



Taking Part 2014/15, Focus On: Understanding Changes in Sports Participation



Statistical Release

November 2015



Department
for Culture
Media & Sport



Historic England

Introduction

This report

This report is one in a series of ten “Taking Part, Focus On” reports, presenting findings on the tenth year of the Taking Part survey (2014/15). Taking Part is a continuous face to face household survey of adults aged 16 years and over and children aged 5 to 15 years old in England. The series expands on and complements the Statistical Release published on 25th June 2015 that presented headline adult findings from the survey, covering April 2014 to March 2015. The “Focus On” series looks in more detail at specific topics, with each report covering one of the following areas:

- 1) Art forms
- 2) Sport**
- 3) Heritage
- 4) Free time activities
- 5) Barriers to participation, disability
- 6) Society
- 7) Wellbeing
- 8) Digital engagement
- 9) Newspaper readership
- 10) First World War Centenary

This report focusses on how sports participation changes for an individual over time and some of the factors that influence this. There is a specific focus on the impact of life events such as someone’s children starting school and the role different sports play.

Forthcoming releases

The next adult release, to be published on Thursday 17th December, will present data covering the period October 2014 – September 2015.

Future adult releases of Taking Part will be published every six months. The next biannual release is therefore scheduled for July 2016 and will present data covering the period April 2015 – March 2016. Future adult releases will follow a similar schedule, being released every six months in July and December.

In addition, another series of “Taking Part, Focus on...” reports will be published in April 2016. Like the current report, each ‘short story’ in this series will look at a specific topic in more detail, providing more in-depth analysis of the 2014/15 Taking Part data than seen in the biannual report.

If you would like further information on these releases or the Taking Part survey, please contact the Taking Part team on TakingPart@culture.gov.uk.

Headline Findings

What have we learnt from this research?

- Whilst the overall number of people playing sport is fairly stable, there can be quite dramatic changes to the amount and type of sport individuals take part in. People don't have a single sporting habit and, like any consumer, their needs change over time.
- Some activities appear better than others at retaining the people who take part in them.
- Life events, like moving house or having children, can influence the amount of sport played by adults. The scale and nature of these changes differs by life event.
- The vast majority of adults who have recently taken up sport are not completely new to sport: they bring some kind of sporting experience or knowledge when they take up a new activity (usually relatively recent).



Chapter 1: Changes in Participation

Taking Part asks all adult respondents whether they have participated in any sport or physical activity over the previous four weeks. People in the longitudinal survey (those who complete the Taking Part questionnaire in multiple years) are asked the same question again at their second interview a year later and by comparing their different answers across years, we can start to build a picture of changes over time. First interviews were conducted across years 7 and 8 of the Taking Part survey (2011/12 and 2012/13) and second interviews across years 8 and 9 (2012/13 and 2013/14).

What do we count as sport?

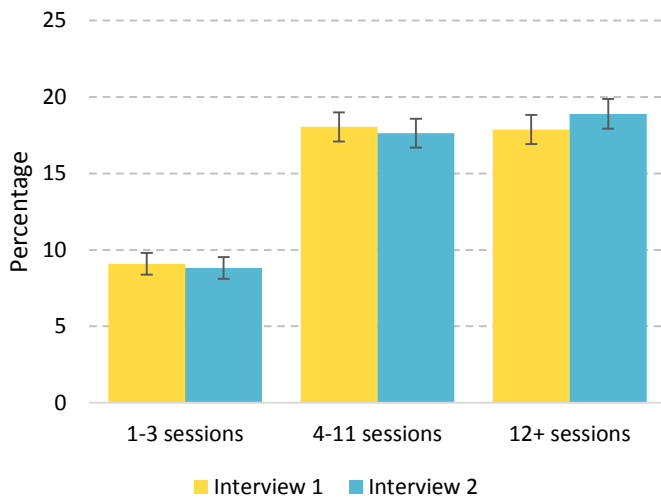
Eligible activities include:

- Swimming
- BMX, cyclo-cross or mountain biking
- Cycling for health, recreation, training or competition
- Bowls
- Tenpin bowling
- Health, fitness, gym or conditioning activities
- Keepfit, aerobics or dance exercise
- Judo
- Karate
- Taekwondo
- Other martial arts such as tai chi
- Weight training
- Weightlifting
- Gymnastics
- Snooker, pool or billiards
- Darts
- Rugby League
- Football
- Hockey
- Gaelic sports
- Cricket
- Rugby Union
- American football
- Archery
- Baseball or softball
- Netball
- Tennis
- Badminton
- Squash
- Basketball
- Table tennis
- Track and field athletics
- Jogging, cross-country or road running
- Angling or fishing
- Yachting or dinghy sailing
- Canoeing
- Windsurfing or boardsailing
- Ice skating
- Curling
- Golf
- Skiing
- Horse riding
- Climbing or mountaineering
- Hill trekking or backpacking
- Motor sports
- Shooting
- Volleyball
- Orienteering
- Rounders
- Rowing
- Triathlon
- Boxing
- Waterskiing
- Lacrosse
- Yoga
- Fencing
- Croquet
- Pilates
- Frisbee
- Trampolining
- Rambling
- Any other water sport
- Skittles

Levels of overall participation are relatively consistent

Overall, the amount of sport people played varied very little from first to second interview, regardless of whether they're normally active 1-3 times a month, 4-11 times a month or more than 12 times a month (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Monthly participation in sport (a session = at least 30 minutes, moderate intensity) at interview 1 vs. interview 2



What is a confidence interval?

