



**CONTINUUM**  
SPORT & LEISURE LTD

## Club Matters, Return to Sport/Activity Survey Findings

### Participants/Members Report

October 2020



[www.sportenglandclubmatters.com](http://www.sportenglandclubmatters.com)

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# 1. Introduction

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has had a significant impact on all aspects of life, and sport and physical activity are no exception. This report explores the views of people who were participants/members of a sports club/group before lockdown. It focusses on how their habits have changed, how they were feeling about returning to their club/group, how soon they are likely to return and what they need to support their return. The report is based on an analysis of the Club Matters Return to Sport/Activity Participant/Member Survey which ran from July to August 2020.

It is anticipated that readers will focus on the findings set out in the Executive Summary and use the remainder of this document as a reference guide to enable them to access more detail on the findings that are of most relevance or of specific interest.

## Ongoing Relevance during an Evolving Pandemic

Whilst the survey results provide a snapshot in time, this report will have ongoing relevance given the evolving nature of the pandemic and the fast-paced changes associated with spiking infection rates. This changing national and local picture means that 'return to play' is non-binary. The virus and associated control measures are likely to have an ongoing impact on behaviour, delivery and access to facilities. Participants/Members and volunteers are therefore expected to continue to return, pause, and change their priorities as the situation continues to evolve.

## The Importance of Sports Clubs/Groups

Across England, there are over 72,000 NGB affiliated sports clubs/groups (SIRC 2017), this number is likely to be doubled when unaffiliated and community clubs/groups are taken into account (SRA 2016). Clubs/groups exist to provide opportunities for people to socialise, learn new skills, take part and possibly even compete in their preferred sports/activities. In England alone, a quarter of all people aged 16+ are members of a sports club/group.



## Covid-19 Has Caused Major Disruption, Club Matters is Here to Help

Throughout the pandemic, participation and volunteering opportunities have suffered major disruption. The Club Matters Programme exists to provide free advice and guidance to clubs and organisations who deliver physical activity and sport and the workforce that support them. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic Club Matters has developed resources to assist clubs/organisations (and the professional workforce that support them) to manage their emergency response, planning and reopening phases. Click here for more detail: [Club Matters](#).

## Club Matters Return to Sport/Activity Surveys

The Club Matters team are committed to supplementing the insight and resources available to clubs/group to help them during this period of unprecedented uncertainty. Following a short consultation with Governing Bodies, Active Partnerships (APs) and wider sector partners, in July 2020, the team launched two national surveys. The surveys contained open and closed questions and were targeted at club/group members and volunteers aged over 16. They also captured the views of under 16s and vulnerable adults by enabling parents and carers to complete them on behalf of their children/those that they care for. Links to the surveys were sent to sector partners for distribution to their clubs/groups who in turn circulated them to their participants/members and volunteers. The surveys were also promoted directly by Sport England and the Club Matters Team. Full copies of the survey questions and a summary of the research methodology can be found in the [Appendix](#). All of the survey data is solely owned by Sport England.

The insight and key findings from this research were specifically intended to identify key trends and issues and inform the development of future resources via the Club Matters programme. This report is one of a series of reports which also includes the 'Club Matters, Return to Sport/Activity Survey Findings, Volunteers Report', 6 category reports and number of sport specific reports.

## Volunteers were More At Risk of Not Returning than Participants

The findings of this report and the volunteers report show that a smaller proportion of participants/members were at risk of not returning in comparison to volunteers. This suggests that demand from participants/members is likely to remain high. While this is good news for clubs/groups, this may cause extra pressure to be added to a smaller group of volunteers. The club/group environment is special because participants/members support each other to have positive experiences, however, they need volunteers to enable them to run. There is a danger that the combination of fewer volunteers and an increased Covid-related workload may not be sustainable. While it is essential to use the findings and recommendations of this report to help to identify the needs of participants/members and support their return, it is equally important to consider how to re-engage and retain as many volunteers as possible.



## 2. Executive Summary

### 2.1 Background and Introduction

**Sports clubs/groups and the volunteers that support them are often the lifeblood of grassroots sport in local communities.** Across England there are over 72,000 NGB affiliated sports clubs/groups (SIRC 2017). This number is likely to be doubled when unaffiliated and community clubs/groups are taken into account (SRA 2016). A quarter of all people aged 16+ across England are members of a sports club/group (Active Lives 2018/19).

**During the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, clubs/groups their participants/members and volunteers have suffered major disruption.** Most faced long periods of closure and for some the future remains uncertain. Little research has been done to directly explore the views of club/group participants/members. This report seeks to address this gap by highlighting the views of those who were participants/members of a club/group before lockdown. It focusses on how their habits have changed, how they were feeling about returning to their club/group, how soon they are likely to return and what they need to support their return.

