

# Activity Check-in

Focus on – the impact  
of cost of living



**The Activity Check-In tracks behaviours and attitudes from both adults, children and young people towards sport and physical activity, revealing the impacts of a rapidly changing world.**

**Each wave captures views on a specific topic of current relevance – in this publication we focus on the impact of the rising cost of living and how the sector can help get people active through it.**

**Full data sets are available on our website.**

**This document is for partners and organisations who work in the sport and physical activity sector. It explores our current, collective understanding and shares some ideas on how to help people get, or remain active at low or no cost.**

## **Contents**

- 3 Ideas to help people get active at low or no cost**
- 7 Resources**
- 9 Insight**

Activity Check-In, is conducted by Savanta ComRes via an online survey. Completed by n=2000 adults (aged 16+) and n=450 children and young people (CYP) in school years 1 to 11.

All participants live in England and data has been weighted to be representative of the English population by age, gender, region and socio-economic status.

Fieldwork dates for quantitative research: Wave one 25/03/2022 and 28/03/22. Wave two 15/07/2022 and 18/07/22. Qualitative online community: 14/06/2022 and 20/06/2022.



# 1. Focus on the experience to support motivation

As people go through the cycle of reviewing their finances fairly regularly, they will be assessing and evaluating their experiences – what is important to them? What are they enjoying (and a reminder that enjoyment will be different for different people)? Where are they feeling the benefits?

Consider how you can provide enjoyable, inclusive, and sociable experiences that will motivate people to be active.

*'Fun classes without the focus on exercise and raising awareness of local free fitness activities really appeals to me. I want to enjoy exercise and have motivation to go - rather than just to 'be fit'*

Female, 18-24, higher socioeconomic background.





## 2. Make accessing activities as simple as possible

In the current context, people are experiencing additional mental strain associated with worry about finances coupled with uncertainty about the future. This is likely to impact people's motivation and psychological capability to be active.

Consider how to make accessing activities as simple as possible by reducing the burden on mental bandwidth, for example:

Make it easy to sign up or take part (and so reducing friction), using local facilities which feel familiar, or instructors who are part of the local community.



### 3. Link people up with local activities

Many people want to do more, but don't necessarily know what opportunities are available in their area, particularly ones which are low cost.

Upskill your Digital Marketing skills by accessing our [Digital Marketing Hub](#) for free on-demand training, webinars, and mentorship. Learn from digital marketing experts and do more with the digital platforms at your fingertips.

*'I recently saw this advertisement on my Facebook page. My sons actually attend classes here and they love it and it has really encouraged me to think about joining up myself as I know that not only is it going to keep me fit but teach me self defence too which is a good inspiration to have'*

Female, 36-54, lower socioeconomic background.



## 4. Actively communicate flexible payment options

Personal memberships are an area consumers are likely to make cutbacks to and changes on. People want to feel in control over the finances.

There is an opportunity to actively communicate flexible payment options in an empathetic way linked to organisations understanding that the rising cost of living is a challenge for people. This may help reduce anxiety and worry for some people.

Easy opt out services and no cancellation penalties are also likely to provide people with reassurance.

*'Gyms to offer rolling contracts rather than fixed term so you can cancel if you need to'*

Male, 36-54, higher socioeconomic background.





# Resources

**We have worked with partners to support and develop a range of free or no cost programmes to help people get active:**

## Parkrun

Free, weekly, community events and take place in parks and open spaces. On Sunday mornings, there are 2km junior parkruns for children aged four to 14.

## Couch to Fitness and Couch to Fitness: Bhangra

Helping people start their journey to a more active lifestyle.

## Studio You

To engage less active teenage girls with school PE lessons.

## Strava partnership

'Make Your Comeback' which includes a free This Girl Club on the app This Girl Can and Strava.

## Digital Marketing Hub

Learn from digital marketing experts, and do more with the digital platforms at your fingertips.



**Our campaigns provide information on how to find free, fun and accessible ways to get active:**

[Join the Movement](#)

[This Girl Can](#)

[We Are Undefeatable](#)

**And to see what cost of living support you and your consumers could be eligible for:**

[Help for Households](#)





# Insight

The rising cost of living is due to converging challenges, including:

- financial legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic
- conflict in Ukraine and associated economic sanctions
- global supply chain issues
- other global instability
- inflation, tax rises and wage stagnation.

We expect the resulting increase in cost of living to negatively impact sport and physical activity more than during previous recessions due to the significance and scale of these challenges.



## What this means for the sector

The increase in inflation and utility costs is having an impact on sector organisations and are coinciding with a time where, for some, participation levels are still recovering following the Covid-19 restrictions.

