



British Active Students Survey: Further Education

Academic year 2018/2019

Forewords

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, Chair, ukactive



A student's time in college is a vital phase of their life; one in which they develop habits, behaviours, and skills that they take forward into their lives at university, the workplace, and into later adulthood. Creating positive health behaviours can provide a lifetime of benefits for this generation, supporting them to be healthier, happier, and more confident, not only today but in the long-term.

At ukactive our mission is to get more people more active more often. At the heart of our vision is the role of the physical activity sector to support an active nation and a commitment to create a society where everybody has the opportunity to be more active.

In order to achieve these ambitions we focus on a lifespan approach – from children and young people to workforce life and older adults. However, we cannot deny that these formative years hold the key to the future of our nation's health and success, our chance to reverse the growing crisis of physical inactivity in the UK.

In the academic year 2018–2019, research for this report, *'British Active Students Survey: Further Education,'* was conducted in collaboration with AoC Sport and Matrix Fitness. This report expands upon its predecessor, which surveyed students in higher education, by capturing valuable information from younger students in further education. Its findings again highlight the vital role physical activity plays in student's health and mental wellbeing, and add to the growing evidence base in this area.

As anyone reading this report will know, today's college students face growing pressure from the environment we live in. While opportunities for study and development have improved in some areas, the same cannot always be said for sport and physical activity. Activity is not viewed as an integral part of our daily routine in the same way that it was for previous generations.

From mounting economic and academic pressures, to increasing screen time and a lack of safety on Britain's roads, college students face a challenging landscape when it comes to fitness. We must not allow their opportunities to be swallowed up by these rapidly shifting societal developments.

College years represent a key period in which to put in place engaging, supportive, and positive experiences of physical activity. Through partnership between the physical activity sector and further education, we hope to open up more opportunities for college students to lead more active lives. Let this report inspire us to act.

Forewords

Tony Ali, Head of Sales – Education of Johnson Health Tech, UK



Further education represents a time of change and growth for students. It is a life changing time of development, not just academically but also mentally, physically, and emotionally, and with this, students can feel faced with increased feelings of pressure, anxiety, and concern.

We believe that a person's health and wellness should not only include their physical health but also their mental, social, and emotional wellbeing. Physical activity and sport has the ability to influence confidence, personal wellbeing, life satisfaction and happiness positively whilst reducing anxiety, stress and loneliness. But barriers to students being active include body confidence, cost and time.

At Matrix Fitness, we believe that the key to breaking down these barriers is to provide options. Options that ensure physical activity is not just available to all but also drives interest and relevance to this generation. This includes providing them with fitness equipment that engages them, motivates them, and allows increased connectivity in a time of technological advancement. Providing them with equipment that helps them set goals, track progress, and celebrate achievement.

Something needs to change. With just over three million students enrolled in higher education, according to the UK Government, there are reportedly 24.5% (16–24 year olds) and 32.1% (25–34 year olds) not meeting the recommended levels of physical activity. These stats are unacceptable and we need to support educational institutions in the important role they play in promoting physical activity amongst young adults.

The education sector is a key area for us and we hope that this research, with ukactive Research Institute and AoC Sport will expand on previous findings from Higher Education research to help demonstrate the vital role that physical activity can play in a student's health and wellness in order to shape an important and long-lasting positive behaviour change for students in the future.

Forewords

Marcus Kingwell, Managing Director, AoC Sport



Further education colleges provide high quality technical and professional education and training for young people, adults, and employers. They prepare over three million students with valuable skills for the workplace, helping to develop their career opportunities and strengthen the local, regional, and national economy.

AoC Sport believes that sport and physical activity are essential components of college life, providing significant advantages in terms of education, employability and health for students. We want to see every college student participating regularly in sport or physical activity.

This report shows us just how much work there is to do in order to achieve this vision. 70% of survey respondents, most of whom are aged 16–25, are not meeting the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines for adult physical activity. 25% of respondents are inactive and a large proportion of all students' time is spent sitting down.

But there are many positives to take away from the report. Most students are aware that sport or physical activity is good for their education, employability, and health. The most active students have the highest scores for mental wellbeing, social inclusion, and perceived academic attainment. They are also confident that they will be employed within six months of leaving college. We now have strong evidence to back up what we've suspected for a long time: that sport and physical activity bring significant benefits not only to students but also to their colleges, communities, and future employers. The challenge for both sectors, further education, and sport and physical activity, is to close the gap between what we want to achieve and what is actually happening.

This report would not have been possible without the expertise of ukactive and the financial support of Sport England and Matrix Fitness – special thanks are due to all these organisations. But I would also like to thank the 3,661 students who completed the survey, along with the college staff who encouraged the responses.

Forewords

Mike Diaper, Executive Director Children, Young People, and Tackling Inactivity, Sport England



Sport England is happy to support AoC Sport to carry out the British Active Students Survey (BASS) 2019: Further Education. Working within the Further Education sector is a key aspect of Sport England's work with young people, as colleges play a significant role in maintaining and growing their students' interest in sport and physical activity, as well as providing opportunities for them to try out new sports and activities.

As we know from our recent Active Lives Children and Young people survey, both participation and enjoyment of sport and physical activity decline as children get older so this is a critical time for young people to maintain their enjoyment and positive engagement with activity.

The insight which will come from the BASS survey will help us better understand the levels of sport and physical activity in college students and importantly, the impact being active has on the lives of these young people. These impacts include the Government Outcomes for Sports: physical wellbeing; mental wellbeing; individual development and social and community development that Sport England works to deliver. As such, we are pleased to see a number of key findings from BASS that provide further evidence of the contribution that being an active college student makes towards these outcomes.

However, we also find that there are too many colleges students who are not leading active lives and as a result not experiencing the benefits that an active life can bring. As a sector, we all need to act and work together to increase the activity levels of these young people and address the significant inequalities including gender, ethnicity and affluence.

Continuing to share our knowledge and understanding of young people's relationship to sport and activity plays a critical role in addressing some of the challenges we face. AoC Sport's commissioning of the BASS for Further Education, alongside data from Sport England Active Lives Survey and findings from the Tackling Inactivity in Colleges programme, is a great example of this kind of collaborative action.

Executive Summary

Active students report higher mental and personal wellbeing, reduced perceptions of loneliness, and stronger perceptions of inclusion, employability, and attainment compared to inactive or fairly active students. This report demonstrates that for students in Further Education, taking part in physical activity can provide a variety of positive effects on physical health and psychological behaviours. Further Education Institutions (FEI) have a pivotal role in supporting the physical and mental health of students through their educational and holistic personal development.

Life pressures for adolescence begin to amount sooner than they ever used to, with young people indicating that a mixture of peer influences, body-image and the time spent on exam revision, homework and future life preparation can impact their mental wellbeing and the time they spend being physically active. This has been shown to start even before further education, however it accumulates to a higher threshold at this point. Between the ages of 16 to 24, FEI statistics indicate that 24.5% of 16–24 year olds and 32.1% of 25–34 year olds are not classified as active (150 minutes+ of moderate intensity physical activity per week). This highlights a crucial role for FEIs in supporting this population to be physically active.

The *British Active Student Survey: Further Education* was conducted at the end of 2018, following on from the second Higher Education survey released in mid-2018. This survey was expanded to explore additional elements such as loneliness and motivations for being active. The survey was rolled out across the UK, with a majority of responses coming from England. A total of 3,661 students responded from 74 FEIs.

>> Over two thirds (70.8%) of the respondents were not completing 150 minutes of moderate activity per week ('active'), with one quarter (25.5%) inactive (completing under 30 minutes per week). Compared to the Sport England's Active Lives survey May 2017–2018, survey respondents were more inactive (by up to 10.1%) and much less active (by up to 46.3%).

>> Being part of a sports team only was the most popular activity type (21.5%), followed by both a sports team and gym (18.0%). 45.9% of responding students were neither part of a sports club or a gym.

>> Active students had more positive perceptions towards exercise and sport experiences.

>> Personal and mental wellbeing were highest for students who engaged in regular physical activity, with participation in sport and attending a gym in combination producing the highest scores.

>> The highest levels of social inclusion and social trust, and lowest levels of loneliness, were seen in active students and those who participated in sports. Active students, who were members of both a sports team and the gym, also perceived their attainment, and employability skills and traits, to be the highest.

>> Top barriers to being physically active were being too busy with studies (27.9%), body confidence (10.5%) and being too expensive (9.6%). Support from FEIs was not a perceived barrier, however the existence of barriers indicates that FEIs could support their students in other ways (e.g. breaking up sedentary time in classrooms).

>> Top motivations for being active were benefits to physical health (16.1%), to improve body image (12.8%), and as stress relief (10.9%). Students recognise the positive effects of physical activity and their motivations for engaging should be considered in future efforts to try and engage them further.

Across Higher and then Further Education, the same pattern emerges: that doing some activity is better than none, but meeting the recommended amount provides the most benefits. Also, students who participated in sport and were members of a gym, or just sport, scored more positively across all metrics compared to those who were members of just a gym or neither. The results demonstrate the important role educational institutions play in supporting and promoting physical activity amongst young adults.