**The report is based on an analysis of the data extracted from the Club Matters Return to Sport/Activity Surveys which were carried out in July and August 2020. This Executive Summary highlights some of the notable results and themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants/members survey.** The full details behind these findings are provided in [Section 4](#). A number of companion reports also exist which explore the results and themes arising from the 'Club Matters, Return to Sport/Activity Survey Findings, Volunteers Report' and explore the findings of both surveys across 6 categories of sport/activity and a number of specific sports.

### 2.2 Survey Responses

Overall, 2,521 individuals completed the survey.

- Respondents came from across the country including a mixture of urban, rural, coastal, deprived and more affluent areas.
- The majority of respondents were aged 16+ and completed the survey for themselves (86.3%). 13.4% of respondents completed it on behalf of their children under the age of 16 and 0.3% completed the survey for a vulnerable adult they care for.
- The age profile of respondents was varied; however the majority of responses were from people aged 35+ (63.7%).
- More responses were received from males (55.9%) than females (43.4%). A very small proportion (0.1%) identified their gender in another way or preferred not to say (0.6%).
- The vast majority of respondents were White British or White Other (93.8%). Less than 4% were from BAME groups (including other).
- 1 in 7 respondents (14.5%) reported to have a disability or long-term health condition (LTHC).
- 95.8% of respondents participated for at least 1 day per week.
- 62% had taken part in their main sport in a club/group environment for over 5 years.

It is important to note that the survey was open to all and therefore the sample is not considered to be statistically representative of the make-up of all participants/members of sports clubs/groups across England. When compared to the participant profile identified in Active Lives there are both similarities and differences.

**2,521 Participants/  
Members completed the  
survey.**

**62% had taken part in a  
club/group environment for  
over 5 years.**

## 2.3 Headline Findings from the Survey

### 81.7% of Participants/Members did Less or Stopped Doing their Main Sport/Activity During Lockdown

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on participation in club/group settings, with the unilateral cancellation of virtually all activity for a period of time. Some 81.7% of all respondents reported doing less of their sport/activity or that they stopped altogether, with those who participated frequently more disrupted than those who were less active in their main sport/activity. Those that reduced or stopped their activity during lockdown were more likely to be female, under 35 years of age, participating in an indoor sport/activity, from a BAME group or have a disability or LTHC.

### The Pandemic has Changed the Way Some People Feel About Participating In a Club/Group Environment

42.4% of respondents reported that the pandemic has changed how they feel about participating within a club/group environment, this increased to 77.5% amongst those who were undecided about their return. The three things most affecting people's feelings included; the health risks of the virus, the need for social distancing and the impact that lockdown has had on their social interactions and friendships. All of these factors are bigger than just sport. How participants/members now perceive the club/group environment is linked to the actions of their club/group and how Covid-19 is impacting on their experience in all other parts of their lives.

### Anxiety was a Key Factor Affecting People's Return

56.1% of respondents had some level of anxiety about returning to their club/group; 11.6% rated their anxiety as significant (4 or 5 out of 5). 43.9% of respondents rated themselves as 'Not At All Anxious'. Higher anxiety levels were apparent in groups that are often under-represented in sport/physical activity including; females, older participants/members and people living with a disability or LTHC.

### Key Concerns Included Hygiene, Covid-19 Rules and Restrictions and the Club/Group Experience

Respondents identified three recurring themes that were concerning them; hygiene and cleanliness, the impact of restrictions on their club/group and playing experience, and how well other participants/members stick to the rules and how their club/group enforces them. The focus on hygiene and others sticking to the rules are likely to be being driven by experiences outside of sport/physical activity including what people hear in the media. These concerns don't necessary pose a direct barrier to people's return. Clubs/groups can proactively seek to ease these by thinking about how they implement and communicate their Covid-19 safe measures and adapt their offer to ensure the club/group experience is still enjoyable and worthwhile.

### Health Risks, Guidelines and the Behaviour of Others were cited as the Main Barriers to Return

Covid-19 related guidelines (and social distancing in particular); concerns about the attitudes and behaviours of other members; and the perception of the risks of returning were the leading themes that were acting as a barrier to people's return. These were very similar to the main concerns raised and were not specific to, nor necessarily driven by, sporting experiences. Clubs/groups are competing with people's wider experiences of Covid-19 and messages that are being amplified by the wider media.

### **6.7% of Participants/Members were Undecided About Returning**

Whilst only 0.7% (n=17) indicated that they won't be returning, 6.7% remained undecided about their return. Those who were undecided were considerably more likely to be feeling anxious about returning to activity at their club/group. 41% of respondents indicated that they had already returned to their club/group, 36.5% intended to return as soon as their club/group opened and a further 13.8% were waiting to see evidence of it being safe or see others returning before returning. This suggests that the vast majority had already or were intending to return (92.5%).

### **Individual Indoor Sports/Activities Have Been Hit Hard by the Pandemic**

76% of participants/members within the Individual Indoor category stopped participating in their sport/activity during lockdown. This category also had the second highest proportion of participants/members that were undecided about returning (7.8%) and the second lowest percentage of participants/members that had returned (17.3%). While not covered in this report, the 6 category reports provide full details and further analysis of each category.

