

# The challenge of growing youth participation in sport

Please read and look to use this insight in your CSAF application



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# **1. Understanding young people today**



## What is it like to be a young person today?

- A challenging economic environment has added pressure to this generation. They feel more stressed and believe that experiences need to help them develop and progress in life.

- Sport is **perceived as becoming more serious** and placing greater demands on young people's time just as life gets more serious too
- Young people are increasingly **aware of their own wellbeing**. They give equal weight to the quality of their mental health, alongside academic prowess, career and physical fitness, in benchmarking their personal success
- With time squeezed, sport needs to emphasise its benefits for the individual young person and its potential for providing social experiences for the group. Otherwise it will too easily be traded out of lives

- There is greater willingness to accept support where it's available (from parents or the government), but also an assumption that support won't be there and a drive to seek out entrepreneurial opportunities.

- Young people today are **more aware and informed** than previous generations and believe, as digital natives, they have the skills to succeed.

### Generation recession

- Pressure to over achieve, getting as much onto your CV as possible before even finishing education
- Finding employment is a struggle, although improving (16-24 unemployment at 18.5%)
- Rising cost of living (especially relevant for 18-25 year olds)
- A degree no longer guarantees a job
- High university fees = big debt at the end of it.

### Anything is possible generation

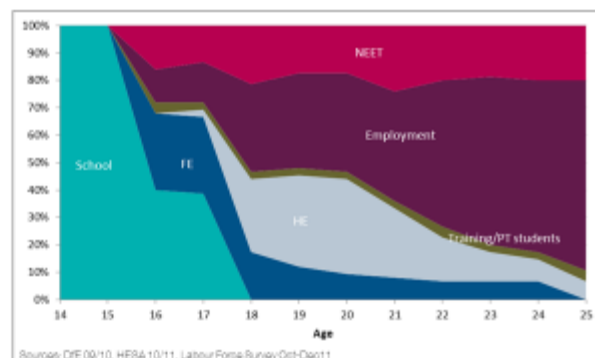
- The web provides instant access to the world – anyone can create a platform to launch their future
- Google provides immediate answers to any of their questions, no youth generation has ever been so informed
- They feel like they can change the world and their digital intuition gives them a super power above and beyond older generations

## Young people's lives are characterised by change

- In total, there are 8.3m 14-25 year olds in England:

- 2.6m (31%) are at school or in further education
- 1.4m (17%) are in higher education
- The majority, 4.3m (52%) are no longer in the education system

- By 25, almost all young people (90%) have left education. Transition out of education represents a cliff edge in terms of the tailored sport offer, just as participation moves from being a passive to a more proactive choice.



- Work colleagues are less of an influence on participation than friends. This creates a further challenge to the transition away from an environment of one's peers
- Whilst the number of young adults living with parents has greatly increased over the past 15 years, the majority of young people will have left the parental home by the age of 25.

## The importance of emerging identity and peers

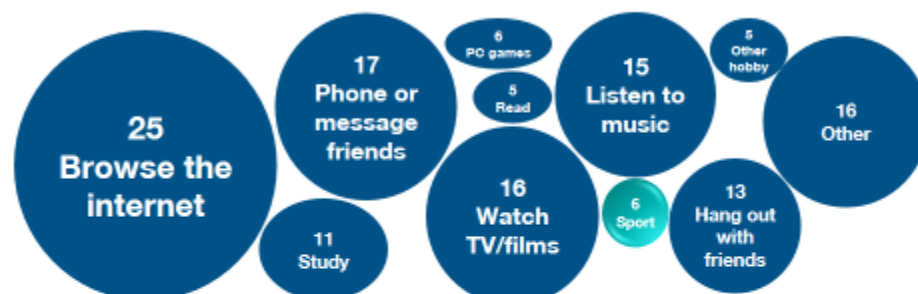
### Supporting emerging identity

- As young people move through school and into adulthood they become increasingly aware of their self-image and what fits with this
- Sport is perceived by some as having the potential to help them learn more about themselves but....
  - They want to **shape their own experiences**
  - They want to go **at their own pace** – challenge and develop but not fail and risk humiliation

### Peers matter

- Young people's lifestyles are structured around experiences with friends and family which are then magnified through social media
- From 14 onwards (and arguably earlier), young people are conscious of how they are **perceived by their peers** and other important people in their lives. These points of reference create the parameters for their personal development
- Young people are committed to their social group and will rarely do something that risks jarring with them. **Engagement with sport is therefore led by what their social group is into** and how sport/activity are seen as fitting in with this
  - Commitment to sport has to avoid feeling like an isolating experience**, with the levels of dedication suggested by elite stars reinforcing a growing impression throughout teen years that a life in sport requires compromise

