

Experience of sport by young people in Northern Ireland

Findings from the Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

Triennial publication

Published: 29 October 2020

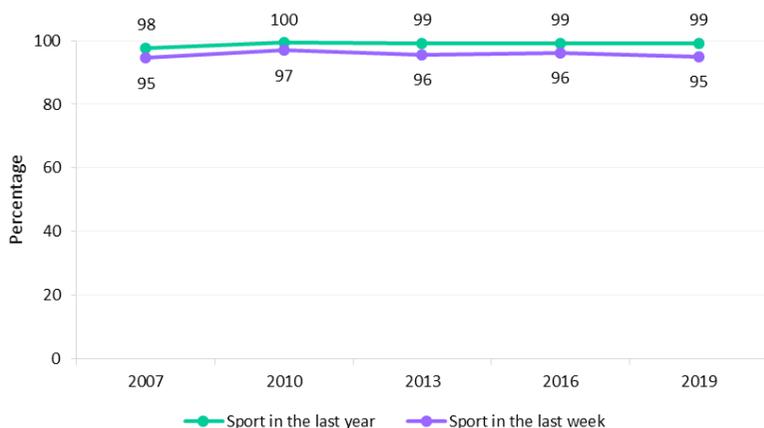
Coverage: Northern Ireland

Main stories

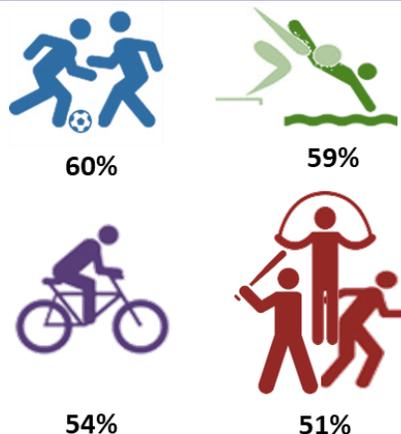
- In 2019, almost all young people (99%) had taken part in sport or physical activity at least once within the year, similar to 2016. Over nine out of every ten (95%) young people had been involved in sport or physical activity within the last week, a decrease on the 96% observed in 2016.
- Boys were more likely to state that they enjoyed sport or physical activity a lot (68%) than girls (54%).
- The most frequently cited benefits of having participated in sport or physical activity were “have fun”, “keep fit”, “learned new skills / developed existing skills” and “improved health”. In addition around half of young people said that participating in sport or physical activity helped “develop skills as a team player” and helped “develop their confidence”.
- Just over seven out of every ten (73%) young people described themselves as being very active, with 52% stating that they ate healthily. However, combining these behaviours shows that just under a third (32%) stated that they both ate healthily and were very active.

Sport participation

Decrease in participation within the last week

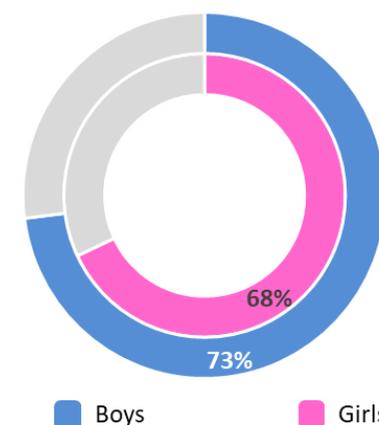


Most popular sports



Sports club membership

Boys more likely to be a member than girls



The proportion of young people who had participated in sport within the previous year was similar to the 2016 results and consistent with the longer term trend. Participation within the last week saw a decrease on the 2016 figure.

The most frequently cited sports activities that young people took part in within the previous year were football (60%), “swimming or diving” (59%), cycling (54%) and “active games” (51%).

Seven out of every ten (70%) young people stated that they were a member of any sports team or club. Boys (73%) were more likely than girls (68%) to be a member, as was also the case for both school teams / clubs and for teams / clubs based outside of school.

Contents

Page

Participation in sport or physical activity	3
Sports trends	4
Types of sports activity / Benefits of sport or physical activity	5
Enjoyment of sport or physical activity	6
Time spent doing sport or physical activity last week	7
Hours per week normally take part in sport or physical activity	8
Member of a sports team or club	10
Frequency of coaching	11
Factors that would encourage young people to participate in sport / Attendance at live sports events	12
Activity level and healthy eating	13
Definitions and technical notes	14

Lead Statistician: Jennifer O'Donnell

psu@communities-ni.gov.uk

DfC Press Office: 028 9082 3412

Published 29 October 2020

Introduction

The Department for Communities (DfC) has responsibility for the development of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland. DfC provides funding for sport, develops sport policy and supports sports initiatives. It promotes sport in the context of its strategy for sport, "Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009—2019". Sport Matters was developed by DfC in partnership with Sport Northern Ireland and approved by the Northern Ireland Executive in December 2009.

Sport Matters contains a number of high level targets designed to improve levels and frequency of participation in sport and physical recreation across the Northern Ireland population that fit with the UK Chief Medical Officers' recommendations in relation to healthy physical activity. The targets aimed at younger people and particular groups of people who are currently known to have lower participation rates in sport and physical recreation are set out below.

- To have established a baseline for the number of children of compulsory school age participating in a minimum of two hours quality physical education per week by 2011.
- To provide every child in Northern Ireland over the age of 8 years with the opportunity to participate in at least two hours per week of extracurricular sport and physical recreation by 2014.

By 2019, from the 2011 baseline, the following will be targeted.

- To have increased the number of people in Northern Ireland who are members of at least one sports club by 2014.
- A minimum increase of 6 percentage points in the participation rates of women, socio-economically disadvantaged groups, people with a disability in sport and physical recreation.

Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey

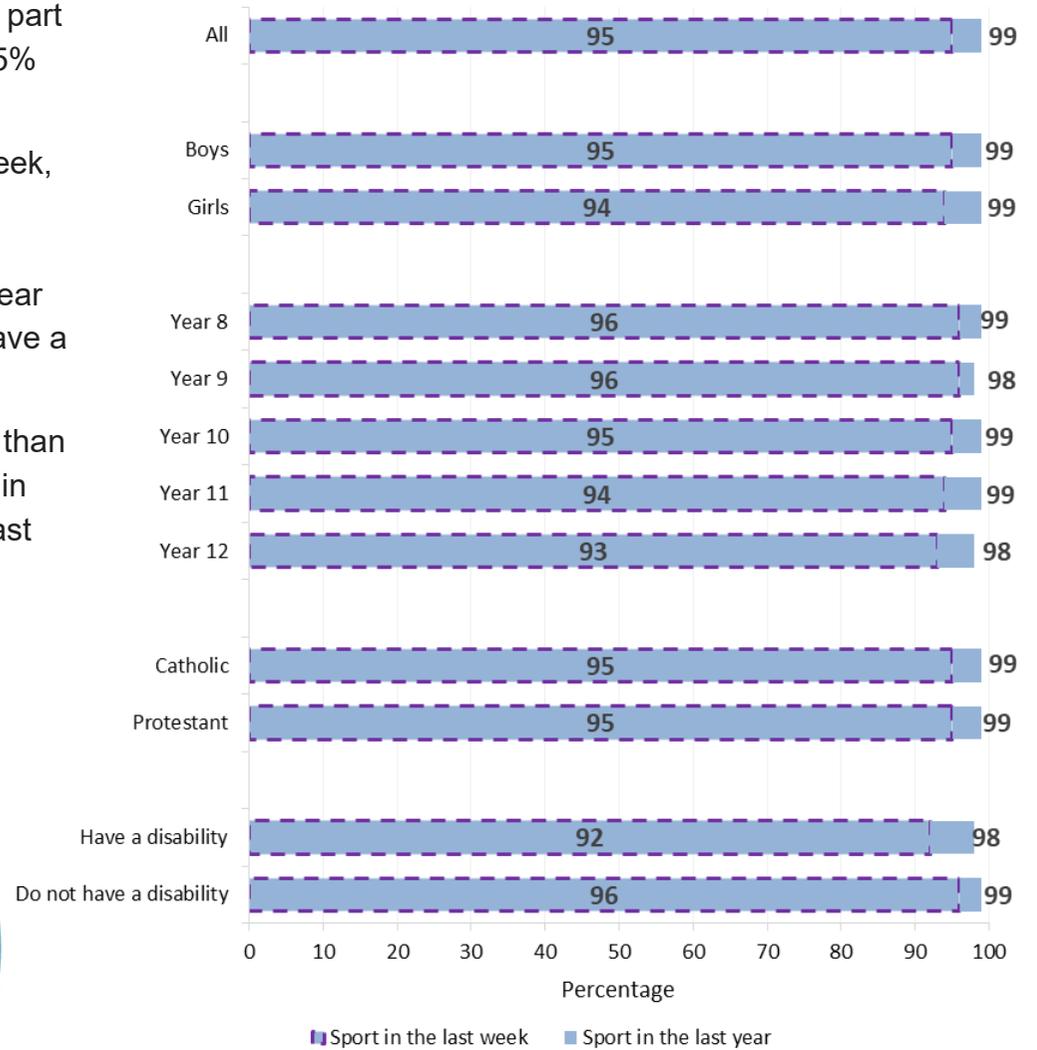
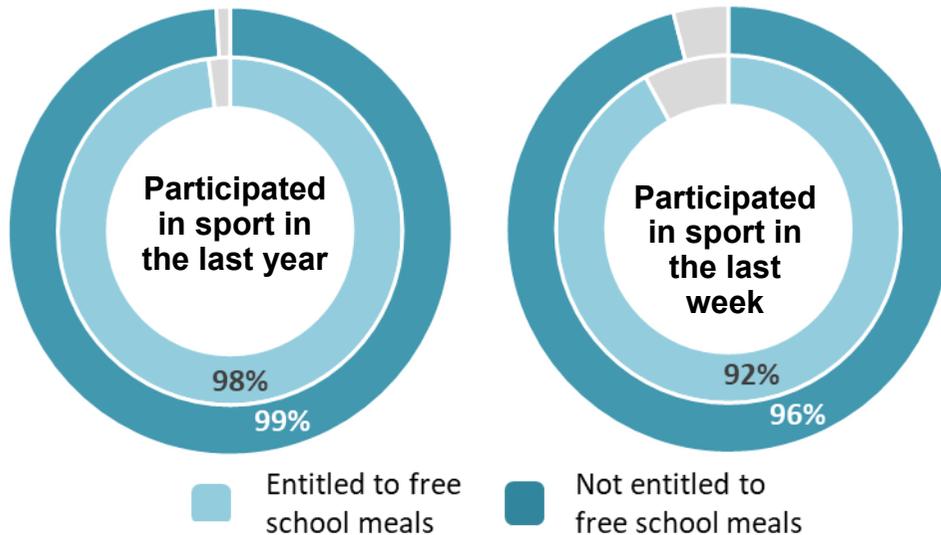
This report presents the findings from the 2019 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS) in relation to engagement with culture, arts and sport in Northern Ireland which are used to inform the development, monitoring and evaluation of policy. More information relating to YPBAS, methodology, definitions and the interpretation of the figures can be found in the [definitions and technical notes](#) section. Data tables are available in [Excel](#) and [ODS format](#). The questions that were asked in YPBAS 2019 are available [here](#).

Participation in sport or physical activity

In 2019, almost all young people in Northern Ireland (99%) had taken part in sport or physical activity within the year prior to the survey, while 95% had taken part in the previous week.

Participation figures for both time frames, the last year and the last week, were similar for boys and girls as well as for young people from the Catholic and Protestant communities. Young people who have a disability were less likely to have participated in sport within the last year (98%) or within the last week (92%) compared to those who do not have a disability (99% in the last year and 96% in the last week).

Young people who were entitled to free school meals were less likely than those who were not entitled to free school meals to have participated in sport over the previous year (98% and 99% respectively) and in the last week (92% and 96%, respectively).



Sports trends

Sports participation

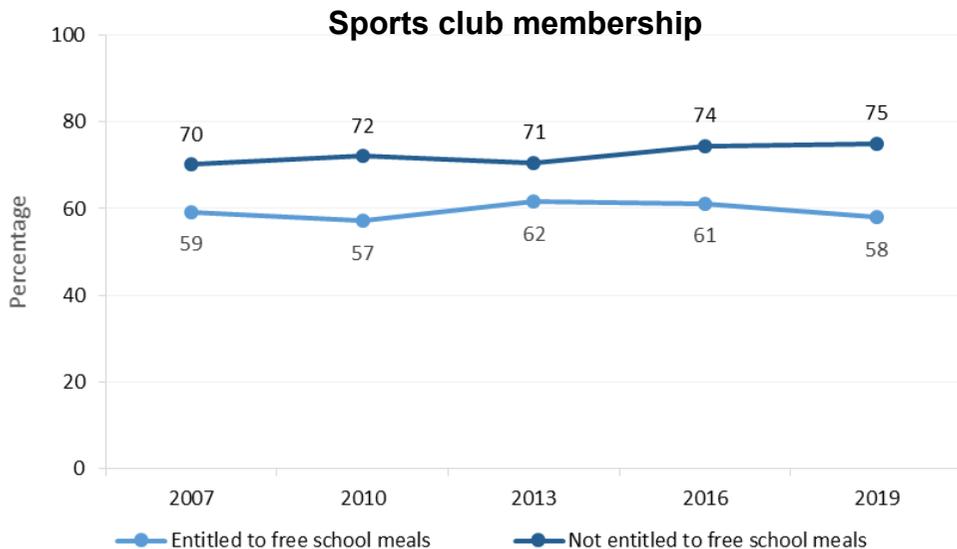
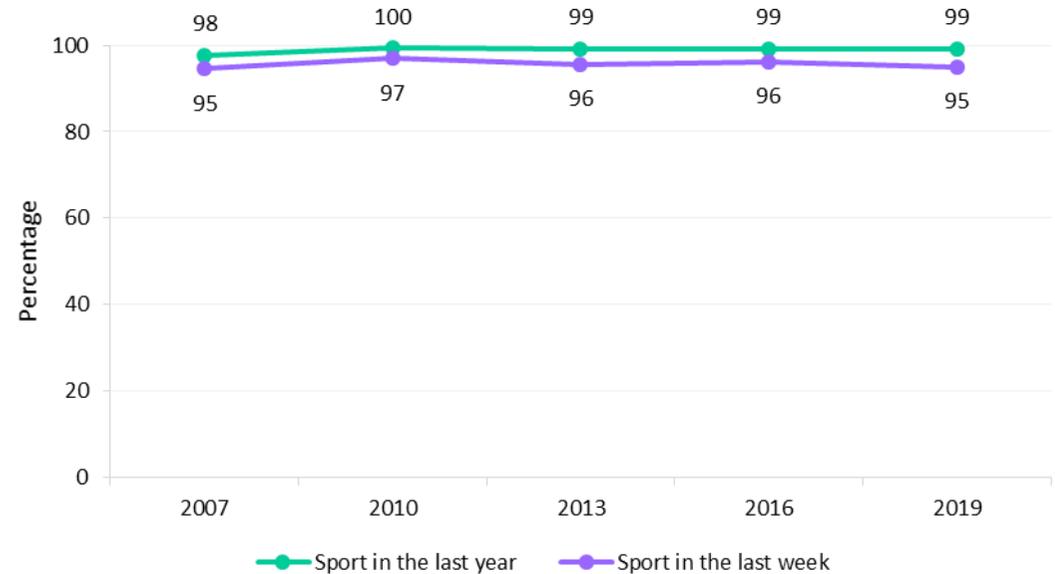
Almost all young people in Northern Ireland had participated in sport in the last year in 2019 (99%). This proportion has remained consistent from 2013 onwards following a slight decrease from 100% in 2010 to 99% in 2013.

