# AN EVALUATION OF
# YOUTH SPORT NORTHERN IRELAND

Mary Allison
Fred Coalter

Centre for Leisure Research
The University of Edinburgh
Cramond Road North
Edinburgh
EH4 6JD

June 1999

# CONTENTS                                                        Page

# LIST OF FIGURES

- Although girls' participation was lower, it was not dominated by a single sports activity as boys' was by soccer. Girls participated in a wider range of sports, with swimming, netball, hockey and dance being especially popular.

## School Sports Co-ordinators: Key Observations

- In very few cases have there been any issues with the quality and commitment of those appointed as Co-ordinators.
- Personal interest and enthusiasm for sport by co-ordinators has been a significant factor in the success of the initiative.
- Most co-ordinators have received limited timetabled time for the initiative.
- Payments to co-ordinators represents only a token contribution towards their time on the initiative.
- Co-ordinators have delivered a significant range of new and extended sports activity.
- Half the co-ordinators have noted an increase in the number of post primary school pupils joining local sports clubs.
- Co-ordinators work in an average of 4 feeder primary schools but there is great demand to extend to a greater number of schools and a wider range of activities.
- The availability of coaches between 3-5 pm is a major constraint for Youth Sport as is developing links with primary schools in rural areas.
- Improvements in pupil/teacher relationships and increases in pupils self esteem were evidenced.
- Networking with Councils and Governing Bodies has been restricted due to the workload of everyone concerned.
- Success was unanimously recognised but demand to expand is unlikely to be satisfied within the current structures and resources.

## Headteachers: Key Observations

- The main reasons for becoming involved in Youth Sport were:-
  - to strengthen and develop general links with primary schools,
  - to involve pupils in community regeneration,
  - to promote sport and enhance PE in their own schools.
- Many head teachers regarded sport as important to encouraging personal and social development and a lifelong interest for their pupils in physical activity.
- Many of the head teachers were keen that Youth Sport targeted young people that were previously turned off traditional sports activities.
- The head teachers recognised the potential of Youth Sport to:
  - bring own board pupils that did not identify with school, and
  - contribute indirectly to broader aspects of school development.
- They agreed that young peoples' self esteem was improved by involvement in Youth Sport. .
- Youth Sport was recognised to have presented staff development opportunities.
- Some head teachers said there would be little difficulty resourcing Youth Sport at their school whilst others saw considerable difficulties allocating resources.

## Partner Agencies: Key Observations

### Education & Library Boards

- All boards were committed to the continuation and development of Youth Sport.
- They believed that priorities needed to be more specific to the needs of the different geographic areas within Youth Sport.
- They identified that a greater commitment is required at senior level with a more strategic approach to involvement in Youth Sport.
- Concern was expressed about the lack of suitably qualified coaches, lack of exit routes and the role of clubs.

# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

In February 1993, a Strategy for Sport for Young People in Northern Ireland was officially launched. The Strategy, developed by a range of agencies responsible for the development and delivery of sport in Northern Ireland, identified the following fundamental needs:

- Improved partnerships.
- Improved structures to develop pathways of performance.
- Opportunities for post-school sport.
- Support for teachers.
- Resources.
- Education and Training.

These needs were to be met by programmes that focused on 13 curriculum sports:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Athletics | Hockey | Netball | Camogie |
| Badminton | Hurling | Soccer | |
| Basketball | Gaelic Football | Rugby | |
| Cricket | Lifestyle Sport | Tennis | |

These programmes were to be delivered through a network of:

- Sports Development Officers
- Coach Development Officers
- School Sport Co-ordinators
- A Central Unit to resource, develop, co-ordinate and train.

Presentations of the Strategy were made by the Sports Council Northern Ireland (SCNI) to district councils, governing bodies of sport, education and library boards and community associations. Demonstration projects were also established in two schools (Antrim High School and Fleming Fulton School) to show how the school co-ordinator element of the strategy could work.

The appointment of a Youth Sport Director and a Resource Officer has meant that it was possible for the SCNI to develop partnerships throughout Northern Ireland.

In January 1995, this development started with the launch of Youth Sport Belfast, part-funded by Making Belfast Work and undertaken in partnership with the Sports Council Northern Ireland (SCNI) and the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB). The initiative started with the appointment of a development officer in the BELB and 14 school sport co-ordinators.

Since 1995, the programme has extended to the South East Education and Library Board area (1996/97), the North East Education and Library Board area (1998) and the Foyle area (1997) of the Western Education and Library Board in a cross border initiative with schools in Donegal. Proposals for other areas of the Western Board and a cross-border initiative in the Southern Board currently are being developed.

At the start of this research, there were a total of 67 school-sport co-ordinators working in 325 schools throughout Northern Ireland (this excludes the schools in the Donegal area). There were also 16 designated sports development officers in district councils that were linked to the programme.

This project has sought the views of all partner agencies involved in the initiative and has had the following aims and objectives.

# SECTION 2: RESEARCH APPROACH

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The issues identified in Section 1.2 were addressed using a combination of surveys, face-to-face interviews and group discussions. At each stage in the project design the steering group were invited to comment on questionnaires, contacts for interviews and the interim survey findings.

## 2.2 SURVEYS

Postal surveys were undertaken with school sport co-ordinators and head teachers and classroom surveys were undertaken with school pupils.

### School Sport Co-ordinators

This survey obtained information on:

- Background information (when appointed, why they applied).
- Sports provision in own school and in feeder primary schools.
- Numbers of boys and girls involved in school sport and changes in this.
- Views about the effects of participation in school sport on pupils.
- Links with local sports clubs.
- Resources to support the current and future programme.
- Views about the adequacy of the infrastructure (coaches, facilities, training etc).
- Views about the future of the programme.

Given the small sample available it was decided not to pilot the questionnaire. However, comments were received on the draft questionnaire from the clients and amendments made accordingly.

Of the 72 co-ordinators in post, a number were excluded:

- 5 schools in Donegal (outside the SCNI remit),
- 2 special schools (these were omitted on the advice of the ELB for that area),
- 1 school where the co-ordinator was on maternity leave, and
- 1 school where the co-ordinator had resigned and a replacement was not yet appointed.

Questionnaires were mailed to co-ordinators at their school address (with a pre-paid envelope for their return) and from the 63 co-ordinators, a total of 53 replies (85%) were received.

Non-respondents were chased extensively over an eight week period by the Centre for Leisure Research (CLR) (using reminder letters and telephone calls), by the relevant Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and by the SCNI. Every effort was made to achieve a 100% response but due to staff sickness and pressure of work, some co-ordinators were unable to respond.

### Head Teachers

This survey obtained information on:

- Background information about the school (size, sports facilities available).
- Their perception of the value of school sport.
- Issues regarding current and required resources for school sport.
- Changing relationships with primary schools.
- Their views on the future of the programme.

## 2.3 INTERVIEWS AND GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Following initial analysis of the survey data, a programme of qualitative interviews and discussion groups was drawn up. This included:

- 6 school sport co-ordinators,
- 6 head teachers,
- 4 governing body development officers,
- 4 district council development officers,
- 4 education and library board development officers,
- 4 education and library board PE advisors (or equivalent),
- 1 programme sponsor, and
- 1 SCNI officer.

In addition, group discussions were undertaken in 6 schools with groups of around 10 boys and 10 girls from Year 8. These pupils were selected randomly and not necessarily for their involvement in Youth Sport programmes.

It was thought that this broader group of pupils would give a more balanced perspective on the role of sport in the lives of young people and allow us to comment on Youth Sport from the perspective of non-participants as well as participants.

The purpose of the interviews and group discussions was to clarify and explore further some of the findings of the postal surveys. Additionally, this qualitative dimension allowed for a more in-depth discussion and understanding of the 'capacity building' concept.

**Table 3.1:    Co-ordinators' reasons for applying for the post**

|  | **Percentage of respondents** |
|---|---|
| Had a relevant background | 49 |
| Wanted to increase opportunities for pupils | 39 |
| Personal reasons | 35 |
| To be involved in sports development | 14 |
| Youth sport ethos appealed | 6 |
| To bring general benefits to school | 6 |
| To increase support/resources from statutory bodies | 4 |

*Base number: 49*

Note:  Multiple response question, percentages add to more than 100%
          A further 5 responses were provided, each by 1 co-ordinator

Just over a third (35%) of the co-ordinators applied for more personal reasons, including career development, increased income and personal challenge.

Most of the interviewees had to compete for the post. They regarded this as appropriate and all thought that it was a fair process, which had not led to resentment among staff. There was some debate at to whether it was possible (or desirable) for senior staff to be involved in co-ordinator posts. Such additional responsibilities were likely to interfere with their current work. In fact, in one school, the head of PE had to resign from the co-ordinator's post for this reason.

Interviewees acknowledged that the work involved was greater than they had imagined and required unpaid time in evenings and at weekends. Nevertheless all said that they enjoyed the work. They believed that they would not have applied for the post had they not already been an enthusiastic teacher who wanted to be involved in extra-curricular sport. All interviewees said that the money was not an incentive to apply, as most regarded it as a token payment that would not cover the volume of work associated with the post. Some felt that the co-ordinators were often more 'child-centred' than other teachers, obtaining a high degree of satisfaction through working with children, rather than simply regarding teaching as 'a job'.

Head teachers were also positive about how the initiative had presented an opportunity for staff development. One commented,

> "it has given her [the co-ordinator] opportunities to develop. It isn't always easy to find these opportunities for younger staff."

Another head teacher said that,

> "within the curriculum teachers are very much in a straightjacket – this project gives them some flexibility to decide what motivates what people."

For some co-ordinators, the post had also given them a new outlook on their work, as they had developed a network of external contacts in primary schools and with sponsors, governing bodies of sport and district councils. This network of contacts had become an invaluable resource for the school.

## Opportunities Provided in Feeder Primary Schools

In the past year each co-ordinator had, on average, provided a total of 11 after-school programmes in primary schools, generally one sport per term per school. A common approach was to work with around 4 feeder primary schools, organise 3-4 courses per school per year with around 20-30 pupils on each course. In addition to this, programmes were often organised during the Easter and summer holidays plus inter-school festivals and competitions.

Interviewees acknowledged that there was often a greater demand for some sports than they were able to cater for, and as one co-ordinator stated,

> "we'd love to involve more kids but there are limits to how many of them can get involved in a course."

## Sports Provided in Primary Schools

Co-ordinators were asked to indicate the sports which they had provided at their feeder primary schools and if this sport was a new opportunity in the school. All co-ordinators had been involved in providing programmes in primary schools, with 94 per cent providing at least one *new* sport.

### Team Sports

The co-ordinators were more likely to provide team games than individual activities and among the top ten sports provided, seven were team games.

Soccer was the most widely provided sport, followed by basketball with both being provided by at least two thirds of the co-ordinators. The next most popular team sport was netball, offered by half the co-ordinators, followed by hockey (41%) and rugby (37%).

*New Sports*

Almost all the co-ordinators (94%) had introduced some new sports into their primary schools. Figure 3.2 illustrates the proportion of co-ordinators providing any sport and, within this, the proportion that introduced it as a *new* sport to some of their schools.

Basketball was provided by about two thirds (67%) of the co-ordinators and in all cases was a *new* activity. Although on a much smaller scale, the other wholly new activities were judo (9%), volleyball (7%), line dancing (4%), handball (2%), keep fit (2%) and karate (2%). Other activities which could be regarded as 'new' because of the very small proportion of schools which had previously provided them were dance; swimming, aerobics, golf and cross country. However, most of these activities were still only available via a small proportion of the co-ordinators.

Among the major sports, almost a third of co-ordinators had introduced athletics, rugby and tennis to their primary schools, making them the second most widespread new activities. The new athletics provision served to increase an already well established activity. However, the introduction of both rugby and tennis has served to increase substantially a previously relatively low level of provision.

Interviewees expressed some scepticism about the limits to introducing many new sports. As one interviewee commented, "you have to respond to pupil demand – they don't all want to do new things". However this was balanced with an awareness that "you have to bring in some new sports, or else boys will play nothing but soccer".

## Proportions of Primary Pupils Participating in Extra-Curricular Sport

Because many children participated in more than one sport it was difficult to estimate precisely the numbers taking part in the Youth Sport programme. However, the co-ordinators estimated that, on average, a quarter of the pupils in their feeder primary schools had participated in their programmes.

---

**Figure 3.3:  Primary Schools: Estimated proportion of pupils taking part in extra-curricular activities**



41% of pupils or more (9%)

up to 20% of pupils (51%)

21% to 40% of pupils (40%)
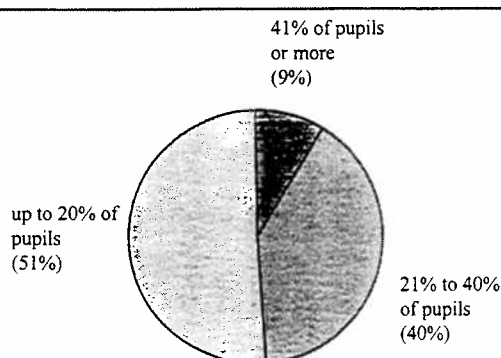
*Base number: 53*

Note:  Average (mean) = 25% of pupils

---

Half (51%) estimated that one in five pupils or less were involved in the programme, 40 per cent estimated the proportion as being between one and two in five and 9 per cent estimated that they had involved more than two in five pupils.

Interviewees had attempted to broaden the participation base by offering a wide range of activities. However, places on courses were limited (usually because of the ratio of pupils to coaches) and were offered on a first come, first served basis. Where demand was greater than the places available, co-ordinators had sought to repeat the course.

*Age Groups Involved in Primary Programmes*

In general, courses were advertised to older primary school pupils and this was reflected in the pattern of participation. Almost all co-ordinators had involved Year 6 (94%) and Year 7 (96%) pupils in the Youth Sport programmes. Three-quarters (72%) had involved Year 5 pupils, with only a quarter (22%) involving Year 4 pupils.

