



YOUTH
SPORT
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YST RESEARCH

Insight driving innovation and impact

Creating Positive Experiences of Competition

August 2020

**SCHOOL
GAMES**

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Introduction

Sports competitions can provide **positive outcomes** for young people. They can support the physical, emotional, social and personal development towards a **life-long enjoyment and engagement in physical activity**. These include important life skills such as leadership, teamwork, empathy and conflict resolution. However, sports competitions also have the capacity to foster **negative outcomes**. These can be too often seen in examples of overly aggressive behaviour, rejection, fear of failure and the development of a negative mindset.

Understanding **when** and **how** sports competition provide both positive and negative outcomes is vital in our ability to design and deliver experiences that effectively meet a young person's **motivation, competence, and confidence** levels.

At the heart of provision for young people should be the creation of positive experiences that provide young people with a platform to develop a life-long love of physical activity and sport. Understanding what makes a **'Positive Experience of Competition'** for **young people** will allow practitioners to plan, deliver, and facilitate competitions that not only elicit positive experiences, but gives young people the best possible chance to develop life skills and remain active throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

The School Games aims to provide every child with a positive experience in an environment where the young person's **motivation, competence and confidence** are at the centre of the competition.



PRINCIPLES OF COMPETITION

- 1** The young person's motivation, competence and confidence are at the centre of the competition.
- 2** The focus is on the process rather than the outcome (on the learning and values development of the young person rather than the result).
- 3** Volunteers, leaders and officials are appropriately trained and display behaviours reflective of the nature of the competition.
- 4** The environment is safe and creates opportunities to learn and maximise social development.
- 5** The facility and the environment that is created for the competition reflects the motivations, competence and confidence of the young people and format of the competition.

Competitions should focus on the process, learning and development of young people. If delivered appropriately, competitions can promote positive youth development. In 2019 the Youth Sport Trust produced an [Approaches to Competition resource](#) which identified eight themes across different alternative competition formats that could be used to support wider development of young people through competition such as adapting the format to increase motivation, widening the competition environment to improve health and adding fun elements to engage new audiences.

This creates a focus on wider outcomes for young people above short-term measures of simply winning or losing any given competition. For a positive experience of competition to occur, young people need to be prepared with the relevant and necessary support so that no young person enters a competitive environment not ready or able to achieve success. What it means for a young person to be “ready” to take part in a competitive environment, will be explored in greater detail through this report.

About the Pilot Programme

This pilot explored what makes a positive experience for young people, focusing on the importance of all stages involved in the design and delivery of sports competitions. The pilot focused on how young people are **selected** and **prepared** for competition, how competition environments can be appropriately designed to meet the **motivations** of different young people, and how the competition environment impacts on the **perceived experience** of competition by young people.

To do this, key stakeholders at the forefront of the pilot were:

- **Children and Young People** participating in School Games competitions.
- **Primary and Secondary school teachers** who play a vital role in the selection, preparation and support of young people for competition.
- **Parents/Guardians** who play a vital role in supporting young people through competition.
- **School Games Organisers (SGOs)** who are at the heart of arranging competitions for schools in their respective geographical area. Each SGO engaged with primary and secondary schools to run separate events which implemented a new pilot approach.

About the Research

YST Research undertook an evaluation of the pilot. The research evaluated what worked well and less well during the pilot (process evaluation) and aimed to understand the extent to which outcomes were achieved (outcome evaluation) in improving young people's experience of competition.

The research combined quantitative methods (e.g. survey responses) and qualitative methods (e.g. interviews, ethnographic observations) to gather data at different time points on the following sources:

- **Secondary evidence** – A literature review of the topic, to provide SGO's with a Resource Document on the importance of a positive experience of competition
- **Teacher Insight** – School Games Competition teacher survey (N=325) completed before competition visits
- **Qualitative insight from competition events**– Gathered by speaking with Young People, Teachers, and Parents during event visits
- **SGO Insight** – reflecting on their respective projects and evaluating their efficacy

This report has been produced by Youth Sport Trust Research. The intention of the report is to:

- Review the baseline landscape in attitudes and approaches towards School Games competitions.
- Evaluate the impact of the pilot project, with insight gathered from young people, teachers, School Games Organisers and Youth Sport Trust observations.
- Provide recommendations to successfully implement and embed a positive experience of competition within a school setting.