### **Females and People with a Disability or LTHC were Amongst those Most At Risk of Not Returning**

Participants/members at greatest risk of not returning to their club/group included; females, people with a disability or LTHC, people who did less/stopped during lockdown and those who were dissatisfied with comms from their club/group. Anxiety about returning was significantly higher amongst those at risk of not returning in comparison to those that had already or were intending to return.

### **Volunteers were More At Risk of Not Returning than Participants/Members, This Could Impact on the Club/Group Experience**

14% of volunteers were unsure about returning or unlikely/very unlikely to return, compared to 6.7% of participants/members who were undecided. This suggests that whilst demand from participants/members is likely to remain high, extra pressure could be added to a smaller group of volunteers. Clubs/groups are special because members support each other to have a positive experience. But they need volunteers to run them, and the combination of fewer volunteers and an increased Covid-19 related workload may not be sustainable and may lead to burnout.

### **Demonstrating how Covid-19 Safety Measures are Being Applied and Enforced Can Help to Encourage Return**

To encourage their return to club/group environments, participants/members wanted to know and see how clubs/groups are applying and enforcing the latest government guidelines, particularly those on social distancing. They also wanted reassurance that extra cleaning is being conducted to keep them safe. As guidelines, and wider government restrictions are subject to regular change and review, participants/members will require ongoing communications and demonstrations about how the club/group is working successfully to keep everybody safe while still ensuring they can enjoy the experience.

## Participants/Members were Most Looking Forward to Seeing Friends/Others and Taking Part in their Main Sport Again

The social benefits of participating within a club/group environment were central to people's desire to engage with friends and like-minded people again. Participants/members were also looking forward to taking part in their sport/activity again, for some this meant regular club competitions, for most it was about training and developing/improving skills.

## Good Communication Is Vital, Even After Reopening

Keeping participants/members up to date with changes, and how guidelines are being implemented, should be central to managing anxiety levels about returning. Nearly half of all respondents (48.6%) reported being very satisfied with how their club/group communicated with them during lockdown. What these respondents valued, and what those who were less satisfied were asking for, was communications that are frequent, accurate, open and honest, easily available, and personalised. When clubs/groups get their communications right, people feel valued, excited, trusting and connected. When clubs/groups don't consistently get their communications right, it results in people feeling hesitant, confused and worried about their return.

## Under 16s were Likely to be Less Anxious and Slightly More Likely to Return

When specifically looking at participants/members under the age of 16, a slightly higher proportion (97.9%) had already or intended to return to activity at their club/group compared to all survey respondents (92.5%). Activity levels during lockdown were significantly impacted for this age-group, with 92.9% doing less or nothing of their main sport/activity. The main difference between this age group and overall respondents appears to be linked to their anxiety levels, under 16s (51.4%) are more likely to consider themselves 'Not At All Anxious' compared to all respondents (43.9%).

## 2.4 Recommendations

The findings of the survey suggested that clubs/groups are likely to see the vast majority of their participants/members return. It is however clear that there is a need for them to continue to work proactively to support people's return and retain them. Understanding and responding to people's needs, anxieties, concerns and preferences is of paramount importance, as is ensuring appropriate and regular forms of communication. The report concludes with some detailed recommendations (see [Section 5](#)) which have been designed to support clubs/groups with their continued efforts to re-engage and retain participants/members. These include:

- **Understanding and addressing the needs and concerns of BAME groups to provide inclusive participation opportunities.**
- **Maintaining virtual activities to support the ongoing engagement of participants/members and reduce the risk of participant/member dropout.**
- **Putting plans in place to drive effective ongoing communications across a range of different channels that aid re-engagement, retention and reduce anxiety.**
- **Asking participants/members for help to boost volunteer numbers.**
- **Being clear about the rules and determining whether some groups would benefit from a re-induction.**
- **Developing ways to monitor the anxiety levels of participants/members on an ongoing basis.**

### 3. Overview of Responses Received

This section provides a breakdown of the respondents who took part in the participants/members survey. It covers:

- Overall numbers of responses.
- Age profile of respondents.
- Gender breakdown of respondents.
- Ethnicity of respondents.
- A breakdown of respondents with a disability or LTHC.
- What's participants/members think is most important about the club/group experience.
- Frequency of participation in club/group activities.
- Duration of involvement in a club/group environment.
- Participation in sport/activities by category.
- The geographical spread of respondents.

It is important to note that the survey was open to all and therefore the sample is not considered to be statistically representative of the make-up of all participants/members of clubs/groups across England. When compared to the participant profile identified in Active Lives there are both similarities and differences.



### 3.1 Overall Numbers of Responses

Overall, 2,521 individuals completed the participant/member survey. The majority (86.3%) were aged 16+, a further 337 (12.9%) responses reflected the views of under-16s and 8 responses (0.3%) were provided on behalf of vulnerable adults.