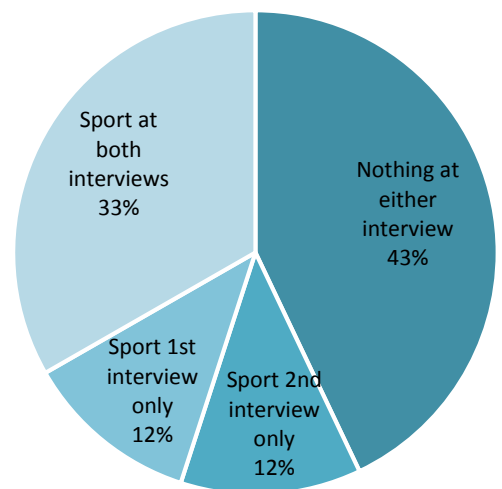
It's impossible to ask every single person in the population how much sport they play. That's why this research is carried out with a representative sample of the population. A 'confidence interval' is the range in which there is a specific probability that the true value will lie within. For this survey, 95% confidence intervals are used which means, had the sampling been conducted 100 times, creating 100 confidence intervals, then 95 percent of these intervals would contain the true value.

Notes

(1) Confidence intervals range between +/-0.7 and +/-1.0.

At an individual level, we also see that participation remains relatively constant over time with three-quarters of people either doing some sport, or not doing any sport, at both interviews. (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2: Participation in sport at first and second interviews as a share of the population



A third of people took part consistently in at least some sport at both their first and second interviews. A slightly smaller proportion (25 per cent) took part weekly at both interviews

43 per cent of people did no sport at either interview

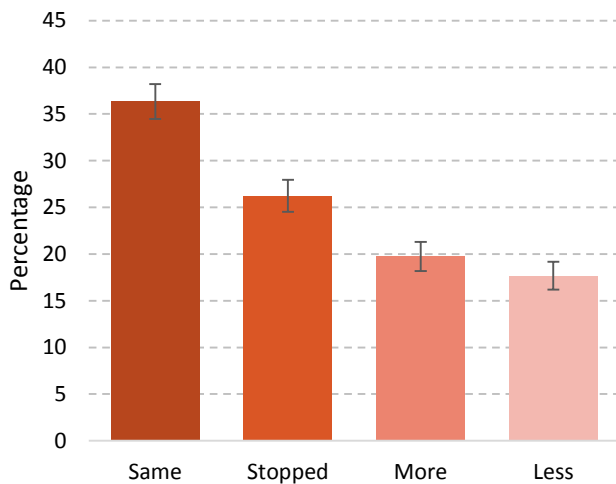
Of the remaining quarter, 12 per cent took part at just their first interview and 12 per cent at just their second interview



Participation patterns are less consistent

Whilst overall participation levels did not change significantly over time, analysis of those who were active at their first interview shows that only 36 per cent of these participants took part in the same amount of sport at their second interview. The remaining two-thirds have changed their participation patterns. A quarter were not participating at their second interview, leaving 38 per cent who have either increased (20 per cent) or decreased (18 per cent) the amount of sport they do. (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: Profile of sport participation for those doing some sport at their first interview for their second interview



Notes

(1) Confidence intervals range between +/-1.5% and +/-1.9%.

What do we mean by 'same amount of sport'?

If someone takes part in 1-3 sessions a month at their first interview and still takes part in 1-3 sessions of sport at their second interview, we say that they have done the same amount. Similarly if they do 4-7 sessions at both interviews, 8-11 sessions at both, or 12+ sessions at both interviews they have participated the same amount.

Males are more likely to have done the same amount of sport whilst females are more likely to have stopped participating.

Does frequency of participation impact on the likelihood of a person staying active?

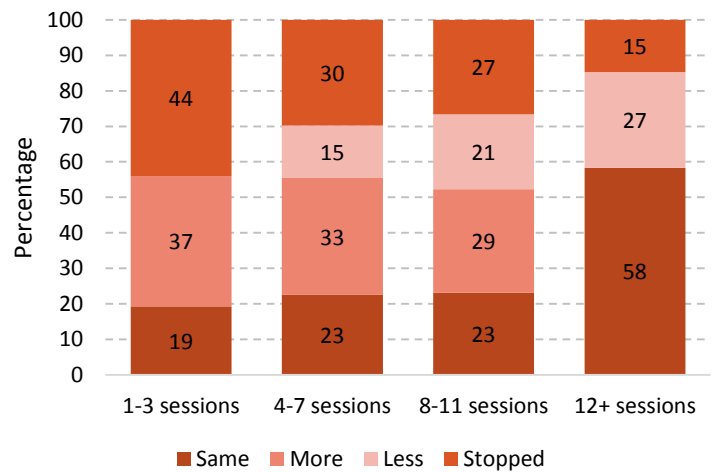
There is no pattern to the number of sessions someone did at interview two having been inactive at interview one. It is as likely that someone would play sport three times a week or more (12+ sessions) as taking part infrequently (1-3 sessions a month). This challenges the idea that it is usual for inactive individuals to increase gradually their activity levels. It appears just as likely that an individual will go from not participating to very frequent participation in a short space of time. This group is explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

We do however find that consistency is highest amongst those participating the most. Individuals participating three times a week or more (12+ sessions) at their first interview are by far the most likely to still be at that level come their second interview. Those who take part once or twice a week are more likely to participate more often than at their first interview. Infrequent participants are most likely to not be participating at the time of their second interview (Figure 1.4).

