities and facilities, and the time and cost of that travel, were seen as important. The cost of usage and equipment, lack of time, poor

weather, and lack of direct routes and gaps within the cycle network were mentioned as other physical barriers.

### Booking systems and customer service

Practical aspects of certain facilities were seen as a significant barrier. The inconvenient and complicated booking system was viewed as impacting both clubs and individual participation. Instances of poor customer service at facilities was also seen as off putting for continued usage.

### Lack of adequate childcare

When there was more than one child in the family, without adequate childcare provision, it was difficult for parents to accommodate for each child's physical activity needs. Trying to provide for multiple children in a family will often involve driving to/from different locations. This requires considerable time, and is a barrier to engagement when the parent does not have opportunities for childcare.





## Section 4. Young Peoples' perceived barriers to engagement

### Activities not enjoyable

Lack of enjoyment was perhaps the most critical barrier to engagement. Several factors hindering enjoyment were reported. Being forced into doing a certain activity resulted in individuals feeling a lack of autonomy, thus preventing them enjoying the activity. Just as competency was a critical factor in enjoyment being a facilitator, lack of competency was considered a barrier to enjoyment. Specifically, lack of fitness and lack of skills led individuals to perceive certain activities as boring.

### Activities not accessible

Lack of accessibility in terms of location, transport and cost were critical factors influencing engagement with physical activity services and provisions. Opportunities being too far away or poor bus connections to these opportunities were mentioned by many participants as reasons why they could not take part in opportunities despite being aware of them and having the desire to participate. Specifically, the female participants mentioned this as a reason for giving up dancing. Cost was a significant barrier discussed by many participants. Cost was considered a barrier in relation to activities such as ice skating and water sports but also swimming for those over 16 as they were no longer eligible for free swimming. Cost of equipment, clothing and

transport to opportunities and facilities were also discussed as barriers.

Similar to the Service Providers, lack of childcare such as on-site crèches and an inability to get a baby sitter when their partners were working were mentioned as critical barriers by the young parents.

### Psychological and social environment factors

Other key barriers were psychological factors including lack of self-confidence and self-esteem. These barriers were specifically mentioned by some of the young parents with children. They expressed that they did not feel comfortable exercising in front of people they did not know, and that this prevented them from exercising at the gym, particularly swimming.

Wider social factors in the form of disengagement with physical activity in primary school, group dynamics and peer pressure were mentioned as barriers. Group dynamics and peer pressure were mentioned as barriers, particularly in relation to participating in sports during PE. Many of the girls felt that football in particular was male dominated, and that this led to them not enjoying it. The girls would try and join in during PE but the boys would take over and make them feel like they weren't good enough resulting in them ending up watching from the side instead of participating. Having to participate with and work with people they did not get along with was also mentioned as a barrier.

## 5. Key Recommendations from the Insights project

Based on the findings discussed above, we have formulated 12 Recommendations that could be considered by Dumfries and Galloway in future strategy and service development and delivery. These recommendations are relevant to the context of the 4 localities in Dumfries and Galloway, and are based on the experiences of local young people, and professionals working in physical activity provision.

It is likely that implementing these recommendations where feasible and appropriate will enhance the physical activity experiences of young people in Dumfries and Galloway, increase access, and encourage ongoing engagement.

### Strategic focus on enjoyment

Enjoyment was perhaps the most critical factor influencing participation in physical activity and engagement with physical activity opportunities. Dumfries and Galloway should prioritize enjoyment within all physical activity provision.

A strategic focus on Enjoyment in Dumfries and Galloway could include:

- Imagery which demonstrates and depicts enjoyment on publicity material;
- Continue organizational delivery of physical literacy training to key physical activity partners emphasising equally the physical, social, affective domains and how they are influenced by competency;
- Offering a range of opportunities to promote choice, opportunities to feel competent, and opportunities to be supported by others (i.e., co-participants and leaders);
- Promotion of group activities that work towards a common goal and are age and stage specific;
- Information for sports clubs on participation pyramids which highlight the importance of enjoyment to retaining numbers thus enabling larger numbers of elite participants;

Enjoyment can be subjective, and what aspects one participant enjoys another may not. Some will gain enjoyment from winning, but others from facility and equipment. Session leads require support to both identify and deliver sessions to meet a wide variety of needs (see next recommendation).

### Training delivery and front desk staff on enjoyment

Regarding the specific training for delivery staff, enjoyment can result from experiencing competency and mastery, from excitement, from having choice, and from a positive social environment. Staff should be competent in understanding these areas and utilizing them effectively. Staff should be trained to see the difference between participation and performance or talent identification. Performance and talent identification are important aspects of sport and can be conducted elsewhere, but do not fit with the public health agenda.

Front desk staff should be trained to provide friendly and enthusiastic customer service at facilities as a means of making physical activity more appealing, and the overall experience more enjoyable.

### Promoting enjoyment through the social element

Creating opportunities to be physically active that also include the opportunity to socialize will be likely to increase young peoples' physical activity engagement. As well as appropriate staff training, this might include offering time and places for social activities before, during or after the activity session.