## Young people's lives are dominated by technology



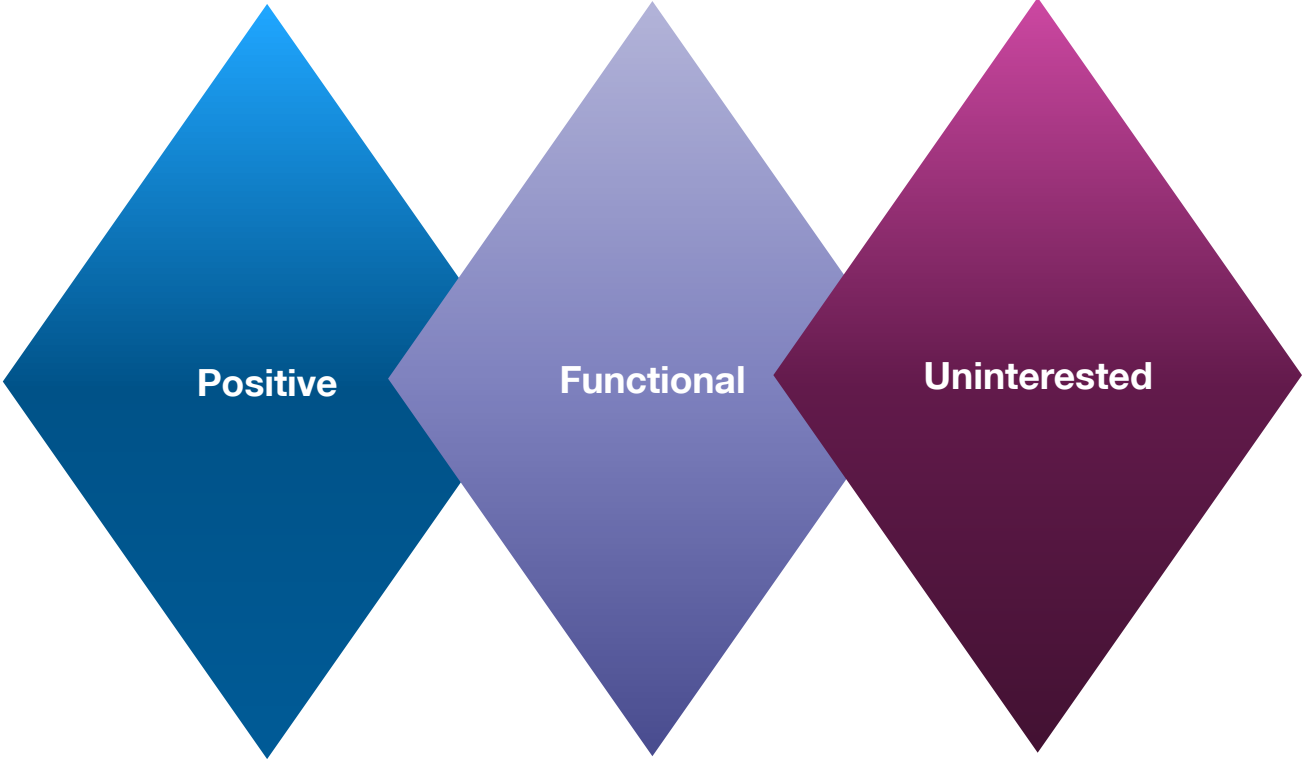
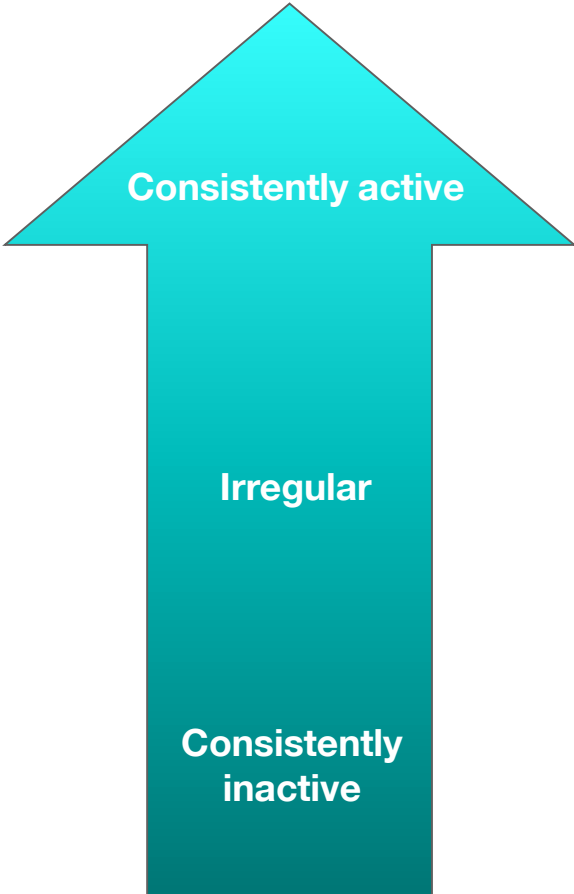
Free time activities: time spent a week on each activity