### 3.2 Age Profile of Respondents

The age profile of participants/members that responded was varied; 12.9% were aged under 16, 23% were between 16-34, 47.4% were between 35 and 64 and 16.3% were 65+. 0.5% of respondents opted not to disclose their age. Throughout this report respondents aged under 16 have been included within the analysis for participants/members under the age of 35. Specific findings for participants/members under 16 are also outlined within section [4.13](#) of this report.

### 3.3 Gender Breakdown of Respondents

55.9% of respondents were male and 43.4% were female. 0.1% of survey respondents identified their gender in another way and 0.6% preferred not to say.

### 3.4 Ethnicity of Respondents

Most survey respondents, 89.4%, were White British, 4.4% were White Other, 1.3% were Asian or Asian British (excluding Chinese), 0.6% Black / Black British, 0.5% were Chinese. 1.4% reported their ethnicity as other and 2.4% opted not to disclose their ethnicity.

Commentary on BAME groups is limited in this report due to the sample size. Given the low proportion of responses from participants/members from Black, Asian, Chinese and Other minority ethnic groups, for statistical reasons, where possible these groups have been grouped together in the analysis as 'BAME' groups. White British and White Other Groups have also been grouped together for reporting purposes. 93.8% of respondents were from White British or White Other groups, 3.8% were from BAME groups and 2.4% preferred not to say.

### 3.5 Respondents with a Disability or Long-Term Health Condition (LTHC)

14.5% of respondents stated that they had a disability or LTHC, 84.1% said they did not and a further 1.4% chose not to say. Of those who reported that they had a disability or LTHC, the majority (74.7%) stated that this affected their physical health, 10.3% stated that it affected their mental health and 10.8% selected other. 4.2% of respondents preferred not to say.

### 3.6 What's Very/Extremely Important about the Club/Group Experience

Respondents were asked to rank how important competition, improving their skills/fitness, informal play and socialising were to their club/group experience using a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least and 5 being the most important. The percentages rating each as very/extremely important (scoring them a 4 or 5 out of 5) were; 83.1% for improving their skills and fitness, 74% for socialising, 60% for competition and 52.4% for informal play.

### 3.7 Frequency of Participation in Club/Group Activities

Respondents were asked how often they participated with their club/group before the Covid-19 crisis. 20.5% of respondents participated for 4+ days per week, 55.3% participated for 2-3 days per week, 20% participated once a week, 2.7% participated 2-3 times per month, 0.9% participated once a month, 0.6% participated less than once a month. The vast majority (95.8%) of respondents stated that they were participating at their club/group at least once a week before the Covid-19 pandemic. Only 4.2% participated less than once a week.

### 3.8 Duration of Involvement Playing their Main Sport in a Club/Group Environment

The majority of respondents (62%) reported that they had taken part in their main sport in a club/group environment for over 5 years. 32.6% reported that they have been participating for between 1-5 years and 5.4% identified that they were relatively new to participating in their main sport in a club/group environment, having been involved for less than a year.

### 3.9 Participation in Specific Sports/Activities

The survey received responses from participants/members from a wide range of sports/activities. A full breakdown of the sports/activities represented by respondents is included in the [Appendix](#).

### 3.10 Participation in Sport/Activities by Category

For the purpose of this survey, each sport/activity was grouped into one or more categories based on its characteristics. A full list of the sports/activities is included in the [Appendix](#). The largest number of responses were received from Outdoor Pitch/Court, Individual Indoor, Individual Outdoor, Water Sports, Martial Arts, Combat and Target Sports and Team Indoor Sports/Activities. A series of 6 reports have been created to highlight the key findings across each category. A small number of responses were also received from Adventure Sports And Dance/Group Exercise/Movement and Walking however, due to the low returns from these categories, separate category reports have not been produced.



