
Inquiry into Participation in Sport and Physical Activity

Evidence from the Sports Council for Wales

Dr Rachel Hughes, February 2010

Introduction

The Sports Council for Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Assembly's Inquiry into Participation in Sport and Physical Activity. Sport and physical activity has the capacity to positively impact on the nation's health, influence educational attainment and behaviour, engage disaffected young people, and serve as a positive capacity building tool for social inclusion. Sport and physical activity is an important strand in the mix of factors which add value to life in our communities.

Background

The Sports Council for Wales is the national agency with responsibility for the development of sport and physical recreation. Our job is to facilitate increased participation, improved sporting performance, and raised standards in sport and physical recreation in Wales.

In our Corporate Plan, 2009-2011, we outline a sporting vision for Wales (see *Box 1*). We recognise that there are a number of different factors that contribute to achieving our aims, and we believe are partners, namely local authorities and national governing bodies of sport, have a key role in delivering this vision.

Box 1: Sports Council for Wales' *Sporting Vision*

- We achieve systematic and continuing success across a range of Olympic, Paralympic, and home country sport bringing enormous pride and enjoyment to our public;
- Children and young people have the best possible PE experiences and opportunities to practice their skills extra-curricular, and to further develop them in our communities;
- Adults take responsibility for their own lives and engage in active participation in our communities;
- Sport and physical recreation is mainstreamed within the policies of public authorities to ensure joined-up thinking and increased opportunities to participate;
- National, regional, and local facilities are planned in such a way as to be sustainable and provide quality experiences for those who use them;
- Wales' coaches and teachers are trained with technical and people skills in order to provide the best possible experiences for those in their care.

Source: SCW (2009a) *Sports Council for Wales: Corporate Plan, 2009-2011*, Cardiff

Participation in Sport and Physical Activity: the importance of robust measurement

In working towards this vision, research outcomes are instrumental in shaping sports policy and practice. Research is a core function within the Sports Council for Wales; we have a long history of providing high quality evidence on issues, processes, and outcomes to inform the development and delivery of policy relating to sport in Wales.

In Wales, we recognised very early on, for the need to establish a firm foundation of empirical evidence on the extent of involvement in sport. The Sports Council for Wales was the forerunner in creating bespoke population-based surveys on sporting matters. We have an impressive suite of longitudinal data, spanning over twenty years. This invaluable resource has enabled us to measure and monitor trends in sports participation at a national, regional and local level, as well as identify issues and gaps in evidence.

We survey the Welsh population on sporting matters from the age of seven. Seven to sixteen year olds are surveyed through our *Active Young People Survey*, and the adult population (15+years) is surveyed through our *Active Adults Survey*; both of which are undertaken on a biennial basis. *Box 2* describes the key facets of our *Active Adults Survey*.

Box 2: Active Adults Survey

- The fieldwork is undertaken on a biennial basis and over a 12 month period to allow for seasonal differences in sports participation.
- The sample size is 22,000 (which equates to c.1,000 per local authority area).
- Adults, aged 15+, are interviewed face-to-face in their home.
- The survey length is 25 minutes.
- Data is collected on the following topics:
 - *Participation levels, and frequency of participation in sport;*
 - *The types of activity participated in;*
 - *Club membership and participation;*
 - *Barriers to, and motivations for, participation;*
 - *Latent demand for different activities;*
 - *Volunteering in clubs and school clubs;*
 - *Other leisure activities undertaken;*
 - *Demographic information.*

Source: SCW (2010) *Sports Council for Wales: Research Strategy, 2010-2013*, Cardiff

Sport Northern Ireland, in partnership with the Department of Arts Culture and Leisure, has developed a similar survey, *Northern Ireland Adult Sport and Physical Activity Survey (SAPAS)*, in order to provide statistically robust data on participation, club membership, volunteering, coaching attitudes to sport and spectating. There have been limited attempts to measure participation rates of adults in Northern Ireland; SAPAS will provide robust data and reliably enhance our understanding of sport and physical activity patterns, and determinants across the Northern Irish population. This is a very positive step forward and will enable sports policy and practice to be formulated from an evidence-informed position.