Pilot Programme Reach

Across the pilot, **11 SGOs** worked with primary and secondary schools within their respective SGO area, to conduct events which introduced a new approach to competition. The overall reach of those who participated is as follows:



Primary Schools

- 56 competition events delivered across the country
- 126 primary schools worked with
- 3681 primary school pupils participated in competitions
 - 47% female pupils
 - 6% from Black, Asian, or Ethnic Minority (BAME) backgrounds
 - 6% with a special educational need or disability (SEND)
- 181 primary school teachers worked with

3681

PRIMARY SCHOOL
PUPILS PARTICIPATED

181

PRIMARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS WORKED
WITH

Secondary Schools

- 31 competition events delivered across the country
- 98 secondary schools worked with
- 1195 secondary school pupils participated in competitions
 - 46% female pupils
 - 5% from Black, Asian, or Ethnic Minority (BAME) backgrounds
 - 6% with a special educational need or disability (SEND)
- 98 secondary school teachers worked with

1195

SECONDARY SCHOOL
PUPILS PARTICIPATED

98

SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS WORKED
WITH

Baseline Landscape of School Games Competitions

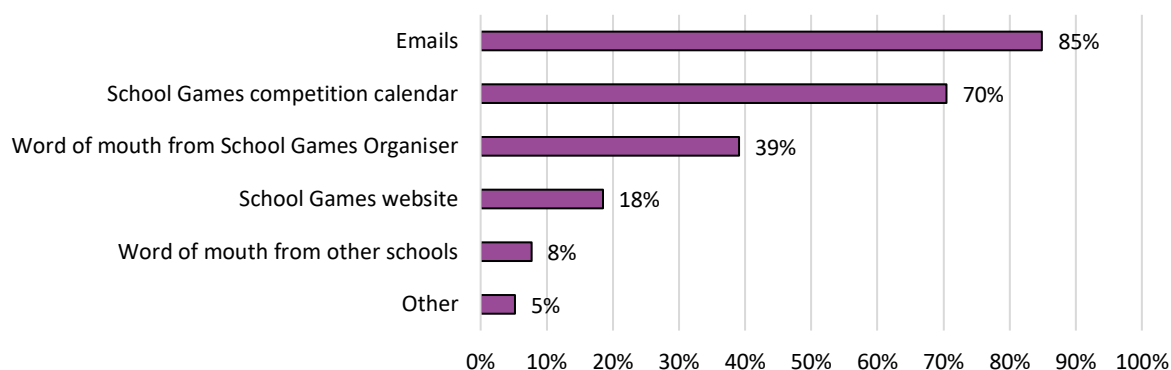
In order to get an accurate landscape of teachers' current practices and approaches undertaken during School Games Competitions, YST Research conducted a short survey which was completed by teachers before they engaged in the pilot competition, or via the School Games platform (for any teacher outside of the pilot).

The survey was completed by 325 teachers/school staff in total (52% female, 47% male; 1% Prefer not to say), of which 81% of respondents had six years or more experience of working in sport with young people. The survey was designed to understand teacher's approaches and attitudes towards the following three topics:

1. School Games Competitions – Logistics and Motivations

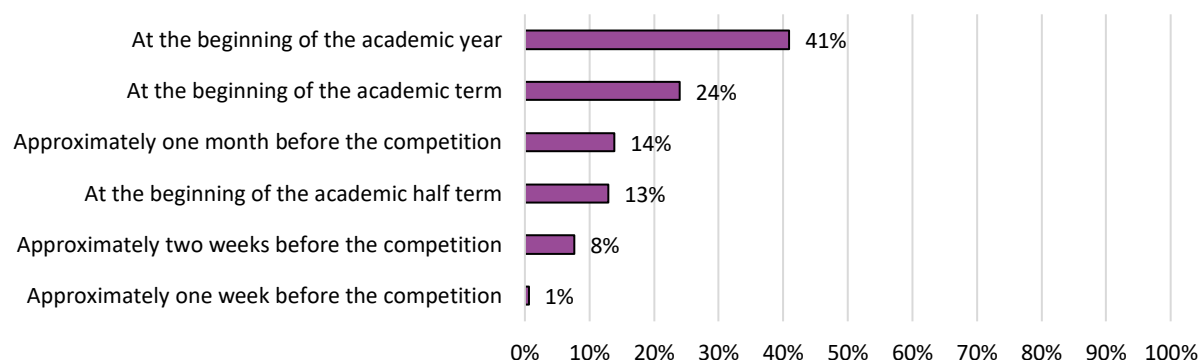
First, teachers were asked how they find out about School Games competitions. Whilst teachers largely reported finding out via email (85%) and via the School Games calendar (70%), it is interesting that **the School Games website is only used for competition information by less than 1 in 5 teachers.**

Typically, how do you find out about upcoming School Games competitions?