Despite the widespread use of local contacts, more than half (57%) also used governing bodies as a source of information about coaches. Governing bodies were a particular source of information for new sports, which were often 'minority' sports. As one co-ordinator commented,

> "it's very difficult to get coaches for new sports – you have very little control over them and you really have to trust the governing bodies."

Interviewees had a number of issues to deal with in recruiting and retaining coaches. Firstly, in some sports there has been difficulty recruiting enough coaches - netball was a sport with a particular shortage of coaches. Secondly, there is a general lack of coaches available directly after school (4-6pm) as many have full-time day jobs and undertake coaching in the evenings only. Thirdly, many had to go through a process of sifting, in order to arrive at a list of coaches which they regarded as suitable for their children. This was related to the fourth issue - increasing competition between co-ordinators for the same quality coaches. This problem has increased with the success and expansion of the Youth Sport programme. Some had to book the best coaches well in advance to ensure that they were available. If the Youth Sport programme is to expand and develop, these issues will need urgent attention.

Some co-ordinators have used students as coaches. However, despite their availability, they are often unable to travel long distances and do not have access to the same sports equipment that governing body, or local club, coaches can offer. As one co-ordinator commented,

> "we've tried to use students, but most of them don't have cars and our primaries aren't easy to get to by bus."

Others had also tried to train senior pupils, but as one co-ordinator noted,

> "we've tried to get seniors through coaching awards but it's very expensive, especially as they move on quite quickly."

Thus, although students and senior pupils can provide a useful supplement to the programme, it is unlikely that they could be used as the foundation for a sustainable and expanding structure.


## 3.4    YOUTH SPORT IN OWN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Introduction**

Despite the interviewees' concentration on developing activity in their feeder primary schools, the survey data also indicate increased opportunities in their own schools – both pre-existing and new sports. Further, the pupils arriving in year 8 who had been involved in Youth Sport in year 7, were better placed to take advantage of opportunities. As one interviewee noted,

> "the kids that get into Youth Sport in primary school are less susceptible to [negative] peer pressure in secondary school. They've got into sport and want to carry on because they like it."

Co-ordinators recognised that these young people had a higher skill base which further assists them to take advantage of their post-primary provision,

15

## Figure 3.4: Post-Primary School: Activities provided

| Activity | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|
| Soccer | 92 |
| Athletics | 73 |
| Netball | 59 |
| Cross-Country | 57 |
| Hockey | 57 |
| Basketball | 47 |
| Badminton | 43 |
| Rugby | 43 |
| Swimming | 37 |
| Gaelic Football | 31 |
| Tennis | 29 |
| Keep Fit / Aerobics | 29 |
| Gymnastics | 28 |
| Cricket | 28 |
| Hurling | 26 |
| Golf | 22 |
| Dance | 20 |
| Camogie | 14 |
| Weight Training | 12 |
| Hillwalking | 12 |
| Volleyball | 12 |
| Trampolining | 6 |
| Irish Dancing | 4 |
| Handball | 4 |
| Table Tennis | 4 |
| Horse Riding | 2 |
| Canoeing | 2 |

*Base number: 52*
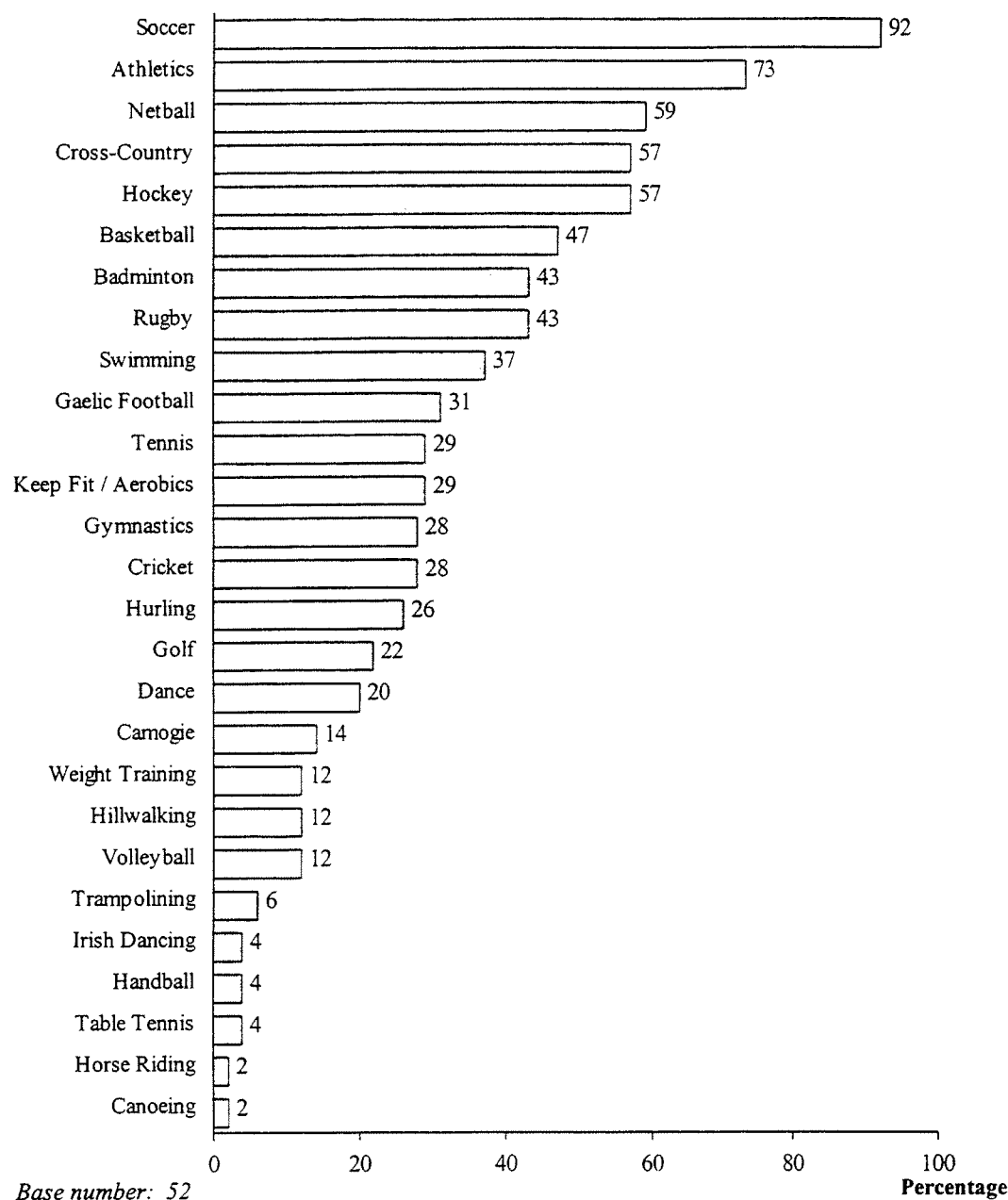
Note: Multiple response question, percentages add to more than 100%

*Individual Sports*

Athletics was the second most commonly provided extra-curricular sport. It was also the most popular individual activity, being offered in almost three-quarters of the co-ordinators' schools. This was followed by the related cross-country (57%). After athletics, swimming was the most common individual activity and was offered by over a third (37%) of co-ordinators.

17

The overall pattern differs from the feeder primary schools. The work of the co-ordinators in their *own* schools has mainly been to consolidate and extend *existing* opportunities, rather than to introduce new sports. For example, the top ten sports in which opportunities had been increased were also the top ten previously provided. Soccer and athletics, which were the two most commonly provided sports prior to the co-ordinators, were also those which have experienced the greatest increases in provision.

However, there were some sports where the scale of increased opportunities did not reflect the provision prior to co-ordinators' appointments. Basketball, for example, ranked sixth among existing sports, but third in terms of increased opportunities. Conversely, netball and cross country were ranked third and fourth among sports already provided, but ninth and tenth in terms of increased opportunities – perhaps indicating that most demand was already being satisfied.

There were similar issues among the less popular sports. For example, gymnastics, which was already provided in over a quarter (28%) of co-ordinators' schools, only increased in 5 per cent of co-ordinators' schools. Similarly dance, provided in a fifth (20%) of co-ordinators' schools, increased in only 3 per cent of co-ordinators' schools – again indicating either a lack of expertise among staff or that existing demand was largely satisfied.

*New Sports*

Eighty-one per cent of co-ordinators had introduced an average of three new sports to their own schools. Given the previous predominance of team sports, it is encouraging that 13 of the 22 *new* activities were individual or partner sports - they also accounted for six of the top ten new activities.

There was no clear pattern to the provision of new sports, although inevitably there was more limited scope to introduce new sports in a context of existing high levels of sport provision. Despite this general impression, the top two new activities, basketball and rugby, were among the top ten sports which were already provided.

# Proportion of Post-Primary School Pupils Participating in Extra-Curricular Sport

*Overall Participation*

Co-ordinators estimated that (on average) 30 per cent of pupils in their own schools were involved in extra-curricular school sport. However, a third of co-ordinators estimated that they had one in five pupils or less involved, with a fifth (18%) estimating that they had more than two in five involved.

**Figure 3.7:** **Post-Primary School: Proportion of pupils taking part in extra-curricular activities**



up to 20% of pupils
(33%)

21% to 40%
of pupils
(50%)

41% of pupils
or more
(18%)
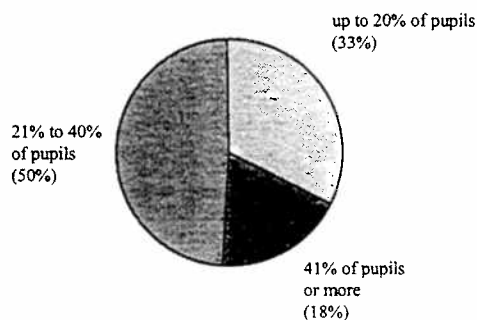
*Base number: 53*

Note: Average (mean) = 30% of pupils

With the average size of the post-primary schools being 600 pupils, this means that on average 180 pupils were involved to some degree in extra-curricular activity in an average post-primary school.

*Participation and Gender*

Co-ordinators were asked to estimate how many boys and girls usually took part in extra-curricular sports. Figure 3.8 indicates their estimates of the average *number* of boys and girls which were involved in each of the top ten extra-curricular sports, *in the schools which provided these sports.*

In eight of the top ten sports, the average number of boys participating was greater than the average number of girls. Only in the more traditional girls' sports of hockey and netball was the average number of girls greater than boys.

In the schools which provide the activities, Gaelic football and soccer attract large numbers of male participants. Among females, although no sport is as dominant as Gaelic football and soccer for boys, there are two main sports - hockey (an average of 40 participants) and netball (36).

**Figure 3.9: Proportion of co-ordinators indicating increases in boys' and girls' participation in the top ten extra-curricular sports**



| Sport | Boys | Girls |
|---|---|---|
| Basketball | 77 | 86 |
| Badminton | 71 | 69 |
| Swimming | 70 | 67 |
| Gaelic Football | 53 | 33 |
| Soccer | 41 | 71 |
| Rugby | 39 | 78 |
| Hockey | 33 | 32 |
| Cross Country | 33 | 30 |
| Athletics | 31 | 53 |
| Netball | 0 | 42 |

*Base number: 50*                                                      **Percentage**
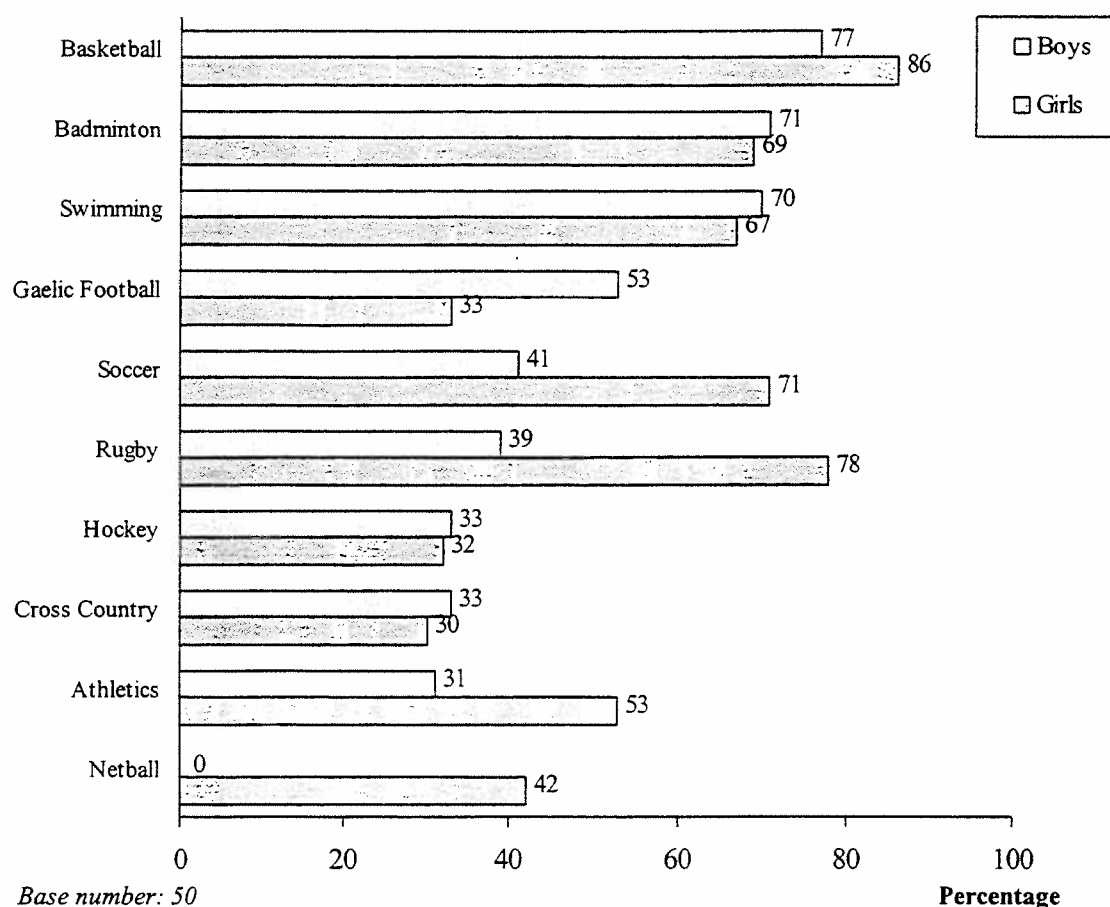
However, there were only four sports where at least half the co-ordinators estimated that boys' participation had increased - basketball, badminton, swimming and Gaelic football.

