

# Active Colleges Briefing Paper



## Focus on female students

This paper outlines the impact of the Active Colleges programme on female students. It brings together data from the evaluation of the Active Colleges programme in general, as well as examples from three Colleges:

- **City College Plymouth** – a college with a national reputation in promoting enterprise, employability and STEM subjects and with more than 12,000 students on full or part-time courses. It is a multisite college and historically has experienced low levels of sport participation amongst females. The College Sport Maker is Kim Eschbaecher.
- **North Nottinghamshire College** – a college with nearly 2,000 largely 16-18 year old full-time students. All courses are mainly delivered on one site, with another approximately 10 miles away. The College Sport Maker is Lucy Willets.
- **Greenwich Community College** – is located in an area of high social deprivation and has approximately 2000 students on full and part time courses. There are approximately 700 16-18 year old students and many are ESOL students from overseas. There is a great ethnic and religious mix at the college and in particular a large Nepalese community. The College Sport Maker is Lee Amalzeg.

## Background

Analysis of the most recent Student Leisure Survey shows an increase in overall participation in sport or physical activity from 77.5% of students in the baseline survey<sup>1</sup> to 80.2% in the latest survey<sup>2</sup>. This represents a statistically significant total percentage increase of +3.5% in participation.

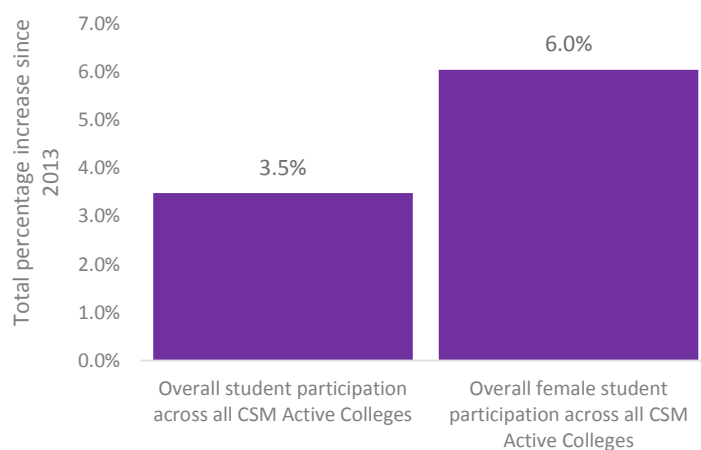


Figure 1: Change in participation in sport/physical activity for students with additional needs [Bases: female=7994; all respondents =16234].

Since investment by Sport England in the Active Colleges programme, participation in sport and physical activity has also increased significantly for many students who have traditionally had lower participation rates.

Since 2013 there has been a variable increase in participation rates across these demographic groups (for example Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, disabled, and part-time students). Female students have seen a total percentage increase of +6.0% in participation in sport or physical activity for 1x30 minutes per week (Figure 1).

Across the Active Colleges programme, College Sport Makers have focussed delivery on **sustainable participation** in sport for a wide range of students with different needs.

<sup>1</sup> The baseline survey (the Student Leisure Survey, Wave 1) was conducted in April 2013 and created a measurement of participation and impact from which the data from subsequent surveys can be compared.

<sup>2</sup> Student Leisure Survey, Wave 7, Year 3 College Sport Maker Survey (CSM Yr3) March 2016.



