

Understanding Sport and Physical Activity Habits of Students from Low Socio-Economic Groups

Final Report



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
1. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 Background	3
2. METHODOLOGY	4
2.1 Index of Multiple Deprivation	5
2.2 Limitations of the research.....	5
3. RESULTS.....	6
3.1 Demographics	6
3.2 Population distribution	7
3.3 Physical wellbeing and participation in physical activity	9
Participation habits before joining university	11
Current participation habits	12
Main activity that students participate in	12
Contrasting views around student participation	13
Further insights on student participation from university stakeholders and student activators	14
3.4 Community Development	14
Lack of evidence base on low SEG groups to support community development	15
Social sport	15
3.5 Barriers to participation	16
Cost of university	16
Other barriers	18
Active students	18
3.6 Individual development, habits, motivation and readiness to participate in physical activity.....	19
Individual development and opportunities.....	21
3.7 Mental Wellbeing.....	22
4. CONCLUSIONS.....	24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

There is some evidence that people from lower socio-economic groups (SEGs) are more likely to be either inactive or less active than those from higher socio-economic groups. Currently, there is little evidence to indicate whether this trend is also the same for the student population.

Aim

The aim of this report is to set the context for providing insight into 'low SEG' students at universities in the UK and to understand the habits and behaviours of these students around sport and physical activity.

Method

The methodology was mixed-method including both an online survey of 729 students and 27 interviews with students and a further 5 university staff.

Results

Generally, the academic profile for both groups was similar although there was a higher proportion of 'low SEG' students (45%) who were commuter students and also students that were of either 'Asian' (24%) or 'Black' (12%) ethnicity. In total, 'non-white' groups made up only 11% of the 'remaining population' sample compared with 39% of the 'low SEG' group.

The results indicate that both the 'low SEG' and 'remaining population' groups were relatively active groups when compared with the national average and a subset of those aged 16-24 nationally. Only 3% of the 'remaining population' group would be defined as inactive although there was a slightly higher percentage (6%) of 'low SEG' participants. In comparison the 'remaining population' were more active than the 'low' SEG group. They were also more likely to be members of a university sport/fitness club as a participant or volunteer. The key barriers which prevented both groups participating in sport and physical activity included cost, academic commitments and a lack of confidence. Interviews with students revealed that there was a range of specific challenges, particularly around cost which prevent students from participating in sport and physical activity.

In terms of student's ability and opportunities to participate the 'remaining population' group scored higher than the 'low SEG' group in both areas. Significantly, only 59% of 'low SEG' students felt that they had sufficient opportunities to participate. In terms of students habits, view of and relationship with sport and physical activity the 'remaining population' group also scored higher overall. Around 60% of 'low SEG' students and 76% of the 'remaining population' had a healthy, sustained relationship with sport and physical activity. Interviews with students revealed that students that didn't participate in sport and physical activity before university were also less likely to participate at university.

Both groups perceived their mental wellbeing as being at a similar level and generally fell into the 'high' threshold that Sport England use for measuring mental wellbeing.

Conclusion

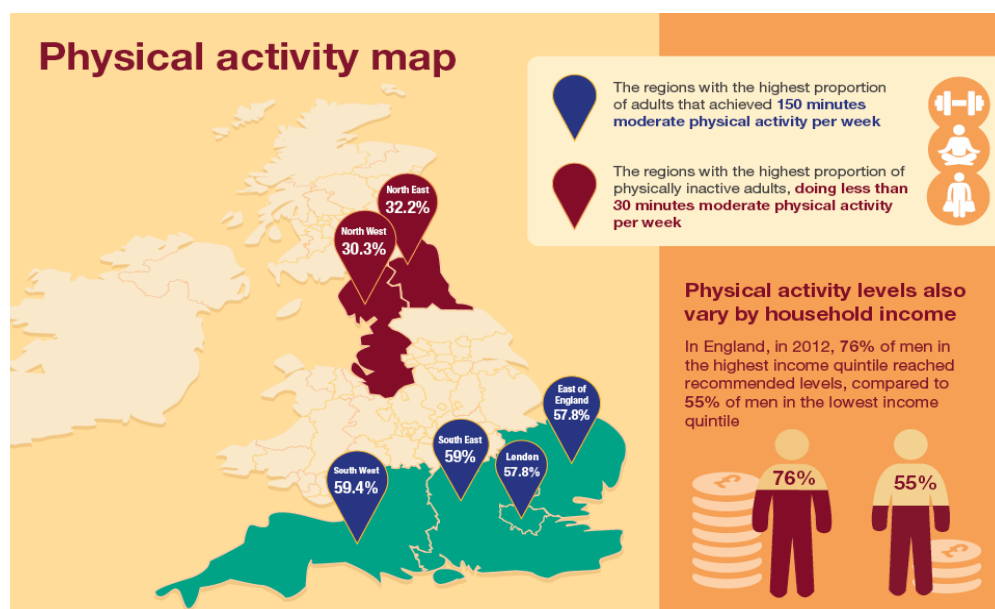
Overall both groups are relatively similar with some subtle differences which may potentially impact on their habits and behaviour in relation to physically activity and their perceived opportunity to be physically active.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In recent years significant government funding has been directed at reducing inactivity in the UK to improve the health of the nation. As a result there has been increased focus on some of the causal factors of inactivity. The Active Lives survey, which measures physical activity levels, habits and behaviours of people across England, has provided much needed evidence on this subject highlighting the scale of inactivity. A key finding of the survey is that people's activity levels vary according to their socio-economic group (SEG). Moreover, there is some evidence that people from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to be either inactive or less active than those from higher socio-economic groups. Figure 1 provides evidence of this by comparing activity levels based on average household income with inequalities prevalent between certain communities in the North and South of England¹.

Figure 1: Active Lives physical activity map



In the UK, a total of 25.2% of 16 to 24 year olds do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity¹. With 2.3 million students enrolled in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and 1.6 million (68%) under 25 years of age, these organisations are influential in supporting and educating this segment of the population to meet the recommended levels of physical activity.

British University and Colleges Sport (BUCS) is the national governing body for Higher Education (HE) sport in the UK, with the aim of creating the best university sport experience in the world. This aim involves supporting students to be physically active whilst at university in order for them to gain the multitude of benefits that participation in sport and physical activity provides. The challenge to ensure students are physically active has risen since the white paper on HE finance and regulation²

¹ Universities UK, Patterns and Trends in UK Higher Education, 2018.

² BIS White Paper, Higher Education: Success as a Knowledge Economy, 2016.

which effectively placed a greater emphasis on students to maximise their investment by focusing more intently on the outcome of their studies. Consequently this shift meant there was less importance placed on extra-curricular activities. It appears, however, from recent evidence, that this focus may be shifting, with increasing discussions over the past couple of years regarding student mental health. Evidence reported in the TRENDENCE UK survey³ showed that involvement in activities of all types appears to be related to better wellbeing, so recognising the importance of extra-curricular activities and how to engage all groups of students should be a priority for all universities.

Currently, there is a lack of data to determine the proportion of 'low SEG' students at universities. The Higher Education Statistics Agency uses the 'Polar 4' socio-economic classification, although they warn of potential inaccuracies in this data because of the complexities of classifying in such a way. However, using the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) 'low SEG' classifications, that includes 6-8 of the NS-SEC scale; low SEG groups attending HE in 2017/18 were 22%.

Generally, there is a lack of understanding of these groups' habits and behaviours towards physical activity when compared with the general population. This report sets out to both provide an indication of the proportion of 'low SEG' students at universities in the UK as well as provide insight into the habits and behaviours of students around sport and physical activity using the Sport England outcome areas as a guide for analysis. The results will therefore provide BUCS with valuable insight into the habits and behaviours and challenges which exist for these groups and allow them to plan more effectively to support students in future.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to identify the habits and behaviours of students was mixed-method incorporating an online survey of students across different British universities, and qualitative research in the form of interviews and one focus group with both staff and students at one British University. The population of this university includes 20% of students from a 'low SEG' background. The mixed-method approach was selected in order to enable a triangulation of data, and to allow a small section of rich and in-depth views from the interviews and focus group to strengthen the quantitative survey data.