Clearly it was much easier to increase girls' lower participation by the provision of opportunities than it was to achieve increases in boys' already high levels of participation (in a relatively narrow range of sports).

**Post-Primary School Links to Local Sports Clubs**

Almost nine in ten co-ordinators (87%) had developed links with local sports clubs as part of their Youth Sport work. The links were mainly in the traditional team sports of hockey, basketball, soccer, rugby, Gaelic football and cricket. However, in light of the shortage of netball coaches, it is interesting to note that links with netball clubs were the poorest among team sports. In terms of pupils' participation in clubs outside school (see Section 6), only two of these traditional team sports appeared in their top five sports - soccer and hockey. Basketball, which was second in the co-ordinators' links with clubs was ranked eighth in terms of participation.

In trying to address the issues of club development, co-ordinators commented on a range of approaches. These approaches included taking direct measures to improve provision. As one co-ordinator said,

> "in some sports there just aren't any local clubs, so sometimes we have to try to start a junior club ourselves."

Where clubs did exist, they were not always willing to co-operate. One co-ordinator commented,

> "some clubs are okay, but some are really wrapped up in their own business. It's a very slow process to change the clubs' outlook."

In other cases the co-ordinators acknowledged that others were trying to address club development issues and that this was beginning to influence clubs. This acknowledgement of others' inputs is illustrated by co-ordinators' comments such as;

> "the junior development pack has been a useful resource to encourage clubs."

and

> "the Sports Council's kite mark scheme has helped. It has put some pressure on clubs to think about what they can offer us."

Despite these difficulties, half the co-ordinators (51%) said that there had been an increase in the number of pupils at their school joining local sports clubs. The figure was higher in Belfast, where two thirds (64%) stated that there had been an increase in the numbers joining local sports clubs. This may reflect that fact that Youth Sport Belfast has been in place much longer than elsewhere and that there are more opportunities to join sports clubs in Belfast compared to rural areas.

**Views About the Impact of Youth Sport in Post-Primary School**

Co-ordinators were presented with a range of statements about the possible benefits of their pupils' participation in extra-curricular activities and asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed. The highest level of agreement among co-ordinators related to the way in which Youth Sport had contributed to improved pupil-teacher relationships and increased confidence among participating pupils.

Just over one third (35%) strongly agreed that extra-curricular sport had *led to a general improvement of pupil-teacher relationships* and 50 per cent agreed. This is partly mirrored in the attitudes of the young people, 53 per cent of whom either agreed a lot/a little with the statement that *taking part in sport at school helped me to get on better with my teachers*. Further, in the discussion groups the pupils said that the relaxed atmosphere of sport helped them to get to know teachers better as people. A further element was that many of the pupils appreciated that the teachers involved in extra-curricular sport were doing it in their own time and this increased their motivation to do well for the teachers.

The areas where co-ordinators were least sure related to the potential for extra-curricular sport to broaden horizons and improve more general behaviour. Clearly a high proportion of the respondents did not have sufficient experience of these aspects to make informed judgements. However among those who did express an opinion, it tended to be positive, with about two thirds agreeing that extra-curricular sport had *lead to an improvement in general behaviour in schools* (64%) and had *enabled pupils to look beyond their local communities* (66%).

Other perceived benefits included improved social skills, increased fitness, improved self-esteem and acquisition of new sports skills.

## 3.5 RESOURCING THE YOUTH SPORT PROGRAMME

### Introduction

Youth Sport co-ordinators relied on a wide range of financial and human resources as well as access to sports facilities and equipment. Further, the Youth Sport programme is a partnership between a range of agencies including the Sports Council Northern Ireland, the education and library boards, the participating secondary schools and their feeder primaries, the district councils and governing bodies of sport. In Belfast, the Youth Sport programme receives sponsorship from Ballygowan, the makers of a natural mineral water drink. The sponsorship provides finance, which has been used to produce high quality promotional material, and products (distributed to participants at events). In some schools, other partners such as partnership boards and development agencies have been involved in supporting the programme. While this broad range of inputs was recognised as necessary, it was also a source of frustration for some co-ordinators that broader partnerships brought increased levels of bureaucracy.

However, half the co-ordinators regarded their existing resources as adequate to provide a sports programme to meet pupils' needs. Among Belfast co-ordinators, who have had much more time to establish their programmes and resource bases, two thirds (64%) regarded their resources as adequate.

Among those who regarded resources as inadequate, the main deficiencies were lack of equipment (44%), problems of access to facilities (40%) and a general lack of finance (40%). Among the co-ordinators who thought resources were inadequate, one in five regarded the lack of time allocated to the co-ordinator post as a problem.

### Funding

*Sources of Income*

The funding arrangements in each of the four education and library boards varied slightly, depending on the range of partners involved. However, each school was given a contribution towards the co-ordinator's costs. This generally started with full support of £2,500 per year, gradually reducing over a three year period as the school took on an increasing proportion of the costs. Each school sport co-ordinator was also provided with a £1,000 expenditure budget that was held in an education and library board account.

Although few co-ordinators were 'very satisfied' with resources, they were most satisfied with those available for staff costs. Nearly three quarters (72%) were satisfied with the finance available for sports coaches.

Interviewees indicated that charges from pupils are usually adequate to cover payments to coaches and, in the group discussions, most pupils did not complain about the charges and regarded the courses as good value for money. Where courses ran at a loss, the deficit was covered by the expenditure budget. This occasionally arose where a coach was paid a higher fee for travelling a long distance (usually to a rural school), or where the course was under-subscribed. Related to the staffing costs, six out of ten co-ordinators felt that the resources for staff training were also adequate.

**Table 3.6:** **Satisfaction with elements of funding to ensure long term sustainability of Youth Sport**

|  | Very Satisfactory | Satisfactory | Don't Know | Unsatisfactory | Very Unsatisfactory |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | Percentage of respondents |  |  |  |
| Funding for sports equipment | 11 | 57 | 11 | 21 | 0 |
| Funding for travel | 4 | 25 | 29 | 31 | 12 |
| Financial support for facility use | 4 | 55 | 24 | 16 | 0 |
| Funding for sports coaches | 17 | 55 | 4 | 23 | 2 |
| Funding for staff training | 10 | 52 | 19 | 15 | 4 |

*Base number: 53*

Note: Multiple response question, percentages add to more than 100%

Co-ordinators were generally satisfied with the resources available for sports equipment and facilities. Nevertheless, one fifth (21%) regarded resources for facilities and equipment as inadequate to ensure the sustainability of Youth Sport.

Where relevant, travel costs were regarded as the most unsatisfactory area. Only 29 per cent of co-ordinators were satisfied that funding for travel was adequate enough to ensure the long term sustainability of Youth Sport, while 43 per cent regarded such funding as inadequate. This was confirmed by interviewees, who commented that primary school participants in programmes often have to be bussed to facilities because of the inadequacy of primary school facilities. Further, as Youth Sport developed there had been potential to bring schools together at one event, but this was only possible when travel costs could be met. It was clear that this was an issue in both urban and rural areas.

Although not always relevant, financial support for facility use was regarded as satisfactory by 59 per cent of co-ordinators, with 16 per cent viewing it as unsatisfactory.

The involvement of parents was the area with which co-ordinators expressed the greatest dissatisfaction – 44 per cent viewed it as unsatisfactory, with only a quarter (26%) being satisfied. Belfast co-ordinators were most likely to be dissatisfied – 61 per cent, compared to 37 per cent of co-ordinators outside Belfast.

**Partner Agencies**

Co-ordinators were generally satisfied with the support they had received from the major partners in the programme. Eighty-three per cent were satisfied with the support from the Sports Council Northern Ireland. There was also a high level of satisfaction with the support provided by the education and library boards (89%), although there was a lower level of satisfaction with the expressive studies advisors (62%) (although 19% had no experience of the advisors).

**Table 3.8:** **Satisfaction with partner agency support**

|  | Very Satisfactory | Satisfactory | Don't Know | Unsatisfactory | Very Unsatisfactory |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Percentage of respondents | | | | |
| Sports Council Northern Ireland | 37 | 46 | 10 | 8 | 0 |
| Education and Library Board | 38 | 51 | 8 | 4 | 0 |
| Sports Development Officers | 48 | 39 | 6 | 4 | 4 |
| Expressive Studies Advisors | 35 | 27 | 19 | 12 | 8 |

*Base number: 52*

The highest level of satisfaction was with those operating at the most local level – the local authority sports development officers – 87 per cent of co-ordinators were satisfied with the support provided by them (with nearly half (48%) regarding the support as very satisfactory).

Overall, interviewees reflected this high level of satisfaction. As one co-ordinator stated,

"there has always been someone there when I've needed advice."

Further, co-ordinators did not wish to under-value the contribution of other co-ordinators. Comments such as "the contact with other co-ordinators has been invaluable" were widespread.

# SECTION 4: HEAD TEACHERS

## 4.1    INTRODUCTION

Head teachers in schools with school sport co-ordinators were mailed a questionnaire and 80 per cent (50) responded. The questionnaire sought their views about strategic issues such as the perceived benefits of being involved in Youth Sport, the resources required to sustain the initiative and their views about its future.

## 4.2    BACKGROUND TO INVOLVEMENT IN YOUTH SPORT

Nearly all the schools (98%) in which co-ordinators worked had previously provided at least one extra-curricular sport. Therefore head teachers were asked about the *added value* provided by Youth Sport and why they agreed to participate.

**Reasons for Involvement in Youth Sport**

About half (52%) of the head teachers regarded the development and strengthening of *general* links with feeder primary schools as important (although the interviewees placed much stronger emphasis on this). Most of the other reasons given for involvement related to the improvement of sporting opportunities (in primary and post-primary schools) and the broader issue of community regeneration.

---

**Table 4.1:  Reasons for applying for Youth Sport post**

|  | Percentage of respondents |
|---|---|
| Strengthen/develop *general* links with primary schools | 52 |
| Involve pupils in community regeneration | 22 |
| Develop physical education in primary schools | 20 |
| Promote sport to pupils | 20 |
| To enhance existing physical education and sport in own school | 17 |
| Believe in the value of sport for young people | 9 |
| Develop an extra-curricular programme for own school | 9 |
| To improve sports participation rates among young people | 7 |

*Base number:  46*

Note:  Multiple response, percentages add to more than 100%
       There were a further 14 responses each provided by individual head teachers

---

About one in five (22%) viewed Youth Sport as an opportunity to involve pupils in a broader process of community regeneration and an equivalent proportion viewed it as an opportunity to develop PE in primary schools. Others had more generalised rationales – a desire to promote sport to pupils (20%), a belief in the value of sport for young people (9%) and the need to improve sports participation rates among young people (7%).

**Figure 4.1: Head teachers: Importance of aspects of sport to overall aims of school**



To involve as many pupils as possible in sport out of lesson time: 84, 16, 0

To provide as wide a range of sports as possible: 78, 20, 2

To have pupils represent the school in competitions: 61, 39, 0

To involve pupils from feeder primary schools in sports activities: 50, 44, 6

To compete against other schools in sport activities: 40, 54, 6

To win sports competitions: 10, 66, 24

Legend: ■ Very important  □ Quite important  □ Not important

Percentage (0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)

*Base number: 50*

Participation was accorded a higher priority than competition. Although 61 per cent thought that representing the school was "very important", only 40 per cent thought that *competing* with other schools was "very important". Further, 10 per cent thought that it was "very important" that pupils won sports competitions, with a quarter (24%) regarding it as "not important" (making it the least important aspect of sport).

This general theme of the importance of taking part in sport was repeated in most of the interviews. A number of head teachers thought that Youth Sport should seek to maximise participation and this objective should have a greater emphasis than the development of competitive sport.

As one head teacher commented,

"in our school we have traditionally focused on competitive team games. Youth Sport gives us an opportunity to extend the range of extra-curricular sports and to offer more opportunities to more pupils."

Similarly, another head teacher stated,

"we need a greater number of children involved – new children especially. Children that currently don't identify with our school sports programme."

The more sports-specific outcomes of fostering fair competition (66%) and identifying and encouraging those with talent (52%) were viewed as least important.

Interviewees confirmed these findings, with one head teacher commenting that, for example,

"it is important to give them sports that they'll continue with after they leave school."

Assisting pupils to develop a generic set of physical activity skills and a basic level of fitness was generally regarded as more important than having specific sports achievements and results.

## 4.3 PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF YOUTH SPORT

### Overall Benefits of Youth Sport

Head teachers were presented with a range of statements about the possible benefits of their pupils' participation in extra-curricular activities and were asked whether they agreed with the statements.

The head teachers were in broad agreement with the school sport co-ordinators about the benefits of extra-curricular sport. With one exception, both groups agreed on the order of the top six benefits. Whereas the co-ordinators had regarded a general improvement of pupil-teacher relationships as the top benefit, head teachers chose increased self-confidence among pupils as the main benefit – 52 per cent strongly agreed that this had been an outcome (a further 46 per cent agreed).