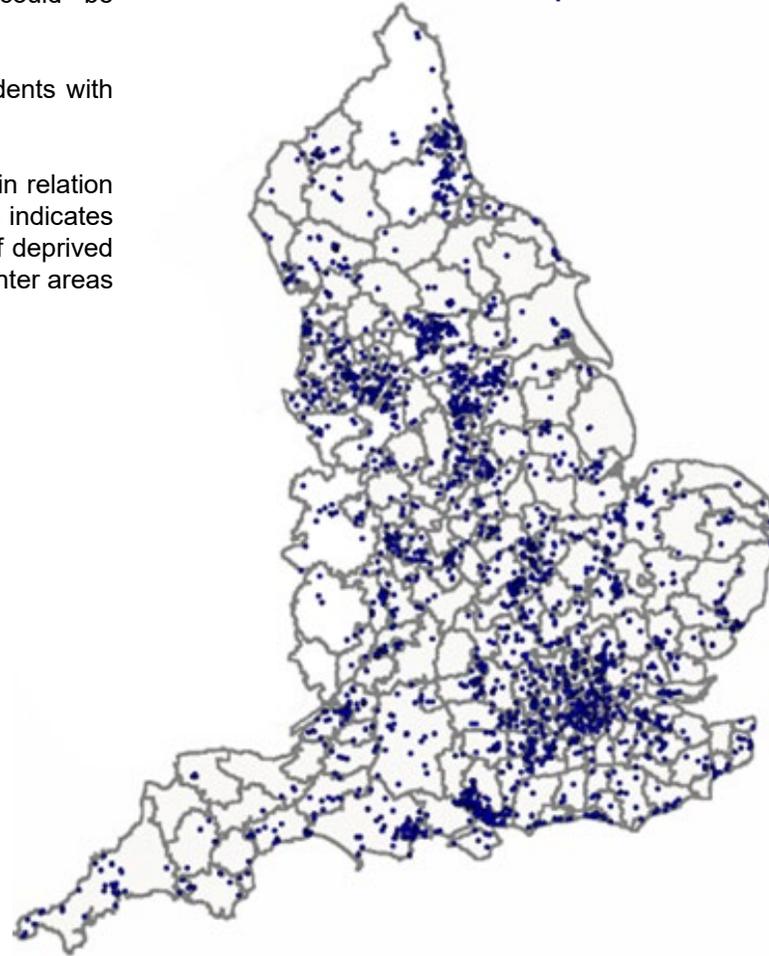
### 3.11 Geographical Spread of Respondents (Participants/Members)

94.9% of respondents provided postcodes that could be geocoded.

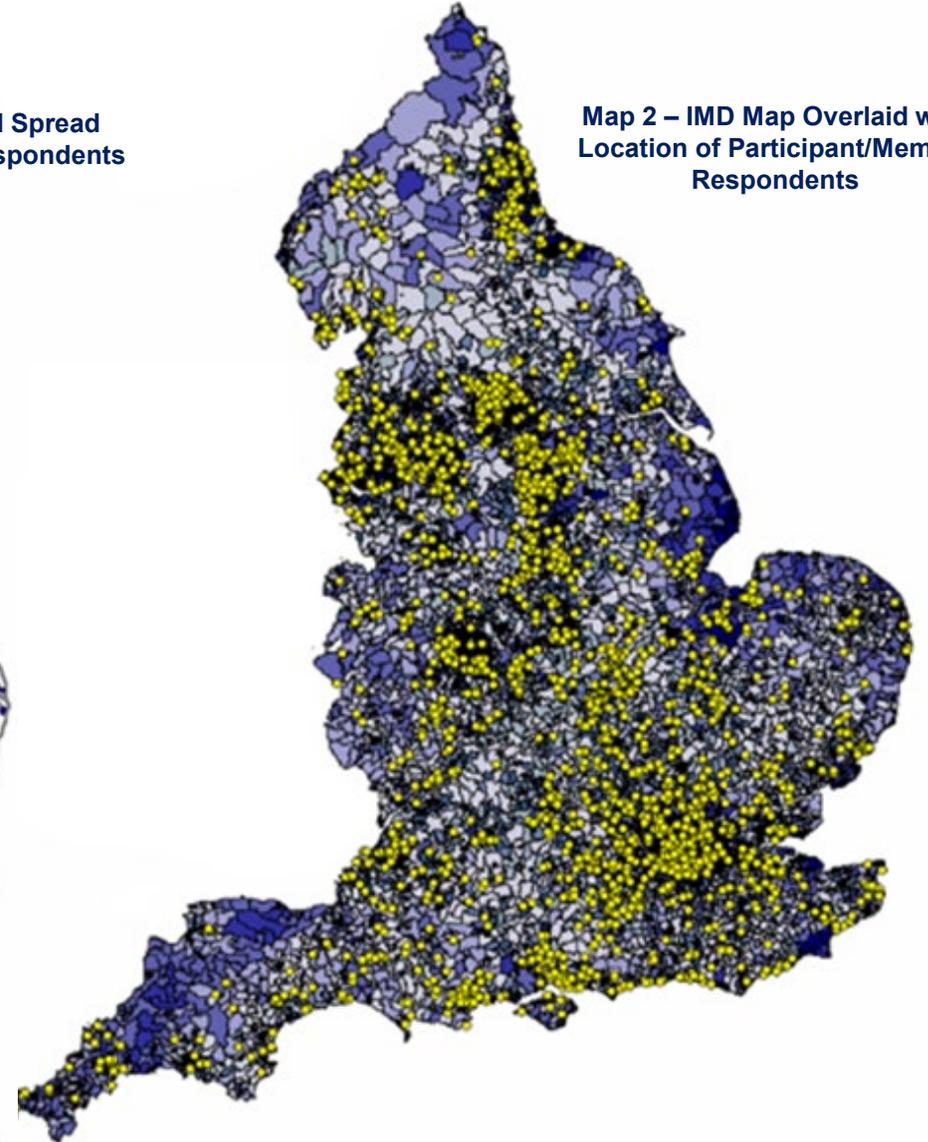
Map 1 shows a good geographical spread of respondents with larger clusters living in more densely populated areas.