Insight suggests<sup>1</sup> that operators are already responding or are considering responding in a variety of ways such as, reducing the number of sessions being delivered and increasing the costs to participants through to looking for alternative venues or halting activity completely.

Closures of facilities will likely impact the workforce, changing contract types or leading to redundancies.

In past recessions we saw greater impact to more costly and indoor, winter and asset owning activities<sup>2</sup>.

Certain sports and activities such as swimming or indoor fitness classes are likely to be impacted more versus walking or running.

<sup>1</sup> Spotted. Members Survey. Facilities: June 2022

<sup>2</sup> C. Gratton and T. Kokolakis: June 2012

The Effects of the Current Economic Conditions on Sport Participation.  
Sport Industry Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam University





## Key findings

**Almost half of adults say that they have less disposable income today compared to a year ago.**

- 39% of people agree that the cost of living increase has had a negative impact on their ability to be active<sup>3</sup>
- 13% say they are currently spending less on physical activity<sup>3</sup>
- 53% think that it will eventually have a negative impact on their ability to be active going forwards<sup>3</sup>.

This is particularly concerning because it comes as the population was still to return to activity levels seen before the pandemic, with people citing barriers such as 'not feeling fit enough' and 'struggling to find the bandwidth' to prioritise being active.





# Challenges

## **Decline in activity levels**

The impact of the cost of living on activity levels is being felt across different groups of people. Whilst there are some small differences, the percentage of people who agree that the cost of living has had a negative impact on their ability to be active is seen across all characteristics (socioeconomic backgrounds, age, gender, disabilities and/or long-term health conditions).

Early data suggests that the rising cost of living may exacerbate inequalities which exist in sport and physical activity, highlighting the importance Uniting the Movements focus on tackling inequalities by providing opportunities and removing barriers to activity.



# Behavioural groups

We've identified four possible behavioural groups from our insight. People may move between groups as they review their financial situation.

## 1. Cutting back

People who can't afford to continue with their physical activity choices.

*'I have stopped going to the gym. I had a gym at home but had to sell it to make ends meet. So, I don't lift weights presently. I walk more and jog more because they cost nothing'*

Male, 36-54, lower socioeconomic background.

## 2. Making choices

Those choosing between paid activities and lowering frequency.

*'I have had to stop swimming as I cannot afford to do that as well as pay for my gym membership'*

Female, 36-54, lower socioeconomic background.

**35% of people report either cutting back or making choices<sup>4</sup>.**





### 3. Positive impact

People who are doing more or continuing because they recognise the benefits to wellbeing.

*'I now spend a bit more money on fitness having got a gym membership, but this was because I was struggling with my mental health'*

Female, 25-35, lower socioeconomic background.

**10% of people report a positive impact.<sup>5</sup>**

### 4. No change

People who are either able to continue to pay for activities or who were doing low cost or free activities prior to the rise in the cost of living, such as walking for leisure, and are continuing with these.

*'...I live the exact same way as I did before'*

Male, 25-35, higher socioeconomic background.

**51% of people report no change<sup>5</sup>.**





# Considerations

The following considerations relate to both people who are cutting back completely and those who are choosing between activities or lowering frequency.

## Cost

Physical activity isn't considered an essential spend for many struggling with the rising cost of living and people are either cutting back completely or making choices between activities.

*'Cutting out swimming costs in order to have the extra to pay for groceries'*

Female, 35-54, lower socioeconomic background.



Whilst cost is a significant barrier it is not the only one.

### **Transport and Travel**

43% of people with less disposable income compared to a year ago agree that they are spending less money on travel (in general terms)<sup>6</sup>.

**Our wider insight suggests that some who use cars to travel to activities are no longer doing so.**

This may affect the physical activity behaviours of people in more rural locations to a greater degree.

**It may also present an opportunity to promote active travel.**

### **Others are unable to take part**

Where some team members are unable to take part, this could result in the wider group not having enough people to play.



## Next steps

We will continue to bring together sector partners to discuss what we are learning, are looking to understand and where we have gaps in our knowledge – to better understand the challenges on the sector and reveal the impact it is having on the workforce.

**We plan to gather and share ‘bright spot’ examples of people consciously being more active to support their mental and physical wellbeing at this time, and good practice examples of how the sector is helping people stay active.**

We need to remain agile to changes to the context such as new government measures or energy caps and continue to update our understanding.

We’re interested to hear any examples of how the sector is supporting people with the rising cost of living – if you would like to contribute any insight, please contact:

[Insight@sportengland.org](mailto:Insight@sportengland.org)