Paralleling this increased pupil self-confidence, 40 per cent of head teachers strongly agreed (and 48% agreed) that participation in extra-curricular sport had *led to a general improvement of pupil-teacher relationships*. However, although their evaluations were still positive, head teachers were less sure about the broader impacts on the general social relations within the school. For example, although agreeing that participation in extra-curricular sport had *led to a greater involvement in the general life of the school*, only 20 per cent "strongly agreed" that this had occurred. Further, although 50 per cent agreed that participation had *led to an improvement in general behaviour in school*, only 12 per cent felt secure enough to "strongly agree" and a third (34%) did not know.

Many interviewees were sceptical about making claims about sport's ability to reduce vandalism and truancy. However, they did not rule out an indirect association. For example, one head teacher commented,

> "sport may help truancy, but not by x, y or z percent. Sport can help some young people's self-esteem and confidence, that often helps them to identify better with school."

In response to an open ended question about the benefits of participation in extra-curricular sports, most head teachers mentioned individual benefits to pupils. These repeated many of the above benefits and included the development of social skills (42%), development of confidence (42%), development of identity within school (32%) and greater enjoyment of school life (10%).

## Links with Primary Schools and Local Clubs

### Primary Schools

Overall, almost nine out of ten (88%) head teachers believed that Youth Sport had led to improvements in their schools' relationships with their feeder primary schools (the rest were not sure). Nearly three quarters (71%) said that their school facilities were used by feeder primary schools and in two thirds (65%) of cases this use had increased since the appointment of the Youth Sport co-ordinator.

However, more than three quarters (78%) did not know if these improved relationships had led to an increased pupil intake from these schools. It seems that the relationship between Youth Sport and these broader educational and community outcomes are difficult to measure in isolation from other factors.

### Local Clubs

Almost two thirds (63%) of the head teachers' schools are available for use by local clubs. Among these, almost a third (30%) said that use by local clubs had increased since their involvement in the Youth Sport initiative. As half of the head teachers regarded their sports facilities as inadequate to meet their current teaching requirements, it is possible that club use of these facilities is constrained by their poor quality or small scale.

## 4.4    RESOURCING YOUTH SPORT

### Introduction

Schools involved in Youth Sport contribute a variety of resources (financial, staffing, equipment) and are required to make an increasing financial contribution from year to year eventually resuming responsibility for all staffing costs. Consequently, it was important to consider head teachers' views about the resourcing of the initiative.

**Table 4.3: Additional resources provided to support Youth Sport**

| | Percentage of respondents |
|---|---|
| Teaching cover provided | 63 |
| Assistance with travel | 55 |
| Clothing/equipment | 50 |
| Funding for paid coaches | 40 |
| Teachers given time off in lieu | 26 |
| Teachers' time paid for | 24 |
| Equipment maintenance | 2 |
| Sports hall lent to primary schools | 2 |

*Base number: 38*

Note: Multiple response, percentages add to more than 100%

In addition to these various forms of support for teachers, 40 per cent of head teachers had provided funding for the employment of coaches. Other forms of support included assistance with travel (55%) and clothing and equipment (50%).

**Staffing**

*Overall*

Only half the head teachers (51%) regarded the existing human resources as adequate to provide a relevant programme to meet pupils' needs. Among those who felt that current staffing was inadequate, 44 per cent said that there was a general lack of staff willing to be involved and 33 per cent identified a shortage of appropriately qualified sports coaches.

*Co-ordinators' time*

On average the Youth Sport co-ordinator was allocated 2 hours and 20 minutes for Youth Sport per week. However, 12 of the 50 head teachers (24%) did not answer this question. If their answer had been 'no time', then the average time would be considerably less. Our interviews with co-ordinators and others indicated that many were operating with no timetabled time (or had been unable to protect the timetabled time).

*Importance of other school staff*

When considering the relative importance of various staff (other than the co-ordinator) to the Youth Sport initiative, head teachers rated themselves as more important than any other group. Nearly three quarters (71%) regarded their contribution as "very important". The next most important contributors, selected by about two thirds of respondents as "very important", were the PE staff and the local primary schools. Taken together, this group of staff would have had the major contact with the Youth Sport programme.

Nearly three quarters (71%) had general purpose playgrounds and two thirds (67%) had outdoor pitches/sports fields. However, only 29 per cent regarded the playgrounds as adequate, with about a third regarding the pitches (36%) and grass/other tracks (37%) as adequate. All other facilities were provided in a half or less of the schools.

**Figure 4.4: Sports facilities**



Base number: 50
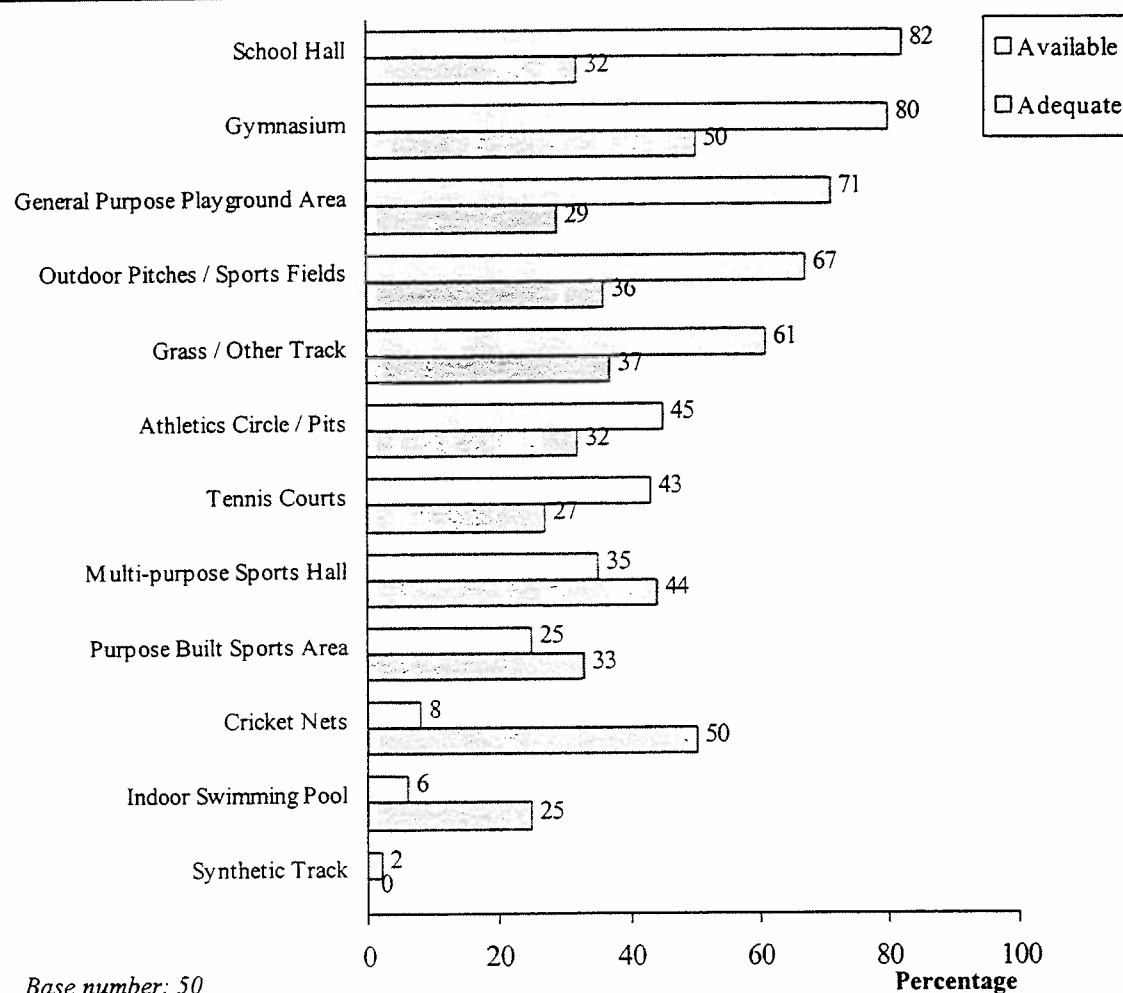
In terms of more specialist sports facilities, 43 per cent had tennis courts but less than one in ten had cricket nets, swimming pools or synthetic running tracks.

43

# SECTION 5: PARTNER AGENCIES

## 5.1 BACKGROUND

In 1993, the Strategy for Sport for Young People in Northern Ireland was launched. The Strategy provided the rationale for, and acted as a catalyst to, the development of the Youth Sport initiative. The aim of the strategy is,

> "to build strategies that remove the barriers that previously existed to young people's participation in sport"

and its principal objective is,

> "to create an environment in which every child can find an interest and involvement in sport, and to find ways in which those who want to improve can be encouraged and enabled to do so".

It was recognised that to achieve this aim and objective it was necessary to put in place a structure that would include:
- Coach development officers with a remit to develop Youth Sport within each of 12 curriculum sports.
- Sports development officers in district councils and education and library boards,
- School sport co-ordinators in post primary schools to manage programmes of after-school sport linked to feeder primary schools, and
- A central development unit to co-ordinate and support a province wide Youth Sport programme.

Within this broad framework, the Sports Council Northern Ireland sought funding to demonstrate the potential of such an approach. In 1994, two school-based demonstration projects were started, one in Antrim and one in Belfast. Following their success, and with the support of Making Belfast Work and Belfast Education and Library Board, a much wider-ranging project was started in 1994 in 14 schools in Belfast.

The Belfast programme was the start of Youth Sport Northern Ireland. In 1994 a Director of Youth Sport was appointed, based in the Sports Council Northern Ireland. The Director has had a centrally important role in co-ordinating the establishment and development of the Youth Sport programme. Through the Director's post and associated support staff, the SCNI continue to play a major role in brokering and co-ordinating relationships between the major partner agencies and in seeking funding for the consolidation and expansion of the Youth Sport programme.

The construction of successful partnerships has been a major achievement of Youth Sport and the key to its success. Youth Sport has been the catalyst for the creation and strengthening of formal links between agencies and organisations who previously co-operated in rather ad hoc and unsystematic ways. These agencies include the SCNI, education and library boards, district councils and governing bodies. In some areas, the initiative also has attracted commercial sponsors (e.g. Ballygowan in Belfast) and additional funding partners.

Others suggested that the purpose of Youth Sport was not only to enhance pupils' sports experience in schools, but also to ensure greater continuity in the transition from primary to secondary schools (an aim which many of the co-ordinators regarded as starting to be achieved, see section 3). However, few viewed this in terms of recruitment and 'promoting' secondary schools to feeder primaries. Rather, the key issues were essentially educational and reducing the possibly disruptive effects of the transition from primary to secondary schools.

Youth Sport was regarded as having promoted a more positive attitude towards sport among some teachers. By participating in Youth Sport training courses many primary teachers had learnt about new developments in sport for young people. In particular, the introduction of mini games had made many sports easier and more enjoyable for young people. Such simplified versions had also made many sports less threatening for non-specialist teachers, enabling them to provide increased opportunities for participation.

A major reason for the positive evaluations was the perception that concerns of educationalists had been understood, prior planning and training had been undertaken (which benefited from the Belfast experience) and a reasonable funding period had been agreed. As one interviewee commented,

> "The Youth Sport programme has been well thought through - unlike some other Sports Council schemes where they wanted a quick return".

**The Strategic Management of Youth Sport**

The perception that the Youth Sport programme had better strategic planning and management that many other SCNI initiatives reflects the centrally important role played by SCNI (especially Ronnie Smyth). The education and library board interviewees felt that the communications with SCNI had been excellent and that the setting up of the initiative had been flexible enough to accommodate the circumstances specific to each board. Flexibility (within an agreed strategy) was regarded as a major strength of Youth Sport.

All interviewees acknowledged the major role played by the SCNI in the establishment of the initiative, the brokering of networks and the initial training of the school sport co-ordinators. The initial training was regarded by both the education and library board personnel and the co-ordinators as a major key to success. As one interviewee commented, "at the set-up the personal and professional development is enormous". Although most of the co-ordinators were teachers, the training introduced them to essential additional skills, ensured that all worked within a coherent and common philosophy and assisted them in developing the necessary community contacts. One interviewee commented that "the personal development of the co-ordinators was a big plus and a good advertisement for Youth Sport".

There was general agreement that the SCNI should continue to act as the lead co-ordinator for Youth Sport. Although some areas had strong views about the strategic direction of the project and the need to set local priorities, they nonetheless felt that a single agency had to be aware of the strategic direction and co-ordination of the initiative across Northern Ireland. This was most especially in relation to the important role which SCNI had to play in co-ordinating the work of governing bodies in addressing the increasing problem of the shortage of coaches.

The ELBs vary in their ability or willingness to adopt the key strategic, catalytic, role in the development of Youth Sport. It is clear that the longer term sustainability of Youth Sport will require the range of partners (ELBs, district councils, clubs, governing bodies) to accept greater responsibility for the initiative. However, whatever the structure, all acknowledged the vitally important work of the SCNI in the development and strategic management of Youth Sport and none rejected their important strategic role.

## The Management of Youth Sport

Most interviewees regarded "quality management" as a major factor in the success of Youth Sport. The installation of "a tight, quality control system" was regarded as central to the establishment, the identity and coherence of the programme and the trust of schools and other partners. For example, a major factor in persuading Ballygowan to sponsor the Youth Sport Belfast was a guarantee of a quality product based on good strategic management.

As Youth Sport had been established for varying lengths of time in each board - five years in Belfast, two years in the South East and Foyle and one year in the North East - the focus of their development work and the extent to which systems were in place inevitably varied. However, the structures were broadly similar.

*Management Structure*

In addition to the strategic input from SCNI, ELBs had divided Youth Sport schools into small 'clusters'. These clusters met to discuss progress and exchange ideas for the development of the programme. This support network included district council staff where relevant.

In all areas, the ELBs' sports development officers played a key strategic role. In addition to administering each school's Youth Sport budget, the ELBs' SDO acts as the key point of contact for the clusters and assists the school sport co-ordinators to write work programmes based on key tasks and targets for each year.