People who played the least sport at first interview are the most likely to stop by the time of their second interview (44 per cent). They are also the most likely group to do more sport (37 per cent)

A very different picture is true of the most active people – where they are most likely to continue the same amount of activity (58 per cent), but also most likely to do less (27 per cent). They are least likely to have stopped altogether.

Figure 1.4: Profile of sport participation at second interview by level of participation at first interview



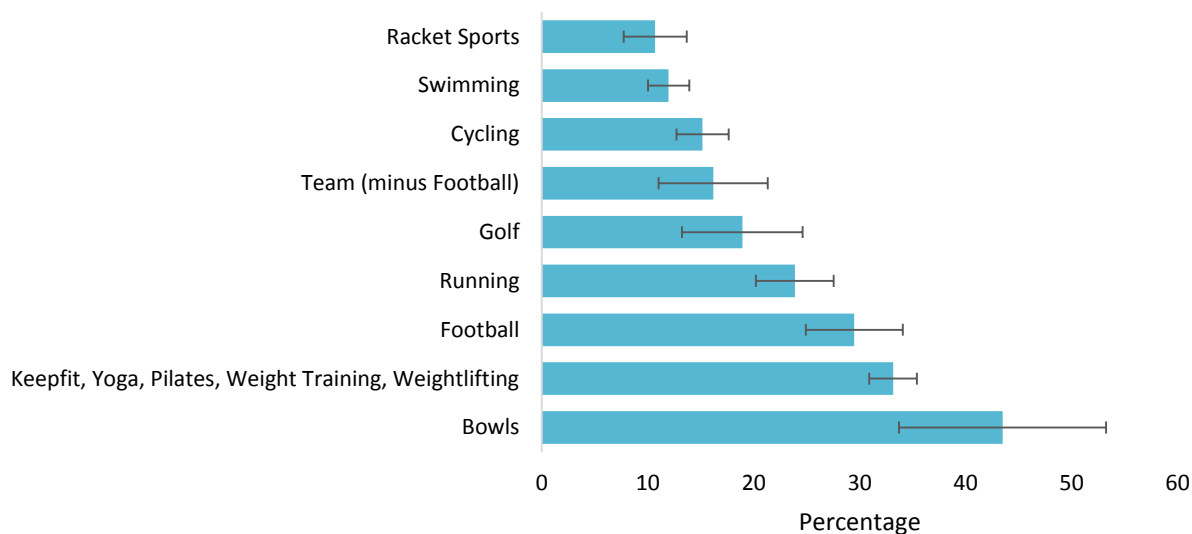
How does consistency of participation differ by sport?

People taking part in bowls had the most consistent participation rates across interviews, with 43 per cent taking part weekly at both interviews. This is followed by fitness activities with a third of participants doing them weekly at both interviews and football at 29 per cent. Racket sports and swimming have the lowest consistency level for weekly participation (Figure 1.5).

How are we defining who has taken part in a sport?

If someone has done one or more sessions in the last 28 days of a given sport at either their first or their second interview they are included as a participant in that sport.

Figure 1.5: Proportion of participants by sport who took part weekly at both interviews



Notes

(1) Confidence intervals range between +/-1.9% and +/-9.8.

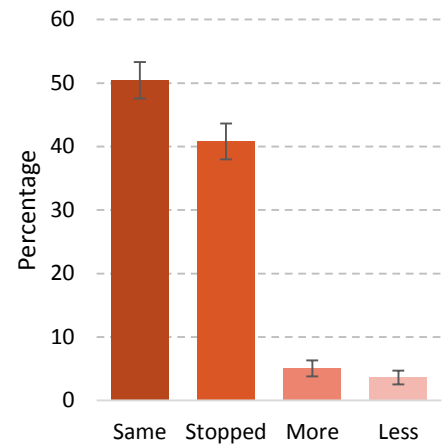


Case study 1: Fitness Activities

People taking part in fitness activities tend to show more consistent behaviour across interviews, with a third participating weekly at both interviews.

Of those taking part in fitness activities at their first interview:

- Only 9 per cent moved either up from 1-3 sessions per month to once a week or down from once a week to 1-3 sessions per months
- 41 per cent stopped participating between their first and second interviews
- Half continued at the same level of participation. For nearly all of these, this was weekly participation.



Notes

(1) Confidence intervals range between +/-1.1% and +/-2.9%.

Furthermore, those doing fitness activity at their second interview who did not do so at their first interview are likely to have been active in something else at their first interview, with 45 per cent doing a different sport and 40 per cent walking. Despite this, 15 per cent were completely inactive at interview one. This is comparatively high compared to other sports. For those dropping out of fitness activity at their second interview, we find that a similar amount (44 per cent) continue on to a different sport. Interestingly, most of these already did that sport alongside fitness at their first interview.