The trend for the proportion of young people who had participated in sport in the last week is very similar to that for participation in the last year, although the most recent figure is a decrease on the 2016 result.

Analysis by gender shows that there were no changes in the proportions of both boys and girls who participated in sport in the last year from 2013 to 2019, following a decrease from 100% participation of both boys and girls in 2010.

The proportion of boys who had participated in sport in the last week has slightly decreased from a peak of 98% in 2010 to 95% in 2019. Participation rates of girls within the last week had remained consistent over the trend period until a decrease from 2016 to 2019.

While young people entitled to free school meals were generally less likely to participate in sport than those not entitled to free school meals, the longer term trends for both groups show little change in the sport participation rate in the last year from 2013. There has been a decrease in sport participation rates in the last week for both those who are entitled to free school meals and those who are not entitled from 2016 to 2019.



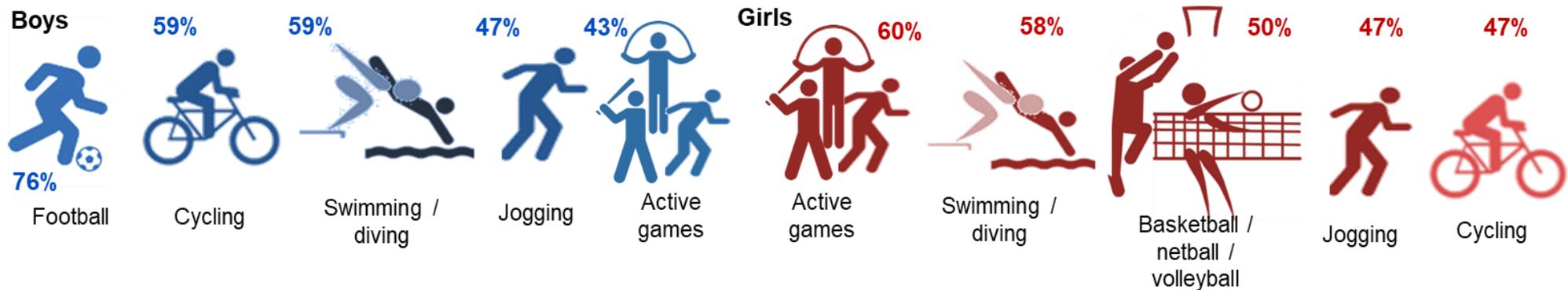
Sports club membership

Analysis of the longer term trend shows that sports club membership has remained fairly consistent at around seven out of every ten young people with no obvious upward or downward trend overall.

Young people entitled to free school meals were generally less likely to be a member of a sports team or club than those not entitled to free school meals. The longer term trends for free school meal entitlement showed that the membership rates for those who were entitled have remained consistent throughout the trend period, however those not entitled have shown a slight increase from the start of the trend period from 70% in 2007 to 75% in 2019.

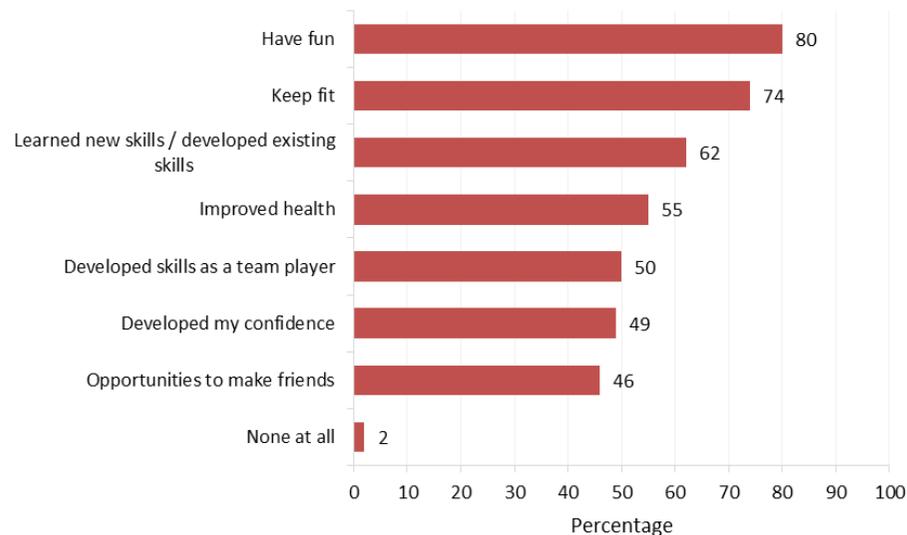
Types of sports activity

The most frequently cited sports activities that young people took part in within the previous year were football (60%), “swimming or diving” (59%), cycling (54%), “active games” (51%), jogging (47%) and “basketball / netball / volleyball” (43%). Football was the most popular sport cited by boys (76%), while “active games” (60%) was the most popular sport cited by girls.



Considering participation in sport over the last week, the most frequently cited sports were slightly different. The most popular was still football (43%), then jogging (35%), “walking for exercise / hill walking” and active games (both 26%), “basketball / netball / volleyball” (23%), cycling and gaelic (both 21%). The most popular sports for boys over the last week remained the same as over the last year, football (62%), however for girls the most popular sport over the last four weeks was “walking for exercise / hill walking (34%).

Benefits of sport or physical activity



The top 5 most frequently cited benefits of having participated in sport or physical activity were “have fun” (80%), “keep fit” (74%), “learned new skills / developed existing skills” (62%), “improved health” (55%) and “developed skills as a team player” (50%).

There were differences between the proportions of boys and girls citing various responses. Boys were more likely than girls to state keeping fit (77%), improved health (60%) and developed skills as a team player or developed confidence (both 52%) as benefits that they experienced from participating in sports or physical activities.

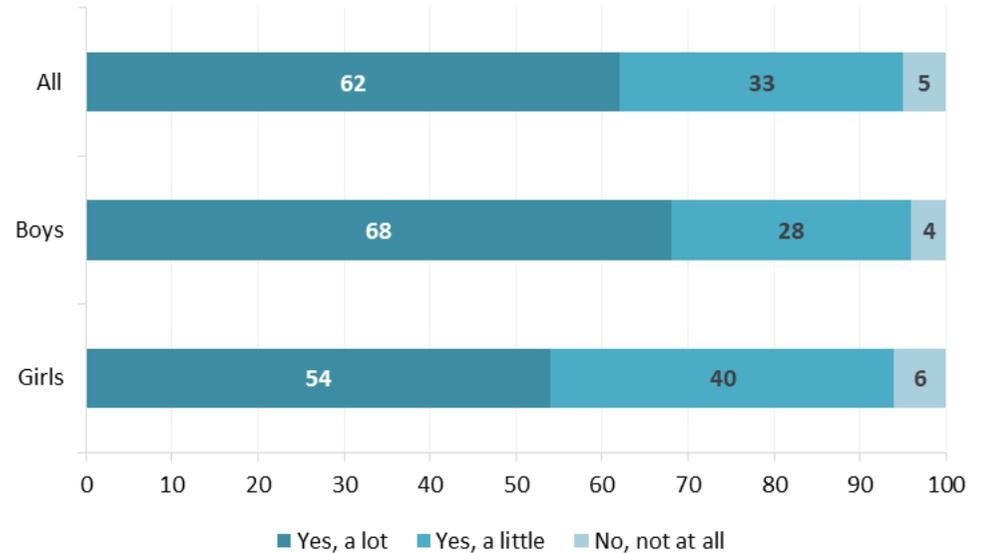
Enjoyment of sport or physical activity

Over three-fifths (62%) of young people surveyed said that they enjoyed doing sport or physical activity a lot, with a third (33%) stating that they enjoyed it a little. One in twenty (5%) stated that they did not enjoy sport or physical activity at all.