*Monitoring Framework*

We have already noted the importance of providing a consistently quality product and each of the ELBs' SDOs had a monitoring system to keep track of the nature and scale of their own work and that of the school sport co-ordinators. This generally involved a quantification of the numbers of pupils involved in programmes (although no allowance was made for double-counting resulting from some pupils attending a range of programmes) and festivals and the number of teachers undergoing training.

These included the establishment of structures for rural primary schools, the co-ordination of cross-border initiatives, the streamlining of their various sport initiatives and the improvement of links with district councils. For example, although some ELBs have good links at the operational level (with SDOs), longer term development will require a greater commitment at senior officer level and a more strategic approach to youth sport.

In addition to the concern about the lack of suitably qualified coaches, there was concern about the lack of exit routes and the role of clubs. This was regarded by one interviewee as "the most difficult issue", although the degree of difficulty varied between areas and sports. For example, in most areas the Gaelic Athletic Association club/community links are strong, but in many other sports (where teams rather than clubs are the norm) there are more difficulties. There was a recognition that clubs and volunteers have their own culture and that these issues must be dealt with "step-by-step". Further, this is an area where the local authorities, SCNI and governing bodies have a major role to play.

Clearly all ELBs (except Belfast) are still in the development stages (e.g. some felt that even three years might not be sufficient time to change attitudes and convince sceptics). In Belfast, after five years there is a clearer view of the nature of longer term requirements.

Within the Belfast Education & Library Board the view is that school support co-ordinators will require a differentiated range of support which will be centrally co-ordinated by the Youth Sport Development Officer. There is additional potential in staff education and training programmes being twinned to wider strategic issues relevant to the Belfast Youth Sport Development Group.

The developing role of the Sports Development Officer has also been reviewed and a wider brief encompassing work in the area of Coaching courses for teachers and other "sports education" development is envisaged.

Within schools, school management groups and principals are actively undertaking to assimilation of the current post of school sports development co-ordinators into posts of responsibility with the staff structures of key posts of responsibilities. There is also a developmental consideration required at a strategic level to ensure that the present school sports co-ordinator posts have also linked to them the potential for "assistant co-ordinator posts". The assistant co-ordinators would work in partnership with the experienced co-ordinator who would "mentor" the assistant co-ordinator into the Youth Sport delivery programme.

Therefore the needs of Youth Sport for improved school/club links and the provision of post-school exit routes were being addressed by working on club development programmes. Most of these had a strong focus on the need for clubs to develop structures and practices relevant to the needs of young people. However, because of the resources available to the development officers they were restricted to a limited number of clubs and progress was inevitably slow. In at least one ELB area the policy was to deal with the club issues step-by-step and concentrate on one club in each of five selected sports at one time.

*Coach Education*

All Youth Sport partners identified the lack of availability of quality coaches for after-school activities as a major issue – both currently and as a possible constraint on the development and expansion of the programme. Development officers were also constrained by the absolute lack of coaches and, in some sports, the lack of coaches available during the working day.

In response to this most had developed coach education courses in partnership with governing bodies. In many cases these were initially targeted at adults in local sports clubs in the hope of increasing the likelihood of young people making the link from school to club. In some cases, coach education programmes were being developed to address some of the broader social policies of the district council, including various re-training and back-to-work schemes for the unemployed.

*Child Protection*

Issues of child protection were emphasised in relation to the development of coaches and clubs. These issues were being addressed via training courses and the establishment of procedures for checking and licensing coaches. Some interviewees had developed child protection training materials for the school sport co-ordinators to use when recruiting and briefing coaches. However, despite these local initiatives, this was an area where strategic co-ordination is required to ensure a standard system throughout Northern Ireland.

**Management of Youth Sport**

Interviewees were generally satisfied with the strategic management of the initiative. However, as with some of those in the education and library boards, there was a perceived lack of strategic integration between the various SCNI initiatives. There was a concern that already hard pressed district council sports development staff were being "pulled in every direction", with no clear statement of overall priorities. The interviewees regarded Youth Sport and club development as their main priorities. However, all had examples of how they had been diverted from their main priorities by other work. A particular concern was the requirement to provide support for one-off events.

## 5.4    GOVERNING BODIES

### Introduction

Links with governing bodies in Youth Sport prioritised sports have to some extent depended on the availability of a governing body development officer. At the time of this research there were 12 sport-specific development officers involved in Youth Sport. However, in some of these sports, there have been limited inputs due to the lack of development officers' time.

Each of the three development officers interviewed had a slightly different approach to Youth Sport. This was determined largely by their available time and other governing body development responsibilities. However, it was possible to identify a range of generic issues including; their understanding and acceptance of the philosophy of Youth Sport, their priorities for development work, the overall management of Youth Sport and their views on the future of Youth Sport.

### The Philosophy of Youth Sport

Each interviewee confirmed that youth development is a key priority for their governing body and agreed that Youth Sport represented a major opportunity to attract young people to sport at an early age. As many of the governing bodies of school sport were thought to be interested mostly in the competitive structure of youth sport, the Youth Sport initiative provided the mainstream governing bodies with opportunities to work with schools to promote and encourage participation.

### The Development Work

*Coach and Teacher Education Courses*

All interviewees had provided a range of teacher/coach education courses for those involved in Youth Sport, mostly in response to requests from the education and library board development officers. As one interviewee commented,

> "we're too strapped for time to be pro-active. We try to meet specific needs where they are identified".

In some cases, courses had been developed for people working with primary-aged pupils and were based on 'mini' versions of the sport.

*Production of Teaching/Coaching Resources*

Governing bodies were also key agencies in the production of teaching and coaching resources - the mini-netball pack, the mini soccer video ("All Together Now"), the 'Kids Stuff' basketball pack and so on. Interviewees commented that these resources have become the foundation for in-service training courses, where the teacher/coach is taken through the material, given opportunities for practical sessions using the resource and can then be left with the pack as an ongoing teaching/coaching guide.

# SECTION 6: YOUNG PEOPLE

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

A major aim of the Youth Sport Northern Ireland initiative is to increase opportunities and participation. In the previous sections we examined the opinions of school sport co-ordinators and head teachers and their assessment of the extent to which sports opportunities had increased as a result of Youth Sport.

In this section we report on young people's assessment of their level of participation in the last year of primary school and the first years of secondary school, drawing on the survey data and the follow-up discussion groups in selected schools. The ten schools chosen for the survey of pupils had school sport co-ordinators who had worked in many of the primary schools which the young people had attended. Although the co-ordinators had been in place for differing lengths of time (from 5 years to 18 months) children in the survey who attended the relevant primary schools would have had some experience of the work of the co-ordinators. The discussion groups were undertaken in six schools, selected to provide geographical coverage.

Clearly care needs to be taken in assessing this data. Surveys of sports participation are subject to well-documented profiles of recall (Chase & Godbey (1985), Boothby (1987)). The evidence suggests that over-estimation of the frequency of participation is more likely than under-estimation (especially if it is associated with portraying a positive image). Such problems of the reliability and validity of participation information based on recall may be exacerbated with young people. For example, research has found that children of primary school age have the ability to report physical activity with a "modest" degree of reliability and validity. Therefore such factors (and their implications for the meaning of "participation") need to be taken into account in the use and interpretation of this data.

## 6.2 SPORTS PARTICIPATION AT PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Physical Education Curriculum

All young people in the survey had been involved in PE in their last year at primary school. They took part in a wide range of team and individual sports, with an average participation in 5.8 different sports. Of the top five sports three were team games – soccer, hockey and netball.

Swimming was the most common activity (77% took part), with soccer (70%) a close second. The dominance of these two sports is indicated by the fact that only one other sport - hockey – was participated in by more than half (53%) of the respondents. The other top five sports – gymnastics and netball - were taken part in by less than half the respondents (45%).

## Gender Differences

The boys and girls in the sample had taken part in a broad range of sports activities in primary school PE, although the boys took part in an average of 6.1 sports compared to 5.6 for girls. Five of the top six sports were common to both – soccer, swimming, hockey, gymnastics and athletics – with the sixth being netball for girls and basketball for boys.

However, in the majority of sports a higher proportion of boys participated. The only sports in which there was a greater *proportion* of girls than boys participating were netball (67% of girls compared to 20% of boys), hockey (56%:48%), gymnastics (49%:42%), dance (30%:23%), Irish dancing (8%:3%), camogie (12%:2%) and swimming (78%:76%) - a marginal difference.

**Figure 6.2:  Primary School:  Sports done in PE lessons by gender**
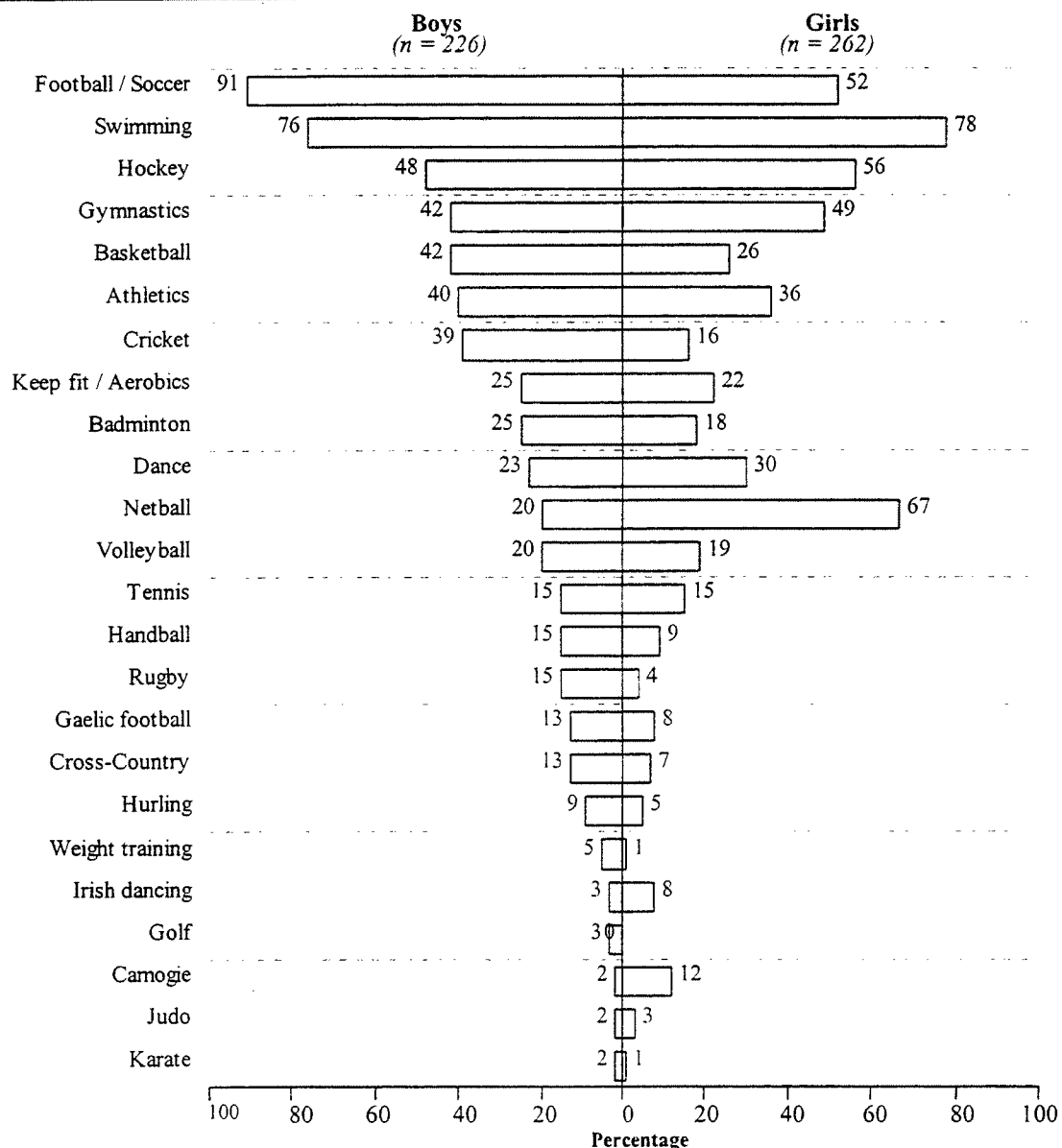


Note:  Multiple response, percentages add to more than 100%

## Figure 6.3: Primary School: Male participants in
### (i) Extra-curricular sport
### (ii) Clubs outside school
### Proportions participating in each sport

| | Extra-curricular sport (n = 212) | Sports as a member of a club outside school (n = 186) |
|---|---|---|
| Football / Soccer | 87 | 79 |
| Hockey | 31 | 23 |
| Swimming | 29 | 32 |
| Rugby | 27 | 20 |
| Badminton | 26 | 24 |
| Basketball | 18 | 18 |
| Athletics | 14 | 10 |
| Gaelic Football | 12 | 11 |
| Tennis | 11 | 22 |
| Netball | 10 | 3 |
| Gymnastics | 9 | 8 |
| Hurling | 9 | 5 |
| Cross-Country | 6 | 12 |
| Cricket | 5 | 15 |
| Karate | 5 | 10 |
| Volleyball | 5 | 7 |
| Golf | 5 | 6 |
| Weight Training | 4 | 9 |
| Keep Fit / Aerobics | 4 | 5 |
| Handball | 4 | 5 |
| Dance | 4 | 2 |
| Judo | 3 | 11 |