The research was preceded by a literature review, reported in a separate document, '*Understanding sport and physical activity habits of students from low socio-economic groups: literature review*', which helped to inform the design of the research questions based on existing evidence in this area.

The online survey was designed incorporating a quantitative measure adapted from the Active Lives survey and other bespoke questions for students aligned to four of the governments' five outcome areas for sport and physical activity⁴:

- Physical health;
- Mental wellbeing;

³ TRENDENCE UK, Only the lonely - loneliness, student activities and mental wellbeing at university, 2019.

⁴ DCMS, Sporting future: a new strategy for an active nation, 2016

- Individual development: and
- Community development.

The purpose of the survey was to understand the habits and behaviours of students in relation to sport and physical activity both currently and prior to them attending university. The survey was targeted at all students and captured home post code data to enable us to segment students according to their SEG and compare 'low SEG' groups with higher SEG groups.

The qualitative methods included 27 interviews with current students (12 of which were 'low SEG' students), four interviews with staff working within sport and physical activity (both the Student Union and the sports department) and a focus group with four student sport activators / sport committee members. The interviews with students asked questions in order to gain a broad understanding of their habits and behaviours and particular barriers to participation. Staff members were asked to provide an overview of how 'low SEG' students fared at the university in relation to participation. The student sport activators / committee members were asked about the ways in which they aimed to engage students in different sports activities and the barriers and issues faced.

2.1 Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is a measure of relative deprivation for small areas (Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA1)). It is a combined measure of deprivation based on a total of 37 separate indicators that have been grouped into seven domains, each of which reflects a different aspect of deprivation experienced by individuals living in an area.

Every LSOA1 in England is given a score for each of the domains and a combined score for the overall index. This score is used to rank all the LSOAs1 in England from the most deprived to the least deprived, allowing users to identify how deprived areas are relative to others.

For the purposes of this research and identifying the 'low SEG' group, the list of LSOAs1 in England is placed in order and divided into equal parts called percentiles. The bottom 20% are the most deprived areas and are identified as the 'low SEG' group and for the purpose of this research the remaining 80% SEG are defined as the "remaining population".

2.2 Limitations of the research

The survey was distributed by BUCS to all Sport Directors and senior leaders in sport/physical activity at universities in Britain. Each university was asked to gain the appropriate approval to distribute the survey to all students currently studying at the university. A limitation of the research is that the National Student Survey (NSS) was also being run at the same time as this survey which meant that some universities refused to approve distribution of the survey because they required students to prioritise completion of the NSS. This limited the response to the survey reducing the number of universities able to participate. In an attempt to improve the response, it was suggested to universities that they could distribute to all 'level 4 and 5' students that are not required to complete the NSS survey although in the majority of universities even this was not permitted. This has therefore created a bias to these years of study.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Demographics

The survey was completed by 729 students from 20 universities. Just fewer than 70% of responses were received by three universities - Manchester Met University (38%), Worcester University (20%) and Sheffield Hallam University (13%). In total, 120 (16%) students from 'low SEG' groups completed the survey. Due to the relatively low response and the lack of engagement from the majority of universities the results only provide an indication of the habits and behaviours of students from a small sample of universities.

The majority of students that completed the survey were undergraduates (93%), studying full-time (98%) and in the first year or second year of university education (78%). The latter is unsurprising given that level 4 and 5 students were targeted by some universities as they are not required to complete the NSS survey. Generally the academic profile for both groups was similar although the 'low SEG' group had a slightly lower proportion of post-graduate students as well as 3rd and 4th year students which may have occurred due to the low sample size for this group rather than any link to drop out rates.

A higher proportion of 'low SEG' students (45%) were commuter students, in that they commute to university from their home address, compared with only 16% of the 'remaining population'. This is expected given that students from 'low SEG' groups are more likely to commute to a local university to reduce costs associated with living away from home.

The gender breakdown of students that completed the survey is broadly similar to the national picture⁵ with 66% of females completing the survey. Analysis of the results by age reveals that 84% of respondents were aged between 18 and 22 which is again comparable to the national undergraduate population of students under 24⁵. There were no significant differences in age or gender between the "low SEG" and "remaining population" groups.

A proportional difference was noted in the ethnicity of the two groups. Respondents from the 'remaining population' were predominantly of 'white - English' (88%) ethnicity, with 30% fewer reported in the 'low SEG' (58%) group. A higher number of 'Asian' (24%) and 'Black' (12%) respondents were reported in the 'low SEG' group compared with only 6% 'Asian' and 3% 'black' in the 'remaining population' group. In total, 'non-white' groups made up only 11% of the 'remaining population' sample compared with 39% of the 'low SEG' group with the national average being 22%.

The number of respondents with a physical or mental health condition was broadly similar although slightly lower for 'low SEG' (11%) compared with the 'remaining population' (17%) and similar to the

⁵Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2016/17 - Student numbers and characteristics.

national average⁵. Of note was that 62% of 'low SEG' respondents that had a physical or mental health condition(s) or illnesses, were disadvantaged in that their condition had a substantial effect on their ability to do normal daily activities compared with the 'remaining population' of students (49%).

From the 27 student interviews, we were able to identify the SEG for 22 students. Three students were international students so the information on SEG by postcode was not available, and two students declined to provide their postcode. Of the 22 students where we could identify their SEG, 11 of these (50%) were from 'low SEG' groups. The majority of these were commuter students. The remaining 11 were categorised as 'remaining population'.

3.2 Population distribution

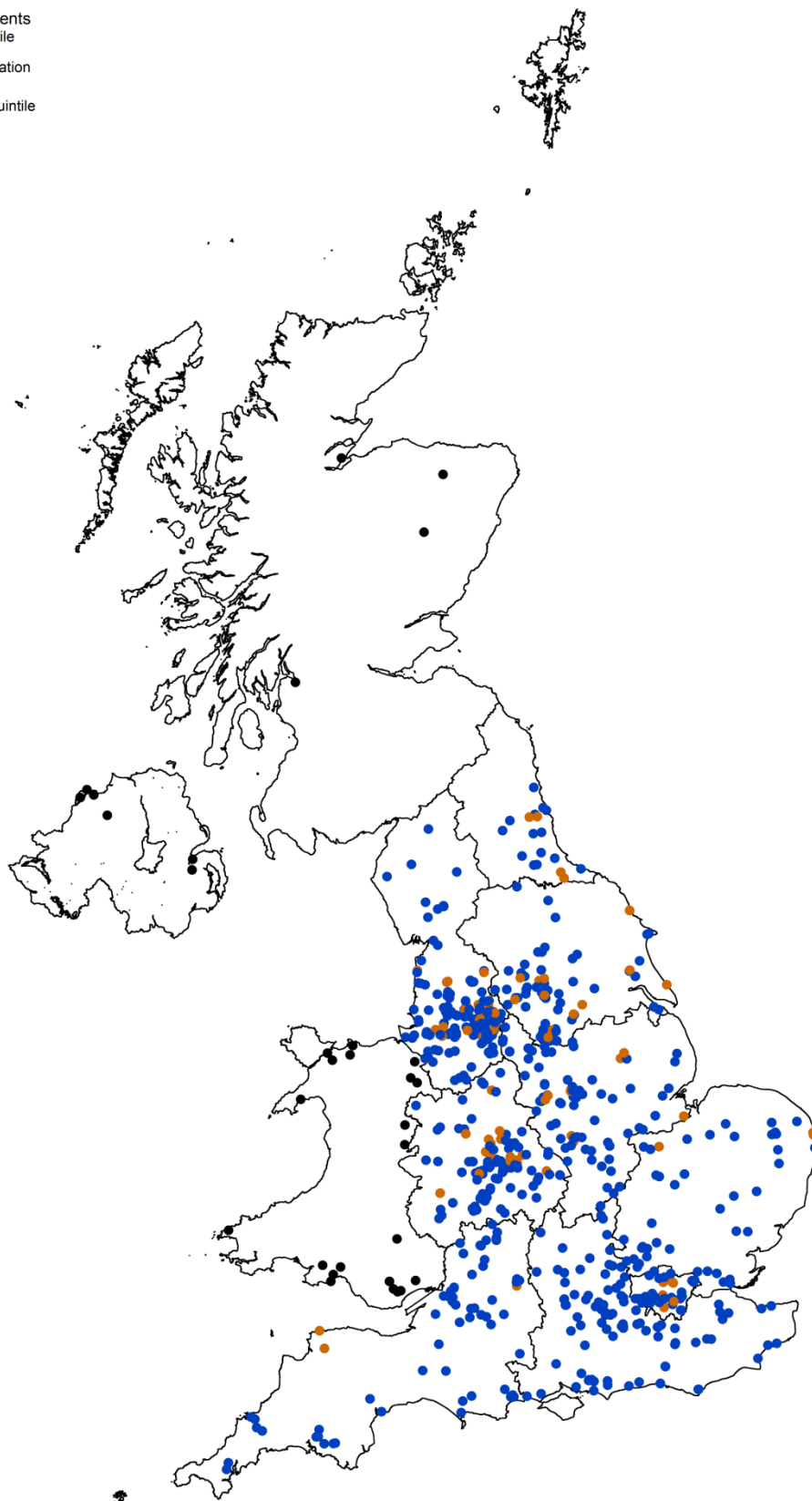
The sample size is also too small to make an accurate national assessment of population distribution. Figure 2 displays the population distribution for both groups and shows that respondents are spread throughout England with certain clusters for both groups apparent around the inner cities. There are also a small number of individual 'low SEG' responses from deprived coastal locations.