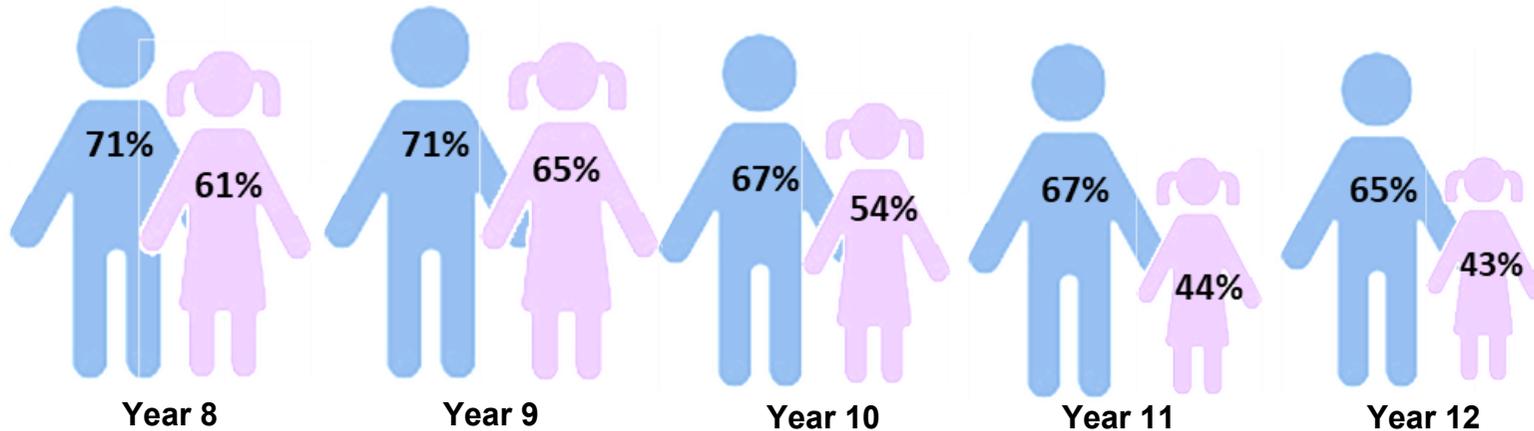
Overall, boys were more likely to state that they enjoyed sport or physical activity a lot (68%) than girls (54%). Conversely, girls were more likely to state that they did not enjoy sport or physical activity at all (6%) than boys (4%).

Enjoyment of sport or physical activity amongst young people gradually diminished as school year group increased, going from two thirds (67%) of those in Year 8 to just over half (56%) in Year 12. In addition when looking at the proportions of those who did not like sport at all, 2% of those in Year 8 stated this compared to 8% of those in Year 12.

Of those young people who enjoyed sport or physical activity a lot, the gap in the levels of enjoyment between boys and girls increased as school year group increased, from only 10 percentage points in Year 8 to 22 percentage points in Year 12.



Enjoyed sport or physical activity a lot

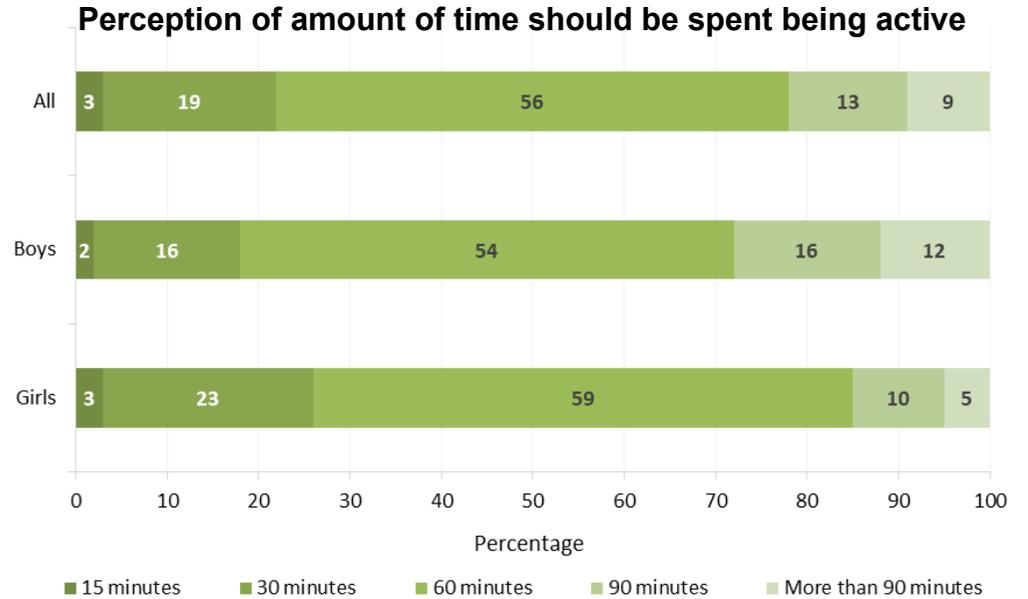


Time spent doing sport or physical activity last week

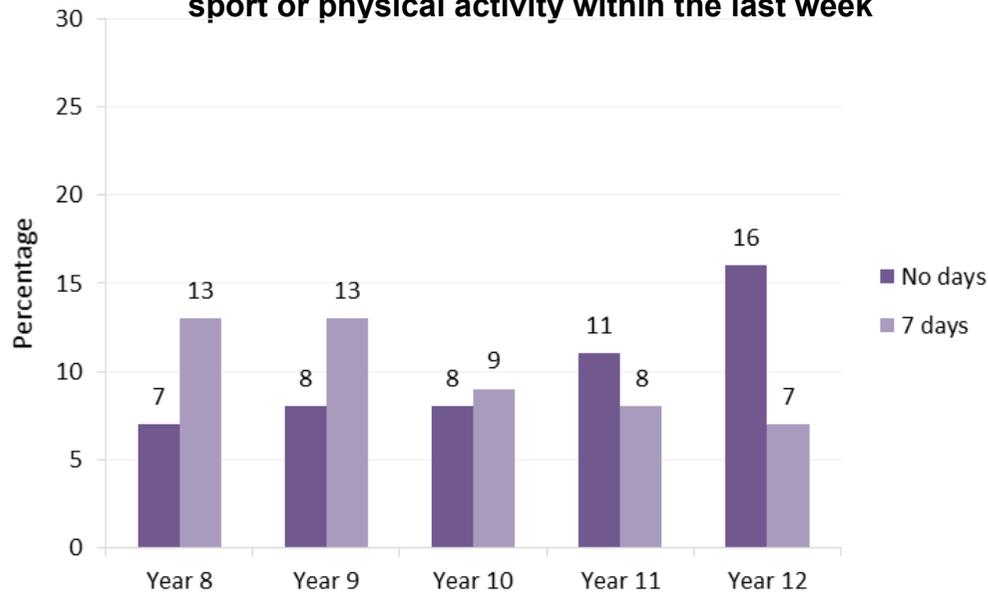
When asked approximately how many minutes should be spent each day playing sport, doing physical activity or playing actively to make you out of breath or hot or sweaty, the majority of young people (78%) gave a response of 60 minutes or more per day, consistent with the Chief Medical Officers' recommendations. Boys (82%) were more likely to state this than girls (74%).

One in ten young people were involved in moderate to vigorous physical activity for at least 60 minutes on each day of the last week. A greater proportion of boys (14%) achieved this than girls (7%).

On average, boys participated in 60 minutes or more moderate to vigorous sport or physical activity on 3.7 days in the last week. For girls this figure was 3.1 days.



Days involved in 60 minutes or more moderate to vigorous sport or physical activity within the last week



Considering school year group, pupils in Year 12 (16%) were more likely than any other school year group analysed to have not been involved in 60 minutes or more moderate to vigorous sport or physical activity on any day in the week prior to the survey. Conversely, when looking at the proportions of pupils who were involved in at least 60 minutes of sport or physical activity every day of the week, pupils in Years 8 and 9 (13%) were more likely than any other school year group to have done so.