Nearly two-thirds (65%) of teachers find out about the School Games competitions at least one term in advance. However, there does remain nearly one in ten (9%) teachers who find out no more than two weeks in advance. The learnings from this are that **the earlier teachers find out about competitions, the more targeted and structured they can be in their preparation.**

Typically, when do you find out about upcoming School Games competitions?



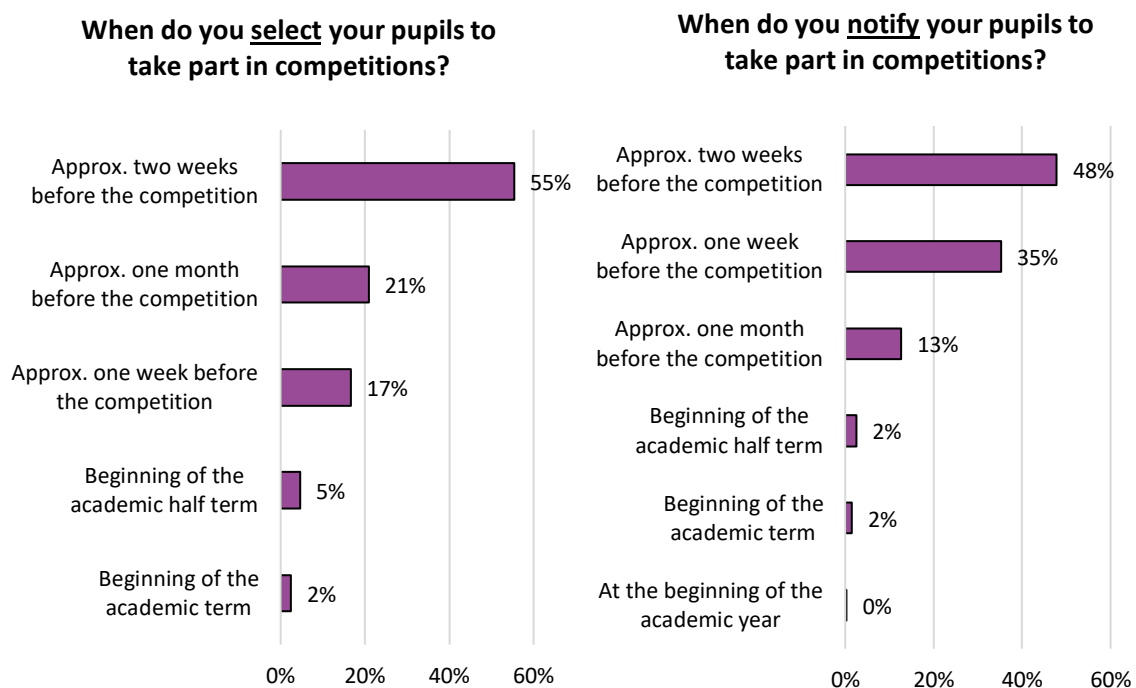
When reporting the information that they are provided with prior to School Games competitions, teachers' responses were dominated by logistical information (i.e. location, date/time of event, number of children required). Alongside this, a key response was that teachers were provided with the rules/format of the competition, which can provide in part essential information to equip teachers with an understanding of which pupils to select and help both teachers and young people with the key preparation for the competition.

Additionally, when reporting their key motivations to enter pupils into School Games competitions, teachers overwhelmingly reported that they wanted the young people to have "Experience of competition/representing school" (N=187). A large proportion reported that they wanted to "Provide all pupils with an opportunity to participate (N=95)" with "enjoyment" reported by 41 teachers.

2. Selection of pupils

A key question asked to teachers was *how* they typically selected pupils for competitions. Most commonly, teachers reported that they selected pupils based on their attendance at extracurricular clubs (N=109) or from the pupils offering interest (N=66), which suggested the pupils' motivation to compete. Other criteria for teachers were ability (N=92), Trials (N=29), or Behaviour in school (N=25). Meanwhile, a selection of teachers reported that it was dependent on the competition, in which the key learning is that each of the above approaches are valid methods, but the *manner* in which they are implemented, to maximise the positive experience of the pupil, is key.

In addition, an interesting finding was the subtle difference between teachers selecting the pupils and notifying them to take part in the competition. Whilst 83% of teachers reported selecting pupils at least two weeks prior to the competition, only 65% of teachers reported that they notify the pupils with at least two weeks' notice. This suggests that this gap between this selection and notification to pupils could be closer and better used to help them prepare for competition.