Percentage: 100 80 60 40 20 0 20 40 60 80 100
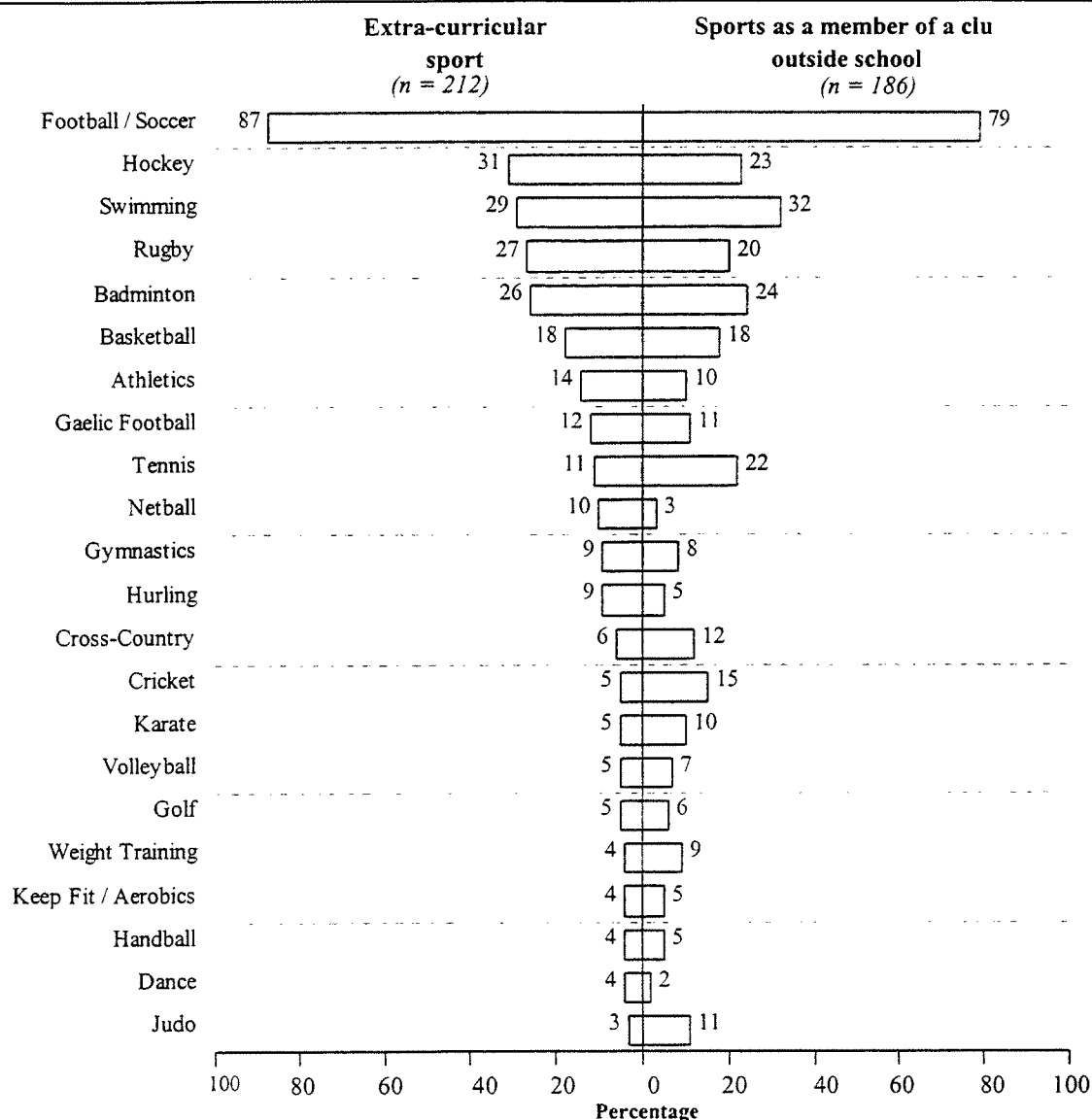
Note: Multiple response, percentages add to more than 100%

Nevertheless, despite the dominance of soccer, there is a substantial degree of multi-sport participation among these boys both in extra-curricular sport and out of school, with an average of 3.6 sports in both contexts.

Among *extra-curricular participants*, the next most popular sports were taken part in by less than one third – hockey (31%), swimming (29%), rugby (27%) and badminton (26%).

## Figure 6.4: Primary School: Female participants in
### (i) School teams/clubs
### (ii) Clubs outside school
### Proportions participating in each sport



| | Extra-curricular sport (n = 222) | Sports as a member of a club outside school (n = 208) |
|---|---|---|
| Netball | 61 | 29 |
| Hockey | 42 | 23 |
| Football / Soccer | 34 | 29 |
| Swimming | 29 | 53 |
| Badminton | 17 | 17 |
| Basketball | 16 | 14 |
| Athletics | 16 | 9 |
| Tennis | 12 | 14 |
| Gymnastics | 11 | 16 |
| Camogie | 11 | 9 |
| Dance | 10 | 30 |
| Keep Fit / Aerobics | 10 | 7 |
| Gaelic Football | 8 | 7 |
| Volleyball | 8 | 4 |
| Irish Dancing | 7 | 21 |
| Cross-Country | 5 | 5 |
| Judo | 5 | 4 |
| Cricket | 4 | 3 |
| Rugby | 4 | 2 |
| Hurling | 3 | 2 |
| Weight training | 3 | 2 |
| Handball | 2 | 3 |
| Karate | 1 | 4 |
| Golf | | 2 |

Percentage: 100 80 60 40 20 0 20 40 60 80 100

Note: Multiple response, percentages add to more than 100%

However, *out-of-school participants* had chosen to participate in different sports. For example, more than half (53%) of out-of-school participants participated in swimming, compared to 29 per cent of extra-curricular participants. Further, although the extra-curricular participation rate for dance (10%) had placed it eleventh, its out-of-school rate (30%) had made it the second most popular sport. Although netball dominated participation in extra-curricular activity (61%) the participation rate among out-of-school participants was less than half this (29%), making it the joint third most popular sport.

**Figure 6.5: Secondary School: Sports undertaken in PE**

| Sport | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Swimming | 60 |
| Gymnastics | 55 |
| Football / Soccer | 44 |
| Dance | 41 |
| Hockey | 41 |
| Athletics | 39 |
| Basketball | 38 |
| Netball | 37 |
| Keep Fit / Aerobics | 37 |
| Cross-Country | 30 |
| Rugby | 22 |
| Cricket | 20 |
| Tennis | 18 |
| Rounders | 9 |
| Badminton | 8 |
| Volleyball | 8 |
| Gaelic Football | 7 |
| Weight Training | 6 |
| Trampolining | 4 |
| Handball | 4 |
| Baseball | 3 |
| Judo | 1 |
| Camogie | 1 |
| Golf | 1 |
| Hurling | 1 |
| Irish Dancing | <1 |
| Karate | <1 |

*Base number: 487*
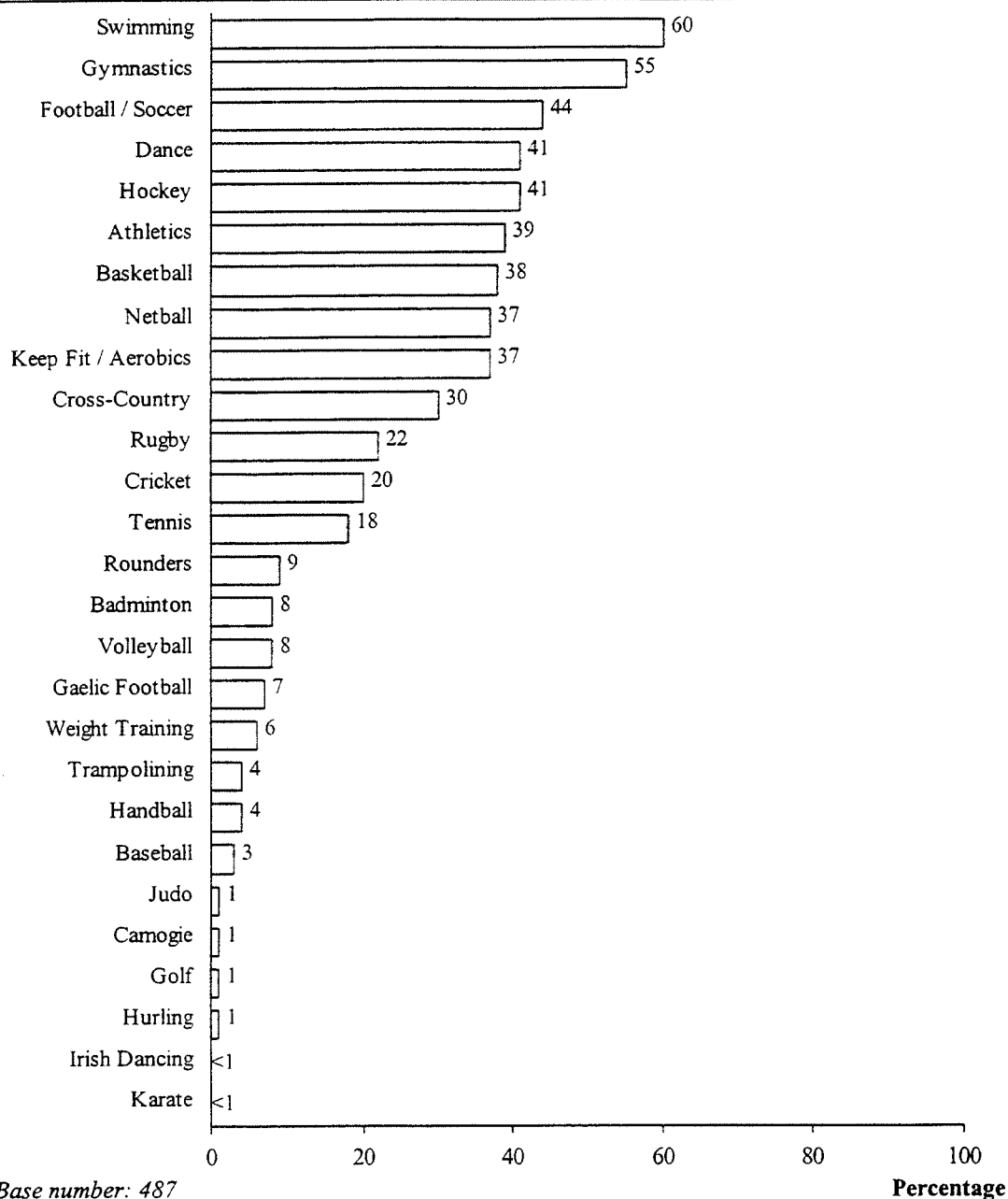
**Percentage**

Note: Multiple response, percentages add to more than 100%

The top ten included four team games and six individual activities.

*Gender Differences in PE Participation*

The boys and girls in the sample had taken part in a broad range of sports activities in primary school PE. However, in secondary schools there were distinct gender-based differences in the sports. Of the top six sports for each, only two were common -- swimming (top for girls and third for boys) and gymnastics (equal third for girls and fourth for boys).

There were three individual activities in the top six. Just over half of the boys took part in swimming (54%) and gymnastics (51%), with 42 per cent participating in cross-country.

*Girls*

On average, girls took part in 5.2 sports in PE, with no sport having the predominant position which soccer had for boys. This was noted by the pupils, one of whom commented,

"it's a shame for the boys, they get nothing but football – we get a lot more sports in PE".

Another girl similarly commented,

"we change sports all the time – they just keep doing football".

This perception was not wholly supported by the survey data, with girls having five sports with participation rates above 50 per cent, compared to four for boys. Two sports (swimming and dance) were each participated in by about two thirds of girls, with more than half taking part in netball, gymnastics and hockey.

Girls' PE participation was characterised by more individual activities, with only three team games (netball, hockey and basketball) in the top ten, compared to five for boys. It is worth noting that whereas 29 per cent of girls had taken part in soccer in primary PE, only 8 per cent did so at secondary school.

**Secondary School: Involvement in Sport Outside PE**

Compared to their last year in primary school, a much lower proportion of year 8 pupils were taking part in extra-curricular sports (58% compared to 88% in primary). Part of the explanation for this may be in the changed nature of extra-curricular activity. In the group discussions, many pupils said that secondary school clubs and teams were selective and that there was not always an opportunity to take part in the sport. As one pupil commented,

"they just play matches all the time and you hardly ever get a game".

However, lower proportions were also taking part in out-of-school clubs/teams (69% compared to 80% in primary) - although some of this "difference" may be accounted for by changing definitions of clubs/teams.

In discussion groups, pupils suggested that lack of access to school clubs/teams was an issue for Year 8 pupils in particular. As one commented,

"the clubs are all for the bigger ones – we're always the last to find out about clubs."

Figure 6.5 illustrates the sports participated in by boys who had either taken part in extra-curricular sport (61% of respondents), or clubs outside school (73%). On average, male participants took part in 2.5 extra-curricular sports and 3 out-of-school sports. As in primary school, soccer dominated participation - 71 per cent of extra-curricular participants and 78 per cent of out-of-school participants played soccer. In extra-curricular activity, soccer attracted more than twice the proportion of boys involved in any other sport and in out-of-school activity nearly three times the proportion.

This dominance of soccer was confirmed in the group discussions, where most boys played and regarded it as their favourite activity. Even in the limited number of schools where soccer was discouraged, boys still regarded it as their favourite sport and did not understand why they were prevented from playing it. However, despite their 'obsession' with soccer, one pupil commented,

"you can get a bit sick of soccer sometimes so it's good to do other sports".

Among male extra-curricular participants, the next most popular sport, rugby, was taken part in by less than one third (30%). Swimming, the third most popular sport, was participated in by only about one fifth (19%) of participants.

Rugby was the only sport in which the extra-curricular participation rate was substantially higher than the out-of-school rate. In discussion groups, some boys suggested that participation in extra-curricular rugby was not optional for them and that having been selected for the team, they are required to represent their school in rugby matches. Most out-of-school sports had higher participation rates than their extra-curricular equivalents. For example, swimming, hockey, badminton, Gaelic football, tennis, golf, judo, karate and athletics all had a higher proportion of male participants taking part outside school. Although soccer remained the predominant sport (78% of participants taking part), three sports had a participation rate of over 20 per cent – swimming, hockey, badminton. A further six had participation rates above 10 per cent – rugby, cross-country, golf, tennis, Gaelic football, and basketball.

