



YOUTH
SPORT
TRUST



YST RESEARCH

Insight driving innovation and impact

Alternative Competition Formats

March 2019

Context

Removing Barriers to Sport is one of the six [strategic objectives](#) for the Youth Sport Trust. The Youth Sport Trust aims to support schools, clubs and families to remove the causes of negative experiences in sport for young people and to ensure youth sport in the UK is inclusive, accessible and fun. Insight gained from the [Girls Active](#) programme identified that the over emphasis on competition in sport is a challenge for some young people. This led to the Youth Sport Trust Research and Insight team conducting desk research to explore possible alternative competition formats.

Utilising the desktop research findings, and in light of The School Games review in 2016 recommendation (below), the Youth Sport Trust, funded by the Sport England National Lottery, launched a pilot project to evaluate the feasibility of conducting alternative competition formats through the School Games Organiser network with the overarching aim of increasing young people's participation in sport and physical activity.

*'Formats, guidance and training support across all levels of the School Games will be refreshed to ensure they fully support the ambitions of 'Towards an active nation' and in particular: engender a sense of competence, **promote enjoyment regardless of youngsters' level of ability and avoid negative/bad experience of competitive school sport.**'¹*

Desk Research

The desk research explored alternative ways to deliver competition to engage more young people in sport through a review of secondary evidence and consultations with key stakeholders delivering alternative competition formats. The desk research identified eight themes across the different alternative competition formats. Each pilot event was required to incorporate elements of at least one of the themes.

- Theme 1: Widening the competition environment to develop character and life skills
- Theme 2: Adapting the scoring to develop different sports skills
- Theme 3: Adding fun elements to engage new audiences
- Theme 4: Widening the competition environment to improve health
- Theme 5: Adapting the format to increase motivation
- Theme 6: Considering age or maturity levels to support fair competition and foster social connections
- Theme 7: Using technology to develop physical skills
- Theme 8: Adapting the competition environment to support individual development in sport

The majority of pilot events included a range of variations within their alternative competition offer. All did this in a different way including those variations that they felt would work for the event they were organising. Of the variations, the most used was alternative scoring (theme 2) and the least used was personal challenges (theme 8).

Project aim

The research aimed to evaluate the feasibility of the alternative competition formats piloted and to gain insight and advice into how they could be successfully implemented in the future.

¹ <https://www.sportengland.org/media/11409/school-games-review-november-2016-update.pdf>

Activities

This pilot project took place in ten School Games Organiser areas (SGOs) across England and one local organising committee (LOC). Each SGO / LOC was tasked with organising two pilot events using alternative competition, one for primary aged pupils and one for secondary aged pupils. Overall, 19 pilot alternative competition events were held. There was a wide variety in terms of the events organised and the number of young people involved, including

**19 pilot events
across England**

**11 elements
of competition
variation**

- Adapted scoring
- Power play
- Sportsmanship / value awards
- Differing selection criteria
- Focusing on skill development
- Player rotation
- Walking variations
- Alternative team formats
- Sin bin
- Bio-banding
- Personal challenge

Research activities included semi-structured observations at over half of the pilot events, in depth interviews with all school games organisers, intercept interviews with young people, parents and teachers as well as written case studies submitted by event organisers.

Reach

The overall reach of the project was calculated using the case studies submitted by each SGO / LOC. This showed that over **2,000 young people** were involved, of which **8 percent** reported having **special educational needs** and **4 percent were from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic** background.

Case study example Football Festival (Y5/6)

Win = 2 points
Draw = 1.5 points
Lost = 1 point
Shot on target = 1 point
Save by the Goal Keeper = 1 point
Sportsmanship = 1, 2 or 3 points

Box 1

This year 5 and 6 football festival used alternative scoring as part of their alternative approach. This was to try to focus on effort as opposed to just winning. The alternative scoring used is outlined in box 1.

The format gave young people more opportunities to score points through activities and through sportsmanship. The approach was well received by both participants and staff and the simple scoring approach was easily understood by the participants. Having points for a 'loss' meant that all teams ended up with at least some points which reinforced engagement levels. The teachers also felt that it was nice to have a focus on sportsmanship within the competition.

'it increases engagement and enthusiasm – support for each other and increases the speed at which the game is played at' Parent

"This is brilliant, I've never got to represent the school before; it's amazing, I even get to wear the school kit! I love dodgeball!" Young person relayed via teacher.

'Very impressed, they want to score points, it is very enjoyable, and they have strategically thought about it. It is giving confidence to those that don't usually score baskets.' Teacher

Benefits

- **77%** of young people responded that they would like to do this new approach **ALL** the time
- **100%** of teachers responded that they would like to do this approach either **ALL** or **SOME** of the time, **nearly half** (48%) of teachers responded that they would like to do this approach **ALL** the time

Through the research activities conducted, several benefits have been identified for young people participating in alternative competition formats.

- ✓ Increase **participation** in sport and physical activity
- ✓ Increased **engagement** and **enjoyment**
- ✓ Inclusive **atmosphere** with increased participation for all
- ✓ Increased **sportsmanship** and **teamwork**
- ✓ Increased **skill development** and **quality of game play**
- ✓ Increased opportunity to think **strategically** and **tactically**
- ✓ Increased **sense of achievement**
- ✓ Increased **confidence** to participate in sport and physical activity
- ✓ **Promotes participation** across those young people who might not have actively participated previously
- ✓ Provides the opportunity for young people to undertake **leadership roles**

Key lessons

The recommendations that emerged from this pilot study can be separated into general and specific, general recommendations can be applied across all types of alternative approaches whereas specific recommendations relate to specific types of alternative competition formats.

General recommendations

- ✓ **Focus on one or two alternative variations for initial events.**
- ✓ **Ensure that young leaders have an adequate understanding of the alternative approach and feel confident to lead the activity.**
- ✓ **Allow sufficient time and resources to consider how best to support a change in mindset.**
- ✓ **Communicate clearly with all participants and stakeholders.**

Specific recommendations

- ✓ **Adapted scoring** is a simple adaptation that was found to be effective at engaging and motivating participants
- ✓ **Music** worked to engage young people and create a fun atmosphere
- ✓ For formats that involve aspects of **player rotation** or player time, ensure that this is monitored to allow everyone the opportunity to participate.
- ✓ Use a standardised checklist to support staff and young people to identify those for **awards**.
- ✓ For **walking variations**, ensure that the environment and audience are suitable for this format.

YST RESEARCH

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

Our specialisms include:

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

For our latest research findings, see our impact report [here](#).

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

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