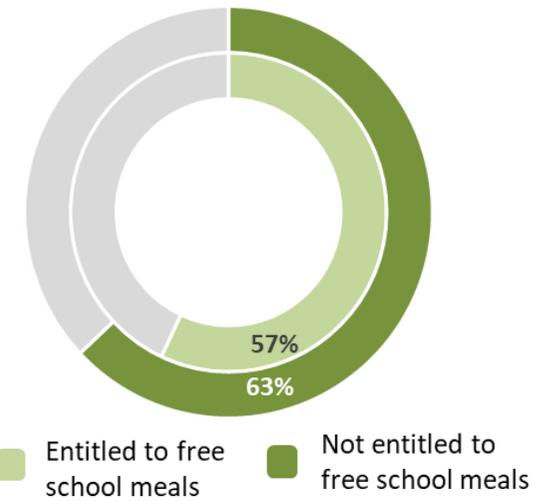
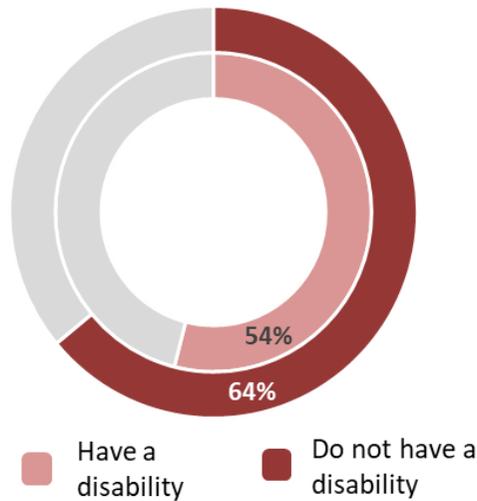
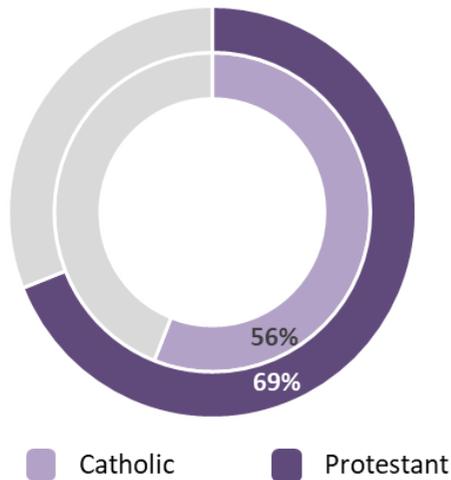
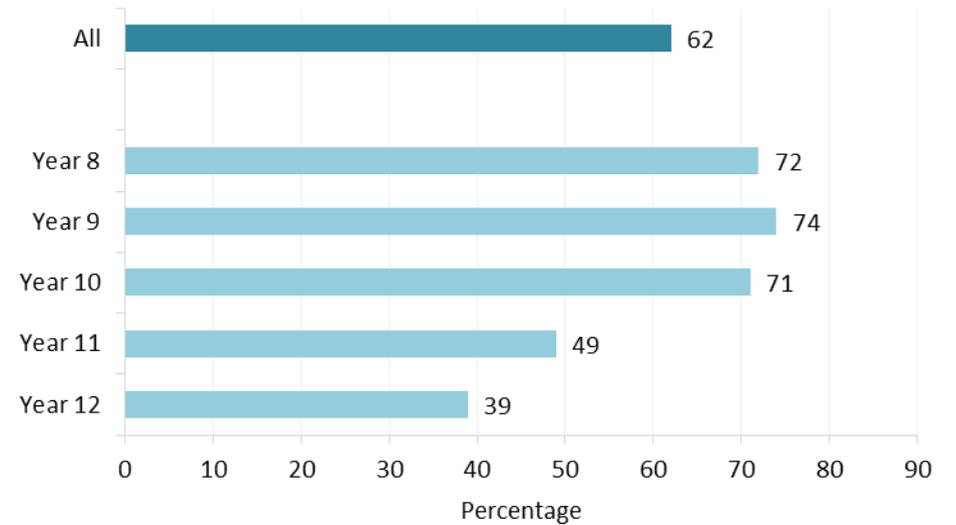
Young people who have a disability were more likely to have not been involved in 60 minutes moderate to vigorous sport or physical activity on any day in the previous week (15%), than those who do not have a disability (9%).

Hours per week normally take part in sport or physical activity

Physical Education (PE) at school

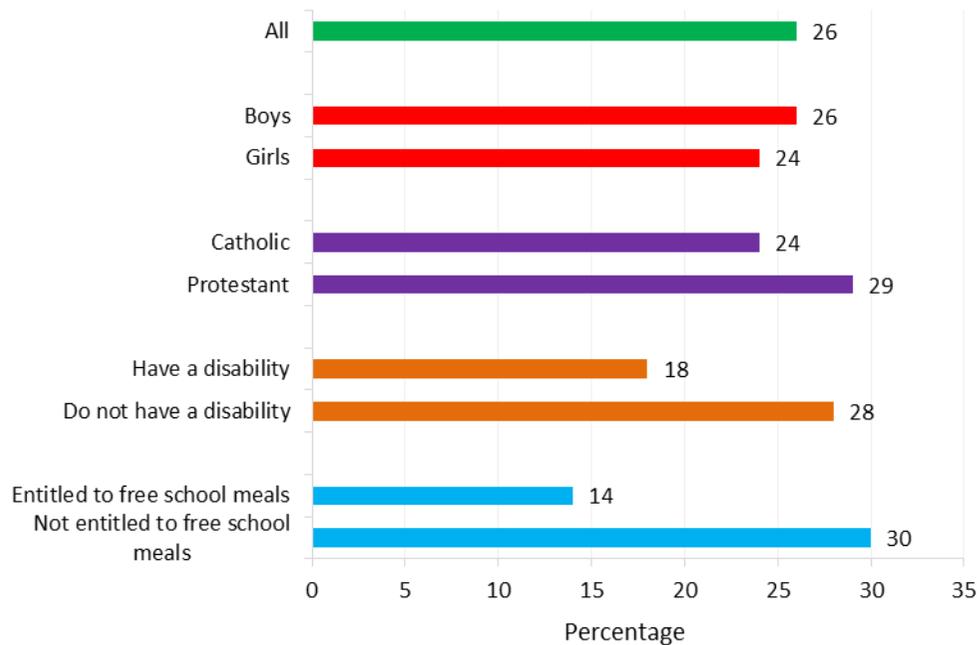
Just over three fifths (62%) of young people were normally involved in PE for 2 hours or more each week. Boys were more likely (66%) than girls (57%) to do so. The proportions of pupils stating that they were normally involved in 2 hours or more of PE each week decreased as school year group increased, with an overall 35 percentage point decrease from 74% of those in Year 9 to 39% of those in Year 12.

Young Catholics (56%) were less likely to normally be involved in 2 hours or more of PE each week than young Protestants (69%), as were young people who have a disability (54%) compared to those who do not have a disability (64%). Similarly pupils who are entitled to free school meals were less likely to have normally taken part in at least 2 hours of PE per week than those pupils who are not entitled (57% and 63% respectively).