Finally, teachers were asked what information they communicate to selected pupils ahead of a competition. The dominant theme from all was centred around the logistics of the competition (N=268), such as the time, date, venue of the competition, what kit is required etc. Some teachers did report that they communicated the expectations/values from the school (N=39) ahead of the competition, and a minority did report that they would communicate what preparation was required in advance (N=22).

Preparation of pupils

With regard to the preparation of pupils for competition, teachers were asked what outcomes they aim to achieve. Encouragingly, responses closely aligned with the key elements of physical literacy, with teachers' key outcomes including: Knowledge/Understanding (N=124), Physical competence (N=83), Confidence (N=68), and Enjoyment (N=56). Teachers also reported the importance of respect/values (N=33) and Teamwork (N=25) in their preparation. The key learnings from this show how teachers' motivations are aligned with the elements of physical literacy when considering the preparation of pupils for competition, yet the inclusion of all five elements is rarely seen together. Those who reported that they were not able to prepare pupils prior to competition primarily highlighted that time and staff constraints prevented them from doing so.

Finally, teachers were asked how they support parents/carers to help prepare young people for competitions. 59% of teachers reported that they do not support parents in helping young people for competitions. Of those who did support parents, responses were primarily centred around logistical information and support (e.g. equipment, travel required) including a letter sent home to consent to play. Teachers did also report that on occasions they provided parents with information to practice at home with their child, which helps their physical competence ahead of the competition.

Competition Event Visits

YST staff members attended a selection of competition event visits, co-ordinated by the School Games Organisers in their respective SGO area. They were challenged to identify barriers to providing positive experiences of competition they face locally and apply an intervention or alternative method of delivery aimed at changing the experience young people have for the better.

In total, 26 intervention across both primary and secondary settings were delivered. Examples of competition events, and their respective purpose included:

➤ Primary Schools:

Barrier to Positive Experience: High levels of anxiety from young people at competitions.

New Approach: Training year 5 young leaders to support the delivery of personal challenges as intra competition for schools prior to inter school year 3/4 sports hall athletics competition. The same young leaders from each school will also be facilitating the inter school competition, acting as a familiar face.

Barrier to Positive Experience: Schools in the area have a high dropout rate at School Games competitions.

New Approach: Aimed at minimising the risk of schools dropping out, schools are set to self-grade their level of preparation for competition with the support of the SGO, which will support the SGO to best decide competition structure based on levels of preparation, not purely physical competence.

Barrier to Positive Experience: Young people turning up to competitions not appropriately prepared to take part.

New Approach: Hosting a themed Multi skills festival. SGO is sending pre-event information to schools to send home before this festival. The information pack will include: Why it is important to get children active, why it is important to develop fundamental movement skills, give example activities that their child will be taking part in and ask parents to practice this with their child before they arrive, so the children are more competent and feel more confident.

Barrier to Positive Experience: Appealing to different young people who would not usually attend competitions.

New Approach: Working together with a new basketball coach in the area to go into schools to offer preparation support and clubs to primary schools. This intervention will explore the opportunity for SGO's to build relationships with external coaches in schools in a bid to best support/prepare young people for competition.

Barrier to Positive Experience: Young people selected for competitions that would not benefit most from the intended outcomes.

New Approach: Delivery of a multi-sport competition for schools. Sports involved in the competition will not be communicated to the schools until young people have been selected. Schools can select young people who would most benefit from attending based on SGO providing

the intended learning outcomes of the competition. Once selected, sports will then be communicated as part of the preparation for competition stage.

Barrier to Positive Experience: SGO has an issue with the behaviour displays of school staff at primary competitions in creating a negative atmosphere and role modelling negative behaviours for young people taking part.

New Approach: A 2-hour CPD workshop for school staff on #ReframingCompetition is being designed between SGO and YST to support in getting key messages out to schools, with a focus on it being a young person facing campaign. This will then extend to messaging and facilitation of behaviour during upcoming competitions.

➤ Secondary Schools:

Barrier to Positive Experience: Young people having the appropriate equipment and wider tools to effectively prepare for competition.

New Approach: Supporting the schools prepare young people using their 'sports library' renting out the specialised equipment for schools. Extending the meaning of the 'sports library' to consider how to also support schools holistically prepare, not just through the use of equipment.

Barrier to Positive Experience: Differentiating the competition environment for young people's first experience of school competition.