### Enjoyment through variety

Where possible young people should be exposed to, and offered, a variety of different physical activities and helped to find and participate in a physical activity they enjoy.

Physical Education (PE) was still seen as restrictive and off-putting to many young people for this reason. Increasing the choice of activities available in PE and letting pupils choose would be likely to help increase autonomy and enjoyment of these activities.

### Promoting physical activity through the family

The family unit and carers can be harnessed to promote physical activity. Increased provision and marketing of activities that families and groups can do together, at appropriate locations and times is likely to be seen as attractive and increase provision.

It is felt that greater focus on leisure and recreational physical activity as opposed to competitive sport may increase the appeal of such opportunities. This approach would increase the physical activity levels of not just young people but also the whole family.

### Provision of child care

Increasing the childcare available at physical activity facilities such as crèches or help with supervising older or younger children during swimming sessions would allow young parents to be more active. It would also make it easier for parents with multiple children to accommodate each of their child's physical activity needs by ensuring that their children can be looked after while they take their other children to opportunities in different locations.

### Raising awareness of opportunities through promotion and role modelling

The lack of awareness of local opportunities and facilities needs to be addressed at a strategic level. A sustainable awareness raising system should be established using social media and community channels. Facebook was specified as a key means of keeping parents up to date on opportunities.

At an individual level, young people reported a lack of role models or trusted sources of information about physical activity benefits, opportunities and tips on behaviour change. Dumfries and Galloway should consider how to increase access to such information through trained delivery staff (see recommendation 2), schools, PE classes, consideration of 'buddy' schemes, and potentially social media. There may be a key function for Active Schools and Community Sports Officers here.

### Transport and physical activity

Improved transport links are seen as beneficial, such as improving bus services from villages to the larger town such as Dumfries. This will improve accessibility and allow individuals to participate in physical activity opportunities and make use of facilities that are not available in the area that they live.

In the current financial climate, Dumfries and Galloway could creatively look at ways to lower cost of existing services to young people, for example by offering a single lower price ticket or pass that includes the transport and also access to the physical activity facility or session.

### Promoting local access and community ownership

Local facilities such as playing fields, village halls, school estates, and public spaces should be made available for physical activity opportunities. This will reduce travel, time and cost accessibility barriers. Community ownership and access of such spaces could enhance engagement and potentially the social aspect. This recommendation should be explored at a local level based on facilities and context.

### Cost and discount

The cost of participating in physical activity, buying equipment and clothing, and transport to opportunities can be high (or be perceived to be high) and reducing the financial burden of participation would be a means of increasing participation and increasing accessibility. If Dumfries and Galloway wishes to increase engagement with physical activity provision, financial barriers (perceived or real) need to be addressed as a priority action.

There is some suggestion that having a small charge as opposed to providing the opportunities for free may help the young people to "value the activity more" and attend on a regular basis. Dumfries and Galloway should experiment with different models to find the balance that achieves most engagement, while not excluding anyone on basis of financial ability to pay. Based on young peoples' views, discounting the cost of fitness classes through deals such as "buy one get one half price" or discounted rates for block-booking is likely to increase the attractiveness of attending classes on a regular basis

Deeper understanding of the real and perceived financial barriers, as well as the value of opportunities to the people of Dumfries and Galloway may be required to make progress in this area. Consultation with communities across the region is recommended in order to make contextually relevant changes that could address financial barriers to PA. Importantly, if trying to increase access for those living in, or close to, poverty, consider if links to free school meals, National Entitlement Cards, or appropriate means-testing likely to help? We recommend assessing how this may relate with, or link to, the Dumfries and Galloway Anti-Poverty Strategy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> On the Up. Dumfries and Galloway Anti-Poverty Strategy 2015-20 [https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/media/17822/Anti-Poverty-Strategy/pdf/0238-15\\_Anti-Poverty\\_Strategy\\_NEW\\_02.09.15.pdf](https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/media/17822/Anti-Poverty-Strategy/pdf/0238-15_Anti-Poverty_Strategy_NEW_02.09.15.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Dumfries and Galloway Active Travel Strategy <http://egenda.dumgal.gov.uk/aksdumgal/images/att36331.pdf>

### Increased active travel opportunities

Active travel is a key area to increase population physical activity levels. This echoes findings from recent service reviews and links to ongoing work to improve active travel for young people in Dumfries and Galloway should be assessed.<sup>5</sup>

Dumfries and Galloway should aim to increase the opportunities for active travel by providing a greater number of well-maintained and sign posted walking and cycling routes. If and when the routes already exist they should be better signed and promoted (see recommendation 7). Participants in this project felt that introducing an affordable bike hire scheme would also increase active travel levels.

### Improvements to the booking system

The booking system for facilities should be online, standardized and with the ability to book several different activities and facilities in one place. This will reduce an important barrier to engagement.

### For more information please contact

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Commissioned by DG Health and Wellbeing on behalf of  
Dumfries and Galloway Physical Activity Alliance