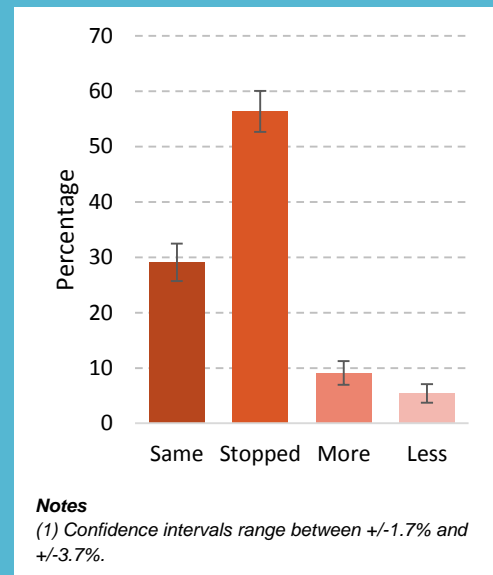
People who play football exhibit very similar behaviours to those outlined for fitness participants above, except that they are more likely to take part in another activity before starting football. Similarly, they are more likely to remain active after they stop playing football.

Case study 2: Swimming

People taking part in swimming tend to have more inconsistent behaviours with just 12 per cent participating weekly at both interview.

Of those taking part in swimming at their first interview:

- Only 14 per cent moved either up from 1-3 sessions per month to once a week or down from once a week to 1-3 sessions per month
- 56 per cent stopped participating between their first and second interviews
- Just under a third continued at the same level of swimming participation, this is split 2/3rd weekly to 1/3rd less than weekly



Those taking up swimming at their second interview are more likely to have been active already at their first interview than not, with half doing a different sport and 41 per cent walking. Less than 10 per cent were inactive. For those dropping out of swimming at their second interview, we similarly find that half continue on to a different sport. Again, most of these already did that sport alongside swimming at their first interview.

Cycling and racket sports participants exhibit very similar properties to those outlined for swimming. However, it is more likely someone will do a different sport at interview one before picking up cycling. It is also more likely someone will continue to a different sport at interview two, having taken part in racket sports at interview 1.

Running participation is also relatively inconsistent but poses an interesting variation to the swimming model. The inconsistent behaviours exhibited are somewhat surprising given the steady upward trend in participation. We assume the popularity of starting running brings in more people than it loses. As per participants in racket sports, runners are more likely to continue with a different sport when stopping running: this activity tends to be fitness.



Chapter 2: Impact of Life events

Survey respondents were asked at their second interview whether they had experienced any changes in their lives. Analysis of these changes alongside participation data gives us a picture of how people move in and out of sport and which factors have a positive and negative influence on their levels of activity.

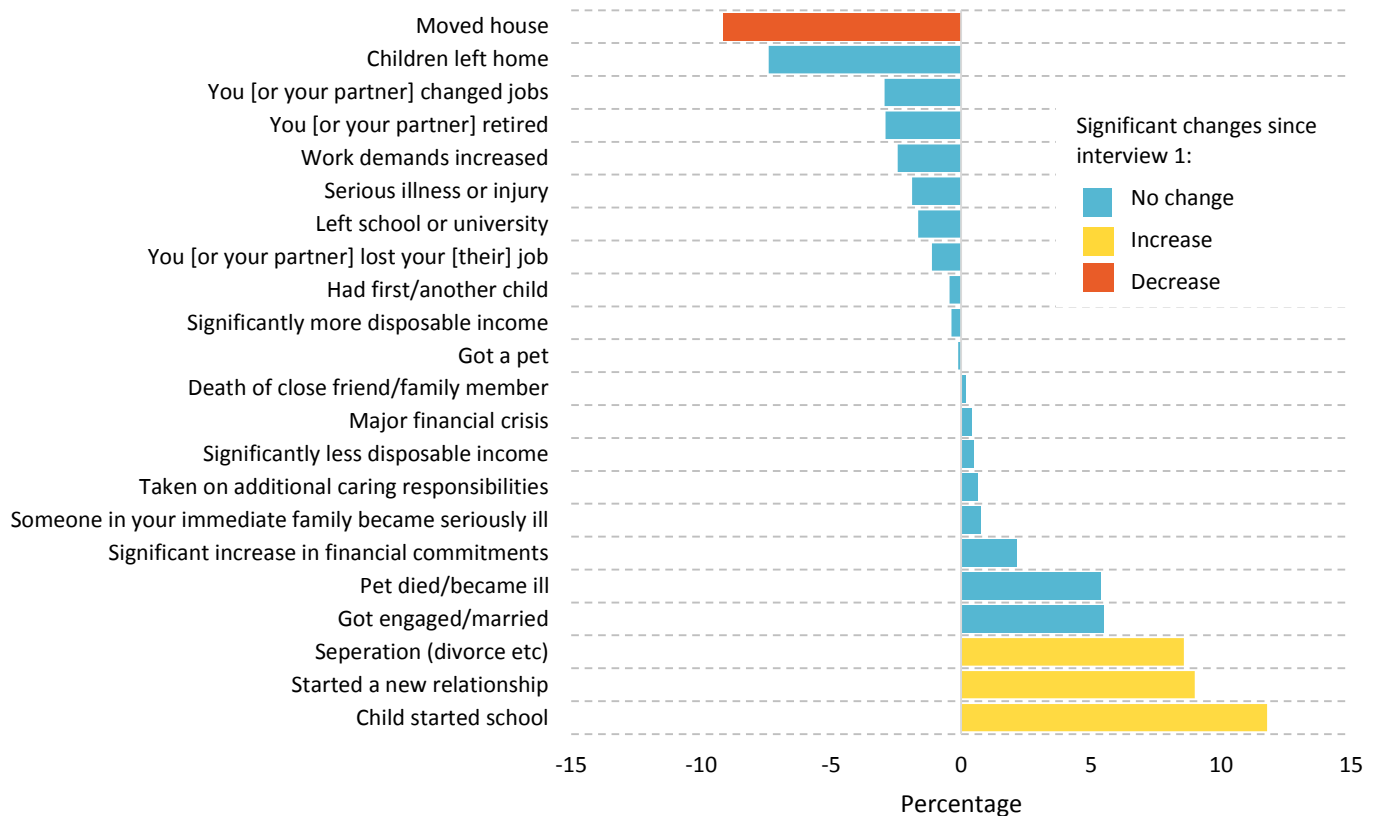
What do we count as a life event change?