- Young people make **extensive use of digital platforms** to organise and live their lives. Their offline lives are subject to greater parental supervision, particularly for younger teens.
- Their online presence is becoming increasingly controlled with a greater focus on **curating their own experiences** and less showing off.
- Online bullying is a real threat and today's youths are well aware of the lasting impact their online identities can have.
- As digital natives, young people's use of social media is innate and constantly running – they don't dip in and out**

# What we've learned about behaviours and attitudes

“Sporting” behaviour

“Sporting” attitude




# Understanding attitudes – their motivations vary – their participation can be fun or functional



What outcome  
are you selling  
young people?



# Understanding attitudes - The power of perception and young people's views of sport

A soccer goalkeeper in a blue jersey is diving to catch a ball in a goal. The goal is in the foreground, and the background shows a green field and a hillside with houses under a cloudy sky.

What do young people think you are offering them?

# understanding behaviours - passive or proactive?

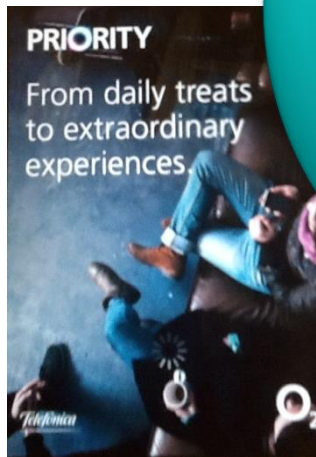
How strongly attached are your participants? How “sticky” will their behaviour be when their life changes?



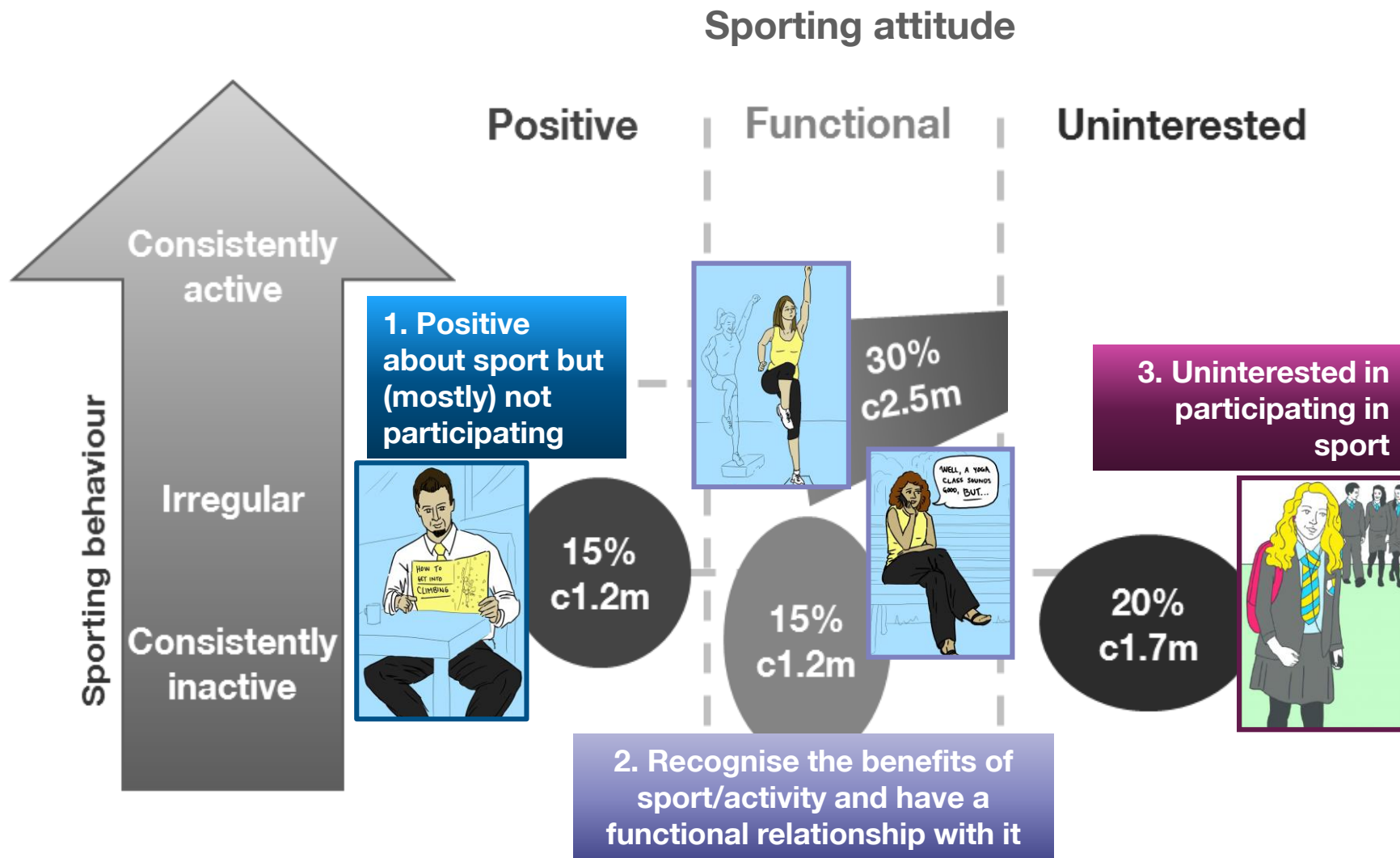
# Understanding behaviours -Experiences or habits?