New Approach: Netball twilight competitions creating an informal, enjoyable and fair competition environment for this cohort of young people. The competition itself will be a form of preparing young people for future environments.

Barrier to Positive Experience: Young people arriving at competition with a large difference in their preparation for the event.

New Approach: A new U 15 sports hall athletics competition for predominantly late developers. Schools are set to self-grade their level of preparation for competition with the support of the SGO, which will support the SGO to best decide competition structure based on levels of preparation, not purely physical competence.

Barrier to Positive Experience: Schools not understanding the intended outcomes of designed competitions and therefore not selecting the most appropriate young people who would benefit.

New Approach: A climbing competition aimed at building confidence levels of young people who have low confidence in school. Due to the nature of target audience and activity, a large focus on preparing the young people through visual photos/videos of environment and providing schools with confidence raising tools. Actual competition based around personal challenges.

Barrier to Positive Experience: Low capacity of school staff members to appropriately prepare young people prior to competition.

New Approach: Providing young people with leadership roles at a year 7/8 competition, with roles of preparing and supporting a team through competition. Roles to include managers, motivators, confidence builders etc that help support all aspects of physical literacy. Aiming to increase capacity and reinforce message of importance of preparation through young leaders to teachers and school staff.

Barrier to Positive Experience: Young people arriving at competition with a low knowledge and understanding of the event and its rules.

New Approach: Year 7 football festival with the introduction of new rules, (linked to new changes in football regarding handball and VAR). There will be a focus on how to best prepare young people for new rules in traditional competition formats, with games being self-refereed so that pupils are able to develop their confidence, knowledge and understanding in the rules of the competition.

Pilot Impact

Impact on the role of a School Games Organiser

100% of SGO's involved in the pilot expressed they will make changes in their future delivery.

Reported changes included:

- Reviewing the outcomes of all current competitions within their competition calendar
- Consulting more with schools to develop targeted events to disadvantaged young people
- Provide a more varied calendar of opportunities for pupils in future years
- Communicate more with secondary school staff to support young people for competition
- Explore different incentives/rewards for schools to move away from a focus on just medals for winning.
- Putting young people at the heart of all competitions, focusing on young people's confidence, competence and motivations to engage with school sport.
- Movement away from a calendar heavily influenced by 'traditional' formats of competition so more young people can feel like they have a positive experience in competitive situations.

Of the SGO's involved in the pilot;

- **83%** reported increased **competence** to support schools/teachers in preparing young people for competition
- **89%** reported increased **confidence** to support schools/teachers in preparing young people for competition
- **100%** reported increased **motivation** to support schools/teachers in preparing young people for competition.

All responses that reported no change were in relation to their secondary school specific interventions.

Impact on Young People

SGO – Primary School

- *“Staff reported that the children were more excited to attend the festival. Even the children with lower self-confidence felt excited about the festival. Staff also said that children enjoyed the activities they had tried before and wanted to show their teacher how much they had practised at home.”*
- *“School staff commented that the pupils that they had brought would not have wanted to represent their school in a traditional sporting competition due to a number of factors including their confidence & competence in ‘sport’. A number of comments were made by staff along the lines of ‘I can’t believe that X is so involved, he usually does not want to do PE’.”*
- *“Most schools targeted children with SEND or who don't normally compete rather than because they demonstrate good teamwork skills. On the day, all teachers reported that it had been a positive experience for the children. We made a point of telling the children they had been selected to represent the school and reinforcing that it was because they were good team workers - which they were on the day with little disagreement between them. One teacher reported a particularly positive effect on a child with autism - who had been able to compete as an equal - something which he hadn't previously experienced.”*

SGO – Secondary School

- *“Engaged some young people that have limited number of opportunities to represent their school and take part in this sort of activity. You could see confidence growing in the young people throughout the session, but it would be good to bring this group together later in the year again to see if there was any long-term impact.”*
- *“Impacted on young people's engagement with the competition, particularly by awarding medals/trophies whilst races were ongoing, this way the focus turned towards motivating friends/teammates as opposed to focusing on who the winners were. “*