Figure 2: Population distribution

Survey Respondents
by IMD 2015 Quintile

● Remaining Population

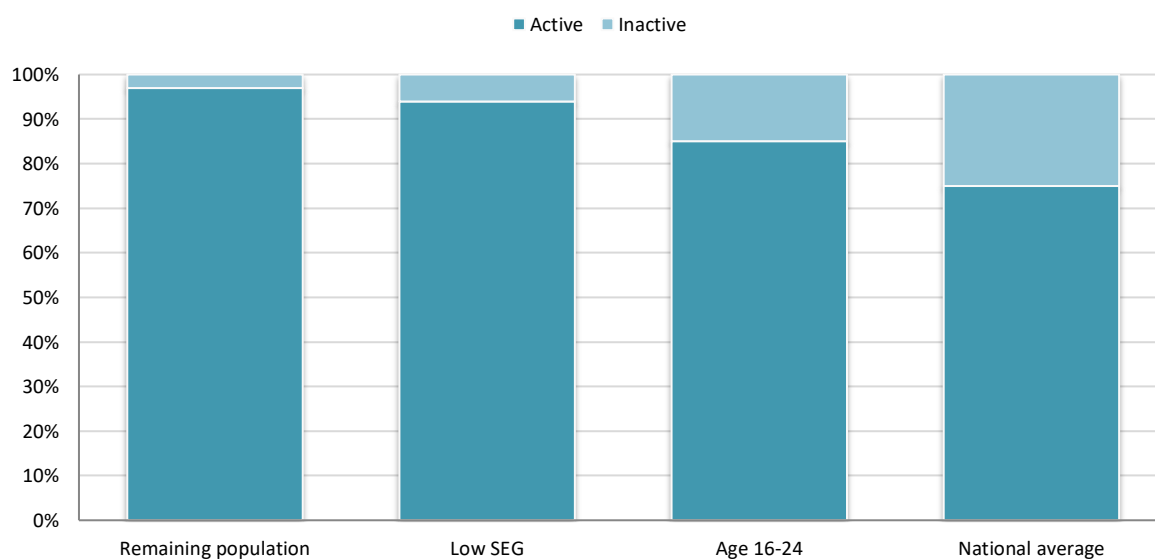
● Most Deprived Quintile



3.3 Physical wellbeing and participation in physical activity

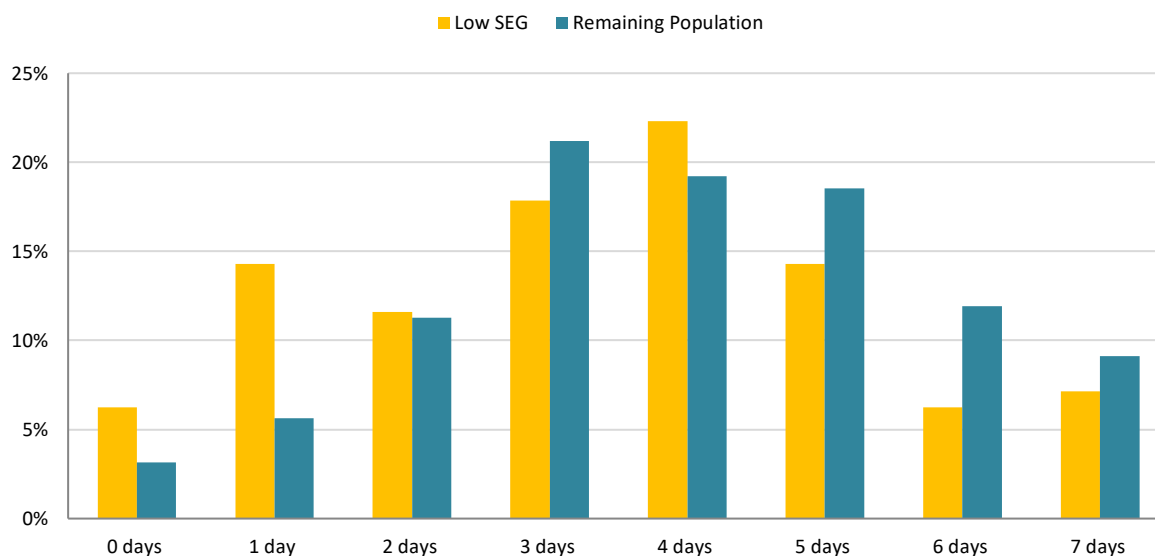
To understand the habits and behaviours of both groups of students it was important to identify their current levels of physical activity. To that end, respondents were asked to select how many days of at least 30 minutes of physical activity they did on a weekly basis which was enough to raise their breathing rate (Active Lives measure). The results displayed in Figure 3 indicate that both the 'low SEG' and 'remaining population' groups are relatively active groups when compared with the national average overall and a subset of those aged 16-24 nationally. Adult inactivity is defined by Sport England as people that participate less than 30 minutes a week of moderate intensity activity. Only 3% of the 'remaining population' group would be defined as inactive although there was a slightly higher percentage (6%) of 'low SEG' participants.

Figure 3: Proportion of active versus inactive students



On average, the number of days students spend doing physical activity at university, which is displayed in Figure 4, was slightly lower (3.3 days) for the 'low SEG' group compared with the 'remaining population' (3.9 days). Generally the majority of both groups would be defined as either being at least 'fairly active' which is demonstrated by the fact that at least 80% of the 'remaining population' are active for equal to or more than 3 days per week compared with 68% of the 'low SEG' group. The 'low SEG' group were less likely to participate for 4 or more days per week.