Introduction

Education is a vital part of life, of which Further Education institutions play a pivotal role. Further Education links compulsory school education to educational opportunities that must be completed (in England, and non-compulsory across the other home nations) until the age of 18 (full-time education, apprenticeship or traineeship, or a combination of working and education or training¹). As young people get older, adolescents are faced with increasing feelings of life pressures that include exams, body-image, and peer influences². Furthermore, young people also indicate that exam revision and homework often present as a barrier to participation in sport and physical activity².

The 'British Active Student Survey' (BASS)³, released in 2018, revealed that active (more than 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity activity each week⁴) university students were found to have greater personal wellbeing, mental wellbeing, social inclusion, and perceived academic attainment and employability compared to inactive (less than 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week) students³. Furthermore, university students who were members of a gym and participated in sport had these same improvements compared to gym membership or sports participation in isolation or students who did neither³. While this provides an indication of the beneficial role physical activity and sport can play for those in higher education, little is known on its impact amongst college students.

According to the UK Government, just over 3 million students are enrolled in Further Education in the UK, with 65.1% of students aged between 16 and 34⁵. Amongst this college age population between 24.5% (16–24 year olds)⁶ and 32.1% (25–34 year olds) are not classified as active (150 minutes+ of moderate intensity physical activity per week)⁶. Additionally, 1 in 5 25–34 year olds are classified as inactive⁶. Due to the extended period of time students will spend enrolled with or located at their Further Education institute, they have an opportunity to promote physical activity and the wider associated benefits. It is especially important to consider and understand physical activity behaviour in this period of younger adulthood because health behaviours (positive or negative) developed in adolescence can often determine long-term behaviours in adulthood and the rest of life⁷.



This report looks to build on the evidence produced from the previous Higher Educational Institution research through the Scottish⁸ (2017), and British³ (2018) Active Students Surveys but with a focus on Further Education. The research aimed to investigate the associations between physical activity levels and type of activity with feelings of wellbeing, inclusion, and loneliness, as well as perceptions of employability and academic attainment, and barriers and motivators to physical activity.

Survey Respondents

The British Active Students Survey in Further Education data collection took place between 19th of November and the 21st of December 2018. Dissemination of the survey to college students was done so through social media, college volunteers, and institution-specific newsletters, mail outs, and institution staff. Responses were collated using an online survey tool.

3,661
survey
responses

Figure 1: Map of institutes that responded

Almost all responses were collated from Further Education institutions (FEIs) within England, with only five responses coming from the other home nations (Wales – 4, Northern Ireland – 1) (Figure 1). Responses were collected from a total of 74 colleges, 23.2% of the total 327 FEIs contacted through the AoC network.

The top three responding institutions based on the percentage of responses against their full time equivalent (FTE) student population were Varndean College (15.5%), Askham Bryan College (14.5%), and Hills Road Sixth Form College (10.0%) (Table 1). These three institutions accounted for 1,034 responses, 28.2% of the total 3,661 responses. The top 10 responding institutions can be seen in Table 1.



Table 1. Top 10 responding institutions by percentage of FTE responses.

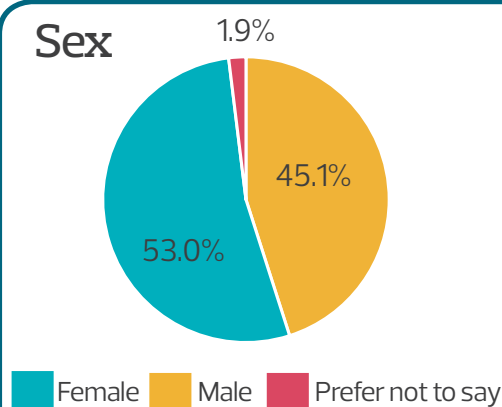
Institution	Country	FTE	Responses	Rate (%)
Varndean College	England	2,070	321	15.5%
Askham Bryan College	England	3,150	456	14.5%
Hills Road Sixth Form College	England	2,580	257	10.0%
Sunderland College Group	England	10,280	397	3.9%
Peter Symonds' College	England	4,460	168	3.8%
Petroc	England	7,760	224	2.9%
Bury College	England	5,590	147	2.6%
New College, Durham	England	4,710	119	2.5%
Wakefield College	England	5,200	113	2.2%
Vision West Nottinghamshire College	England	8190	155	1.9%

Demographics

Just over half of respondents were female (53.0%), similar in proportion to the overall college population (54.8%)⁵. Respondents ranged between 16 and 69 years of age, with most (40.1%) aged 18 years. Compared to the college population the survey represents a younger sample, as across the college population just under a third are aged 18 or under (28.6%; 6.7% aged 18), 17.4% are aged between 19 and 24, and 19.1% are aged between 25 to 34⁵. Overall, 12.8% of the population surveyed reported having a disability, slightly lower than the college population (18.0%)⁵. Participants who were White or White British made up the majority of respondents (87.2%), higher than the college population (76.8%)⁵. Both Black or Black British (college population: 6.6%) and Asian or Asian British (college population: 9.0%) had a lower response to the survey than the college population⁵.

A majority of students (92.2%) were full-time, and were studying at level 3 which includes A-Levels (AS and A2), BTEC awards, certificates, diplomas, and nationals, OCR nationals, NVQs at level 3, advanced apprenticeship, and the International Baccalaureate⁹.

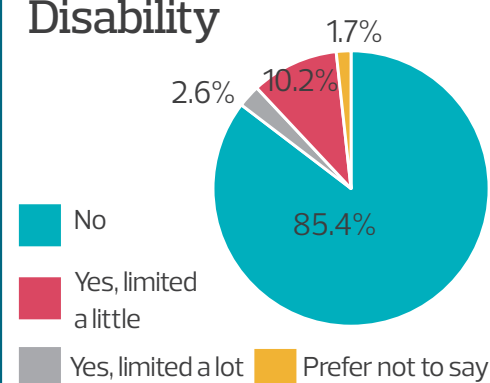
Sex



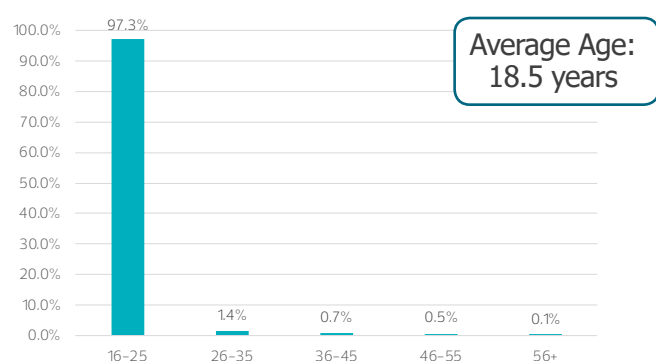
Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Survey
White or White British	87.2%
Mixed	3.4%
Asian or Asian British	5.5%
Black or Black British	2.1%
Other	1.8%