Hours per week normally take part in sport or physical activity

After-schools sport or physical activity



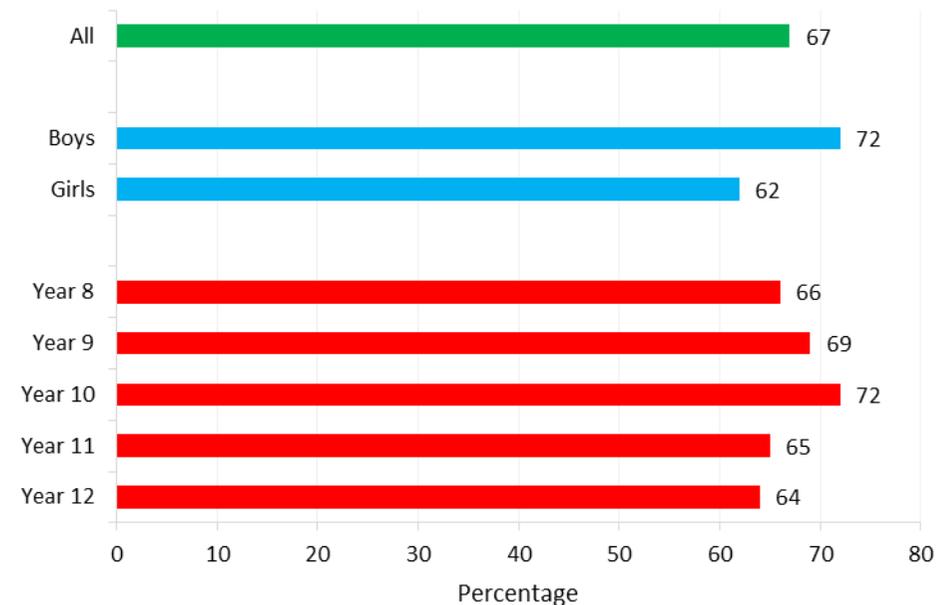
Just over a quarter (26%) of pupils normally stayed behind after school to take part in sport or physical activity for 2 or more hours each week. Protestants (29%) were more likely to be involved in 2 hours or more of after-schools sports or physical activity each week than Catholics (24%).

Young people who have a disability (18%) and those who are entitled to free school meals (14%) were less likely to have normally taken part in at least 2 hours of after-school's sport or physical activity than those who do not have a disability (28%) or who are not entitled to free school meals (30%).

Outside of school sport or physical activity

Just over two thirds (67%) of young people normally took part in sport or physical activity outside of school for 2 or more hours each week. Boys (72%) were more likely to have done so than girls (62%).

Young people who have a disability (61%) were less likely to have normally taken part in at least 2 hours of sport or physical activity each week than those who do not have a disability (69%), as were pupils entitled to free school meals (60%) compared to those who were not entitled to free school meals (70%).



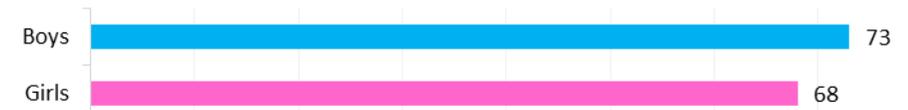
Member of a sports team or club

Young people were asked if they were a member of a school team / club and if they were a member of a team / club outside of school which involved them taking part in physical activity. Seven out of every ten (70%) young people stated that they were a member of at least one such team / club. Boys (73%) were more likely than girls (68%) to be a member. This was also the case for both school teams / clubs and for teams / clubs based outside of school.

Young people who have a disability were less likely to be a member of a team / club that involved them taking part in physical activity (61%) than those who do not have a disability (73%). This was the case for both membership of a school team (34% and 47% respectively) and membership of a team / club outside of school (52% and 64% respectively).

This was also evident when considering entitlement to free school meals, with those pupils entitled (58%) less likely to be a member of a team / club than those who are not entitled (75%).

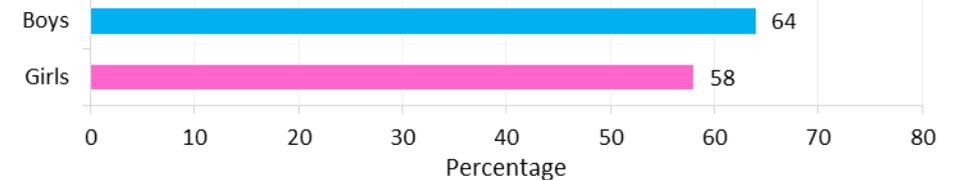
Any sports team or club



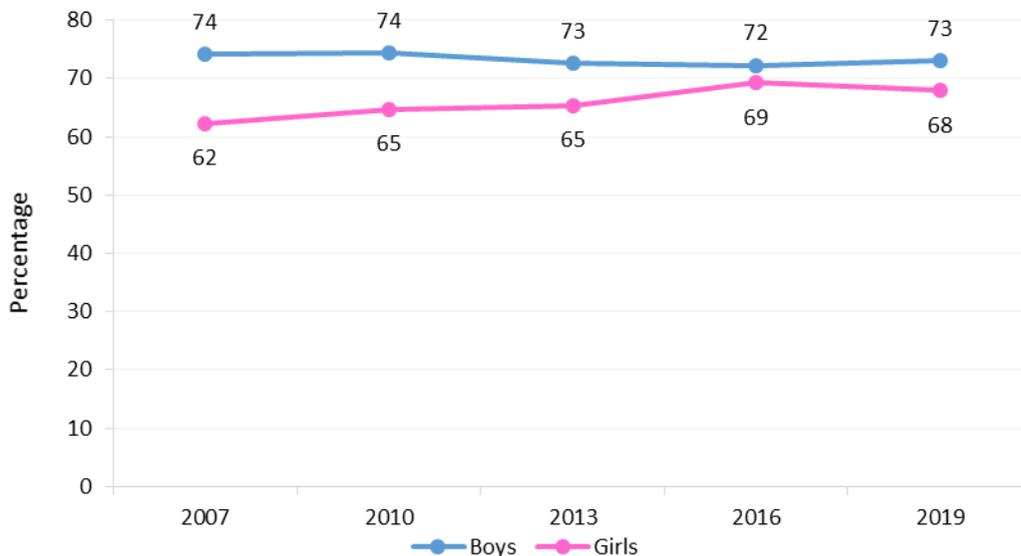
School sports team or club



Outside of school sports team or club



Membership of any sports team or club by gender

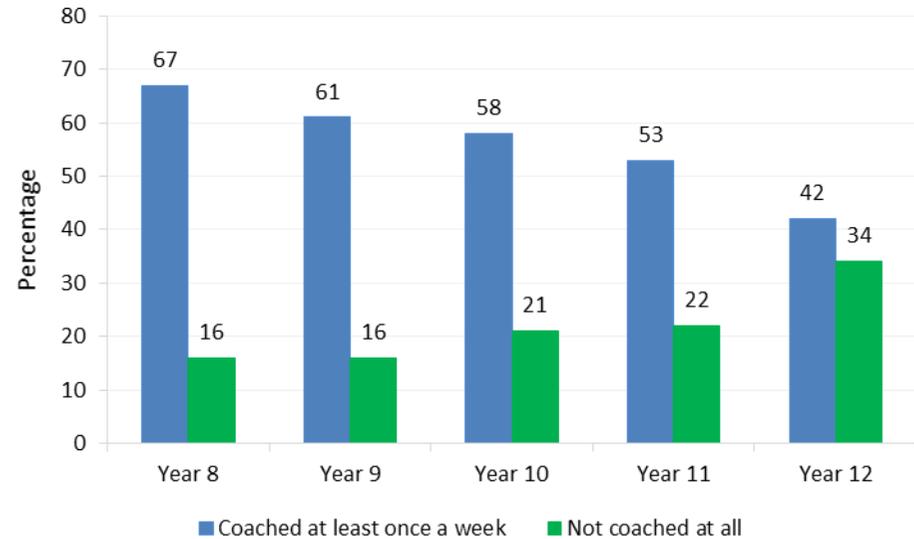


Trend analysis by gender shows that while membership of a sports club by boys has remained fairly consistent over the available years, the proportion of girls who are members of a sports team or club increased from 62% in 2007 to a peak of 69% in 2016 and remained consistent at 68% in 2019.