Figure 4: Total number of days spent doing 30 minutes or more of physical activity

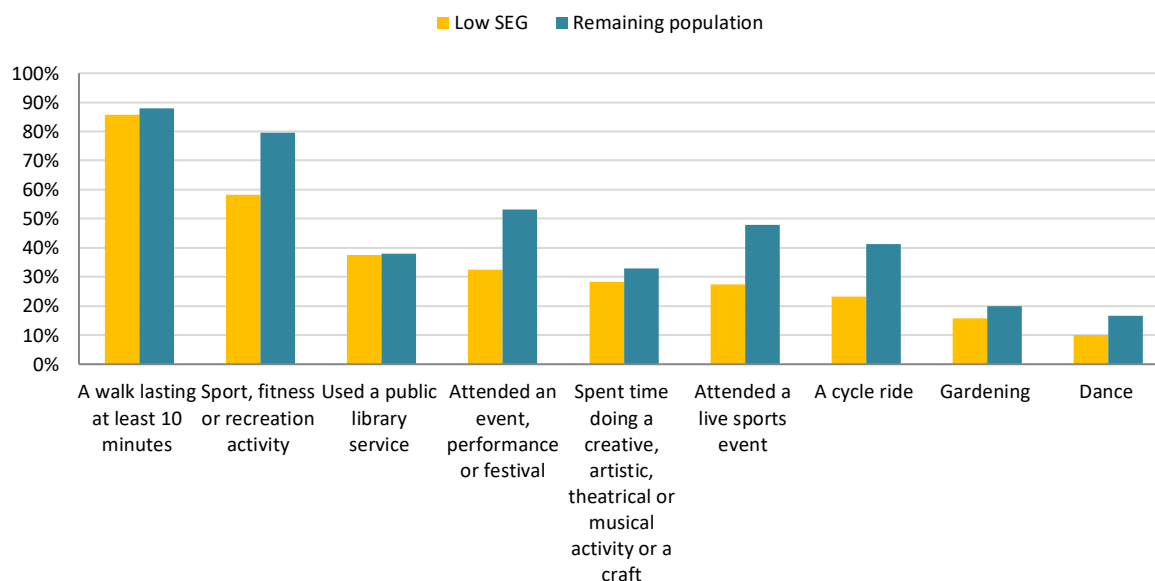


Participation habits before joining university

To understand the current habits and behaviours of students it is important to assess the type of physical activities which students participated in both currently and prior to joining university. Figure 5 displays the range of activities students participated in prior to joining university with walking, gardening, sport and fitness activities, dance and cycling included as options for physical activity. Overall 98% of the 'remaining population' group took part in at least one of these physical activities compared with 96% of the 'low SEG' group. In terms of activity preference, it was a similar picture across both groups with walking (lasting at least ten minutes) being the most popular physical activity followed by sport, fitness and recreational activity.

The spread of participation is broadly similar across groups although the 'remaining population' group were more likely to engage in sport related activities either through participating in sport, attending live sports events, other performances, or festivals or going on a cycle ride. This evidence is further reinforced when removing gardening and walking from the analysis as the participation figure for organised sport and fitness activities (i.e. cycling, dance and sport and fitness activities) drops 12% to 86% for the 'remaining population' group with a more significant decrease of 28% reported for the 'low SEG' group (68%).

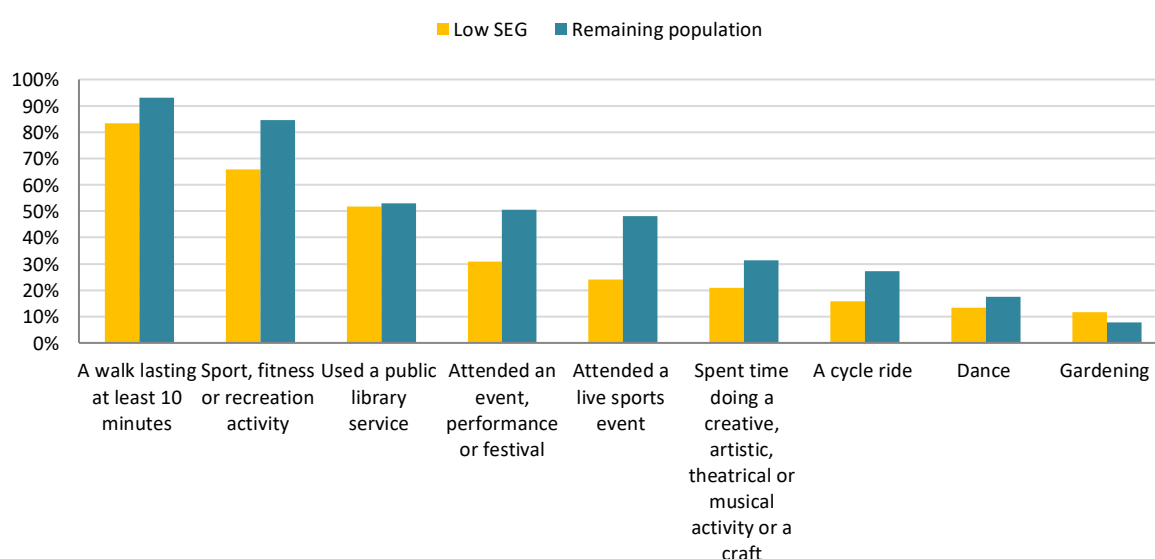
Figure 5: Type of activities students participated in before joining university



Current participation habits

Generally a high proportion of students from both groups were active before attending university and the aforementioned trends are similar for the majority of students since joining university. Figure 6 shows that for the 'remaining population', there was a 5% increase in the number of people that participate in sport, fitness or recreation activity and a decrease in cycle riding of 14%. The 'low SEG' group followed a similar trend with a 7% increase in sport, fitness or recreation and 7% decrease in cycling. The decrease in cycling activity could be because students may not have taken their bikes with them to university due to issues with transport or storage of bikes in their accommodation at university.

Figure 6: Type of activities students currently participate in



Main activity that students participate in

Students were asked to select the main sport or physical activity in which they participate whilst at university, which may or may not be a structured activity delivered by the university. Over 60% of both groups dedicate upwards of three days to their main activity. The most popular activities for 'low SEG' groups were going to the gym (17%), followed by walking (14%), basketball (8%) and football (6%). Similarly the gym (13%) was the most popular for the 'remaining population' group, followed by netball (8%) and football (5%) and Lacrosse (6%). It is though worth noting that certain sports which could be assumed to be more expensive or difficult to access such as golf, sailing and rowing were not sports selected by the 'low SEG' group. The range of sports may have been skewed by the greater number of responses from the 'remaining population' group.

Contrasting views around student participation

The interviews with students provided a contrasting view of their habits and behaviours in relation to physical activity. The results showed that those from 'low SEG' groups were less likely to participate in physical activity both before university and whilst at university. Those from the 'remaining population' group were more likely to have participated prior to university and maintained their pre-existing levels of activity. From their responses, the students can be categorised into three groups:

Firstly, those students that did not participate in any sport or physical activity at all before starting university, and who still do not participate in any sport or physical activity now, of which there were four students. Three of these students were 'low SEG' and for one, their SEG is unknown.

Secondly, there were 13 students who participated in some sport and physical activity prior to starting university, but since starting university their participation levels have either declined, or they have stopped participating altogether. Of these, six were 'low SEG', four were the 'remaining population' and for three the SEG is unknown.

Finally, there were 10 students who did participate in some sport and physical activity prior to university and who have continued to participate at the same level / duration or frequency. Only one of these students was from a 'low SEG', and in contrast, eight of these students were from the 'remaining population' group, and one SEG was unknown. Of these students, most had continued with the same activities that they did previously, but there were some students that had taken up different activities since starting university. For these students, this was due to their change in circumstances since beginning university. Reasons for a change in activity types varied but included, for those students who had moved away from home to attend university, losing contact with friends / team mates, and fewer opportunities to participate in the same activity. For example there was one student (remaining population) that skied regularly prior to starting university, but due to a lack of opportunities in Sheffield, had ceased skiing and since taken up ice hockey and lacrosse. Those commuter students who had continued to live at home and lived locally (in Sheffield) found it easier to continue with their existing activities. For example, one third year student ('low SEG') played football for a local league team prior to university and had continued to play for the same team throughout his time at university. He also did some paid football coaching and refereeing for his old school, which he would not have had the opportunity to do, had he moved away for university.

Several commuter students continued to be members of a gym that they had been attending prior to university.

It should be noted that there were no students interviewed who had increased in their participation levels since starting university.

Further insights on student participation from university stakeholders and student activators

During the focus group with the four Student Activators / Sports Committee members, they described their roles in recruiting new students to sports teams, especially during the sports fair at the start of a new academic year. It was described that students that signed up for sports teams tended to be existing participants, and that it was rare, especially for the more mainstream and popular sports, for new students that had not done the sport before, to sign up for a team when starting university. This insight demonstrates the importance that students are physically active prior to university in order for activity to continue whilst at university. The literature review also showed evidence from previous research that sporting habits are developed pre-university whilst at primary and secondary school.