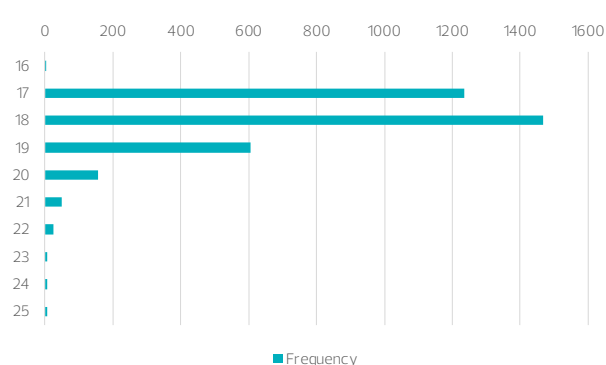
Disability



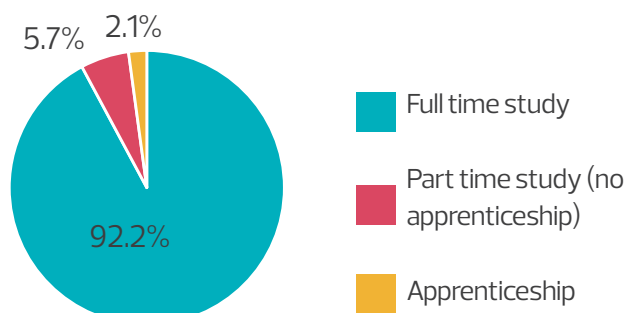
Age Distribution



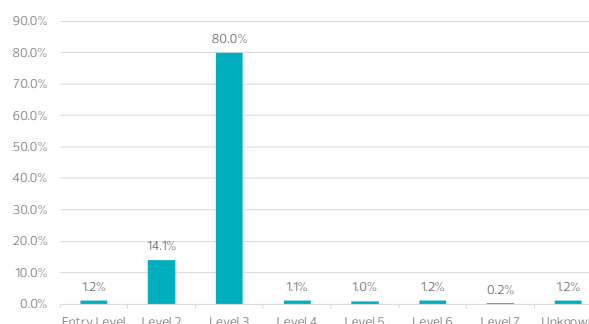
Age Breakdown



Type of Study



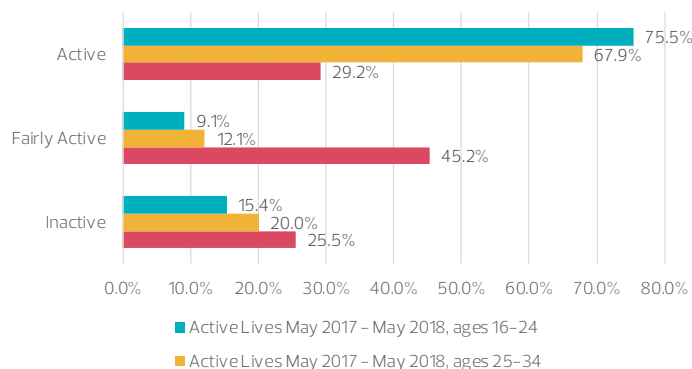
Level of Study



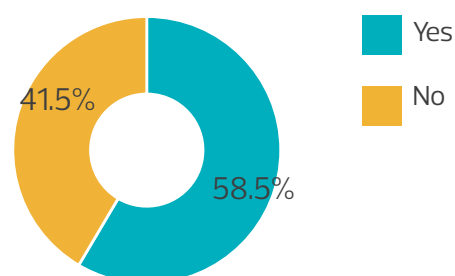
Physical Activity

A majority of the students were not taking part in enough physical activity each week to be classified as active (150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week; 75.5%). Most fell under fairly active (45.2%) – completing between 31–149 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week⁶. Just over a quarter (25.5%) were classified as completing under 30 minutes per week⁶ (inactive), which has been shown to be inadequate for acquiring full health benefits⁴. These physical activity levels were collected and grouped in accordance with Sport England's Active Lives survey⁶ to allow for comparison to national data. They differ slightly from the UK Chief Medical Officers' (CMO) guidelines that suggest 16 to 18 year olds are measured against the children's guidelines⁴ which do not allow for comparison. The Sport England activity classifications are used throughout the remainder of the report.




Activity levels of respondents and national data



Are you aware of the current guidelines for how much physical activity you should be doing?

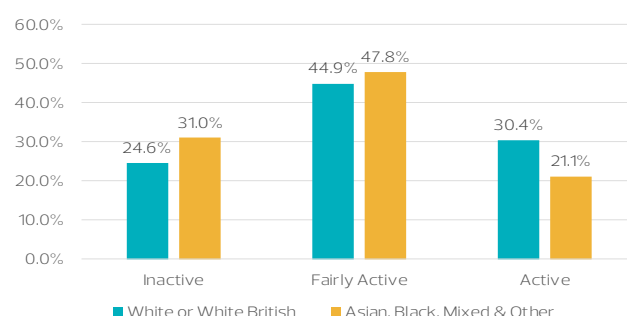


Compared to the 16–24 and 25–34 year olds of the Sport England's Active Lives Survey⁶, this survey had a notably lower proportion of active individuals. However, the proportion of fairly active respondents was more than four times the Sport England national data. Despite the high levels of students not classified as active, a majority (58.5%) reported being aware of how much physical activity they are supposed to be achieving. Such disparity suggests that education is not the main factor influencing activity levels, and highlights the importance of understanding barriers and motivators to participating in physical activity.

	Inactive <30 min 	Fairly active 31- 149 mins 	Active 150 mins+ 
Female	29.3%	47.1%	23.7%
Active Lives Survey May-18	26.4%	13.3%	60.3%
Male	20.9%	43.5%	35.6%
Active Lives Survey May-18	23.8%	11.6%	64.5%

Physical activity levels segmented by sex indicates that there were a higher proportion of females who classified themselves as being inactive (29.3%) in comparison to males (20.9%). The opposite is true for being classified as active, with a higher proportion of males reporting being active (35.6%) than females (23.7%). A similar pattern is found in the Sport England's Active Lives Survey⁶ data, where males also appear to report being more active than females.

Physical activity levels split by ethnicity



A higher proportion of students who were White British report being active (30.4%) than those who were Asian, Black, Mixed, or Other (21.1%). Likewise, they were also less likely to report being inactive (White British: 24.6%; Asian, Black, Mixed or Other: 31.0%).

Physical Activity

**Average time sat:
9 hours,
48 minutes per day**

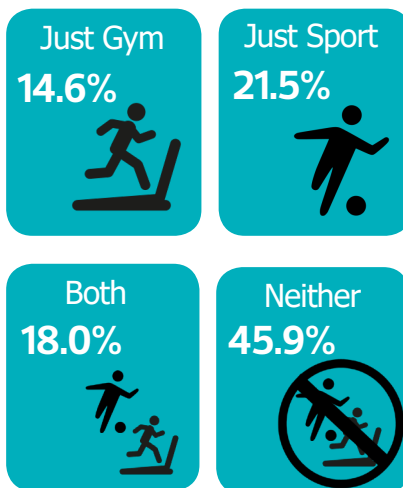
Students from this survey reported sitting for longer than the average sat by students from the Scottish⁷ and British³ Active Students Surveys (8 hours 48 minutes), but lower than students in Ireland (12 hours 6 minutes)¹⁰. Thus, this is not an unusual amount of sitting time for students, but indicates they are spending a large proportion of their time whilst in education being sedentary.

Type of activity was classified into the four groups. Over half (54.1%) of students were gym members or took part in sport, with 18.0% doing both, 14.6% just gym members, and 21.5% just sport members. Just under half (45.9%) were not members of either.

Of those who were members of sports clubs, 44.5% were members of both a college and non-college team while 16.1% were members of a college sports team only. Students took part in a variety of sports, with the most common sports being football (15.6%), rugby (5.0%), netball (3.6%), badminton (3.5%) and basketball (3.4%).

Over a third (36.6%) of students who were members of a gym were members of a leisure centre, followed by members of a university or college gym (27.3%). 18.5% of students reported being a member of a private gym.

Activity type classifications



Experiences of Exercise and Sport

Key Findings

- >> Active students reported higher positive feelings towards exercise and sport experiences, as did those taking part in sport in isolation or being a gym member.
- >> Those who were most active reported the most confidence when exercising and playing sport.
- >> Taking part in enough physical activity to be classified as active increases the perception that students will achieve their goals and have positive self-efficacy. Attending a gym and participating in sport was indicative of this.

To measure and understand experiences of exercise and sport amongst college age students, questions were taken from the Sport England's Active Lives Children and Young People survey¹¹. On average, most students either strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoyed participating in (73.4%), that they were confident to take part in (56.7%), and they found it easy to take part in (48.9%) exercise and sport. This agreement, however, was greatest for students who reported being active.

Experiences of Exercise and Sport by Activity Level



Experiences of Exercise and Sport

Understanding why physical activity is good and how to get involved in different sports were also highest for the more active students. Student's self-efficacy (confidence in their ability to achieve the goals they set for themselves) followed a similar pattern. While a majority of students are positive that they can achieve their goals (strongly agree or agree), over a third (36.7%) provided a neutral, indecisive or negative response. This suggests a sizeable proportion of students are not positive about their goal setting abilities and confidence in meeting and completing goals and tasks. This tended to be more the case for students who were inactive.

Experiences of Exercise and Sport by Activity Type



Students who reported that they took part in both sport and were members of a gym reported the most enjoyment of (92.3%), confidence to take part in (81.7%), and ease of participating in (70.6%), exercise and sport. This was followed by students who just play sport (92.6%; 75.7%; 62.7%). Those who had a gym membership in isolation scored better than those involved in neither sports nor the gym. Students who participated in either just sport or just attended a gym scored equally in their ability to achieve goals, in comparison to those who did neither.

Overall students understood why physical activity is good for them (by saying they agreed or strongly agreed). This was the case for the majority of students who took part in both sports and were gym members (94.7%), took part in both in isolation (sport: 96.2%, gym: 94.4%), and those who did neither (88.6%). Knowing how to get involved in other sports, and self-efficacy were highest for participants in both activity types (84.8%, 72.8% respectively).

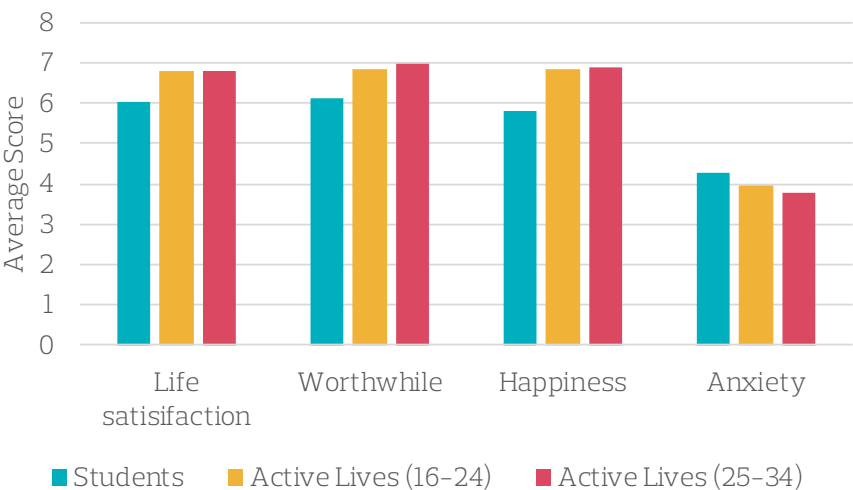
Personal Wellbeing

Key Findings

- >> The best personal wellbeing scores were found for students who engaged in regular physical activity.
- >> Being more active was associated with greater odds of students having higher personal wellbeing.
- >> Participation in sport in isolation produced better personal wellbeing scores than doing sport and attending a gym, or attending a gym in isolation. Life satisfaction and happiness were highest, and anxiety lowest, for students who did sport in isolation in comparison to those attending a gym in isolation.
- >> The combination of sport and gym participation produced better personal wellbeing scores than doing neither.