Impact on School Staff

SGO – Primary School

- *“The preparation phase of this pilot helped the staff to understand the event they were attending, made them feel confident and competent enough to support their own children. They also said they could help to motivate the children the weeks before and on the bus on their way because they were able to talk about what was going to happen.”*
- *“The staff commented that the information provided, including the explanation of what the festival wanted to achieve, was vital in ensuring that the pupils selected were the right pupils for the competition. It also enabled staff to prepare pupils ahead of the festival so that pupils did not arrive expecting to be competing against other schools.”*
- *“The school staff knew what was expected and felt confident in what was expected. However, because we left the choice of players down to the individual school, some schools chose their more able pupils whereas some chose their lower ability ones which meant there were huge differences in ability in spite of the training. The teachers who brought the lesser able pupils felt disheartened as they were still getting beaten by huge amounts”*
- *“It was evident that the activities I had sent out prior to the competition hadn't been used (We repeated one of the activities as a competition and I asked the children if they had played the game before. None had). The unintended impact here was that schools staff realised that their children would have done better in the competition had they prepared them for it.”*

SGO – Secondary School

- *“Made the school staff think a little more about who they should select for this opportunity rather than just selecting the students who normally get selected. Feel the staff enjoyed having the opportunity to work with different students and feel they had the potential to make a difference to these young people. Some of the schools took the preparation very seriously following all the guidelines, others less so. Highlights the fact that the staff have such an important role to play and some were just not used to having to do any preparation prior to coming to a competition.”*
- *“The importance of fully preparing pupils for competitions became apparent to the staff as the festival progressed. The one school that had properly prepared pupils was evident as they could speak with pupils after matches to get their feedback and also to address where pupils could've made different decisions or could have been more confident in making a decision whereas the schools that hadn't were unable to do this.”*

Post-Teacher Survey Results

“Much improved confidence and boost to self-esteem for children who usually struggle academically or physically in school. To see children who are usually withdrawn and quiet, scooting around with a smile on their face was a real joy.” (Primary School Teacher)

“The consultation in advance of the competition was great for our girls. They felt some sense of ownership to the new systems being set in place. They understood more about why its important to expect professional and positive behaviour from accompanying school staff in terms of the effect it has on the primary children taking part. They were keen to make sure the children had enjoyment as their number one outcome” (Secondary School Teacher)

“The children selected have some issues regarding their self-esteem and confidence. By talking to the children beforehand about the 'fun' aspect rather than the competition made the children want to be involved.” (Primary School Teacher)

“[It is valuable to have] Better prepared and informed leaders. Primary Schools need to change their culture towards competition and understand how important it is for ALL children to have a happy experience, when not every child can win. This needs embedding” (Primary School Teacher)

“The student had opportunity to practice using the equipment and understand rules / format of the competition before the event” (Secondary School Teacher)

“Our children helped shape it, so they are happy to compete positively. WE want our children to take part in sporting competitions but also be nice human beings and citizens” (Primary School Teacher)

“Overall, the system is working well. There is a wide range of activities for children to compete. Perhaps having more 'non-competitive' events would allow more children to attend.” (Primary School Teacher)

Impact on Parent/Guardians

SGO – Primary School

- *“Parents reported that it was good to understand what their child should be doing in PE at such an early age and should receive more homework regarding this. They loved that they were involved. It also helped them to pose questions to their children following the event.”*

SGO – Secondary School

- *“Parents/guardians were sceptical of the new approach which in some ways rubbed off on the pupils. Parents/guardians rather than encourage their pupils to make decisions fairly and for the benefit of their development, were encouraging them to make decisions that would give them an advantage.”*

Young Person Insight

Alongside the event visits, YST Research gathered qualitative insight from young people who were attending the School Games competitions. Across each event, we used a Graffiti Wall to ask children to write a response to the statement, *"The one thing that makes a sport competition fun is..."*

Across all responses, the key themes that came out were:

1. **Teamwork** – *"Working together as a team"*
2. **Taking part** – *"Taking part and working with my best friends"*
3. **Friendship** - *"Having a good time with friends and doing well"*
4. **Challenge** – *"Representing the school and pushing myself to the limits"*
5. **Having Support** - *"Being kind to one another while doing competition"*
6. **Winning** - *"Winning as a team"*

In addition, pupils provided insight on what they enjoy the most and least from parents and teachers when they have a competition. As shown below, pupils liked it most when their teacher provided them with encouragement and support, to cheer them on and give them help and advice to improve. Conversely, pupils did not like it when their teachers shout, and make them feel bad. Pupils did not want to feel pressure or feel as though they had done something wrong.

"I like it when my teacher..."



"I don't like it when my teacher..."



Similarly, the same question was asked to pupils on what they liked most and least from their parents or guardians during a competition. Responses were predominantly similar, in which they liked their parents cheering them on and giving encouragement and support. Pupils were equally likely to dislike it when their parents/guardians shout during competition or make negative comments which embarrass them. Interestingly, there was a mixed response from pupils in liking or disliking it when their parent/guardian watches them or asks them questions about the competition. This suggests that the content, delivery and context is important to reflect upon in how feedback is given to individual pupils.