"If you are going to start playing, you start in your first year, and then you carry on throughout the three years, whereas in your second and third year it's different. In your third year, you probably aren't concentrating on joining a new sport; you are concentrating on exams and what you are going to do after uni. You don't say after your first year, 'oh I think I will join a sport'. You catch people early on when they first start; otherwise I think the opportunity is lost. People don't dip in like that."

"If its things that are more popular, for example hockey, I've never done hockey, I would assume that it's a sport that I would need to have done before. The same with football, rugby, you wouldn't necessarily start these types of sports when you start at uni, cos you would expect everyone else to be so much better than you. And there are so many people doing these sports that you would feel a bit of pressure, being a complete beginner."

3.4 Community Development

Once students arrive at university they have a choice as to whether they engage in physical activity within the university or in the local community. According to the results, 63% of the 'remaining population' group are members of a university sport/fitness club whilst 30% are members of community sports or fitness clubs. Significantly, the figure is only 34% for 'low SEG' groups that have university membership and 19% for community clubs. Overall there are a significantly greater percentage of 'remaining population' members of sports and fitness clubs although the difference is less marked when comparing 'low SEG' students that are members of a community club. This is likely due to the higher proportion of 'low SEG' students that commute to university and therefore their previous activity habits are maintained from within the community where they live.

In terms of volunteering in sport and fitness activities, the 'remaining population' were more likely to have volunteered before (43%) and during (39%) university compared with the 'low SEG' which was 30% on both counts. According to these results, students that volunteered prior to joining university were more likely to volunteer at university whatever their SEG group. This could also potentially be an issue of engagement within university life particularly within 'low SEG' groups and commuter students. For example, only 61% of 'low SEG' students agreed that they felt a part of university life compared with 70% of the normal population group.

Lack of evidence base on low SEG groups to support community development

Sports staff reported that they do not have access to information on SEG or any other details regarding students' background. As a result they cannot target 'low SEG' students, or provide information on their participation levels in comparison to the rest of the student population. The support offered by the support staff is therefore more holistic across all students. A subsidised offer is provided to all students, regardless of economic status, to access low cost facilities. The staff did, however, suggest that having this information around SEG would be useful to enable them to plan interventions, and look at the access and barriers to participation in 'low SEG' groups.

"We need to ask 'do we engage with the rich and not the poor?', 'do we engage equally across all categories?' And the answer at this moment in time is that we don't know, because we don't have access to that bit of student information."

It was suggested that students often look for quality, rather than cost, yet the importance of these different factors across different SEGs was unknown.

"A lot ask for quality over cost. You see this with some of our competitors, so we have Tribe Fitness on our doorstep, where sessions are £10 per session and students go and pay it because of the experience they get, because of the atmosphere that is created within that workspace and that type of environment that we don't provide. So again, it shows the students are willing to pay for quality. The flip side to that is that it is probably a lot less likely to be a student from a low socio-economic background, but we don't have the insight to say categorically how balanced the number of students are across sport compared to the main university body."

Social sport

One of the sports staff described the social aspects of sport as being important for students, particularly in the first year as new students, to enable them to meet people and make friends. He suggested that a focus on sport as a social bonding platform, rather than as something competitive, would encourage more participants as well as help people to develop friendships and reduce isolation.

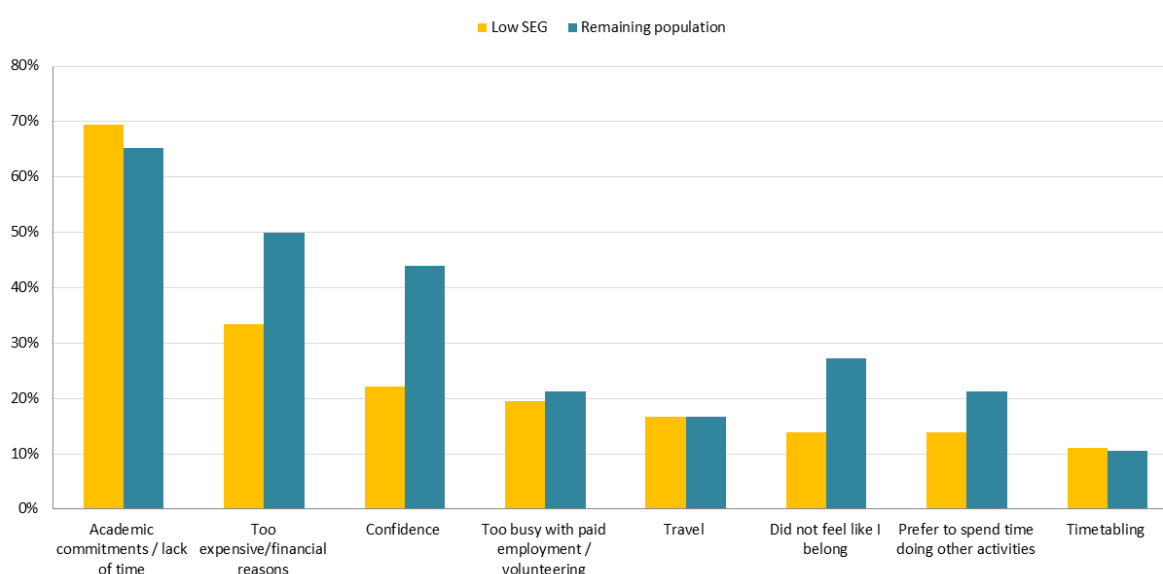
"What people get so caught on is sport being competitive. Everyone thinks if you're gonna play sport at university you have to make the second team, the first team, well what's the point really? It's so much more than that in terms of the social intramural

like people doing teams with their course mates that first year when you're in halls I think is the biggest one where you need to target. I think especially with this group as well if we can put on tournaments where you can use sport and physical activity as a vehicle to meet people in your halls of residence within the first few weeks."

3.5 Barriers to participation

Analysis of the inactive group from the survey results shows, positively, that the majority of students from the 'low SEG' group (75%) and 'remaining population' group (70%) would like to take part in sport and physical activity in future. Clearly there are barriers which prevent this group of students from currently participating. The key barrier to participation in sport and physical activity at university for just over 60% of students in both groups is the 'lack of time' that students have due to their course commitments and related studies. Ten students that were interviewed reported that they had a lack of time for physical activity and sport due to their studies, and for some, having a part time job whilst at university. These included five 'low SEG' students and five from the rest of the population.

Figure 7: Barriers to participation for students that do not participate in sport and physical activity



Cost of university

As anticipated a further barrier to participation is the 'financial cost' of becoming physically active which may include gym membership or the cost of travel to facilities etc. The latter barrier was reported by 33% of students from the 'low SEG' group and half of the 'remaining population' group in the survey which provides evidence that financial constraint are more prevalent for the 'remaining population' students. The sample of inactive students was quite small which could have skewed the results in favour of the 'remaining population'. During the interviews, cost was reported as a barrier by five students, who were all 'low SEG'. These students in particular reported that the cost of university gym facilities / membership was high, and that they could not afford this as a student.

The sports staff reported that cost was a big issue as to why people do not participate, and that even with subsidised facilities, cost was still flagged as an issue by many students. How many of these students were from a 'low SEG' background, however, was unknown, due to sports staff not having insight into SEG, as mentioned earlier.

"We know that as a whole based on the insight that we have, cost is one of the most flagged issues as to why people don't partake in physical activity, but that has always been the case. For example, a standard gym membership at this moment in time is £18, which used to be £12 - even at this price, cost was still flagged as being the predominant issue."

"I think that the cost is probably the main barrier to this group because although they want to access it, can they actually access it is another question."

"One of the main angles to it for us cost-wise, is that for some of the students before coming to university, sport was never something they had to pay for, it was parental led and therefore a lot of the education that we have to do generally speaking, is actually to explain how much it costs to hire a football pitch, to pay for a sports hall, to get a personal training session or to pay a gym instructor. Those sorts of things within their life experience to that point, they have not had to deal with."

Another member of staff also described that the cost of sport is a barrier because there are a number of additional costs associated with sport participation at university – not just membership costs and session fees, but transport, food and drink, plus attending social events such as going out on Wednesday nights with the sports team. It was described that these social aspects were important in developing feelings of belonging and community through sport but the financial cost of these was difficult for some students.