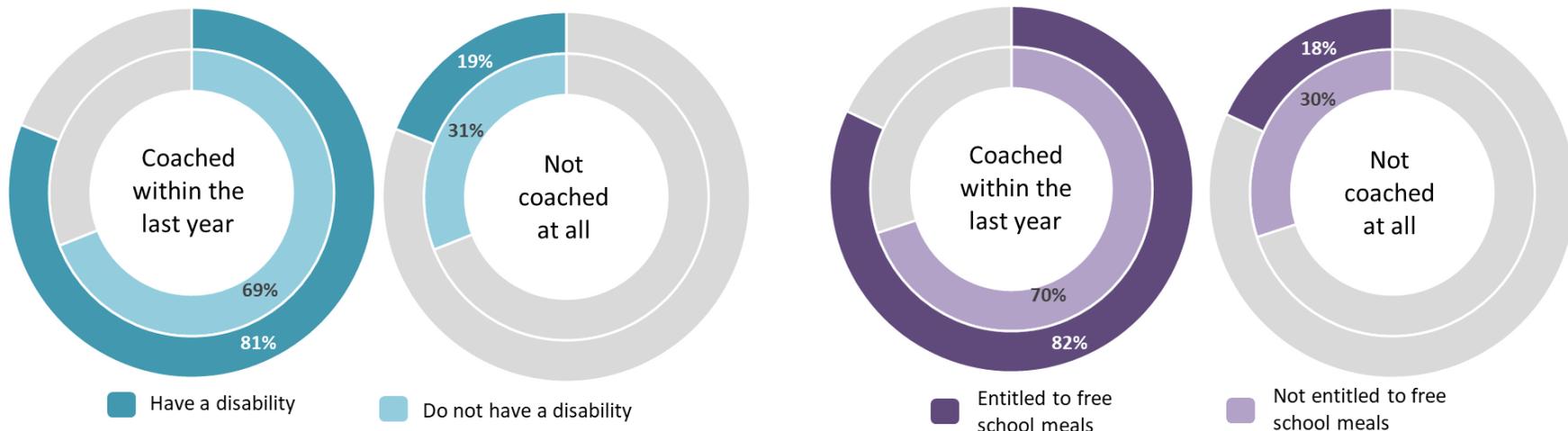
Frequency of coaching

Just under four fifths (79%) of young people had been coached in sports within the last year, not including coaching received during PE / games lessons. Over half of young people (57%) had been coached at least once a week, around two thirds (64%) at least once a month. Boys were more likely to have been coached within the last year compared with girls (80% and 77% respectively).

The proportions of pupils who were coached at least once a week in the last year fell as school year group increased, with 67% in Year 8 compared to 42% in Year 12. Conversely the proportions of pupils who had not been coached at all in the last year increased as school year group increased with 16% in Year 8 having not been coached at all compared with 34% in Year 12.



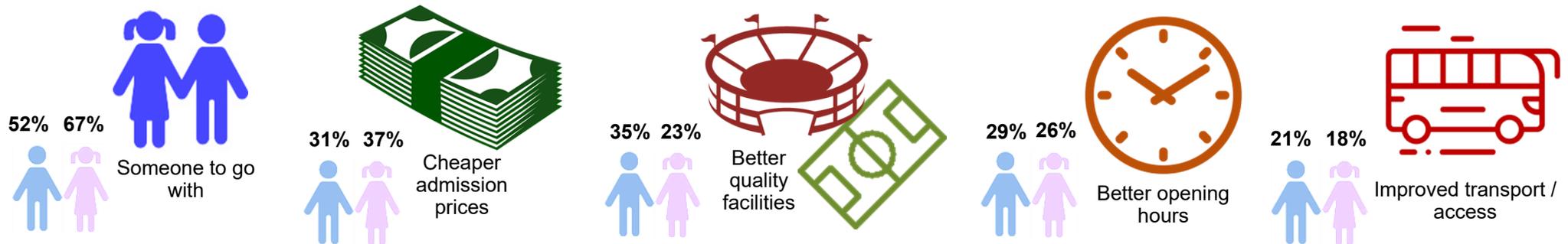
Concerning disability, those pupils who participated in sport and have a disability were less likely to have been coached within the last year (69%) than those without a disability (81%). Those who do not have a disability were less likely to have not been coached at all (19%) compared to pupils who have a disability (31%). Similar differences were evident when considering free school meal entitlement.



Factors that would encourage young people to participate in sport (more) in the future

The most frequently cited factors that would encourage young people to participate more in sport were “someone to go with” (58%), “facilities nearer to home / school” (47%), “cheaper admission prices” (34%), “better quality facilities” (30%) and “better opening hours” (28%). Just over a tenth of young people (13%) stated that nothing would encourage them to participate more in sport in the future.

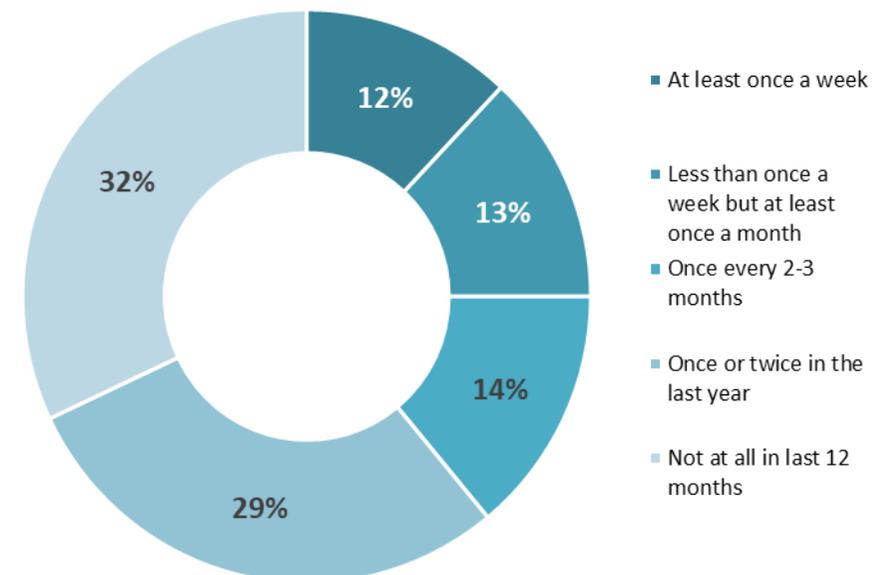
Higher proportions of girls than boys cited “someone to go with” (67%) and “cheaper admission prices” (37%) as factors that would encourage them to participate more. On the other hand, boys were more likely than girls to have stated “better quality facilities” (35%), “better opening hours” (29%) and “improved transport / access” (21%) as factors that would encourage them to participate in sport more in the future.



Attendance at live sports events

Just over two thirds of young people (68%) had attended a live sports event in the previous year as a spectator. A quarter (25%) had done so at least once a month and 12% at least once a week. Boys (72%) were more likely to have attended a live sports event in the previous year in order to spectate than girls (63%). Likewise, boys were more likely to have attended at least once a month (29%) compared to girls (20%), and boys were more likely to have attended at least once a week than girls (14% and 9% respectively).