“I like it when my parent/guardian...”



“I don't like it when my parent/guardian...”



What can we learn from this?

It is important to use the insight from young people to shape the structure and behaviours of future competition environments. Crucially, key learnings from young people would be that they want teachers to:

- Support their efforts
- Give encouragement
- Advise on how they could try something different

For parents, it is likely that listening to the individual needs of your child will be the best way to help provide them with a positive experience of competition. Key learnings for parents would be to:

- Be present – visible and pay attention to what they are doing
- Be positive – highlight specific things that they are doing well
- Be proactive – seek opportunities to encourage, recognise and value their efforts rather than their results. Think about how to support intrinsic motivation to compete and take part.

The journey of a young person for a competition (secondary school)



“Picture the scenario...”

Selection - You are at school, and you have just found out that you have been selected to take part in a competition for your school. How do you normally feel?

Quite happy because they've recognized my talent and that I'm good at sport, so it makes you feel quite good that I've been picked for a tournament. Sometimes there'll be a letter that will get sent home to parents to say you have been picked. On the letter there's usually a list of names that are doing it, but you don't get the letter until a few days after they've told you about it.

Preparation - It is the day before the competition, and you are reminded about the competition the next day. How do you normally feel?

Nervous but then excited at the same time. Mostly nervous, because I've had falls in the past when doing races so then I usually get panicky that my shoelace is going to come undone or I'm going to trip. So not actually doing it, but if I make a mistake whilst doing it.

Motivation - You have arrived at the competition event, and you are about to start soon. How do you normally feel?

Even more nervous than I did the day before and everything again, the tripping up, the forgetting something comes back and then seeing the competition and thinking 'she looks like a good runner I don't want to go against her' or 'I could beat her'. I usually talk to my friends or warm-up and get my mind off it. We talk about the positions and the races that we're doing.

Competence - You have started the competition. How do you normally feel?

I just want to get it over and done with. I'm still nervous but more or less now just confidence is coming out, I just want to get it over and done with and I want to do my team proud and feel like I've done well in what I've done. If you're in a team you have to perform at your best because that's what every person in a team should do, always do their best because you're trying to please yourself and you're trying to do well for your team that you're playing for. When I'm doing the races, I'm like 'this is fine, I'm doing what I like to do' and I realize it [the nerves] was just going up to the race.

Reflection - You have finished the competition. How do you normally feel?

Pretty good that I've done my races that I was once nervous for and I didn't want to do. Makes me feel good that I've done the races and the best that I can do. I think about what I could do better. I'll take it to my training as well and I'll think in my training classes outside school I could do this better in there instead. It's always fun cause it's sport and I like sport so everything I do about sport is fun. Winning is something I like to do and if I lose, I get a bit [clicks tongue] but I like competing against people to prove my ability.

Do you sometimes find, would you say you didn't have fun if you lose or would you still have fun?

I would probably still have fun [if I didn't win] but I would've liked it more, had more fun if I did win because I'd feel a bit better throughout the day because I'd probably get a bit fed up and be like 'I don't want to do it again' or 'I'm going to lose again' but it's always fun either way. It puts me in a better mood if I do well.

Conclusions

Why Is It Important to Create a Positive Experience of Competition?

Recent evidence from the *Active Lives Children and Young People Survey* provides key findings in relation to **physical literacy** and attitudes towards sport and physical activity amongst young people ^{3,4}.

Physical literacy = the fundamental skills required for lifelong participation in physical activity ⁵. Physical literacy has five elements – *Enjoyment, Confidence, Competence, Knowledge & Understanding*.

Key Elements of Physical Literacy

Key findings include:

- 1. Physically literate children and young people are more likely to be active** – The more of the four elements present (as shown above), the more active a young person is likely to be.
- 2. Physically literate children and young people are happier, more resilient and more trusting of other young people** - The more elements of physical literacy present, the higher the levels of happiness, resilience and social trust.
- 3. Enjoyment is the biggest driver of activity levels** - While all elements of physical literacy make a difference to young people being active, enjoyment of sport and physical is the biggest driver of activity levels.
- 4. Physical literacy declines with age** - As children and young people grow older, they report *lower* levels of enjoyment, confidence, competence and understanding.