Students reported below average personal wellbeing (measured using the ONS Personal Wellbeing measures) scores overall when compared to Sport England's Active Lives survey data for 16–24 and 25–34 year olds⁶. This was especially the case for happiness and anxiety, which are the areas of personal wellbeing that are least positive for the surveyed students.

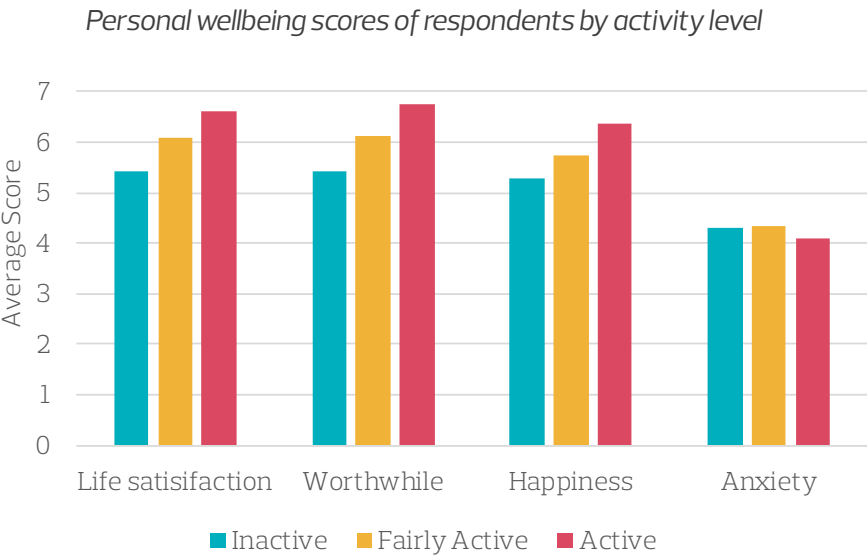
Average personal wellbeing scores of respondents and national data (16–24 & 25–34 year olds)



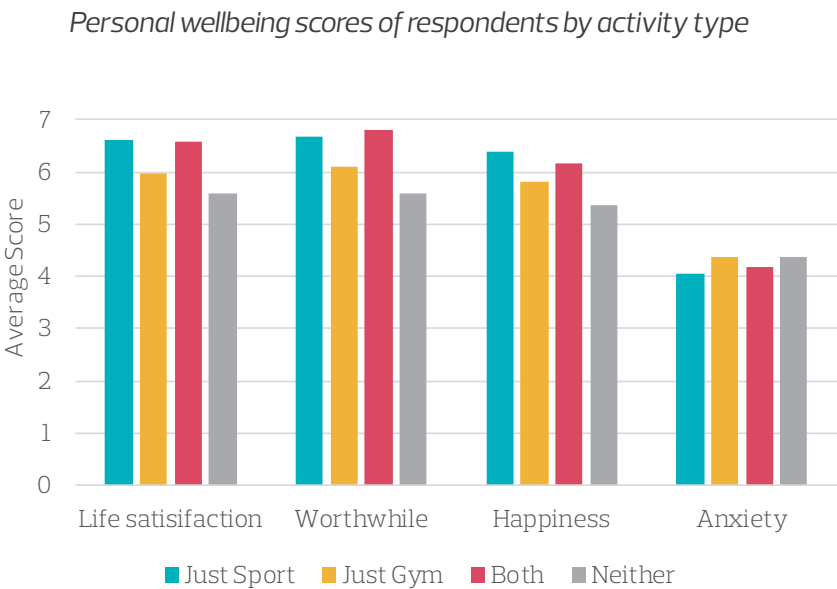
*Anxiety is negatively scored – a lower score is better.

Students who were active scored better in all four aspects of personal wellbeing than those classified as fairly active or inactive. Physical activity participation appeared to make the most difference for levels of happiness and worthwhileness, whereby active students had the highest happiness and worthwhile scores in comparison to other the other activity groups. Ordinal regression examining the linear relationship between physical activity group and personal wellbeing showed that students with higher physical activity were at increased odds of having higher mental wellbeing (OR = 1.68 [95%CI = 1.49 to 1.89]).

When segmented by activity type, personal wellbeing scores were generally higher for those who were taking part in just sport or in both sport and attending a gym. Those who reported being part of a gym only had slightly lower scores, indicating that opportunities to participate in physical activity through either sport or a gym benefit wellbeing. Students who took part in neither reported the lowest scores for personal wellbeing, in particular for happiness, and had the highest score for anxiety.



*Anxiety is negatively scored – a lower score is better.



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Mental Wellbeing

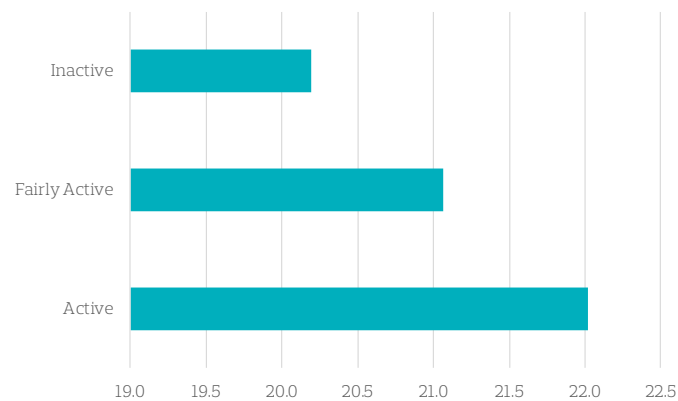
Key Findings

- >> The highest mental wellbeing scores were found for students who were classified as active, and lowest for those classified as inactive.
- >> Being more active was associated with greater odds of students having higher mental wellbeing.
- >> Participation in sport and attending a gym in combination produced highest mental wellbeing scores, followed by participation in just sport and just attending a gym.

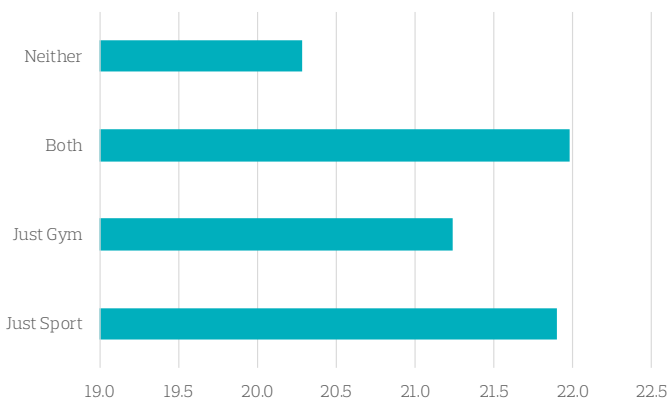
Overall, the mean mental wellbeing score was 21.1 out of 35, and similar to findings from the previous BASS in Higher Education^{3,7}. Measured by the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS), this score indicates feelings surrounding optimism about the future, relaxation, how problems are dealt with, and how close people feel to others. Mental wellbeing scores were lower than the most recent benchmark for this scale reported in the 2011 Health Survey for England, where the average score was 23.6¹². This indicates students reported feeling less positive about all these aspects of wellbeing in comparison to the England population.

A similar pattern to personal wellbeing was found for mental wellbeing. Students who are active demonstrate mental wellbeing scores that are up to 1.8 points higher than those who are inactive. Once again, students who report being fairly active have better mental wellbeing than those who are inactive, suggesting doing some activity is better than nothing, but doing the recommended amount of physical activity provides the most benefit. Ordinal regression examining the linear relationship between physical activity group and mental wellbeing showed that students with higher physical activity were at increased odds of having higher mental wellbeing (OR = 1.52 [95%CI = 1.34 to 1.72]).

Mental wellbeing scores of respondents by activity level



Mental wellbeing scores of respondents by activity type



Students who participate in both sport and attend the gym generally report higher mental wellbeing scores than those who just take part in the gym. Participating in just sport is similar to participating in both, indicating that sport appears to provide an additional benefit to wellbeing. This is dissimilar from those surveyed in higher education³, where just attending a gym had more positive effects than just sport. In both cases students who take part in neither reported scores 1.7 points lower than those who take part in both.