What reason do young people have to keep coming back to what you offer?



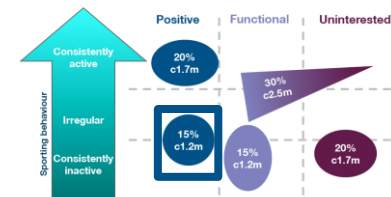
# The three key young people audiences



## **2. How to design activity for young people**



# Designing activity for: those Positive about sport but (mostly) not participating



How easy have you made it for me?

How much have you prompted, reminded (and even rewarded) me?

Is it really for me (and my friends)?

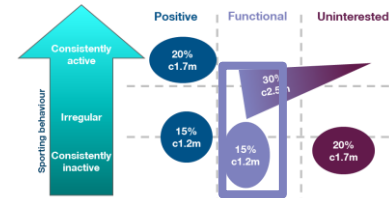


What makes it unmissable?

Don't expect too much from me....

... but help me find (and stay at) the right level for me.

# Designing activity for young people who have An increasingly functional relationship with sport



I want to see results

Give me something I can share with my friends

Will it give me what I want?



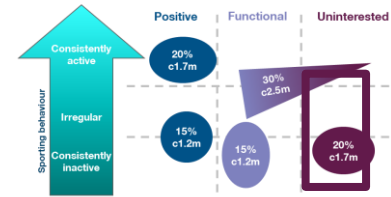
Don't tell me to do it and don't say it will be fun

How does this fit into my life?

Don't make me feel uncomfortable

I may need help to maintain a habit

# Designing activity for those Uninterested... but not necessarily inactive



Don't try to  
change my mind

What's in it for  
me?



Give me  
reassurance

Choose your  
language  
carefully

Talk to me  
about my life

## **In summary be clear which young people audience you are after and remember . . .**

Young people's behaviour does not always reflect their attitude to sport – we need to focus on changing behaviours not attitudes

Many young people take part in sport for more functional or lifestyle reasons. We need to keep engaging them and providing feedback on what actually matters to them not what matters to sport

Sport can provoke strong emotional responses. Whilst the activity can be sport, the message that sells it doesn't have to be.

Sport often has to compete or connect with wider interests or priorities. Young people respond well to meaningful experiences; those which benefit them as an individual, reinforce their place in their social group or help them develop

The supply of sport tends to reach those already engaged. Young people, particularly those in their late teens/early 20s, need to feel the community sport offer is specific enough to their needs and fits with their lives

# Designing activity for all young people should be aware that . . . .

## 1. Young people are seeking experiences which are:

Interactive

Social

Rewarding

Personalised

Inspiring

Creative

## 2. Messengers are influential on young people when they are:

Trustworthy

Expert

Like me



## **3. Examples of what works**



# WHEELSCAPE – putting young people at the heart of decisions about what they do and where they go

Key themes – youth collaboration & co-creation; broadening the definition of sport

**Wheelscape** is a skater-run company that works with local skate and BMX communities in Bristol to build and improve skate parks based on user consultation

They put skaters at the heart of every aspect of decision making. Focused on innovative, fun and value for money builds – they’ve found that greater innovation in design and construction is what their young (and older) user-groups truly desire.