"Everything ramps up. I think that's the issue involved in sport. It is fair enough you can pay and play, I think that's fine with people, but you don't feel a part of that club until you integrate wholly."

If a student has not participated in sport or physical activity prior to joining university then the financial barrier is less penetrable, as described by the student activators / sports committee members during the focus group.

"I think that, unless you have played before Uni, you aren't going to really want to join a team, pay the fees, sign up for a game, if you've never done it before. If you haven't played before and are from a low economic background, you would find it very intimidating, the sports fair itself, and then being asked for that money. It's all quite a lot in one go."

Staff also reported that the increase in tuition fees had an impact on sports participation, with a focus on social participation moving to a more academic focus. Most of the opportunities to play sport have to be funded by students and this is therefore perceived as being an additional expense which is difficult to contemplate given the tuition fees that students already pay. It was described

that within university Ice Hockey, there was a decline in participation in the year the £9,000 fees came in, which was the only decline ever seen in participation in the sport of Ice Hockey in the UK. Yet following that year, participation subsequently increased.

“So, either it was a one-year blip that just happened to coincide with the fees or the message at induction for that group of students said to them something about weighing up their priorities and deciding what is more important ... ' to play sport or get a good grade in your degree?’”

It was suggested that the university has addressed some of the concerns students may have had about balancing those two commitments which may explain the bounce back.

Other barriers

Interestingly, a lack of confidence was the third most reported barrier to participation from the survey results, followed by competing work/volunteering commitments as well as competing preferences for other non-sporting activities such as socialising. In addition, five students that were interviewed reported that they were either not interested in sport and physical activity at all, or that since starting university, their interests had changed. For example, for three students, since attending university their participation had declined as their social life had taken up more time and they had started to go out drinking with friends and enjoy the student lifestyle.

“I chose, you know, to get hammered every night if I'm being brutally honest. I don't really regret it, I just wish I done a bit of both. It's strange because obviously you know every weekend with the lads when I lived in a house of 5 lads we always watched Match of the Day, we always kept up with, you know, the Champions League, we always watched everything, so we kept up with all the sport in terms of following it...we just didn't play it. I went to the sports fair, I signed up, paid my fee and everything, and just didn't turn up to training.” ('low SEG' student)

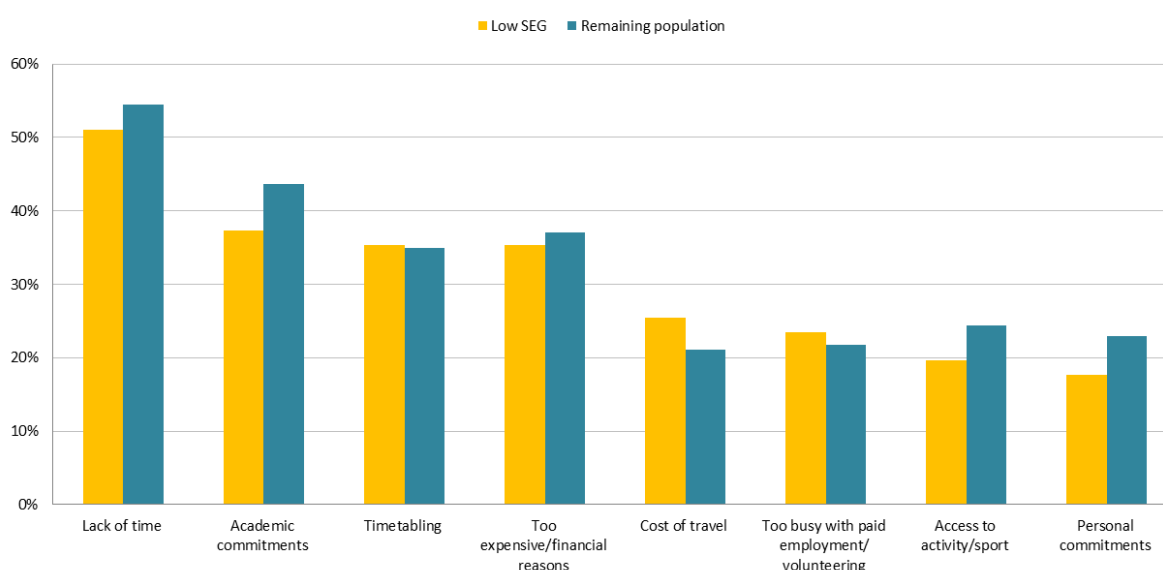
The main survey finding when comparing the 'low SEG' and 'remaining population' group was that a higher number of 'remaining population' students (+22%) deemed that 'lack of confidence' as being a barrier. 28% of students also responded that they did not feel like they 'belong within a sporting/physical activity environment'. These feelings may also be attributable to a lack of confidence but more widely demonstrates that work is needed in universities to change student perceptions and provide an inclusive environment for all students whatever their SEG. 'Other' comments referred to poor mental health and anxiety as a potential barrier which further demonstrates that students need support to overcome mental health problems and improve self-esteem to the extent where they feel confident participating in physical activity and sport.

Active students

When comparing students that are active the results displayed are similar for both the 'low SEG' and 'remaining population' group. Positively, over 60% of students that are currently active also want to participate more than they currently do. The main challenges were the same as the 'low SEG' group

with 'academic commitments' followed by a 'lack of time', 'financial reasons' and 'timetabling' popular responses for students not being able to do more than they already do.

Figure 8: Barriers to participation for students that do participate in sport and physical activity



3.6 Individual development, habits, motivation and readiness to participate in physical activity

To understand the habits and behaviours of students it is important to be able to consider their perceived view of sport and physical activity to assess their relationship with it in relation to a series of Likert Scale questions around the following themes:

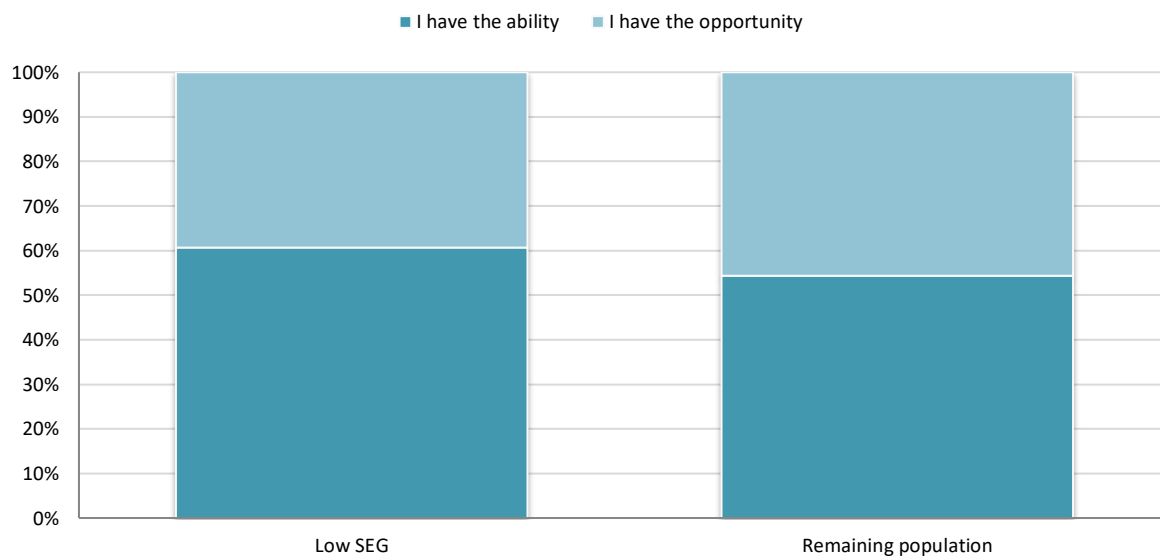
- They have a sustained habit to participate in physical activity;
- They perceive they have the ability to participate in physical activity;
- They perceive that they have opportunities to participate in physical activity;
- It is important to them;
- They enjoy it;
- It is part of their routine; and
- They believe it is typically them.