- Moving house
- Having significantly more disposable income
- Having significantly less disposable income
- Significant increase in financial commitments such as household bills, mortgage, loans etc.
- Major financial crisis, like losing the equivalent of 3 months income
- Leaving school or university
- Work demands increasing
- Changing jobs (respondent or partner)
- Losing their job (partner losing their job)
- Retiring (respondent or partner)
- Getting a pet
- Pet dying or becoming ill
- Starting a new relationship
- Moving in with a partner
- Getting engaged or married
- Having a first child
- Having another child
- Children starting school
- Children leaving home
- Serious illness or injury
- Someone in their immediate family becoming seriously ill
- Taking on additional caring responsibilities for a friend or family member
- Separation due to divorce, marital difficulties or relationship breakdown
- Death of a spouse
- Death of a close friend
- Death of a close family member

Some life events have more of an impact on participation than others

Analysis of adult participation changes across the two interviews shows that children starting school, starting a new relationship and separation from a partner are most associated with people playing more sport. In contrast, moving house and children leaving home have a negative impact. (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Change in participation from interview 1 to interview 2 by life event



(1) Confidence intervals range between +/-0.6% and +/-4.0%.

Some factors have more or less impact, depending on gender. These are outlined below:

Leaving school or university has a negative impact on males (-7 per cent) but a positive impact on females (+3 per cent)

Starting a new relationship has a much greater positive impact on females (+16 per cent) than on males (+4 per cent)

Moving house has a greater negative impact on males (-15 per cent) than on females (-3 per cent)

When looking at the life event changes in more detail, we note that negative impacts on participation do not necessarily mean stopping sport altogether. It can also mean a reduction in the amount of activity. The rest of this chapter explores some of these events in more detail.



The impact of moving house

Moving house has a negative impact on weekly participation with rates decreasing nine percentage points for this group compared to their first interview (prior to moving home). Despite this, we see a significant group of people doing more sport than they did at their first interview. Looking deeper at the data, we see that the active (already participating at least once a week) become more active, whilst the impact on those doing less is to drop below the weekly threshold. Importantly, moving home does not appear to lead to increased drop out. (Figure 2.2).

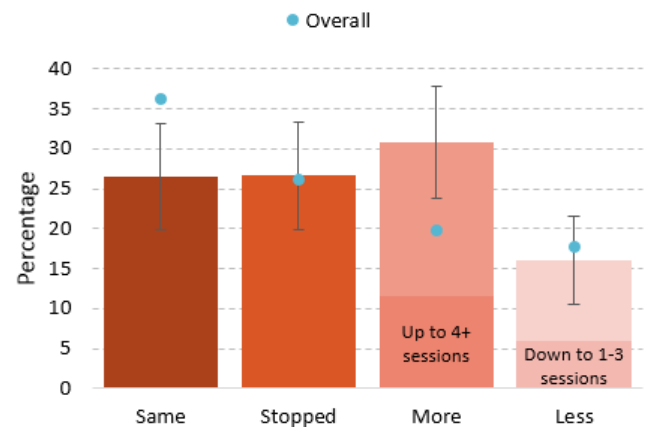
Moving house does not increase the likelihood that someone will stop participating in sport.

People are more likely to participate more than remain at the same level.

Two-thirds of those doing more sport were already participating once a week, this is in line with participation changes overall.

Indications are that a greater share of those participating less fall beneath the once a week threshold as compared to participation overall.

Figure 2.2: Impact of moving house on level of weekly sports participation



Notes

- (1) Confidence intervals range between +/-5.5% and +/-7.0%
- (2) Overall blue dots show the proportion in each group for all people in the sample.