## Encouraging female students to participate in sport and physical activity

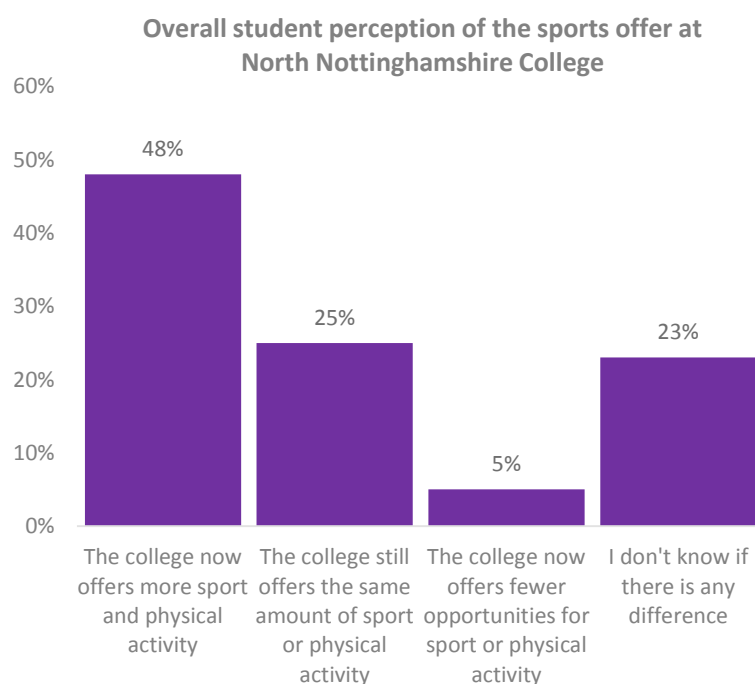
All students across Active Colleges state that encouraging and sustaining sport and physical activity at college requires a sports offer which:

- Fits around specific timetable requirements; and
- Provides strong and positive communication of the types and availability of sport at the college.

In addition, female students have said that that they want to **participate in male or female only sport activities** (e.g. women's basketball) at least in the first instance. As such, College Sport Makers have developed approaches and sporting opportunities to help achieve this.

At City College Plymouth, Kim has used her visible role within the college's *Student Journey Team* in the college's student centre to utilise the opportunity for day-to-day face-to-face student contact. This has been crucial in reaching out to female students who don't participate in sport, as opposed to focusing efforts on the sports department aimed at sporty individuals.

Kim has re-designed the student centre activity room from a walkway and smoking area which consisted of "dead space" into an area which is used for table tennis, touch tennis, dance classes and other sporting activity. Kim believes that by re-creating this into an attractive space to try out sports in an informal environment female students feel comfortable, less self-conscious and are able to participate with friends. Kim manages the space to ensure it is a targeted and dedicated space for sport participation, with a particular emphasis on female engagement.



At North Nottinghamshire College, student participation in 1x30 minutes of sport or physical activity per week is 84%, above the Active Colleges national figure. When Lucy started at the college in February 2013, sports for non-sports course students – *enrichment sport* – was not on offer.

She initially set up activities for all students, but because of a lack of female student engagement (identified through student surveys) she targeted activity through a variety of different approaches. Overall student feedback demonstrates this cultural shift towards sports activity at the college with the perception now being that the offer is wider than in previous years (Figure 2).

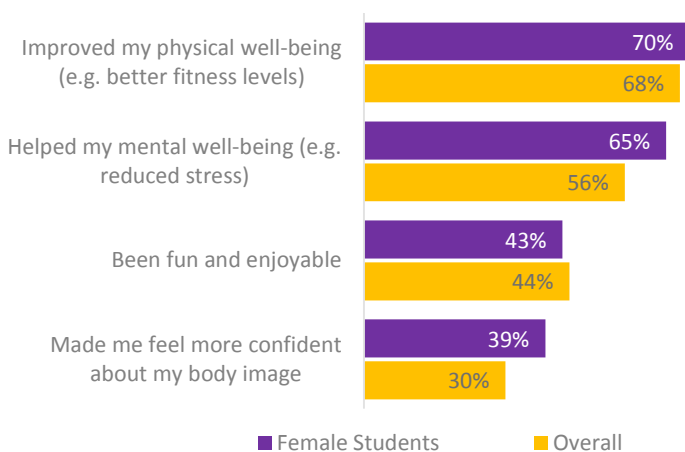
**Figure 2: Overall student perception of the sports offer at North Nottinghamshire College [base = 40].**

### **Focussed targeting at North Nottinghamshire College**

Lucy has set-up female-only fitness suite sessions as many female students suggested that they lacked self-confidence in engaging with sport and did not want to use the fitness suite with other male students. Zumba and yoga classes have also been established and in previous years a 5k Race for Life project was a great success. Also, Lucy has found that classes specifically tailored to individual group needs have been generally more effective than simple college-wide marketing. Once engaged, those less likely to take part in sport are often very keen to continue.