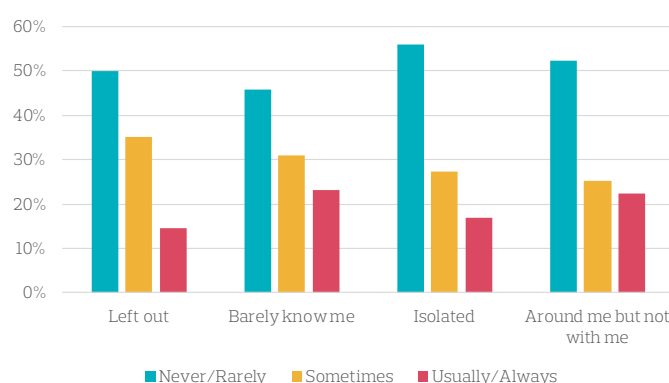
Social Inclusion

Key Findings

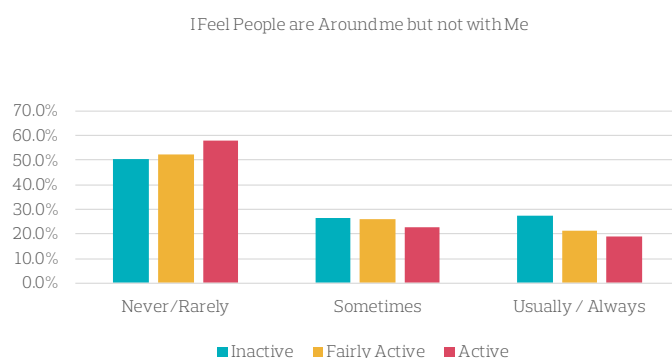
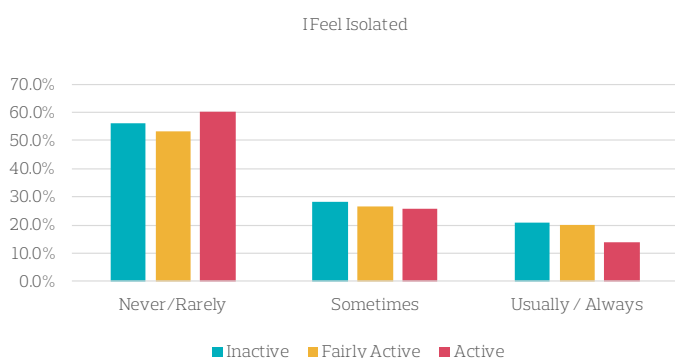
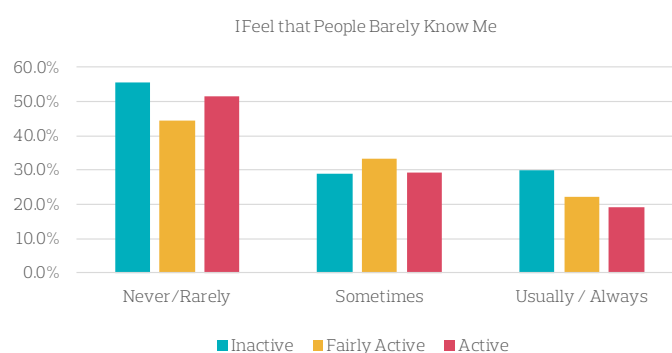
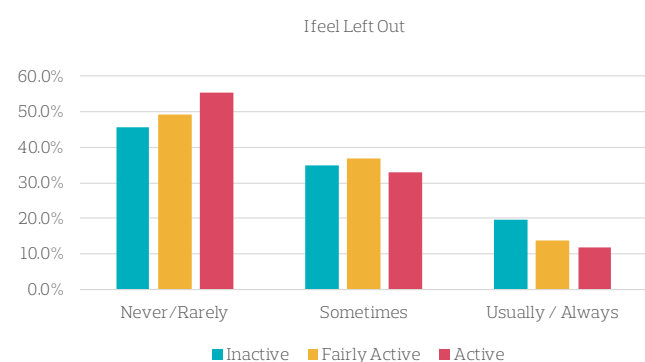
- >> Participation in both sports and attending a gym improves students' perceptions of social inclusion.
- >> The highest levels of social inclusion and social trust were seen in active students and those who participate in sports.
- >> Being more active was associated with 25% reduced odds of feeling socially isolated, and 29% greater odds of having higher social trust.
- >> Members of sports teams report being more socially included, and trusting people more, than those who were members of gym only.

For each of the four questions asked, over 45.8%–55.8% of students indicated that they never or rarely experienced these feelings of isolation, signifying positive levels of social inclusion. Nonetheless, between 14.7% and 23.3% of students reported usually or always feeling isolated. This pattern is similar to previous surveying³, however the proportions of social isolation are greater for Further Education students than those reported by Higher Education students.

Social isolation scores of respondents



Social inclusion scores by activity levels



When looking at the responses broken down by activity level, active students are more likely to report rarely or never feeling socially isolated (for all four statements) than the overall averages. When compared to active students, inactive students were more likely to report being 'usually' or 'always' social isolated by 7–11 percentage points. This was particularly the case for the statements 'people barely know me' and 'people are around me but not with me'. Ordinal regression examining the linear relationship between physical activity group and social inclusion showed that students with higher physical activity were at decreased odds of feeling social isolated (OR = 0.75 [95%CI = 0.65 to 0.87]).

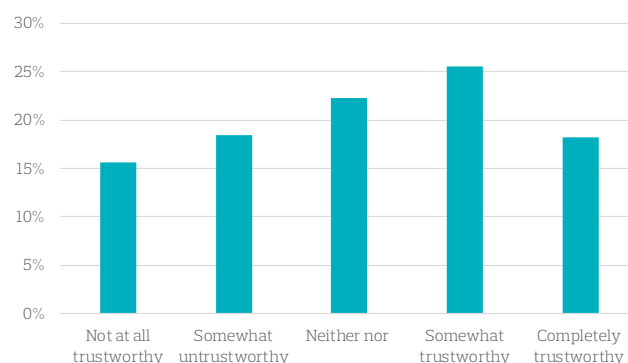
For all four statements, students who were most likely to report feeling socially included were either those who just did sports, or participated in both sports and attended a gym. The proportion of students who usually or always experienced feelings of social isolation was higher for those who only attended a gym (by 5–8 percentage points) than those who only participated in sports. This implies that being a member of a sports club helps improve social inclusion. Being a member of a gym provides greater social inclusion than not being a member of one.

Social inclusion scores by activity type

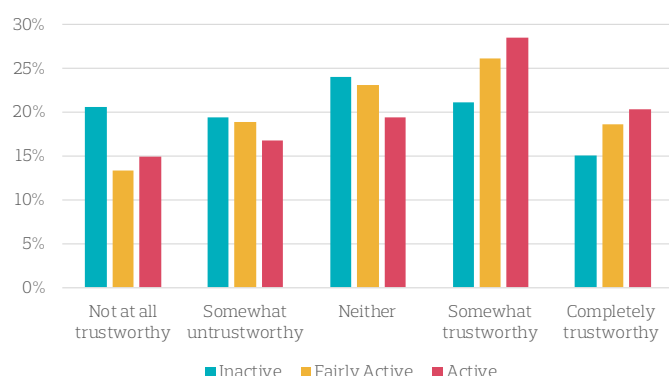


Responses to social trust were roughly balanced in positive and negative responses, with a slight tendency to be more positive. While 43.7% of students reported that they felt people could be either completely or somewhat trustworthy, 34.0% felt people were not at all or somewhat untrustworthy.

Social trust scores of respondents



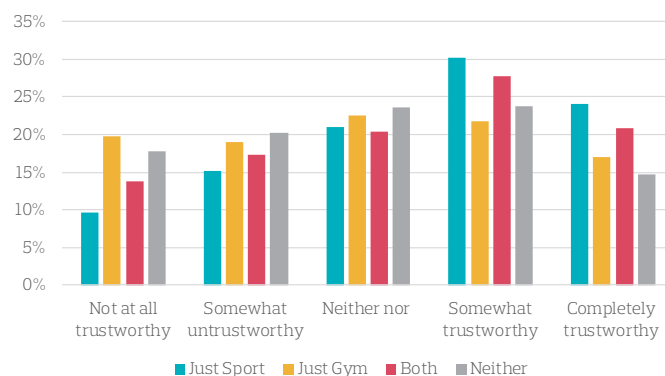
Social trust scores by activity level



Inactive students were more likely to report that people are not at all trustworthy or somewhat untrustworthy (39.9%) in comparison to fairly active (32.2%) and active students (31.7%). Likewise, active students were most likely to report that they felt individuals were somewhat or completely trustworthy (48.9%). Ordinal regression examining the linear relationship between physical activity group and mental wellbeing showed that students with higher physical activity were at increased odds of having higher social trust (OR = 1.29 [95%CI = 1.15 to 1.45]).

Most noteworthy, perhaps, is the split by activity type. Students who attended a sports club in isolation exhibited the highest levels of social trust, with 54.2% reporting that they felt people were somewhat or completely trustworthy, in comparison to those who attended a gym in isolation (38.8%). In fact, students who attended just a gym reported similar levels of social trust to those who took part in neither a gym nor a sports club (38.5%).

Social trust scores by activity type



Note: Social trust scored on a 0–10 Likert scale, groups created as such: Not at all trustworthy (0–2), Somewhat untrustworthy (3–4), Neither (5), Somewhat trustworthy (6–7), Completely trustworthy (8–10)

Loneliness

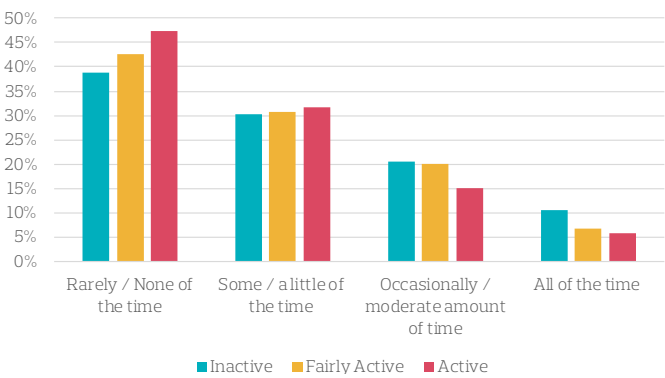
Key Findings

- >> A majority of students report being rarely or a little lonely. Active students were most likely to report low levels of loneliness.
- >> Being more active was associated with 21% reduced odds of students feeling lonely.
- >> Members of sports teams report being the least lonely, in comparison to those who were members of a gym only, or those who were members of neither.