For the purpose of the analysis we grouped these themes into two categories. The first included points 1-3 above, and was categorised around whether students perceived they had a readiness for physical activity in terms of the necessary ability and opportunities to participate. The second included the remaining four bullet points and considered their habits, view of and relationship with sport and physical activity. This category allows us to consider the perceived importance and prioritisation of sport and physical activity within a student's life. Both categories were compared across the 'low SEG' and remaining population group.

In terms of student ability and opportunities to participate the majority of both groups scored highly (95% of the 'remaining population' group and 88% of the 'low SEG' group) as to whether they agreed

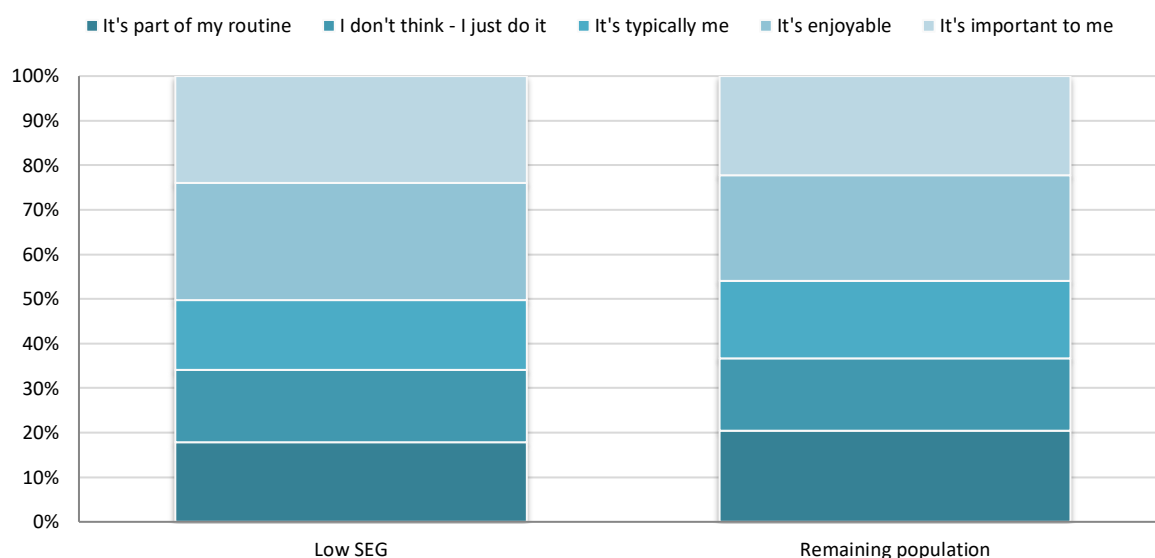
they had the 'ability to participate' in sport and physical activity. As previously stated it is crucial that students perceive that there is a supply of opportunities to enable them to be physically active. Around 80% of the 'remaining population' group agreed that there was sufficient opportunity to play sport although this was only 59% in the 'low SEG' group. Overall the 'remaining population' group scored higher than the 'low SEG' group on both questions with the difference highlighted in Figure 8.

Figure 9: Readiness to participate



In terms of students habits, view of and relationship with sport and physical activity the 'remaining population' group also scored higher overall. The difference was most significant with regards to sport and physical activity being a part of a student's routine. Overall, around 60% of 'low SEG' students and 76% of the 'remaining population' had a sustained relationship with sport which will hopefully lead to lifelong participation in sport and physical activity.

Figure 10: Sport / Physical Activity Habit



In order to achieve a physical activity habit it often requires a specific goal or determination to start and maintain activity. Students were asked in the survey their level of agreement to whether they felt they could achieve most of the goals they set themselves which is a key component of 'individual development'. The results for both groups were similar with 73% of the normal population and 74% of the 'low SEG' group believing they can achieve most of the goals they set themselves. The fact that there is a similar level of determination to start or maintain activity suggests that 'low SEG' students' perception of the opportunities available and financial constraints may act as a more considerable barrier for this group.

Individual development and opportunities

Most students that were interviewed reported that they were happy with their current activity levels and did not have a desire to do more physical activity or sport, including those who did not do any activity at present. Some suggested that they might participate more frequently once they had finished university, as they thought they would have more time. There were three students that suggested they might be more willing to participate if they had more knowledge or awareness on the opportunities available at university, and three students that suggested that they would like to participate more if there were some offers or reductions in the cost of university gym memberships, which would encourage them to join the gym.

"Would like to do more and would join the gym here if there were some offers or discounts. It is quite expensive. I could see me joining if they had some offer on." ('low SEG' student)

"The University needs to increase its advertising of sport and physical activity; I don't see much around the opportunities to take part." ('low SEG' student)

"Although I think university do a good job in advertising when you first start, I think as the year has progressed, the less I have heard about sporting and physical activities. This

means that if I decided at a later date I wanted to start playing, I wouldn't really know how to go about it. So I think more propaganda from the university itself may encourage increased participation." ('remaining population' student)

The student activators / sports committee members suggested that increased communication of university provision, facilities, and social sport sessions was needed in order to encourage new participants to become more active. It was suggested that there needed to be more of a focus on recruiting new participants to sports clubs, as opposed to recruiting people that would be able to compete in teams. One idea put forward was introducing a sports fair for new participants.

"They could do a sports fair for just social sport, or just for the development teams, that would be a bit more chilled out, aimed at people that haven't done it before, as opposed to 'come and play now'. That could be a good idea, targeting it so it isn't current participants that go."

It was also suggested by one member of the sports staff that there is a lack of awareness of the sport provision at the university, particularly amongst students who currently do not participate at all. It was suggested that the use of role models to promote sport, providing examples of individuals who had managed to balance their academic studies and sport participation, would be useful.

"I know you don't want to stereotype people and that's the issue as well but information saying 'if you meet this criteria this is something that we'd recommend you get involved with'. You don't have to push them but 'we recommend you do this sport, it costs not much more than you think you'd pay anyway, and here's a role model who's done this, they study finance and banking but they've got time on the side of this and they've got a first every single year'. Just something to inspire people which I think is lacking."

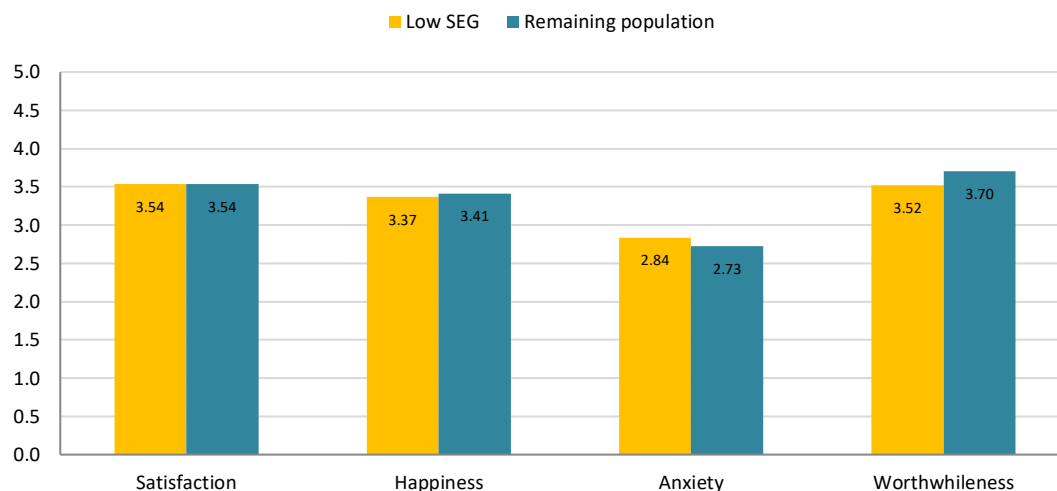
Another staff member also spoke of the benefits of providing opportunities for 'low SEG' students.

"You see real development and quite often they appear to be very committed because it is not something they always get the opportunities to do. They tend to be quite committed and with that they get a lot of development as well and you really see them shine in terms of the playing side and life skills as well. Being part of a team, teamwork, communication and all those areas that come secondary to the sport that is so important and where there is so much benefit for everyone and you really do see them shine through."