## Impact on students and colleges

Getting young people who are less likely to participate in sport or physical activity is critical to the success of College Sport Makers, but is also beneficial to the student and the college. Students who participate in sport or physical activity state that they experience both physical and mental health benefits as a result. Figure 3 shows the main benefits as reported by female students across all Active Colleges. The main physical benefit focuses on increased fitness levels, as might be expected. The broad range of mental health benefits, however, can have an impact not only on the students themselves, but also wider college strategic goals and even contribute to local and community outcomes.

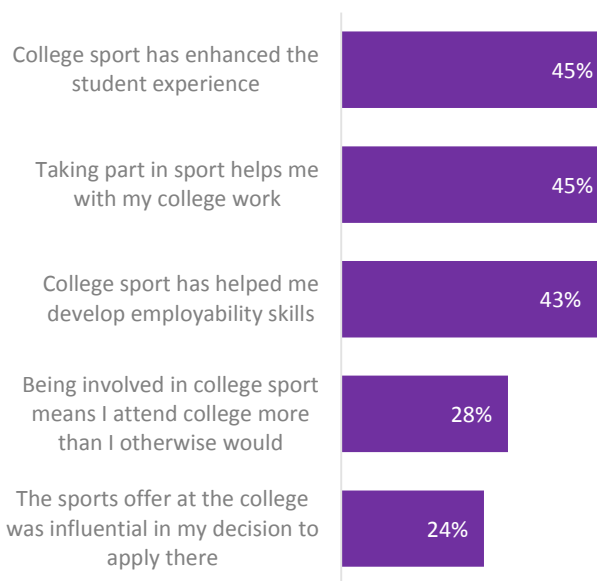


**Figure 3: The main benefits of participating in sport or physical activity [bases variable – total female responses=2153; total overall responses: 10,259].**

For example, general mental health improvements (reducing stress), engaging in a fun and enjoyable activity, increased confidence and making new friends can help engender positive attitudes and increase happiness. Part of this increase in participation for female students is the innovative and collaborative way in which Active Colleges are working to encourage long-term engagement across different colleges and college sites. An example of the impact of this activity for female students, is highlighted in Figure 4.

Figure 4 presents female student perceptions of the impact that sports participation, or the sports offer at the college has on them. This data helps to understand the relationship between participating in sport and the impact this has on colleges as a result. For many Active Colleges, building activities which are attractive to students traditionally less likely to participate will often involve working with tutors who are able to communicate and “market” these activities to the right students.

At North Nottinghamshire College Lucy has highlighted the importance of strong staff support in promoting and helping to develop sport and physical activity. Lucy believes that the most active groups of students tend to have enthusiastic and health conscious tutors who are keen to support their students in their sporting activity. Mel Hancock, for example, is the *Adult Future Learning Manager* at the college, and has taken a strong interest and encouraged students on *land-based* courses to participate in sport through flexible timetabling and health checks in her classes.



**Figure 4: Outcomes of sport or physical activity for students [bases variable – total female responses=6,904].**

Mel believes that through flexible timetabling; creating a space within which students are able to take part in sport; making sport approachable; coupled with building a strategy around healthy living and backed up with bespoke feedback, students are interested in what's on offer – they want to try something they might not have done before.

*Lucy [has created] a safe environment for female students to try new sports, to get healthier, to have the confidence to get involved. - Mel*

*I feel I can prove myself more now; I want to show that countryside management doesn't need to be a male dominated profession. I am less tired, less out-of-breath; I drink more water and eat more healthily as a result - Claire*

Claire, a Countryside Management student at North Nottinghamshire College is a good example of someone who has started to engage in sport at the college as a result of the female-focussed activities developed. Claire regularly attends the female only fitness sessions at the college, and as a result of engaging in sport in this way has gained the confidence to join a local swimming club. This activity means that she now has more confidence when taking part in practical outdoor work which is a critical part of her course.