## Five rules to engage young people in physical space

1. **Getting people involved** in design means they ‘own’ and care for their facilities – policing them and promoting them too.
2. **Engage with everyone on their own terms** and on their own turf – from a steering group to workshops outside, getting involved in promotion and fundraising - all helps build a life-long relationship with the sport and scene
3. **Group design** – bring together people who wouldn’t meet but share a passion and help them to mentor each other – they need to share their love and it helps create strong local role models organically
4. **Run events** – celebrate the build and have ‘jams’ - where people meet and skate. It’s about social inclusion and less about winning, a little funding and status can go a long way as it credits young people with their achievements
5. **Stay in touch** – social media and skating with them means they stay connected and know Wheelscape care, it’s not a one off – it’s a link to the UK-wide community and a responsibility to keep the park maintained



“ Young people are drawn by the physical space and being with other young people – the sport can be second to that. It’s a welcoming place to be yourself – you can belong without having to fit in with subculture norms, spend money, go to training or wear a kit. ”

**Matthew Hewitt**  
**Wheelscape**

# RUN DEM CREW – reassessing what’s motivating about sport

## Key themes – creating sense of community; safe, positive and supportive

**Run Dem Crew** redefines a traditionally solitary sport to empower and engage young people - and in turn engage and mentor others too

Charlie Williams (Founder of the East London night running collection Run Dem Crew and RDC Youngers in 2007) is inspired by music and poetry, but motivated by the future. His alternative to traditional running clubs is a commitment to lifting up the next generation through sport and creativity.

The **RDC Youngers** project across London provides mentoring and advice with the added opportunity to explore London in a safe, unique, positive and supportive environment – the only rule; go hard or go home. As well as exploring the streets of London the Run Dem Crew also celebrates the diverse urban environment that surround the 1948 space with post run workshops, films and talks.

### Five rules to engage young people and empower them

- 1. It’s not about the running or the winning** – it’s about being in the pack and a valued part of the crew, not ostracizing, competing or being top of the league
- 2. Inspire young people and fit around their life needs** – give advice, mentors (and mentoring) bring together people who want to help or be helped, but don’t know how. Offer work and real-life benefits
- 3. Show the variety of life** beyond their social circle – meet other tribes and see new areas they wouldn’t see otherwise
- 4. Use relatable icons** and set a good example – celebs that resonate that are explaining their process every day, so it’s always relevant and easy to relate to
- 5. Use Social media** – be relevant to them and reach out – sometimes it’s easier to DM than it is to say things in words



“ Sport for young people in the UK isn’t inspirational – in primary school they are always running, but they lose their love of moving.

Competition is ok, but the focus should be on being your best – not comparing to others. Schools are very competitive, it really puts people off for life

**Charlie Dark**  
**Run Dem Crew**

”

# Morning Glory – getting active in a different way

**Key themes – lifestyle exercise can be fun; re-packaging the sporting experience; non-judgemental**

**Morning Glory** brings exercise to an existing love of clubbing, getting closer to youth drinking culture. This immersive morning dance experience, thought up by two events producers, plays to the strength of those who love to dance into the night and challenges those who fall out of bed reaching for the alarm.

Its **rave your way into the day** events bring together a shared passion for conscious clubbing, social change and good times. Not to mention they're a fail-safe way to kick-start even the blurriest of gym-hating eyes.

They provide the music, the dance floor and the massage, super-food smoothie and coffee kiosk and the rest is pretty much up to you. You can even wear your pyjamas if you wish - no-one's judging here. Just turn up ready to groove, and your moves will leave you oozing energy and positivity.

## Five rules to engage the clubbers

- 1. Welcoming and non-aggressive** – it's about replicating euphoria and the hedonistic unity of going out by enabling participants to enter a new space with new norms and leave their sports baggage at the door'
- 2. Freedom and fun** - this means extras, entertaining characters, a festival-style layout - the opposite of the pressure of a traditional controlled, strict environment such as a gym or sports club where people are told what to do
- 3. Spirituality** is very appealing – helping people be themselves and feel 'in touch' is addictive, it helps them have a new outlook on life and a new frame of mind
- 4. Event exercise** – once a month events are easier to commit to. Also, by flipping the expectations of clubbing upside down, they challenge people who would never go the gym in the morning to come out for an early morning experience
- 5. Cherish diversity** – it's easier to feel 'normal' in a mixed crowd. Bringing a mix of people together is an attraction in itself



“

It's all about... letting people experience something new and move in a way they can't literally anywhere else. We spend 10 hours a day not being ourselves at work we want people to be [able to be themselves] by coming in to our world.”

”

**Samantha Moyo**  
**Morning Glory**

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