A stronger participation base outside school was particularly evident in the racquet sports of badminton and tennis and the martial arts of judo and karate. As would perhaps be expected given the strong community focus of Gaelic games, a greater proportion of boys played Gaelic football in clubs outside (13%) than inside (8%) school.

*Girls: Participants in extra-curricular and out-of-school sport*

Figure 6.8 illustrates the sports participated in by girls who had either taken part in extra-curricular sport (55% of respondents) or clubs outside school (64%). There is a substantial degree of multi-sport participation in both contexts. On average, female participants took part in 2 extra-curricular sports and 2.9 out-of-school sports. Unlike the predominance of soccer for boys, no single activity dominated girls' participation in or out of school, although half (47%) took part in swimming out-of-school.

In *extra-curricular* activities the two most popular sports were the team games of hockey (39% of participants taking part) and netball (38%). The next most popular sports were taken part in by less than one fifth of participants – cross-country, swimming and soccer.

Among the top six extra-curricular sports (taken part in by at least 10% of participants) there were four team games – hockey, netball, soccer and camogie – presumably reflecting the tradition of representative school teams. Team games were popular among some of the pupils in the group discussions, with one girl pointing out that,

"in team games you're not left to do it yourself, your friends are there too".

Significantly, dance, which was only tenth (6%) in extra-curricular activities was the third most popular (31%) out-of-school activity. While hockey and netball remained popular, they slipped from being the most frequent extra-curricular sports, to fourth place out-of-school.

It is significant that a number of sports had substantially higher participation rates outside school. In addition to swimming, soccer, dance and gymnastics, sports with higher participation rates include basketball, badminton, keep-fit/aerobics, Irish dancing, tennis and athletics.

**Secondary School: Timing and Frequency of Participation in Extra-curricular Sport**

Fifty-eight per cent of pupils in the ten schools took part in extra-curricular sport. Of these, more than two thirds (68%) did so after school on weekdays. Weekend participation was much lower, with just over one third (37%) taking part. Only 14 per cent of participants took part during lunchtimes (perhaps due to the limited time available and the use of staggered school lunches).

**Table 6.5: Extra-Curricular sport: When undertaken**

|  | Percentage of respondents | Base number |
|---|---|---|
| Weekdays after school | 68 | (282) |
| Weekends | 37 | (280) |
| Lunch times | 14 | (234) |

Note: Multiple response, percentages add to more than 100%

Many pupils had no desire to participate at lunchtimes because, as one pupil explained,

> "by the time you get your uniform on and off and get your lunch, there's no time to do clubs, and anyway, you need a break".

More than half (55%) of participants in extra-curricular sport took part once or twice a week. However, nearly one third (30%) participated between three and four times per week, with 15 per cent claiming to take part five or more times per week.

**Table 6.6: Extra-Curricular sport: Frequency of participation**

|  | Percentage of respondents |
|---|---|
| 1 or 2 times per week | 55 |
| 3 or 4 times per week | 30 |
| 5 or more times per week | 15 |

*Base number: 170*

Nearly two thirds (63%) also regarded *being with friends/team* as a 'really important' aspect of competing for the school. Although participating in competitive sport served to reinforce the bonds with school and school-friends, factors associated with the wider community were viewed as less important. For example, about half (49%) did not regard *travelling* as an important factor, and more than one third (36%) did not regard *visiting other schools/facilities* as important. Only 18 per cent viewed *meeting other young people* as 'really important' and over a quarter (27%) did not see it as important.

## 6.4 COMPARING SPORT AT PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL

### Extra-Curricular Activity

Overall participation rates in extra-curricular sport were higher in the final year of primary school (88%) than in the first years of secondary school (58%) (although much participation in primary schools is likely to have been of a less formal nature than in secondary school). Further, in relative terms, cross-country was the only sport with a substantially higher proportion of participants in secondary school than in the last year of primary school.

Although soccer was easily the largest extra-curricular sport in both primary and secondary schools, the participation rate was much lower in secondary schools. Among sports' participants in primary school extra-curricular sport, 60 per cent had taken part in soccer, compared to only 44 per cent at secondary school (largely accounted for by a much lower level of participation among girls).

One interpretation of the data in Figure 6.9 is that Youth Sport has been successful in creating sporting opportunities in the feeder primary schools, where absolute and relative rates of participation were higher than in the surveyed secondary schools.

Further, pupils in the group discussion mentioned distinctions between Youth Sport in primary school and extra-curricular sport in secondary school. As one pupil commented:

> "in primary school we got real coaches that gave you lots of practices. Now we just get teachers and they don't do any skills with you, it's mostly just playing matches."

The less informal, more structured, approach in secondary schools was noted one pupil, who stated,

> "we've got much better facilities here than a primary school, but they never let us use them. They lock everything up just because the big ones break things."

## Sport Outside School

Overall participation rates in sport in out-of-school clubs/teams were higher in the final year of primary school (80%) than in the first years of secondary school (69%). This partly reflects a decline in girls' participation from 79 per cent to 64 per cent, compared to a decline from 82 per cent to 73 per cent for boys. Further, there was a reduction in the range of sports, from an average of 3.4 in primary school to 3 for secondary pupils. This reduction in the average number of sports is reflected in a decline in the *proportions* of participants in most of the most popular sports. For example, in the last year of primary school 43 per cent of participants took part in out-of-school swimming, compared to 38 per cent in the first year of secondary school. There were similar declines in the proportion of participants in badminton, netball, rugby, Irish dancing and cricket.

## Attitudes To Sport In Primary And Secondary School

The survey data indicate that in the last year of primary school a higher proportion participated in a greater number of sports than in the first year of secondary school. However, this is not the *perception* of respondents. Despite fewer participating in a lower average number of sports, the secondary pupils' perception was that they had more sports to choose from in secondary school. Three-quarters (76%) agreed with the statement that *there are more sports to choose from in secondary than primary school.*

One interpretation of this might be that the activities undertaken at primary school were more informal, regarded more as 'games' than 'sport'. Further, segregation on the basis of gender and increased emphasis on competition made the activities at secondary school more 'sport-like'. This perception was reinforced by the facilities available in secondary schools. As one pupil noted,
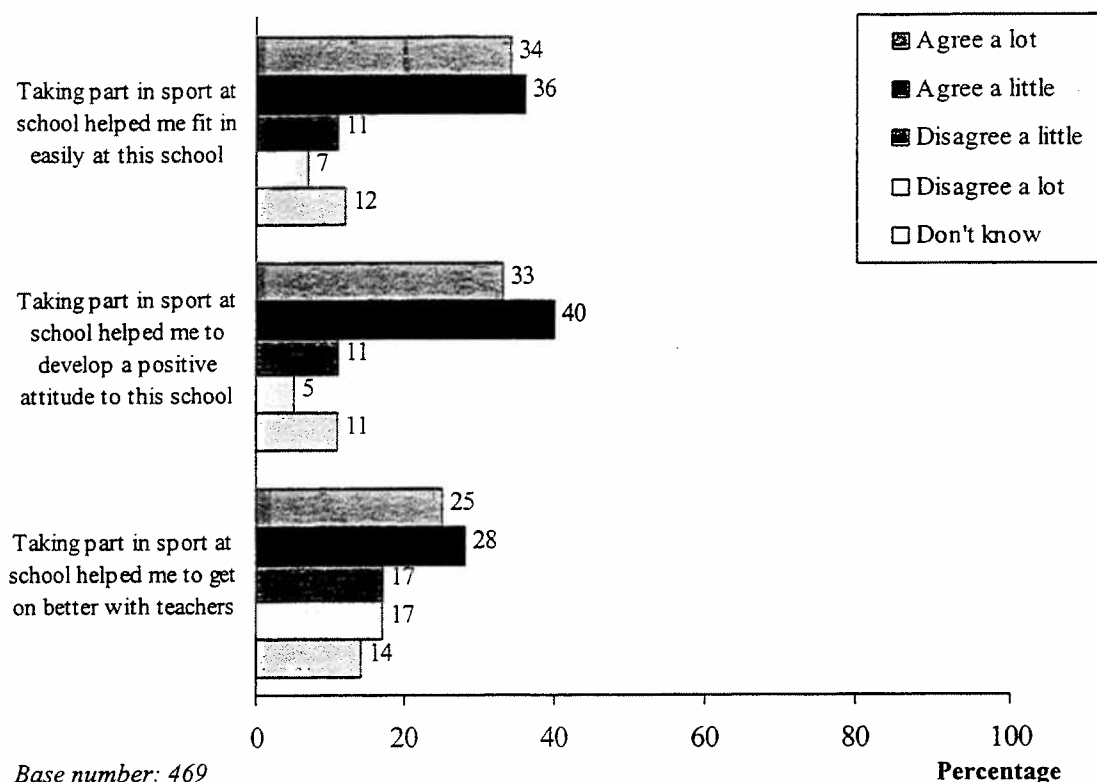
> "we've got big playing fields here, not just a wee playground".

This interpretation is partly supported by the fact that, although the majority enjoyed sport in secondary school, 38 per cent agreed that *sport in secondary school is not as much fun as primary school.* Further, 30 per cent disagreed with the statement that *I enjoy doing sport in secondary school more than I enjoyed sport at primary school*

---

**Figure 6.11: Attitudes to sport in secondary and primary school**



Base number: 476

Percentage

---

79
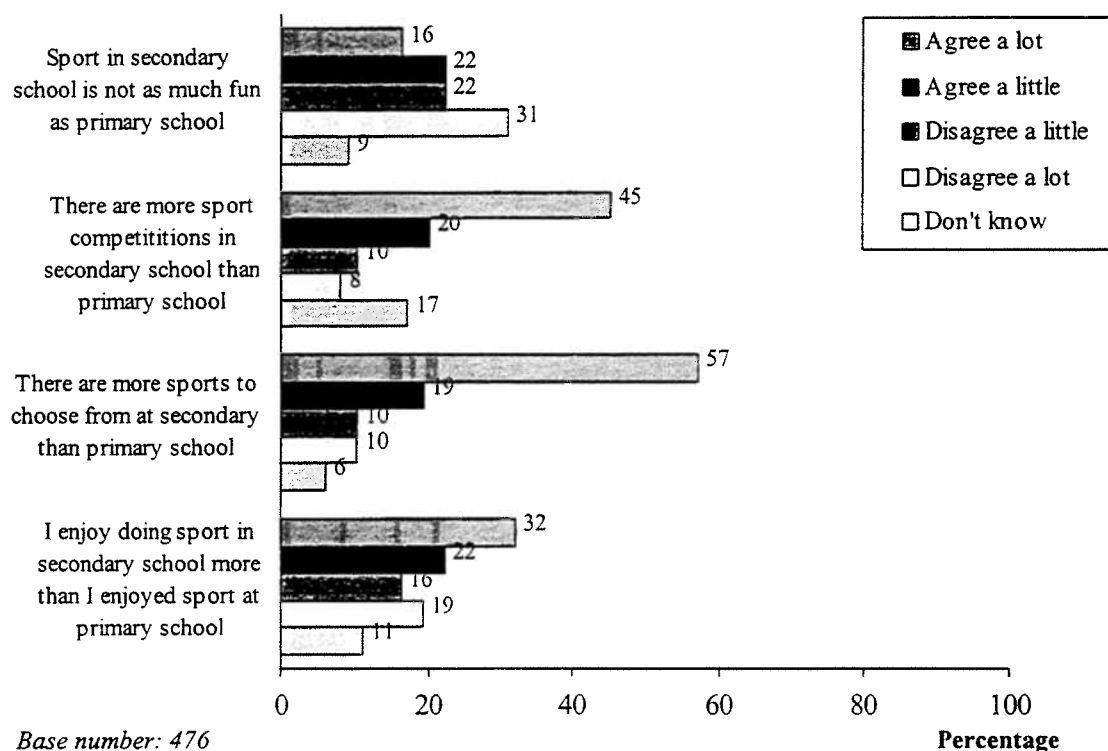
## Figure 6.12: The role of sport in adapting to secondary school



Taking part in sport at school helped me fit in easily at this school: 34, 36, 11, 7, 12

Taking part in sport at school helped me to develop a positive attitude to this school: 33, 40, 11, 5, 11

Taking part in sport at school helped me to get on better with teachers: 25, 28, 17, 17, 14

Legend:
- Agree a lot
- Agree a little
- Disagree a little
- Disagree a lot
- Don't know

*Base number: 469*  **Percentage**

Three quarters (73%) agreed either "a lot" or "a little" that *taking part in sport at school helped me to develop a positive attitude to this school* (only 16% disagreed). Although the effect on relationships with teachers was less strong, just over half (53%) agreed that *taking part in sport at school helped me to get on better with teachers* - a view held equally by boys and girls.

This view was confirmed in the group discussions, with pupils stating that generally they had more positive relationships with the teachers who were involved in after-school sport. Sport provided a more informal context – "good crack" - which allowed them to get to know the teacher in ways that were more difficult within a formal classroom setting. As these teachers could reciprocate in this more informal environment, the pupils generally regarded them as more "human" than some others.

More generally, pupils regarded having "some fun" in school as important. When asked what they would do if there was no sport at their school, they consistently replied that,

> "I would go elsewhere".

Sport (and PE) were regarded as essential in order to relieve the pressure of more academic work and to release tensions built up by sitting at a desk for most of the day;

> "it's the only bit of fun we get",

> "you'd get dead bored if you just sat down all day".

## Sport and personal development

The potential of sport to contribute to personal and social development has been recognised by many agencies and it was a major factor in Making Belfast Work's investment in Youth Sport.

We have already noted the positive evaluation which the young people had of PE and games and 89 per cent agreed "a lot" or "a little" with the statement that *I want to be successful at sport* – an aspiration slightly more common among boys (93%) than girls (83%). It would seem that most had achieved this ambition, with three-quarters (74%) having a general sense of competence, agreeing a lot or a little that *I am good at sport and exercise* (there was no difference among boys and girls about this). The same proportion (76%) disagreed that *I get embarrassed when I have to do sport and exercise* - a view held equally by boys and girls (although it is important to note that about one in five (19%) agreed with this statement).