Sporting Infrastructure: people and place

Wales, like any other country, varies significantly in terms of its sporting infrastructure: both people and place.

Our research¹ shows, for example, that there are significant variations in participation across Wales: in Cardiff and Gwynedd, over 65% of the adult population² regularly³ participate in sport and physical recreation; this compares to 26% and 30% in Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taff respectively.

There are also disparities in levels of participation by gender group: 54% of adult men in Wales regularly participate in sport and physical recreation; this compares to 47% of adult women. This pattern varies considerably geographically. Five local authorities have a difference of 10 percentage points or more between adult male and female participation: Newport (18% points), Swansea (17% points), Merthyr Tydfil, (15% points), Torfaen (14% points), and Bridgend (10% points). Adult male participation is higher than female participation in all but three authority areas (Anglesey, Wrexham and Carmarthenshire).

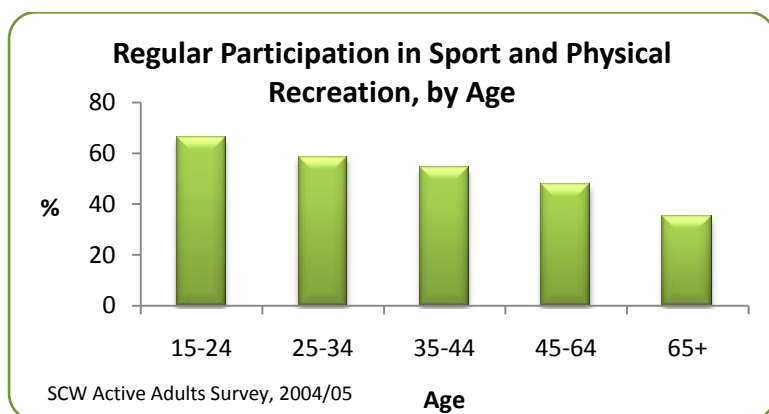
Similarly, as can be seen in *Figure 1*, there is variation in the levels of participation by age: 66% of 15-24 year olds regularly participate in sport and physical recreation, this drops with age to 35% of 65+ year olds who regularly participate.

¹ Sports Council for Wales' *Active Adults Survey*, 2004/05.

² Adult population: 15+ years.

³ Participate in sport and physical recreation at least once in the last four weeks.

Figure 1



The nature of activity that is being undertaken tends to vary over a person's life course. Participation in recreational walking, for example, increases with age.

There is also a clear relationship between participation and social class. The highest levels of participation are seen in socio-economic group (SEG) AB and the lowest in SEG E.

Similar geo-demographic patterns of participation in sport and physical recreation are exhibited by children and young people (see *SCW, 2007, 2009b*).

Through strategic monitoring we know, however, that participation in sport among the Welsh adult population has remained relatively static over recent years. The sporting sector in Wales, similar to that of Northern Ireland, faces a big challenge: *Climbing Higher*, the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for sport and physical activity, details a series of ambitious targets for sports participation. Unlike our work with children and young people⁴, our contact with adults in Wales is far more disparate, and our understanding of the adult (non)sporting population is relatively limited.

In this context, and utilising the data from our *Active Adults Survey*, we have developed an insight tool that segments the Welsh (non)sporting population into 12 distinct groups. This enables us to better understand the (non)sporting adult population (their consumer behaviour, the brands they prefer, their preferred methods of communication, their preferred sporting activities, their likelihood to volunteer in sport, their barriers to participation). It also enables us to show how the sporting segments are distributed locally, regionally, and nationally, and use the segmentation to help make strategic and tactical decisions about who to target and where.

⁴ The Sports Council for Wales works to improve physical literacy and increase sports participation by children and young people through the educational setting. This is primarily facilitated through our *Dragon Sport*, *5x60*, and PE and School Sport programmes.