Loneliness was a new metric that was included in this year's survey. It was included because of its social economical relevance and impact on wider health and wellbeing of individuals¹³, and prevalence in adolescence¹⁴. It was measured using a single-item measure of loneliness¹⁵, taken from the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D).

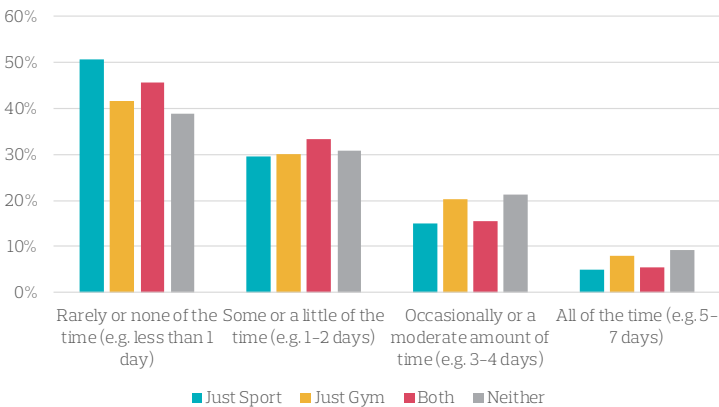
Although a majority of students reported low levels of loneliness (e.g. 1–2 days a week; 73.9%), over a quarter (26.1%) report being lonely a moderate amount or all of the time. Being active appears to reduce perceptions and feelings of loneliness, with this group least likely to report being lonely occasionally or all of the time. Responses from fairly active and inactive students were similar, but inactive students were more likely to report being lonely all of the time (10.5% vs. 6.9%). Ordinal regression examining the linear relationship between physical activity group and loneliness showed that students with higher physical activity were at decreased odds of feeling lonely (OR = 0.79 [95%CI = 0.70 to 0.89]).

Loneliness scores by activity level



Students who participated in some form of a sports club, either in isolation or alongside attending a gym, reported the lowest levels of loneliness. Those who participated in a gym in isolation reported similar levels of loneliness to those who were neither part of the gym nor took part in sport. These tended to be higher levels of loneliness with 28.3% saying they were lonely moderately or all of the time, in comparison to 19.8% of sport club members. However, 41.7% of just gym attendees report being rarely lonely, which is higher than those who were not attendees and did not do sport.

Loneliness scores by activity type



Perceptions of Attainment

Key Findings

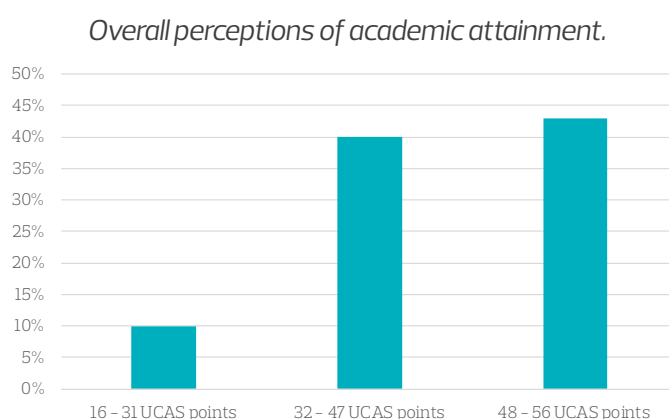
- >> In general the student population surveyed perceived their academic attainment to be high.
- >> Active students were the group who perceived their attainment to be highest, followed by fairly active students.
- >> Sport and gym participants also had the highest attainment perceptions, followed by those who took part in just sport.

Student's perceptions of their academic attainment were collected by asking the grade that they expected to achieve at the end of their course. Due to the breadth of courses and study levels, the grades provided were transformed into UCAS points and then averaged to ensure that students studying one subject could be compared to those studying more than one subject or course. Table 2 provides an overview of the three UCAS point groupings and associated grade examples¹⁶.

Table 2. UCAS points and grade comparison.

UCAS points group	Equivalent grade
16 – 31 UCAS points	Pass / Grade D or E / Level 2/3
32 – 47 UCAS points	Merit / Grade B or C / Level 4/5/6
48 – 56 UCAS points	Distinction/Distinction* / Grade A/A* / Level 7/8/9

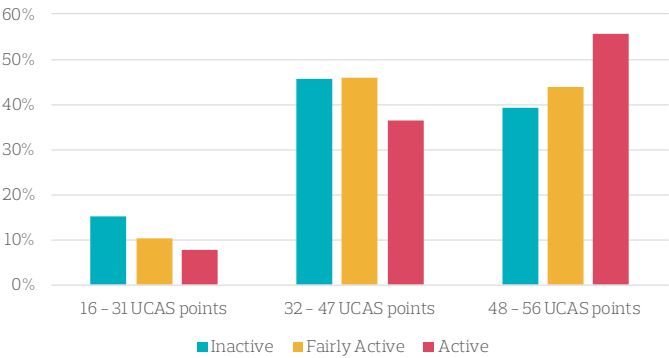
Of the population surveyed, the highest perceived attainment was 48–56 UCAS points (43.0%) followed by 32–47 UCAS points (39.9%). This suggests that these students perceive themselves to be achieving the higher grades available for their respective studies.



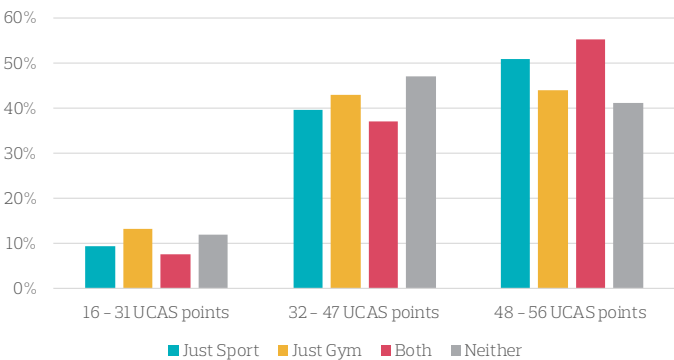


By physical activity level, active students perceived themselves to have higher academic attainment (by 55.7%), reporting they will achieve 48–56 UCAS points on average. The fairly active students (43.9%) perceived themselves to achieve a higher academic attainment than the inactive students (39.3%). However, 32–47 UCAS points was the most common academic attainment perception of the fairly active (45.8%) and inactive (45.6%) students. Ordinal regression examining the linear relationship between physical activity group and academic attainment suggests that students with higher physical activity may be at increased odds of having higher academic attainment, though the precision of this estimate is wide (OR = 1.65 [95%CI = 0.5 to 5.51]).

Perceptions of academic attainment by activity level



Perceptions of academic attainment by activity type



When segmented by activity type, students who took part in both sport and were gym members had the highest perceived academic attainment of 48–56 UCAS points (55.4%). Of the activity types in isolation, students who took part had higher perceptions of academic attainment (51.0%) than just gym members (43.9%).

For gym members only, a similar proportion also perceived they would achieve 32–47 UCAS points. The students who perceived their academic attainment to be highest in the 32–47 UCAS points category were those who took part in neither sport nor were gym members (47.0%).

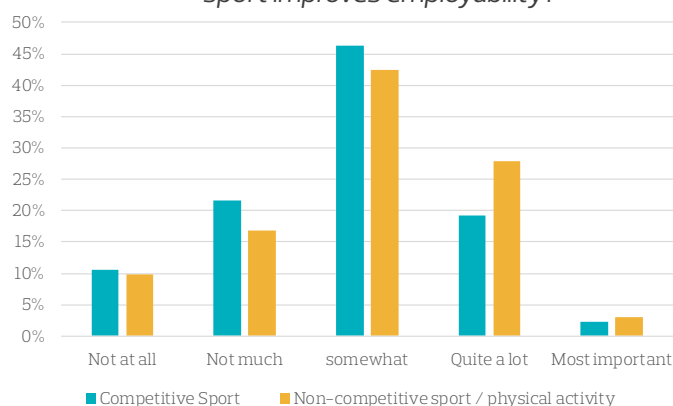
Perceptions of Employability

Key Findings

- >> Active students were most confident that they would be employed within six-months of graduating and rated themselves higher on all 10 employability skills.
- >> Students who took part in both sports and attended a gym also rated themselves highest on 8 out of 10 employability skills.
- >> Members of a sports team, a gym, or those who did both, rated themselves similar for employability traits, and higher on communication, leadership, and self-promotion than students who were a member of neither.

Students were asked to rate if they felt that participating in physical activity, exercise, or competitive or non-competitive sport improved their perceptions of employability or acceptance into further study. Most commonly students felt that both somewhat improved their employability. Students taking part in non-competitive sport, exercise, and physical activity were more likely than those taking part in competitive sport to say it improved employability quite a lot or that it was the most important factor.