3.7 Mental Wellbeing

As part of the survey, students were asked to rate their mental wellbeing on a 5-point Likert scale with '5' being 'completely' and '1' being 'none at all' on the areas of life satisfaction, happiness, anxiousness and worthwhileness. For the purpose of the analysis an average score was created with the higher score a more positive result except in relation to levels of 'anxiousness' where a lower score is preferable.

Figure 11: Mental wellbeing scores



Overall both group's perception of mental wellbeing in the four areas was similar and generally fell into the 'high' threshold, a positive indicator that Sport England use for measuring mental wellbeing. For example, life satisfaction was similar across the two groups with both recording an average score of 3.54. In terms of worthwhileness the average score was slightly higher at 3.7 for the normal population compared with 3.52 for the 'low SEG' group. The normal population on average scored their happiness higher (3.41) compared with the 'low SEG' group (3.36). Perceived anxiety was lower in the normal population (2.72) compared with the 'low SEG' group (2.85). Overall, the normal population perceived their wellbeing to be generally more positive in comparison to the 'low SEG' group.

Previous results from Active Lives show that inactive people on average have lower mental wellbeing scores to their active counterparts. All scores from the inactive group would be categorised as 'medium' scores and therefore lower than the active cohort although the results are potentially unreliable because they are drawn from a very small sample of respondents.

Ten students that were interviewed reported benefits to their mental wellbeing from doing physical activity. This included students that were not currently active, who reported what they either perceived to be potential benefits of participation, or what they had experienced themselves in the past, despite not currently being active. In particular, several students described the potential of being active as a student for reducing the stress of their studies.

"And one of the other things for me is it is having something for me, to take my mind off other things. It is nice to have something that you can do like that to help you relax, and you can do it whenever you need it, if you feel like you need it, you can go to the gym and it always makes me feel better afterwards." ('low SEG' student)

"I actually joined the gym because they said you know like, you know the course that I'm on I could do with something outside of the course to relieve stress, give you another interest, helps you to relax by doing something that's separate from everything else." ('low SEG' student)

Staff reported the importance of sport and physical activity for improving mental wellbeing, and that this is a focus for the sports staff, in working with the university wellbeing service to help support students.

“The wellbeing service is the prime one, we are doing increasing amounts of work with them to try and get student referrals and we are looking at how we might reform our workforce to do better holistic support for health related interventions and generally speaking mental health.”

“The students union are involved, they are trying to push for more funding for workshops and things like this to build confidence - it was an important part of the elections and manifestos for this year.”

The importance of physical activity and sport for mental wellbeing is highlighted by the fact that the university is currently exploring the idea of developing a 'physical activity advisor' role that sits alongside a student support advisor and academic advisor. If a student is highlighted within a certain group or mental health group they would be allocated a physical activity advisor alongside other support services and they would then facilitate a physical activity intervention to benefit that student.

4. CONCLUSIONS

For the purposes of this research and identifying the 'low SEG' group, the list of LSOAs¹ in England was placed in order and divided into equal parts called percentiles. The bottom 20% are the most deprived areas and are identified as the 'low SEG' group, and the remaining 80% are defined as the 'remaining population'. It should be noted that the scope of this research did not allow us to examine in detail the influence of different demographic factors within the 'low SEG' group. As was identified by the literature review, there is a need to acknowledge the diversity of 'low SEGs', and whilst there is evidence to show that the group as a whole are more likely to be inactive, people classed as 'low SEG' should not be treated as one homogenous group. However, the following broad conclusions can be made from this research, and figure 12 summarises the key differences between the 'low SEG' and the 'remaining population' groups from the data. Due to the relatively low response and the lack of engagement from the majority of universities to the survey, it should also be noted that the results only provide an indication of the habits and behaviours of students from a small sample of universities. Similarly, the small sample size for the qualitative data allows for some rich and in-depth data, but cannot be seen as representative of the views of wider populations or indeed from students at different universities.

Overall the two groups in the survey sample are relatively similar with some subtle differences which may potentially impact on their habits and behaviour in relation to physical activity. The demographics of the sample are broadly similar although there are a greater number of BAME students in the 'low SEG' group. Proportionally there was a broad geographical spread with clusters of respondents mainly around inner city areas. Crucially there are a greater number of commuter students in the 'low SEG' group which undoubtedly influences student behaviour in relation to sport and physical activity at university. This is partly because of the time it takes to commute to and from university, but also because they are likely to already be engaged in their local community and therefore their social habits may not necessarily change as much when compared to students that

live on or close by to campus. This was also reflected in the interview data, as those low SEG students that were active tended to be commuter students who continued to participate in their pre-existing activities.

Both groups are active cohorts within the survey data, although there were also a small proportion of inactive groups within each subset. The type of methodology employed may have encouraged a higher number of active students to respond. This is because the survey was a physical activity and sport survey which was distributed by universities and therefore active students may have been more likely to complete the survey. Traditionally hard to reach inactive groups are more difficult to engage and therefore a larger study which uses a random sample approach co-ordinated across universities may help to reach such groups in future.

In contrast, within the interview data, the results showed that those from 'low SEG' groups were less likely to participate in physical activity both before university and whilst at university. Those from the 'remaining population' group were more likely to have participated prior to university and maintained their pre-existing levels of activity.





































The results provide some evidence that the 'remaining population' group did have a more sustained habit to participate in sport and physical activity because they had a greater 'readiness' for participation and had a stronger habit, view of and relationship of physical activity and sport. It is clear from the interview findings that these habits are formed before students attend university as it seems that students that do not participate in sport and physical activity prior to university continue to be inactive when they arrive, plus the 'remaining population' students that were interviewed were more likely to participate prior to university and to continue their levels of participation. The survey results include further evidence of this as the type of activities that people participate in before university are similar to those they enjoy when at university. The focus group with student activators / sports committee members suggested that new students are unlikely to take up a sport that they have not done before, and even more so as they enter their second or third years of university, as they become more focused on their studies.

On the whole the 'remaining population' group scored higher in relation to physical wellbeing in the survey, as they participate more often at university and they are also more likely to be members of university sport and active within clubs as both participants and volunteers. Notwithstanding this the 'low SEG' group were not too far behind and therefore the likelihood is that a greater number of inactive students as well as commuter students, and those that didn't agree that they had the opportunities to participate, tipped the balance in favour of the 'remaining participation' group.

Perception of opportunities was significantly lower for the 'low SEG' group although there were no qualitative findings which help to explain why this response was more prevalent within this group. The results around barriers to participation did not show any significant difference between the two groups. For example, financial barriers were actually more frequent in the 'remaining population' group within the survey. However it is important to note that a number of barriers exist that either prevent students from participating or reduce the amount of time or opportunities they have to participate. Financial barriers were described as significant by sport staff and the sport activators / committee members in the qualitative data.

Both mental wellbeing and individual development scored similar, although there were noted issues around a 'lack of confidence' as a barrier to participation for both groups and particularly with the 'remaining population' group, which would require further investigation. Greater awareness of the impact that mental wellbeing has on participation in physical activity needs to be addressed as it is clear that this affects all students regardless of their SEG. Interestingly, for the individual development measure both scored equally in that they 'can achieve most of the goals that they set themselves'. If this is genuinely the view and approach of 'low SEG' students then it appears that their perception of available opportunities to participate in physical activity is a significant barrier. Consequently, challenging this barrier should be a logical first step for universities to improve opportunities for 'low SEG' groups.

Figure 12: Summary of results

	 Low SEG	 Remaining Population
Outcomes		
 Physical wellbeing		
 Mental wellbeing		
 Community development		
 Individual development		
Barriers to participation		
 Cost		
 Lower perception of opportunities		
 Lack of confidence		
 Lack of time		
Habits		
 Commuter student		
 Readiness to participate		
 Relationship with physical activity		
Participation		
 Physically active		
 Uni club members		
 Volunteers		
Key	 Similar outcome  Higher proportion of respondents compared with comparator group  Positive outcome compared with comparator group	