For each of the segments, a six page *pen portrait* has been developed which describes the segment's key attributes. Examples of two of the pen portraits can be seen in the Appendices.

The profile of the Welsh population by sporting segment can be seen in *Table 1*. What this demonstrates is geographical differentiation across the different regions of Wales. 'John and Anne' and 'Huw', for example, tend to be more prevalent in the rural areas of Wales, whereas, 'Tony' tends to be more prevalent in the Valleys areas of South Wales. We have found utilising the segmentation tool at a local authority extremely illuminating. Cardiff and Blaenau Gwent are two local authority areas within the South East Wales region; as can be seen from *Figures 2 and 3*, however, they display very different sporting segmentation profiles.

Table 1: Profile of the Welsh Population by Sporting Segment

		% of population							
		Wales	North Wales	South West Wales	South East Wales	Valleys	Metro-politan Wales	Rural North	Rural Heartland
1	Huw	3.2	3.8	4.7	2.2	0.2	1.5	4.9	9.5
2	John & Ann	11.6	16.5	14.3	8.1	3.4	8.1	21.3	22.5
3	Christine	12.6	10.7	11.5	14.0	17.1	13.5	8.5	7.9
4	Mark	6.9	7.0	5.8	7.3	4.4	9.2	6.7	5.3
5	Bob & Betty	7.3	10.5	8.3	5.5	2.7	6.4	13.7	10.7
6	Tony	11.6	9.1	11.1	13.0	19.2	11.0	6.7	6.8
7	Lisa	12.5	10.2	10.4	14.5	15.0	15.0	7.9	7.2
8	Siân	7.2	9.3	8.4	5.8	2.6	6.9	11.1	11.2
9	Gav	3.9	3.2	3.5	4.4	5.3	4.3	2.7	2.3
10	Dot	9.4	7.7	9.5	10.1	14.4	9.0	6.0	6.2
11	Rhys	2.8	2.9	3.1	2.6	1.0	3.2	3.4	3.8
12	Steve	10.9	9.1	9.4	12.5	14.8	11.9	7.2	6.6

Cardiff is a relatively young population who tend to be physically active. The majority of Blaenau Gwent's population, however, is contained within just five sporting segments, and these segments tend to be less physically active.

What this allows us to do is ascertain what the population looks like, and importantly enables us to make decisions about which segments of the population we can have the biggest impact in terms of increasing participation levels in sport and physical activity. The *pen portraits* provide valuable insight on the (non)sporting behaviours of each segment (barriers to participation, preferred methods of communication, likelihood to volunteer in sport etc.) and act as a tool to enable resources to be targeted more effectively.