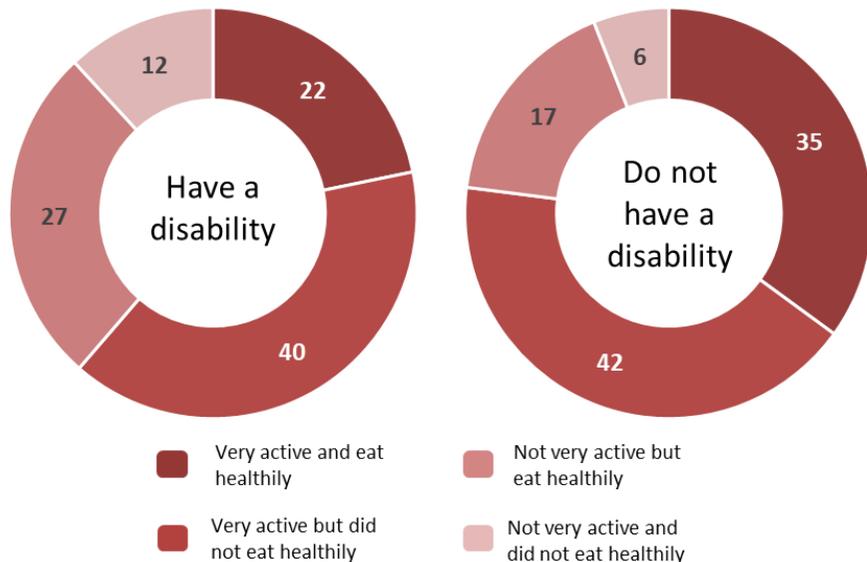
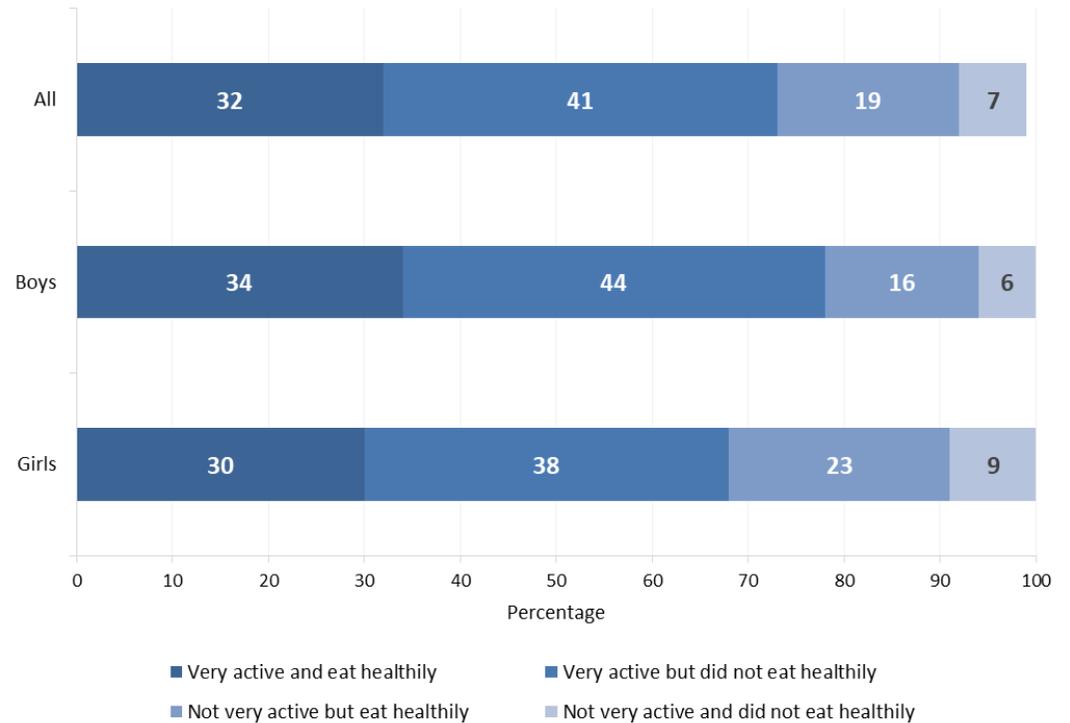
Young people who were entitled to free school meals were more likely to have not attended a sports event at all as a spectator within the previous year (41%) than young people who were not entitled to free school meals (29%).



Activity levels and healthy eating

Young people were asked to best describe their combined activity levels and eating habits. Just over seven out of every ten (73%) young people described themselves as being very active, with 52% stating that they ate healthily. However, combining these behaviours shows that almost one third (32%) stated that they both ate healthily and were very active. Just over two fifths (41%) stated that they were very active but did not eat healthily, while around a fifth (19%) stated that they were not very active, but ate healthily. Just over one in twenty young people (7%) stated that they did not eat healthily and were not very active.

Boys were more likely to describe themselves as being very active (78%) than girls (68%). A higher proportion of boys (34%) stated that they were both very active and ate healthily, compared to girls (30%). There was no significant difference in the proportions of boys and girls who stated that ate healthily (50% and 53% respectively). On the other hand girls were more likely to state that they were not very active and did not eat healthily (9%), compared to boys (6%).



Considering school year group, pupils in Year 8 were more likely to describe themselves as active (81%) and that they eat healthily (60%) than pupils in Year 12 (65% and 49% respectively).

Young people with a disability were less likely to say that they were very active (62%) than those young people who do not have a disability (77%).

In addition, a higher proportion of young people who have a disability stated that they were not very active and did not eat healthily (12%) compared to those young people who do not have a disability (6%).

Definitions and technical notes

Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey

The Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency was commissioned by a consortium of government departments and public bodies to design, conduct and report on a study of the behaviour and attitudes of young people in Northern Ireland. The Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS) is a school-based survey carried out among year groups 8 - 12 and covers a wide range of topics relevant to the lives of young people today. The main aim of the YPBAS is to gain an insight into, and understanding of, their behaviour and lifestyle. It also aims to influence various government policies and practices relating to young people and to facilitate access to research findings and expertise.

Questionnaire

Two versions of the questionnaire were used to accommodate demand for topics on the 2019 survey. The content and structure of each questionnaire was agreed in consultation with clients. Schools were randomly assigned one version of the questionnaire. A copy of the DfC questions can be accessed at:

[DfC Questions on the Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019](#)

Sample and response rate

The Department of Education (DE) provided CSU with a list of all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland (excluding independent schools and those which catered solely for pupils with special needs). All 196 post-primary schools, were contacted and invited to participate. Eighty schools agreed to participate in the study, resulting in a response rate of 41%. One class in each of the five year groups (years 8-12) was then randomly selected to take part in the study. A total of 3,892 pupils were surveyed using Version A (response rate 85%) and 4,226 pupils using Version B of the questionnaire (response rate 87%). DfC's questions on engagement of culture, arts and leisure were included in Version A.

Sport participation - Participated in at least one of the following activities in the 12 months prior to the YPBAS:

- Active games
- Angling/fishing
- Athletics/cross country
- Basketball/netball/volleyball
- Boxing
- Canoeing/Kayaking/Rowing
- Cricket
- Cycling
- Dancing
- Darts
- Football
- Gaelic Football
- Golf, pitch and putt, putting
- Gymnastics
- Hockey
- Horse riding
- Hurling/Camogie
- Ice skating
- Indoor bowls
- Jogging
- Keepfit, aerobics, yoga, dance exercise
- Martial Arts
- Motor sports
- Rugby union or league
- Shooting
- Skateboarding/Rollerblading
- Skiing
- Snooker, pool, billiards
- Swimming or diving
- Table tennis
- Tennis/Badminton/Squash
- Tenpin bowling
- Trampolining
- Walking for exercise/Hill walking
- Weight training\lifting\body building
- Windsurfing/boardsailing
- Yachting or dinghy sailing
- Other

Statistical significance in this report

The result presented in this report are based on data which has been weighted by year group, gender and religion in order to reflect the composition of the Northern Ireland post-primary population. Since a three stage sample design was used: schools, classes and pupils, the required assumption of random sampling was not met for significance testing. In 2013, standard errors were calculated for some of the variables in the survey using a formula for complex samples. However, when these were compared with standard errors calculated using the formula for random samples there was little difference (see [Technical Report](#)). Given those findings, and that the methodology is consistent with that used in 2013, tests of statistical significance in this bulletin have been carried out using the formula for random samples.

Any statements in this report regarding differences between groups such as different years and whether young people are entitled to free school meals, are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% confident that the differences between groups are actual differences and have not just arisen by chance. Both the base numbers and the sizes of the percentages have an effect on statistical significance. Therefore on occasion, a difference between two groups may be statistically significant while the same difference in percentage points between two other groups may not be statistically significant. The reason for this is because the larger the base numbers or the closer the percentages are to 0 or 100, the smaller the standard errors. This leads to increased precision of the estimates which increases the likelihood that the difference between the proportions is actually significant and did not just arise by chance.

Other notes

The following should be noted when interpreting figures and tables:

- Percentages less than 0.5% are denoted by '0' and where there are no responses, they are denoted by '-'.
- Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.
- Percentages may not add to 100% for questions where multiple responses are allowed.
- Detailed tabulations are not provided where the number of respondents is too small to allow meaningful analysis.
- The base number of responses to each question, which is shown in each table, is the unweighted count. The base may vary due to some respondents not answering certain questions.