The impact of changing jobs

Changing jobs has a smaller negative impact on weekly participation rates (-3 per cent) than moving house and appears to impact in a different way. Changing jobs makes it much less likely that someone will do more sport. They are more likely to maintain current levels or stop participating. It is the combination of these factors that leads to the overall negative impact. (Figure 2.3).

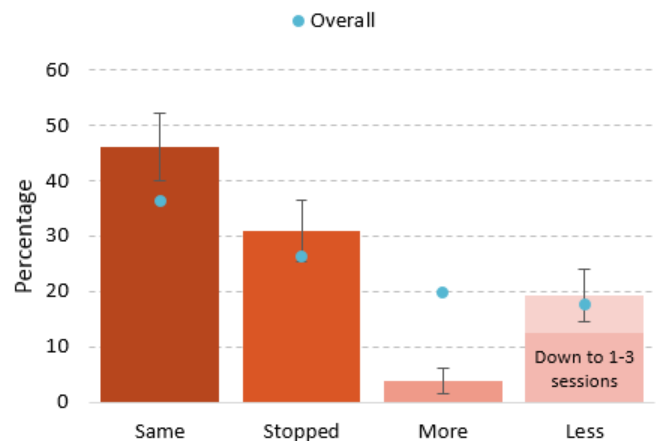
Changing jobs increases the likelihood that someone will stop participating.

People are more likely to remain at the same level than participate more.

People are unlikely to do more sport.

Two-thirds of those participating less still continue to meet the once a week threshold.

Figure 2.3: Impact of changing jobs on participation



Notes

- (1) Confidence intervals range between +/-2.3% and +/-6.1%
- (2) Overall shows the proportion in each group for all people in the sample.

The impact of children starting school

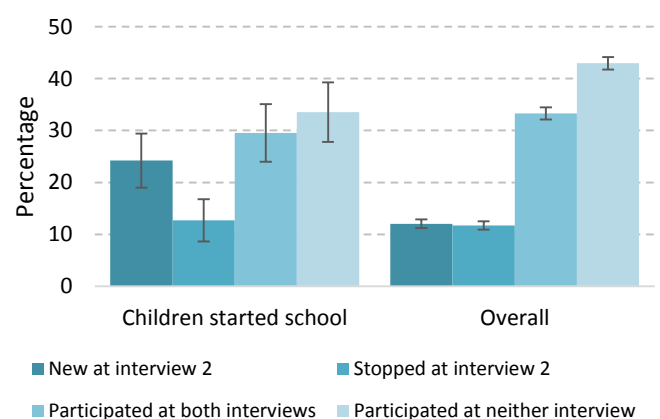
Children starting school has the largest positive impact on weekly adult participation overall (12 per cent increase). Adults in this group are more likely to do more sport than previously, but they are also more likely to stop participating. The main driver for the increase in participation is in fact because people are twice as likely to start sport after their children start school (24 per cent population versus 12 per cent average). (Figure 2.4).

Children starting school increases the likelihood that parents will stop participating.

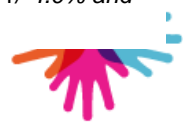
People are more likely to participate more and less likely to remain at the same level of participation.

People are twice as likely to take up sport after their children start school.

Figure 2.4: Impact of children starting school on participation



- (1) Confidence intervals range between +/-4.0% and +/-5.7%



The impact of separating from a partner

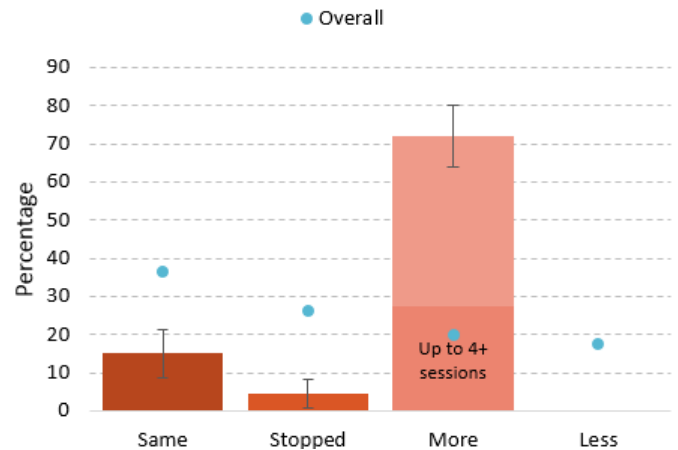
Separation from a partner leads to adults doing more sport compared to their first interview with the weekly rate increasing by 9 percentage points. Unlike when children start school, this isn't achieved by people starting to do sport but through people increasing the amount of sport that they do alongside very few people stopping taking part. Figure 2.5.

Separation from a partner reduces the likelihood that someone will stop participating.

Nearly three-quarters of people do more sport leaving far fewer stopping and very few doing less.

Of those doing more sport, the proportion that already met the once a week threshold is consistent with overall participation changes.

Figure 2.5: Impact of separating from a partner on participation



Notes

(1) Confidence intervals range between +/-3.7% and +/-8.1%

(2) Overall blue dots show the proportion in each group for all people in the sample.