Figure 2

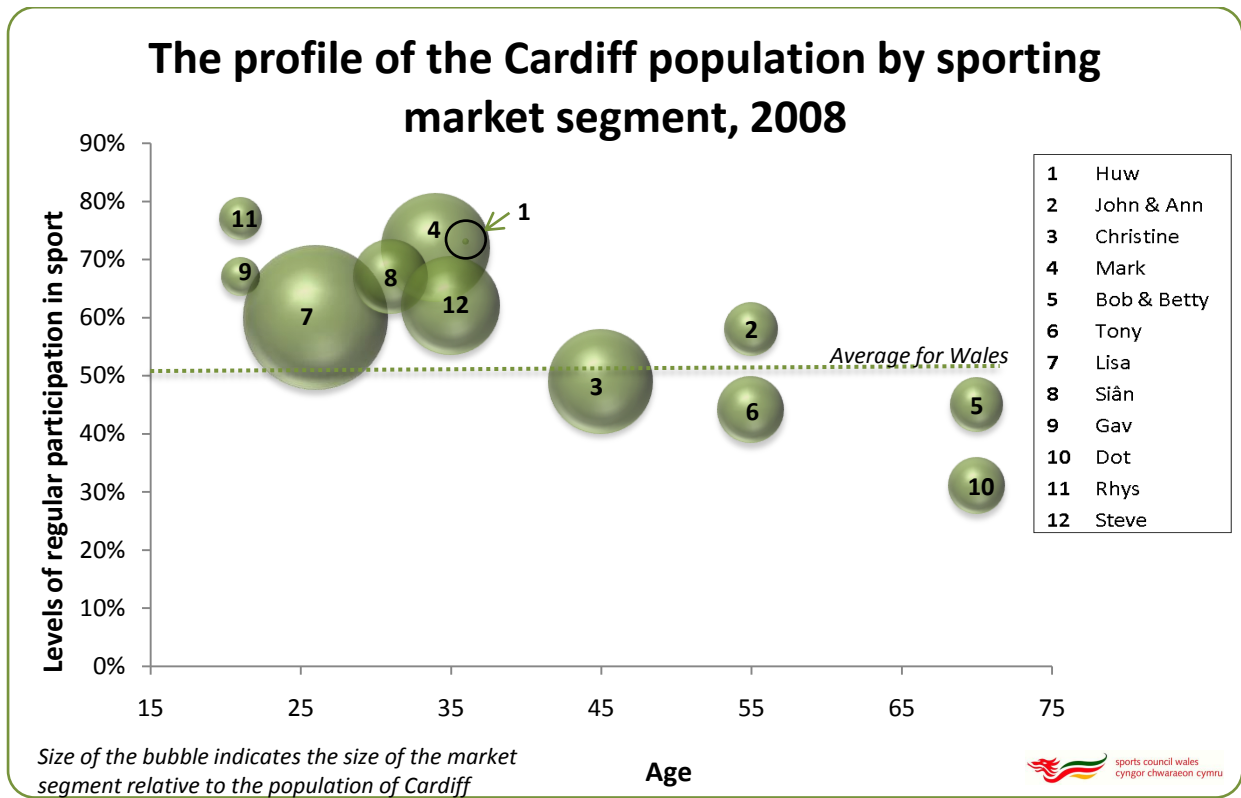
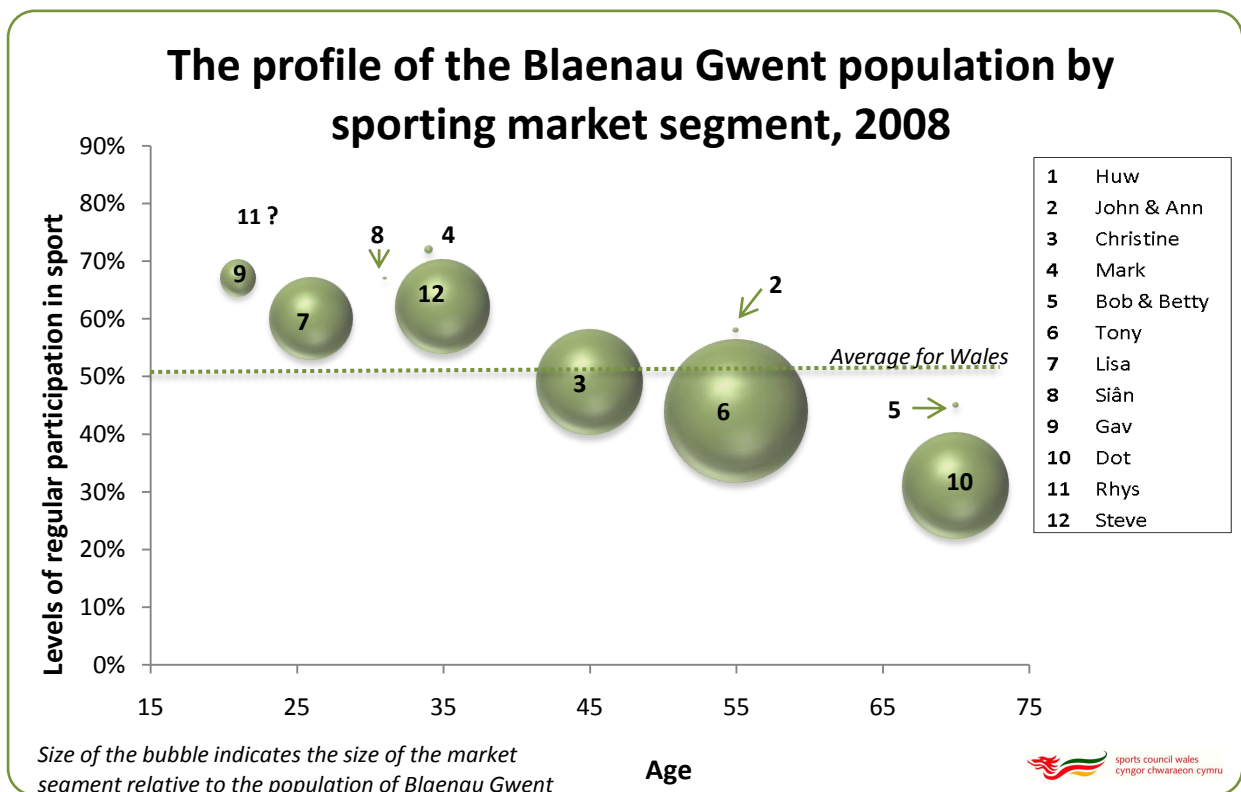