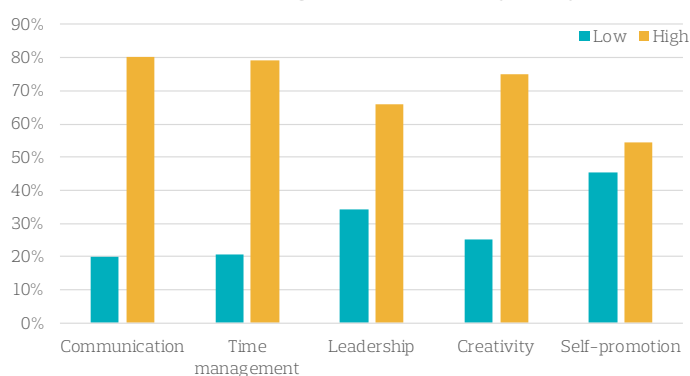
To what extent do you feel participating physical activity, exercise, or sport improves employability?



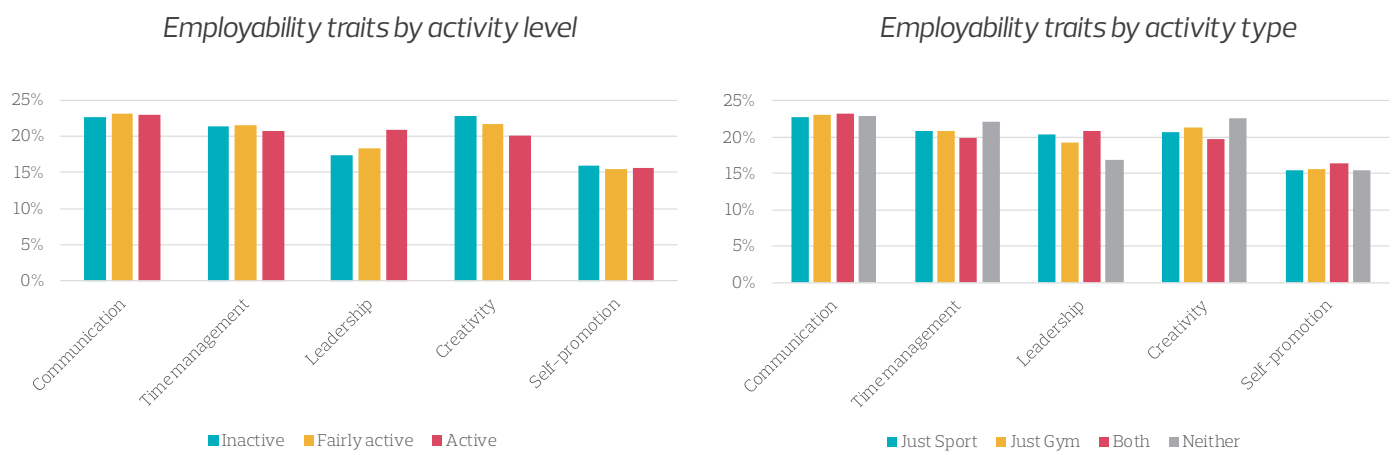
Segmenting the responses by activity level, active students were more likely than fairly active or inactive students to say they felt sport and physical activity was the most important factor influencing their perceptions of employability. Specifically, active students taking part in non-competitive sport and physical activity (47.1%) were more likely to select these responses than those taking part in competitive sport (28.8%).

When rating their employability traits, students were more likely to perceive themselves being high in all five traits, no matter how active they were. On a scale of 1–4, their ratings were split into high perception (3 or 4) and low perception (1 or 2).

Perceptions (high/low) of employability traits

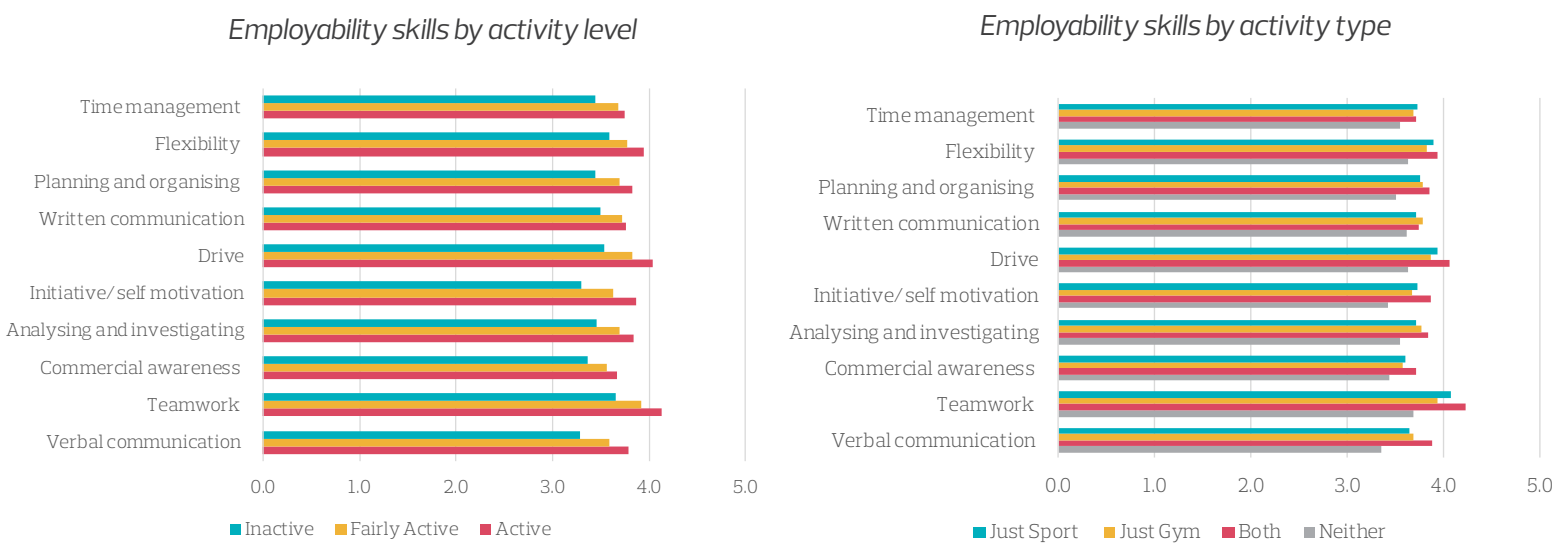


Students rated themselves highest in communication (80.1%), time management (79.3%) and creativity (74.8%). The percentage of students who scored themselves highly were then segmented by activity level and type. Fairly active and active students rated themselves the same in their employability traits and slightly higher than inactive students in areas of communication and leadership. However, in the other three traits, there were minimal differences between the activity level groupings, with inactive students rating themselves higher in traits of creativity and self-promotion.



Segmentation by activity type provided a similar perspective, with individuals who were neither a member of a sports club or a gym scoring highest in traits of creativity and time management than all other groupings.

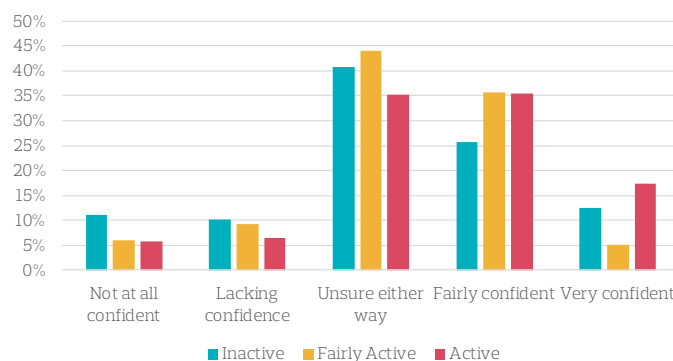
Members of a sports team, a gym or those who did both rated themselves similar for employability traits, with those who attended just a gym rating themselves higher on self-promotion and communication than those who attended a sports club. Being a member of a sports team, however, benefited the most in terms of leadership, whereby their scores were higher than those who attended just gyms.



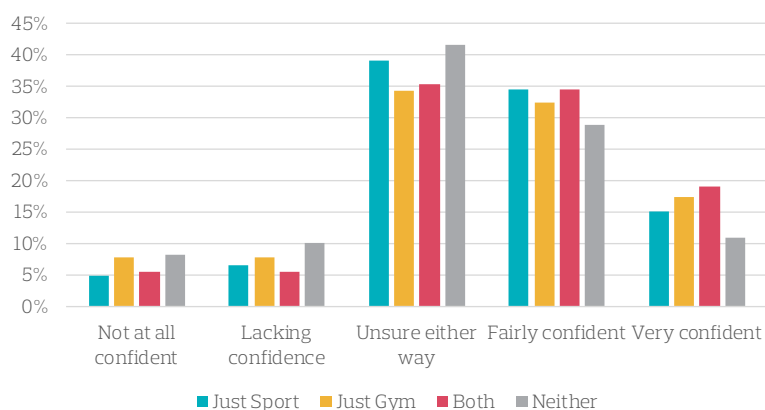
Students were also asked to rate to what extent they perceived themselves to have 10 key employability skills. Overall, all students rate themselves highly, with the lowest score of 3.5 out of 5 reported for commercial awareness. Students rated themselves most highly for teamwork skills (3.9 out of 5). As per employability traits, the most active students perceived themselves to be better in all 10 employability skills than less active students, with teamwork, drive and flexibility being ranked the highest by active students. Fairly active students rated all employability skills higher than inactive students, who were least confident about these skills. In particular, inactive students were least confident (rated the lowest) in their verbal communication and self-motivation skills.