**Figure 6.14: Sport and personal development**



Base number: 469
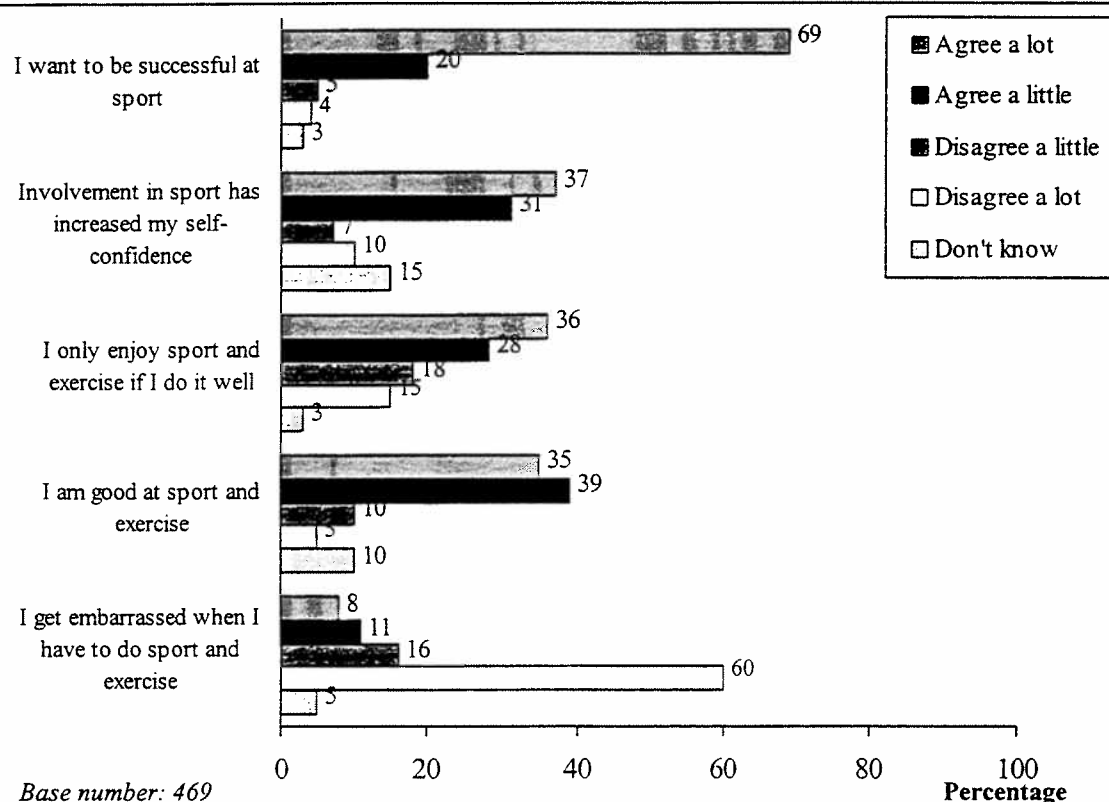
This general sense of competence may explain the fact that two thirds (68%) also agreed with the statement that *being involved in sport has increased my self-confidence*. In the group discussions, many of the pupils referred to their sense of achievement in sport and the importance of improving personal performance (even where they did not win),

"it's great when you get to play for the school, everybody shouts for you and you feel great".

The negative aspects of not being fit were also raised in the group discussions,

> "if you don't do PE and sports you get lazy and then you just lie about and watch the telly."

Many had a negative view of non-participants who were perceived to go home and watch television after school.

## Sport, family and lifestyle

A major rationale for Youth Sport is to lay the basis for life-long participation. One aspect of this is to increase the opportunities for young people to participate in a wide range of sports. However, other factors will include parental attitudes and young people's attitudes to sport outside school.

There appears to be broad parental support for participation in sport, with three quarters (75%) agreeing that *my family encourage me to do sport and exercise,* although it was slightly more common among boys (77%) than girls (69%). Nevertheless, it seems that for most pupils, not only do they want to be successful at sport, but also their parents encourage them to be so.

**Figure 6.16: Sport, family and lifestyle**



Base number: 469
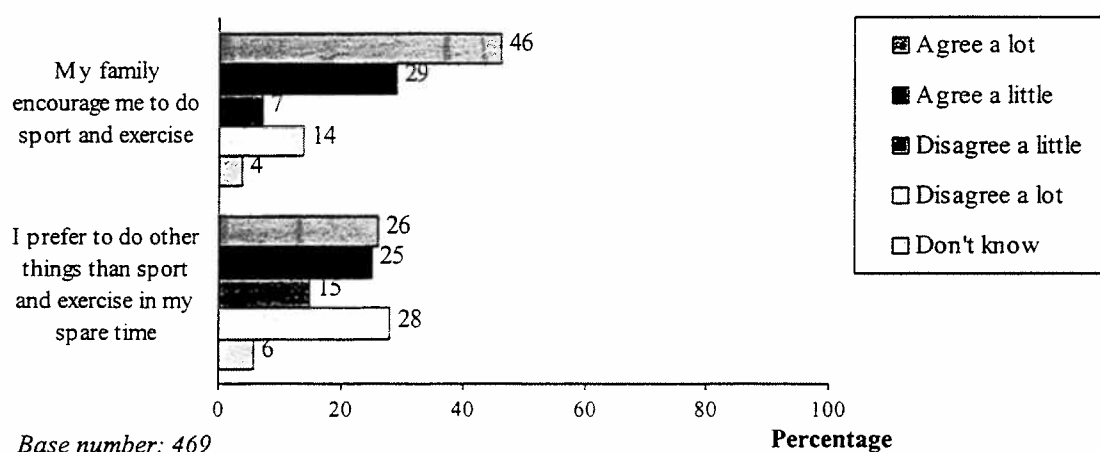
However, despite the positive attitudes to sport and broad parental support, the priority accorded to sport *outside* school is rather mixed. For example, 51 per cent agreed with the statement *I prefer to do other things than sport and exercise in my free time* (with 26% agreeing a lot - both boys and girls agreed a lot with this statement). One interpretation of this might be that, although most young people enjoy sport and exercise, much of their needs are met by school-based and extra-curricular participation. Sport is regarded as a school-related activity, either because it is part of school life, or because it is simply better in school. As one pupil stated,

> "you sometimes play in the street outside your door, but it's better at school because there's more room to run about".

85

## 6.6    SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The respondents reported a high level of participation in sport in and out of school, at both primary and secondary school. While there was some variation between boys' and girls' participation rates, this was more evident at secondary school. The differences were greatest in competitive sport, where the girls' participation rate was less than half the boys'.

However, although the girls' overall participation rate was lower than boys, their involvement in sport was not dominated by any single activity in the same way as boys' was by soccer. Girls' participation was spread across a wider range of activity, with swimming, netball, hockey and dance being especially popular.

Regardless of the decline in participation rates between primary and secondary school, pupils perceived there to be a greater choice of sports activities at secondary school. There are two possible explanations for the difference. Firstly, pupils may be aware of greater choice in sports in secondary school but may also have greater choice in a wide range of non-sports activities. Given that young people, like adults, have a finite amount of time they may be unable to take advantage of the increased opportunities. Secondly, it is possible that many of the sports offered in primary school were not seen as 'sport' but rather as games and physical activities.

The pupils almost universally regarded sport as good fun, enjoyable, good for their health and something that many of their parents encouraged them to do. However, it should be noted that around two thirds said that they only enjoyed sport if they did it well. This desire to be competent at sport was reinforced in the group discussions when pupils complained that they didn't get enough training and practices in secondary school, rather the focus was on playing in matches and other competitive events.

In part this may reflect the scepticism of some district councils about becoming involved in an initiative which may require them to make long term commitments to it. Although some simply lack the lack of resources to take on additional work, others are concerned that Youth Sport "might just be another Sports Council initiative that will disappear and be replaced with something else in a year's time".

*Recommendations*

Recognising the strength of partnerships in some areas and the need to establish and develop these in other areas, the following is recommended:

- There is a need to develop stronger relationships at chief officer level within district councils and to establish the place of Youth Sport within strategic policy. Although current operational links are strong, the long term commitment of district councils is essential to the consolidation and development of Youth Sport.
- Where possible, there should be a sharing of best practice with senior staff from successful areas providing advice to assist developing areas. The SCNI has an important strategic role to play in collecting and disseminating such information.
- Except for Belfast all areas are still in the early stages of development. The SCNI emphasis should be on providing support and guidance to enable the *consolidation* of Youth Sport. New, related, initiatives should be kept to a minimum in order to avoid placing additional pressures on already heavily committed partner agencies.

## 7.3 DAY-TO-DAY MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

At the time of the research there were 67 school sport co-ordinators working in 325 schools throughout Northern Ireland. They were supported by staff in 16 district councils and 12 governing bodies. On average, co-ordinators employed 7 coaches to help to deliver their programmes and over half are satisfied with the support they receive from other teachers in terms of ensuring the long term sustainability of the programme.

In the 12 months prior to the survey, co-ordinators had provided an average of 11 programmes in their feeder primary schools and 94 per cent of co-ordinators had provided them with at least one *new* sport. In their own schools an average of 8 extra-curricular sports were provided *prior* to the co-ordinators' appointment and 81 per cent of co-ordinators had managed to introduce an average of three *new* activities. Further, 87 per cent of co-ordinators had established links with local clubs.

Given their limited time allocations, and the scale of work involved in the establishment and ongoing management of a new initiative, it is remarkable that so much has been achieved during the average of 3 years that co-ordinators have been employed in Belfast and 1 year elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

However, ensuring staff resources for Youth Sport has proven to be difficult. Some co-ordinators have no formal time allocation, and where they have, they have often been unable to protect it. Many have found the work extremely time consuming (and much more than could be deemed to be covered by the additional payment).

It should be recognised that it is often more expensive to employ coaches in rural areas. In addition to transport costs there is often a need to offer incentive payments to attract coaches to these areas.

## 7.4 OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUPILS

In the 10 surveyed schools, 88 per cent of pupils had been involved in extra-curricular sports in primary school and 58 per cent in post-primary school. At primary school, 80 per cent of pupils had been involved in clubs outside school and 68 per cent at post-primary school. Although, half the co-ordinators said that there had been an increase in number of post-primary school pupils joining local clubs, this still represents a smaller proportion of pupils involved at secondary than at primary school

Although pupils' participation rate in after-school sport is lower in post-primary school, their perception is that they are offered a greater choice of sports than in primary schools and that, generally, sport was more fun.

In and out of school, boys' participation rates were higher than girls', especially for post-primary competitive sports, where it was twice that of girls'. In 8 of the top 10 extra-curricular sports boys' participation exceeded girls', the exceptions being hockey and netball. However, although girls' participation was lower, it was not dominated by a single sports activity as boys' was by soccer. Girls participated in a wider range of sports, with swimming, netball, hockey and dance being especially popular.

Pupils generally were very positive about participation in sport, they enjoyed the fun elements of the activities and regarded this as a balance to the more serious and applied academic activities of school. They welcomed opportunities to get to know the staff in more informal contexts and Youth Sport in primary school had helped to make the transition to post-primary school less overwhelming. Many also were very comfortable with sport in their school environment and found contexts outside school less engaging and often in facilities that they regarded as "worse than school". Unless friends or family already were associated with sports clubs, the transition to sports clubs appeared to be difficult.

Further, in the group discussions, many young people thought that it would be difficult to stay involved in sport when they left school and recognised that older pupils in school did less sport than themselves. For some, despite their obvious interest and enthusiasm for sport, a declining involvement in sport was seen as a normal pattern of growing older.

*Recommendations*

The issue of participation pathways raises a number of difficult issues. Improving opportunities to become members of sports clubs is, quite properly, a major focus of Youth Sport. Clearly, as Youth Sport extends participation and creates demand for opportunities for development beyond participation, it is essential to create more opportunities for young people to join child-friendly clubs.

There are a number of qualitative *outcome* measures associated with participation in Youth Sport - increased self-confidence, better integration in school culture, improved student/staff relations. As these are linked to the school improvement process and may be important outcomes for head-teachers and boards of governors (and are clearly important in attracting continuing funding), some attempt should be made to measure them. For example, the current piloting of Self Evaluation Through Attitude Questionnaires (SETAQ) in a sample of schools and the desire to make schools self-evaluating organisations, represents a possible model for future evaluation of the work of Youth Sport. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- The possibility of collecting qualitative outcome data relevant to Youth Sport in future SETAQ initiatives should be explored. Collaboration with a small number of schools would enable the collection of longitudinal qualitative data which would enable the evaluation of the cumulative impact of Youth Sport programmes.

## 7.5   THE FUTURE OF YOUTH SPORT

With any new initiative there is a temptation to judge success on the basis of scale of achievement (output), rather than quality and effectiveness (outcome). Youth Sport has partially succeeded in overcoming this problem by limiting the scale of work to that which can be funded and delivered - in particular, the number of post-primary and primary schools which have been included. However, most partner agencies are working to their resource limits, with the current level of activity relying on extended professionalism and personal enthusiasm.

Because of the success of Youth Sport there is an expectation that the initiative will expand to include new schools (for the sake of equity), increased numbers of pupils and a greater diversity of sports. More and better links with clubs, sponsors, district councils and governing bodies are also expected. While such links are essential for sustainability, this expansion needs to be developed at a pace that takes account of the demands which are likely to result in terms of increased co-ordinators' time, finance, trained coaches, facilities and equipment.

*Recommendations*

In the context of the anticipated expansion of Youth Sport and the constraints posed by current workloads and resources, the following are recommended:

- There is a need to concentrate resources on *consolidation* of existing programmes and planned incremental expansion.

- There is a need to use previous experiences with schools in order to establish a set of 'readiness factors' as the basis for including new schools (eg willingness to protect co-ordinators' time; commitment to staff development; willingness to commit other resources) .