Enjoyment



Confidence



Competence



Knowledge

Importantly, whilst most children and young people feel they understand why exercise and sport is good for them, only **51%** strongly agree that they enjoy taking part. This means that **49%** are not likely to receive the full benefits of sport ⁴. Furthermore, young people's reported levels of confidence and competence in taking part in sport are even lower, both which have implications to consider when designing competitions.

Did you know?

Despite enjoyment being the biggest driver of activity levels, only **51%** of young people strongly agree that they enjoy taking part

51%



Understanding

What Does This Mean in Practice?

Sports competitions can play an important role in developing a life-long enjoyment and engagement with physical activity, but some young people are still missing out these opportunities and too many young people have negative experiences when selected. Those involved in the provision of sports competitions should review processes that create barriers preventing young people accessing positive experiences of competition and act on these accordingly. If competition can develop life skills identified earlier in this document, all young people should have the opportunity to experience meaningful competition that meets their motivations.

When young people are not prepared to take part in a sports competition, there is a greater opportunity for a negative experience of competition to occur, which in turn could put off a child from taking part in the future. Preparation consists of more than just developing the physical competence to take part in the activity, and should also incorporate the development of motivation, confidence, knowledge and understanding as identified through the Active Lives Children and Young People survey 2019 in the important role of physical literacy as an indicator of enjoyment.

What Makes a Competition Experience Positive for young people?

Evidence from YST Research has revealed that young people self-report the best thing about taking part in sport and physical activity is “**fun**”¹.

This is supported by further research which cites fun as the primary reason for sustained participation in sport². Importantly, such research has shown that the simple idea of fun (e.g. ‘messaging around’ or laughing) is not shown to be the most reliable indicator of enjoyment within sport. Instead, events with **engagement, meaning** and **purpose** were key contributors to ‘fun’ in sports. The fun-factors that were shown to be of primary importance amongst young people were:

- Trying Hard
- Positive Team Dynamics
- Positive Coaching

Based on the evidence collected through the present report, the following recommendations for the successful delivery of Positive Experiences of Competition are outlined below:

Key Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1 – DEVELOPING PHYSICAL LITERACY - Building strong foundations for life

Children’s physical literacy impacts not only the *amount* of activity they do, but also how much they *benefit* from this activity. It is important to understand the role sports competitions can play in the development of physical literacy for all young people.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – DESIGNING COMPETITIONS – Reflecting motivations, competence and confidence.

There is no definitive point in time when a young person is ready to experience competition, they can be designed in a way which reflects how ready a young person is to take part and therefore should not be a barrier to access. Understanding the motivations, competence and confidence of young people prior to competition can help you create and design an environment that meets the needs of young people.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – COMPETITION INTENT – Identifying and communicating the intent of competition

Competition organisers should be encouraged to design and deliver competitions with clear intentions and outcomes that meet the motivations of the young people you are supporting. Another key factor significant in whether young people have a positive experience of competition is the culture of the environment that is created by coaches, teachers, parents, young leaders and peers. It is therefore important that teachers, coaches and parents are supported to understand the intent of competition to transform youth sport culture into a positive arena where young people can develop and have a rewarding sport experience.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – SELECTION – Adapting selection processes to remove barriers

Young people that would benefit the most from positive outcomes of competition are not always provided with the opportunity to participate. There should be an increased focus on understanding which young people currently face barriers to access competitive sport. Allowing enough lead in time for effective selection to take place, reviewing selection processes to be more inclusive and remove barriers, and considering how ‘ready’ a young person is to be put in any given competition environment should all be considered.

RECOMMENDATION 5 – PREPARATION – Supporting a young person to be ‘competition ready’

Young people attending competitions are not always appropriately prepared before taking part. Greater focus should be applied to supporting young people’s preparation for competition to increase the likelihood of a positive experience. Preparation should include all five elements of physical literacy: their motivation, physical competence, confidence knowledge and understanding.

References

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3. Sport England. Active Lives: Children and young people survey 2017/18. 1–34 (2018).
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YST RESEARCH

The Youth Sport Trust (YST) is a national children's charity passionate about creating a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits that come from play and sport. YST Research offers research, analysis, insight and evaluation services to organisations with an interest in the wider children and young people's sector. Our research expertise is focussed on improving the wellbeing of children and young people through sport and physical activity.

Our specialisms include:

- Education, PE and school sport
- Community sport / clubs
- Early years settings
- Life skills and employability
- Activism and volunteering
- Health (physical, social and emotional)

For our latest research findings, visit <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/research-news>

By working with us, you are supporting us to achieve our mission to improve children's lives and their future.

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