Map 2 shows the geographical spread of participants in relation to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019 (IMD). This indicates that survey respondents were drawn from a mixture of deprived (darker areas on the map) and more affluent areas (lighter areas on the map).

Map 1 – Geographical Spread Participant/Member Respondents



Map 2 – IMD Map Overlaid with Location of Participant/Member Respondents



## 4. Analysis of Responses

This section of the report provides an analysis of the survey responses and explores a number of leading research questions including:

- Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed participants/members' habits?
- Has the pandemic changed how participants/members feel about their club/group?
- How anxious are participants/members feeling about returning to their club/group?
- What are their main concerns about returning?
- How likely are participants/members to return to their clubs/groups once restrictions are lifted?
- What are the barriers to returning?
- What are characteristics of returned participants/members?
- What are the characteristics of participants/members at risk of not returning?
- What support/reassurances are needed to encourage participants/members to return?
- What participants/members are looking forward to most about returning to their club/group?
- How satisfied were participants/members with communications from their clubs/groups?
- How could clubs/groups improve their communication with participants/members moving forwards?
- An exploration of the views and behaviours of Under 16s.

### Note on Sample Sizes

The analysis in this section focuses on trends across the main demographic groups and behaviours where sufficient sample sizes were received.

In identifying the key themes and significant differences, an analysis of the responses to quantitative questions was undertaken for groups of responses that totalled 40+. Where responses were lower, no headline conclusions have been drawn. Where relevant, the number of responses (n) has been referred to in the text for clarification. The approach adopted has been to share as much data as possible. The tables in this section are only greyed out where a response/cell was less than 10. This ensures that the patterns of responses across different options remain clear, even when the number of responses isn't big enough to confidently draw conclusions from it.

Clubs/groups, NGBs and wider partners may wish to carry out their own research to help supplement these findings and provide additional insight.

It is noted that there is likely to be a degree of under-reporting in relation to those that are unlikely to return as they may have been less likely to see the surveys or less inclined to have completed them.



## 4.1 Change in Participation Habits

### Key Findings

81.7% did less or stopped their main sport/activity during lockdown.

Most likely to do less or stop:

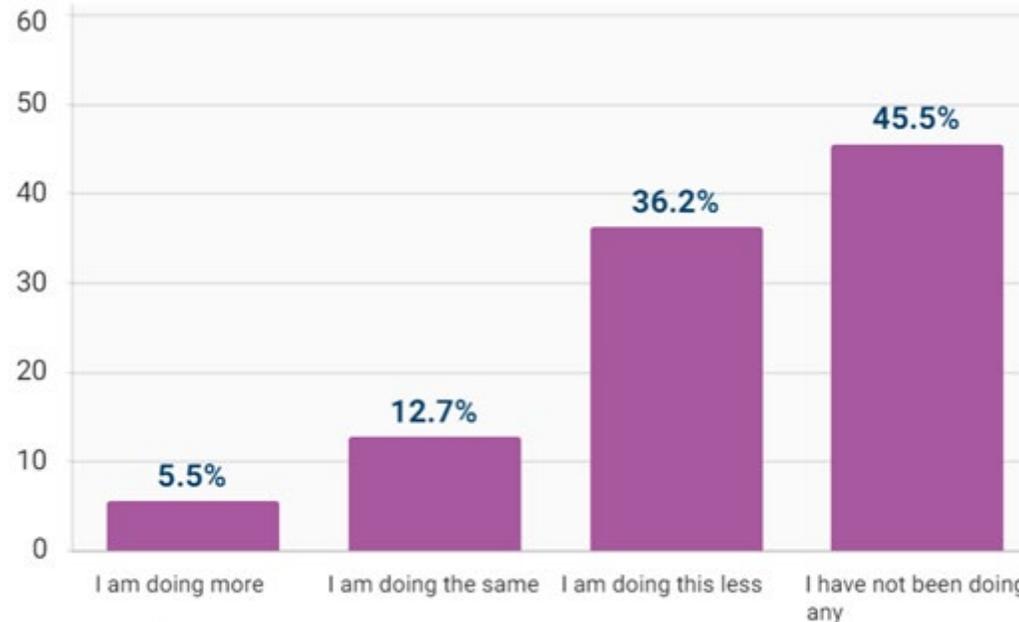
- Females.
- People with a disability or LTHC.
- Under 35s.

Participation during lockdown was dominated by outdoor sports.

### Most Participants/Members Reported Doing Less or Stopping Their Main Sport or Activity over Lockdown

81.7% of all survey respondents reported that they were doing less of their main sport/activity or had stopped altogether during lockdown. This illustrates the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on clubs/groups, with the cessation of virtually all activity impacting upon participation habits.