At City Plymouth College, Kim has focussed on building sustainable links with tutors, helping them to see the importance of exercise and the associated outcomes that this can bring. Tutors have witnessed improved student attentiveness and academic achievement since the introduction of the enriched programme of study. This in turn has had impacts that can be linked to wider college outcomes and the strategic college vision. Kim also believes it is critical to ensure that staff are encouraging and fully bought into increasing participation amongst their students too.

*"It isn't just about changing student perceptions, but seeing a shift in tutor and staff attitudes towards sports as well." Kim*

## The community perspective

Equally important in increasing participation in sport and physical activity has been the links created between Active Colleges and local community organisations, County Sports Partnerships and other regional stakeholders. This is, in part, critical for College Sports Makers as they look to meet specific targets based on their role and activity. Across the Active Colleges network, for example, links to local and community programmes and groups has increased significantly since the start of the programme.

College Sport Maker Activity	Increase since the start of Active Colleges (% increase)
Community Links	641 (393%)
Regular Participation Activities off College Site	371 (742%)

*Total activity numbers across 156 colleges with complete data on the CSM Delivery Plan Target Tracker*

At Greenwich Community College, Lee established a partnership with Charlton Athletic football club's CARE (Community and Race Equality) team to facilitate sports sessions in the local community that help students from different groups engage more regularly. In particular, Lee has drawn on CARE's knowledge and support to build specific sports offers which are relevant for different groups in the area – for example a specific Nepalese dance class.

One significant activity which has been developed is the opportunity for female Muslim students to take part in football. These football teams are open to students and other girls in the local community. At Greenwich Community College, female Muslim students present particular challenges as many do not participate in sport at all. In order to engage with this group effectively Lee, with the help of CARE approached the local mosque in order to engage Muslim women at the college, but also women in the wider community. Lee has worked with these local partners to create a local female football group, made up of people from the college, mosque and local leisure centre, in order to build community relationships.

*“The Female Football Mentoring Programme is demonstrating impact for the college as it developing student skills in communication, team-working and self-confidence – all important aspects of employability” - Lee*

The work Lee is doing at Greenwich Community College extends beyond simply providing sporting opportunities but also about bringing communities together to ease tension through a dialogue of sport. Building on these community activities, Lee has also helped

establish the Female Football Mentoring Programme where groups of female students work with coaches, who mentor them, enabling them to gain coaching experience themselves.

## Focus on challenges and potential solutions

Colleges experience challenges in their roles in helping students with additional needs to participate in sport and physical activity. These challenges and potential solutions are outlined below:

- Across each of the colleges highlighted, encouraging students to participate in regular sporting or physical activity has not been straightforward, requiring extensive support from a range of college staff and organisations. To help ensure that all students have an opportunity to participate at college, CSMs have:
  - Increased communication with the sports department to share ideas and facilities and to help launch new initiatives to raise the profile of sport at the college for everyone.
  - Developed a more coordinated approach with students, coaches, those responsible for timetabling, and making sport more visible, accessible and informal.
- Encouraging students to be *self-motivated*, even amongst those who have taken an initial step in engaging in sporting or physical activity for the first time, is an ongoing activity. The impact of self-motivation can be great as well and can lead to a sporting habit for life. Across the colleges, the College Sport Makers have:
  - Engaged with students and listened to their needs, removed barriers to participation by using college space innovatively and made sporting activity publicly visible and informal. This has meant that female students have been more likely to try out new activities across the colleges more widely.

## And finally...

At each of their respective colleges Kim, Lucy and Lee have all used distinctive, bespoke methods to engage with students, and particularly female students, who may not have previously taken part in sport. By working with key staff at their college, and by using local contacts and organisations to embed participation across wider community environments, Active Colleges has created an environment where female students feel safe, confident and inquisitive about the types of sport on offer and their willingness to engage.

*If you would like further information about the work that Colleges are doing to help students to participate in sport or physical activity please contact: Duncan Skelton, Senior Manager – Further Education: [duncan.skelton@sportengland.org](mailto:duncan.skelton@sportengland.org)*