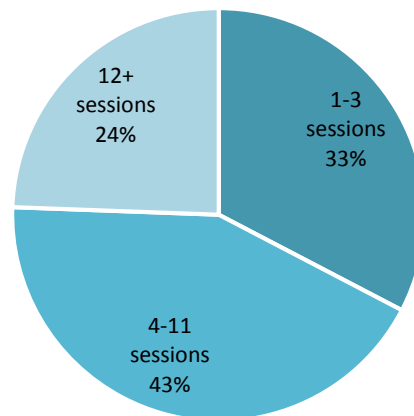
A very similar pattern is observed for adults starting a new relationship.

Chapter 3: Previous engagement in sport

In chapter 1, we learned that there is no pattern to the number of sessions of sport someone did at interview two having been inactive at interview one. It is as likely that someone will start doing sport very frequently and infrequently. (Figure 3.1).

This group of participants are explored in more detail in this chapter, particularly looking at whether they are “recent participants” or “returners to sport”

Figure 3.1: Frequency of participation at interview two for those not participating at interview one



In order to understand previous engagement with sport, participation rates in the previous year were analysed. This found that, whilst they had not been active in the previous month at interview one, almost 80 per cent of “new” participants had taken part in sport at some point in the past year. This suggests that the majority of people have had some relationship with sport in the previous 12 months.

With only two interviews worth of data we are unable to make firm judgements about the proportions who are new to sport versus those returning. Therefore, for the purpose of this report, we have approximated three pathways to eventual participation at interview 2.

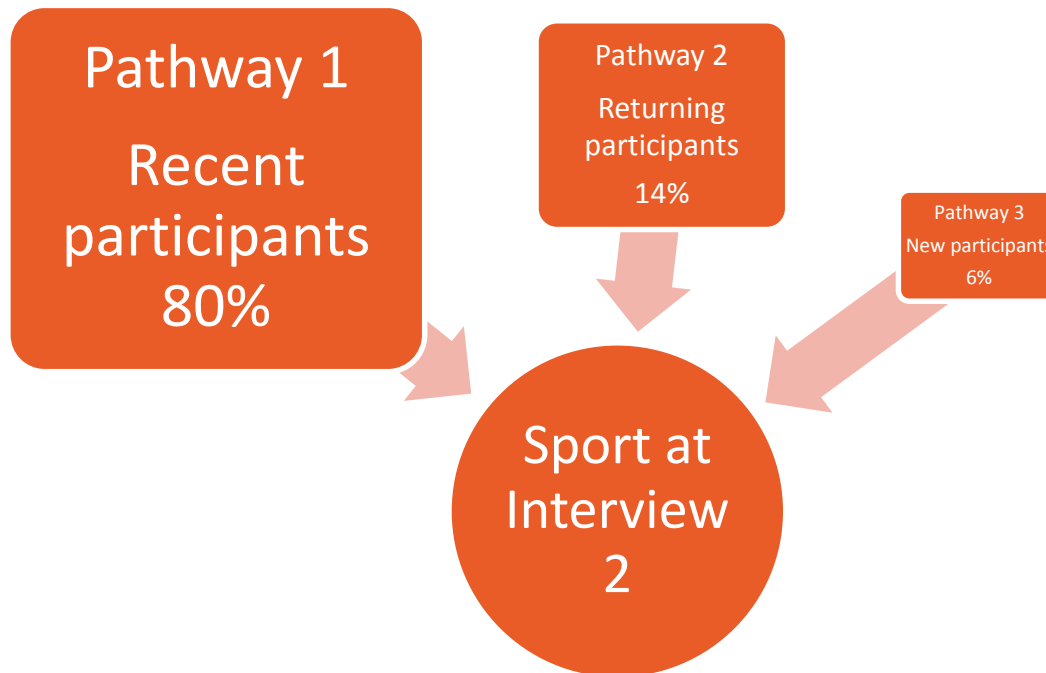


The three pathways into sport at interview two (Figure 3.2)

Pathway 1 (Recent participants): Sport in the last 12 months at interview 1

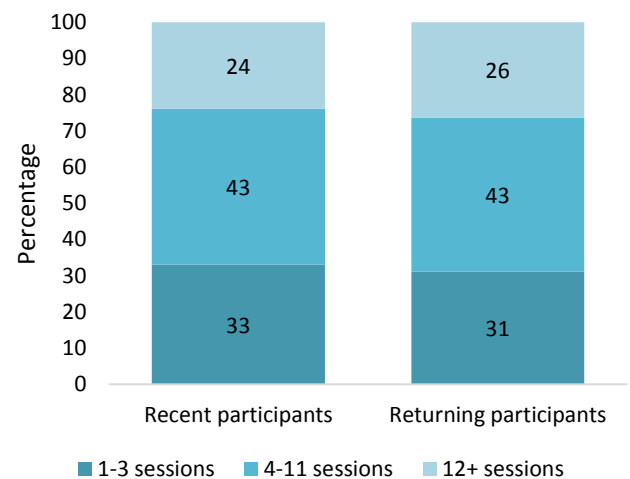
Pathway 2 (Returning participants): No sport in the last 12 months at interview 1, but active at some point prior

Pathway 3 (New participants): No sport in the last 12 months, or at any point prior



We have analysed whether the different pathways affect the amount of sport undertaken, but there appears to be very little difference. This indicates that the route into sport does not impact onto the level of sport they do. (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Level of sports participation at interview two by pathway into sport