Being a member of both a sports club and a gym greatly increased perceived employability skills, again in areas of teamwork and drive. In most cases ratings were similar for students who attended just the gym or just did sport, with those doing just sport rating themselves higher for skills of teamwork, flexibility, and drive. Those attending a gym perceived themselves to have skills of verbal communication skills and self-motivation, in comparison to those who were not members. In comparison to those who were part of a sports team, gym members rated themselves higher for analysing and investigating, planning and organising, and verbal communication.

Confidence of employment by activity level



Confidence of employment by activity type



Finally, students were asked to rate how confident they were that they would be employed six-months after finishing their college course. Overall, 45.9% of students were fairly or very confident that they would be employed within six-months. Active students once again reported being the most confident (52.7%; fairly or very) that they would be employed within six-months in comparison to fairly active (40.6%), and then inactive (38.2%).

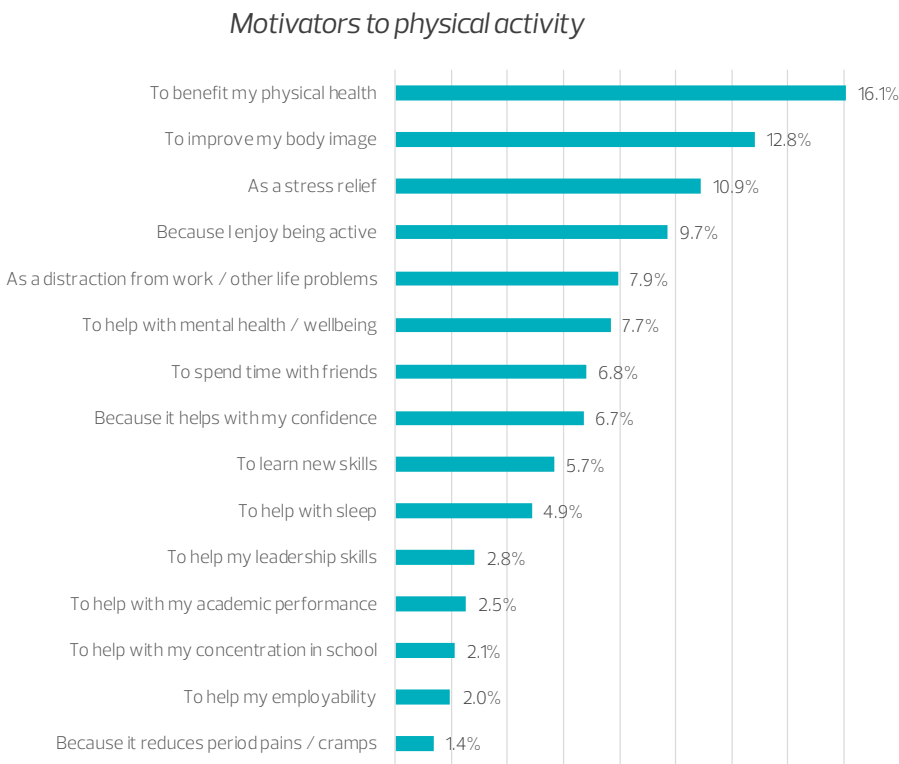
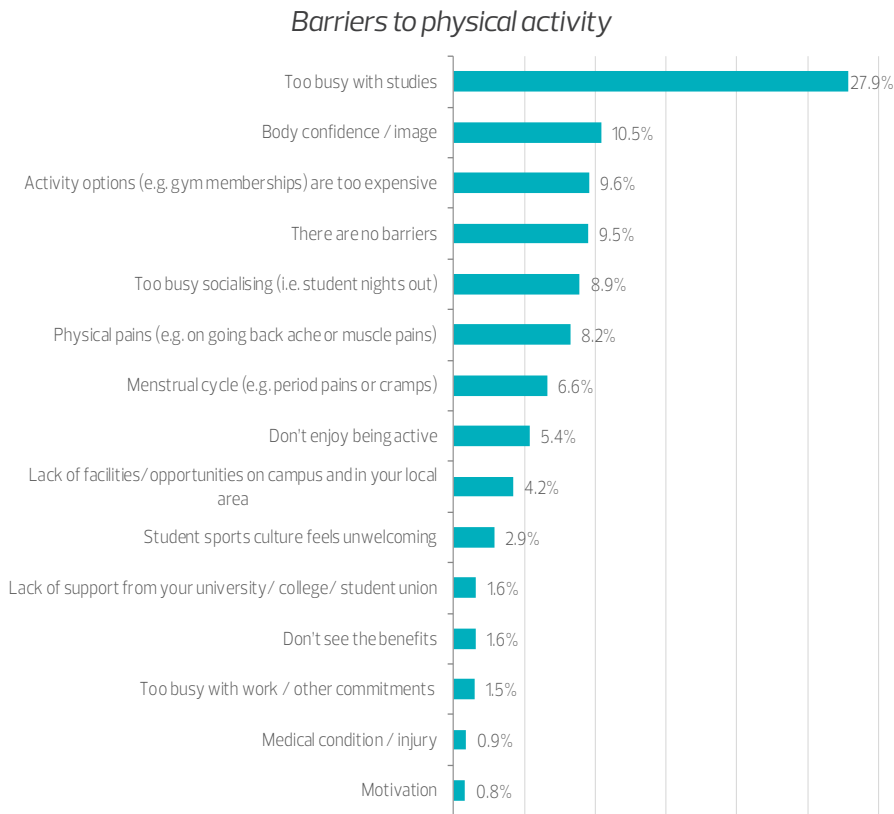
Being unsure of employment is most common, especially amongst students who are neither gym members or participate in sport (41.7%). For the students that are confident, it is the students who take part in both sport and the gym.

Barriers & Motivators to Being Active

A variety of factors influence barriers and motivators towards being active (e.g. age, gender, socioeconomic status, mental health). To understand these better, this survey asked students about the barriers they face that prevent them from being active, and the reasons why they decide to engage in physical activity.

The biggest reported barrier to being physically active was being too busy with studies (27.9%), which was the case regardless of activity level. Other barriers included body confidence/image (10.5%), cost (9.6%) and too busy socialising (8.9%). Encouragingly, lack of support from ones college was not a highly rated barrier (1.6%).

No barriers was the fourth highest response (9.5%). Although this is the case, this was more likely to be a response from active (45.3%) than inactive (14.5%) students. The existence of other barriers also suggests that colleges could support their students in other ways (e.g. ensuring time for activity inbetween study) to decrease their prevalence.



The top three motivators for being active were to benefit physical health (16.1%), to improve body image (12.8%) and as a stress relief (10.9%). Being active is recognised by students as having positive effects for both physical and mental health – mental health and wellbeing itself was the 6th most commonly cited motivator.

By activity level, inactive students were more likely to be active to benefit their physical health (33.4%) and improve their body image (26.1%) than fairly active (28.6% and 22.9% respectively) or active students (25.0% and 19.5% respectively). Active students were most likely to be active because they enjoyed it (21.6%), in comparison to only 8.6% of inactive students who cited this as a reason.

Summary and Conclusions

For the first time the physical activity habits of Further Education students have been explored through the *British Active Students Survey 2019: Further Education*. This explored the impact on physical and mental health, academic and employability prospects, and how Further Educational institutions (FEIs) can support more active lifestyles. This survey follows on from the research conducted through the Scottish⁷ (2017) and British³ (2018) Active Students Surveys that focused on higher education.

As with the findings from higher education, the results from this survey have shown that students who are more physically active report better levels of personal and mental wellbeing, social inclusion, loneliness, and trust, as well as more positive perceptions of their academic attainment and employability. Similar results were seen for students who participated in sport and were members of a gym, however, those who participated in sport alone scored higher than gym members alone. This suggests that although both types of activity participation combined produce the best findings across the board, sport participation can support wider improvements. Nonetheless, attending a gym still provides physical health and social benefits that are enhanced compared to not participating in either sport or the gym.

The UK Government reports that just over three million students⁵ are enrolled in higher education; between 24.5% (16–24 year olds) and 32.1% (25–34 year olds)⁶ do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity. The BASS in Higher Education³ states that moving to university can be a life changing experience however we know that adolescents are continuingly feeling life pressures². Further Education provides the link between compulsory schooling to either working life directly or attending university for continued education. The role of Further Education is therefore vital, and can be enhanced by providing opportunities to be physically active. The barriers and motivations explored in this report reveal that while students feel support is in place through their institutions, they are still spending almost half of the day sedentary. By promoting physical activity through a reduction in sedentary classroom time, in addition to providing clear links to gym-based and sporting opportunities, these institutions can help encourage healthy behaviours in their students which can impact them for life.

This survey was distributed across the UK, however a majority of respondents were located in FEI in England. Although this is dependent on network links across FEI, an area for focus in any further surveying will be to gather a more representative sample of responses across the four home nations. Nonetheless, this survey has indicated a clear association between physical activity levels and the type of activity with improvements in overall wellbeing and the perceptions students have of their current skills and their future abilities. These results, along with the research amongst Higher Education, demonstrates the important role educational institutions play in supporting and promoting physical activity amongst young adults.

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AoC Sport | email: sports@aoc.co.uk | twitter: @AoC_Sport

Matrix Fitness | marketing@matrixfitness.co.uk | twitter: @MatrixFitnessUK

Sport England | email: SportEnglandFE.Team@sportengland.org | twitter: @Sport_England

ukactive Research Institute | email: research@ukactive.org.uk | twitter: @_ukactive