Participation Habits During Lockdown (%)



81.7%  
Did Less  
or None

12.7%  
Did the  
Same

5.5%  
Did More

## Some Groups were More Likely to Do Less

Those most likely to be doing less or no sport/activity included:

- Females, 49% reported that they had stopped altogether (compared to 42.8% of males).
- Those with a disability or LTHC (55.2%).
- Those under 35, 89.3% of this group did less or stopped their main sport/activity.
- Those from BAME groups, with 90.6% doing less or none of their main sport/activity.
- Those who participated in indoor sports/activities (96% of participants/members from the Team Indoor Category and 95.4% of those from the Individual Indoor Category). This is however likely to be a result of limited access to appropriate facilities/equipment and social distancing restrictions at the time of the survey.



## Some Groups of Participants/Members were More Likely to Stay Active or Do More

Those most likely to maintain or increase their levels of activity were:

- Males, 6% did more (compared to 4.8% of females) and 13.8% did the same, compared to 11.4% of females.
- Those without a disability or LTHC, 19.7% did the same amount or more, in comparison to 10.7% of those with a disability or LTHC.
- Those from a White or White British ethnic group, 18.6% reported doing same levels or more activity throughout lockdown.
- People aged 35 and above, 23% either maintained or increased their activity levels, more than double those under 35's (10% maintained/increased).
- Those who participated in outdoor sports/activities including; Tennis, Running/Athletics/Jogging, Golf and Cricket.



## Those who Participated More Frequently within a Club/Group Environment Prior to Lockdown were Impacted More

Apart from those who participated less than once a month, all other participants/members were adversely impacted by the lockdown. The disruption was equally experienced regardless of the longevity of involvement (how long people had been involved for). It is worth noting that for those who had taken up their main sport/activity within the last year, over half were no longer doing any of this sport/activity, and a small core of this group (11%) reported that they were doing more than pre-lockdown.



## Summary

The survey results suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on participation within club/group settings. This is indicative of the impact that the pandemic has had on the wider sports sector with the curtailment of everything from small scale to major events and competitions over a prolonged period. Where participation was noted, it was dominated by outdoor sports/activities with indoor activities recording low levels of participation. A range of factors, from permission to play to being able to access appropriate sporting facilities, local and national restrictions, the 'rule of 6' and personal circumstances are all likely to have an ongoing bearing on participants/members speed of return.

## 4.2 Feelings About Returning to a Club/Group Environment

### Key Findings

42.4% felt differently about participating at their club/group because of Covid-19.

77.5% of those undecided/not returning said the pandemic had changed the way they feel.

Top 3 themes impacting on people's feelings:

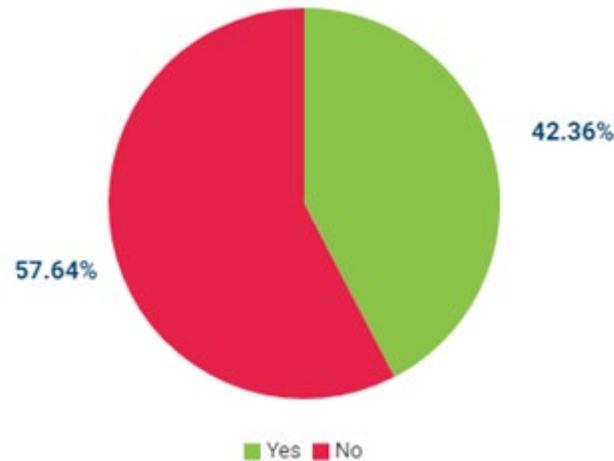
- Social distancing.
- Missing friends and shared experiences.
- Health risks.

### 2 in 5 People Felt Differently about Taking Part in a Club/Group Because of the Pandemic

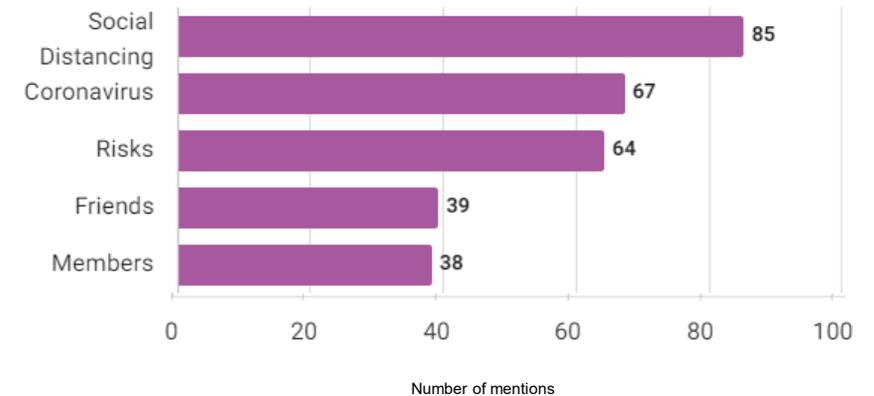
When asked if the Covid-19 pandemic had changed how they feel, either positively or negatively, about taking part in their main sport/activity in a club/group environment, 42.4% of respondents stated that the pandemic had changed how they felt. The percentage rose to 77.5% amongst those who were undecided about returning or were not intending to return compared to 29.8% of those who wanted to return as soon their club/group reopened. A deeper analysis showed some small variations across different demographic groups and notable differences between those aged under 35 (36.4%) and those aged 55+ (45.9%).