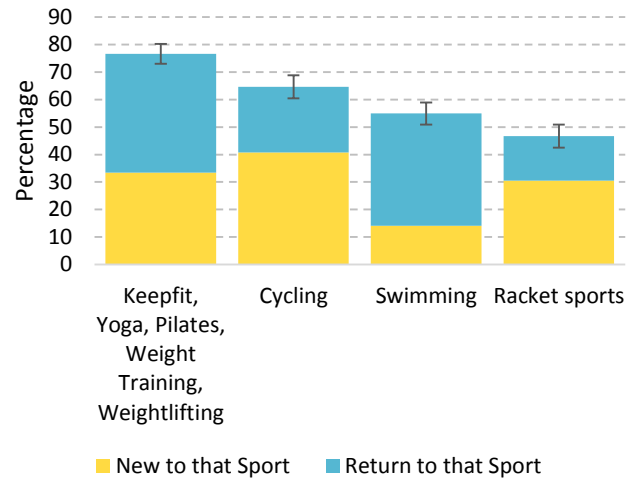


Which sports are people more likely to pick up?

Where it was possible, we have analysed which sports people take part in, depending upon which pathway they have come through.

We find that for our recent participants, fitness activities remain the most popular sport with almost three-quarters taking part. Participation remains high in cycling (two-thirds), swimming (just over half) and racket sports (just under half). For swimming, however, we see a greater skew towards people being returners to swimming, whilst for cycling we see a skew towards them being new to cycling, just not new to sport (Figure 3.5).

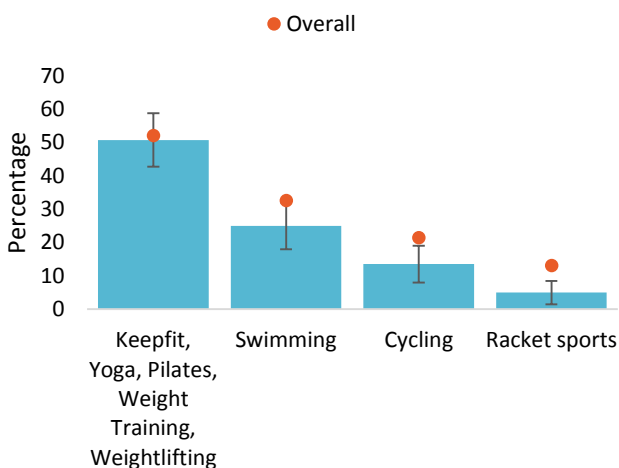
Figure 3.4: Participation by sport for those who are recent participants (participated in the last 12 months at interview one)



Notes

(1) Confidence intervals range between +/-3.6% and +/-4.2%

Figure 3.5: Participation by sport for those who are new to sport (did not participate in the last 12 months at interview one)



(1) Confidence intervals range between +/-3.5% and +/-8.1%
 (2) Overall blue dots show the proportion participating in each sport for all people in the sample.

For those who are returning participants, again fitness activity remains the sport they are most likely to do. Their participation rate matches the overall participation rate for fitness at interview two, suggesting it is accessible for this group. Swimming is the second most popular activity with a quarter taking part, but this is below the overall swimming participation share. (Figure 3.4).

Overall, recent participants (those that had participated in the last 12 months at interview one) are more likely to take part in a range of activities than those who had not participated in the last 12 months at interview 1 (returning participants).



Annex A: Further details

1. The Taking Part survey is commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and its partner Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs). For 2011 to 2015 these are Arts Council England, Historic England and Sport England.
2. Taking Part is a National Statistic and as such has been produced to the high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. National Statistics undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs and are produced free from any political interference. See the [Statistics Authority code of practice](#) for more information.

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed. See the [UK Statistics Authority assessment](#) for more information.

3. The latest results presented here are based on interviews issued between April 2014 and March 2015. The total sample size for this period is 9,817.
4. Statistical significance tests have been run at the 95% level. A significant increase at the 95% level means that there is less than 5% (1 in 20) chance that the difference observed within the sampled respondents was not also observed in the English population as a whole.
5. For more information see the [Taking Part Survey](#) webpages, including previous publications. Versions of the [questionnaires](#) from all years of the survey are also available.
6. The fieldwork for the survey has been conducted by TNS-BMRB. For more information, see <http://www.tns-bmr.co.uk>.
7. The series of reports has been produced by Helen Miller-Bakewell, Wilma Deda, Becky Woods, Catherine Mottram and Niall Goulding (DCMS), Louise O'Sullivan, David Bade and Adala Leeson (Historic England), Eloise Poole (Arts Council England), Rachael Whitney and Helen Price (Sport England). Acknowledgement goes to colleagues within the DCMS, partner ALBs and TNS-BMRB for their assistance with the production and quality assurance of this release.
8. The responsible statistician for this release is Helen Miller-Bakewell. For enquiries on this release, please contact Helen on 0207 211 6355. This release was prepared by Rachael Whitney and Helen Price.
9. For general enquiries telephone: 0207 211 6200 or email enquiries@culture.gov.uk.
10. To be kept informed about Taking Part publications and user events, please sign up to the Taking Part online newsletter [here](#).

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