Figure 3



In Wales, although we would advocate that this is directly transferable to the Northern Ireland context, the Welsh Assembly Government's policies seek to make a difference across Wales as a whole; the emphasis across the regions will, by necessity and as our participation data demonstrates, be different. Local solutions need to be found for local issues.

In order to better reflect local needs, the Sports Council for Wales has moved towards a decentralised approach to sports delivery and development. If the challenging Government targets are to be achieved, then local innovation is required.

To help facilitate this, we have created Local Authority Partnership Agreements (LAPAs) between the Sports Council for Wales and each of the 22 local authorities in Wales. This is the start of a new approach to partnership working, developing and embedding shared values, common goals and joint aspirations in addressing the challenges of achieving a 'better, fitter and healthier Wales'. The LAPA process therefore seeks to build on the SCW's existing relationships with Local Authorities, which have already ensured the successful implementation of initiatives such as *Dragon Sport*, *5x60* and *Community Chest*, whilst encouraging new and innovative approaches of engaging with individuals and communities. We have challenged Local Authorities to consider how sport and physical recreation can be made an integral part of their service planning and provision. The LAPA provides a framework for addressing the diverse and varying needs of our numerous communities, with the philosophy of developing 'local solutions' to local issues'.

Sharing Knowledge

Although we are advocating a devolved and regional approach to sports development and delivery, this does not mean that issues in certain localities are unique. Some areas will share similar characteristics (this is where the market segmentation tool is useful in identify similarities). Our role is to facilitate the transfer of learning and knowledge to ultimately enable an increase participation in sport and physical activity. There are a number of ways in which information and learning is shared, both within Wales and between sports councils.

- We share 'good practice' case studies both internally and externally. This enables others to learn and develop from what works and why;
- We disseminate sports participation data and research findings;
- We distribute e-newsletters to partners;
- We share our Board papers with Sport Northern Ireland;

-
- The UK sports councils are involved in an annual research symposium where the focus is on sharing information, practice, addressing common issues, and collaborating in research;
 - We have, and welcome, a close working relationship with Sport Northern Ireland. This reciprocal relationship has enabled sharing of ideas relating to research, policies and programmes, and management and governance issues.

Conclusion

Increasing levels of participation in sport and physical activity is an important issue, and the Sports Council for Wales welcomes the opportunity to share our experiences from a Welsh-perspective. Wales has many synergies with Northern Ireland and we believe that much of our work and understanding is transferable. We have forged close working relationships with Sport Northern Ireland and will continue to share policy and practice on sporting issues. We would be more than happy to discuss any aspect of this response with Members and/or officials.

Dr Rachel Hughes

Research and Evaluation Manager
Sports Council for Wales
Sophia Gardens
Cardiff
CF11 9SW

15th February 2010

Appendices