Across all respondents, the three most commonly sighted themes affecting their feelings were the need for social distancing, the impact on their friendships and the health risks of the virus.

Change in Feelings about Participation %



Topics mentioned most often in comments about why the pandemic has changed respondents' feelings



## Key Factors Impacting How People Felt About Returning to their Club/Group

### The Need for Social Distancing

Social distancing is a very visible sign that life is now different. For participants/members, social distancing had them questioning two assumptions:

- Can their sport/activity continue while social distancing is in place?; and
- If it is able to, can they trust their fellow participants/members to respect the guidelines and keep everyone safe?

Concerns about whether their sport/activity could/should continue varied by the different categories. Sports such as Golf and Equestrianism (Individual Outdoor Category) as well as Softball and Outdoor Bowls (Outdoor Pitch/Court Category) were held up as activities that routinely keep participants/members apart. However, participants/members from Indoor Team Sports/Activities like Badminton and Basketball and various Martial Arts felt that the guidelines would have too big an impact. Others had started questioning their own motivation for participating in and wondering whether it was still possible.

- *"It's close contact so high risk."*
- *"Difficult to imagine playing with social distancing, it's a sport you sweat a lot in, use sweat towel etc".*
- *"Feel like there's no point starting back this year with no real season, out of practice and it not being the same with social distancing etc".*

For others, the change in feelings related to their levels of trust in their fellow members.

- *"I am concerned about the behaviour of others and risk of spreading Covid 19."*
- *"I am worried about social distancing (remembering to do it, and other people bothering to do it)."*
- *"[I am] not prepared to play with other people until social distancing has been called off."*

### The Impact on Friendships

Respondents also reflected on how the pandemic has impacted their friendships and the importance of the fun or supportive community they were part of.

- *"I look forward to the softball season all year and it has been very hard to miss out, both on playing the game but especially socialising with my friends."*
- *"[It has] really effected [sic] me with the lack of team time with friends and team development."*
- *"I have realised how important it is to me and is a major part of my life."*
- *"[I] wanted to see my friends, I wanted to play football and get life back to a sense of normality."*
- *"[I] realise how important it was to me to be active and have good friends."*

Some respondents reflected on friendships that only exist within their club/group environment, whilst others noted they miss the connection only afforded by certain activities.

- *"Have missed club mates - we've done really well with things like zoom turbo sessions at keeping everyone together and connected."*
- *"Unable to travel with friends to competition."*

## The Health Risks of the Virus

Participants'/members' feelings were being impacted by the wider health risks of Covid-19, both to themselves and their family members. The impact on family members dominated where participants/members had partners, children and parents who are at a higher risk. Putting family members at risk, in some cases also threatens people's livelihoods.

- *"My husband is vulnerable so I cannot risk passing any infection on to him."*
- *"We have a family business, and it would be irresponsible to put my family at risk of having to isolate for a fortnight."*

Shielding others was not the only concern that participants/members had. Some had also changed their views about their own health, and what they're prepared to risk. Interestingly, this anxiety had some participants/members viewing the club/group environment differently. There was a sense of unease amongst some, of a familiar setting now being higher risk.

- *"Nervous about playing because of Covid-19 risks."*
- *"More anxious about going back into a higher risk environment."*
- *"numbers of infections will have to be very low before I can risk inviting more people into my inner circle."*

### Summary

The pandemic has changed the feelings of over 40% of survey respondents. Some of their new feelings are positive, as they have realised how important their sport/activity and club/group are to them. Participants/members reflected on the strength of their friendships and even the fun of shared experiences like travelling with teammates. These are all positive experiences that clubs/groups should keep highlighting within their communications. These positive associations are important to keep top of mind for participants/members, particularly those who are more reluctant to return.

The pandemic has also changed feelings in ways that make it harder for clubs/groups to get participants/members to come back and then to keep returning. Some concerns related to how suitable the sport/activity was within the guidelines. These concerns can, to an extent, be addressed at a national level by Governing Body and wider partner communications. However, the fear that other members may not comply with the rules, needs to be proactively addressed directly by club/groups. This means combining regular communications, with physical changes and being open about the desire to enforce social distancing and other rule changes consistently.

## 4.3 Anxiety Levels Among Participants/Members

### Key Findings

Anxiety was affecting people's return.

56.1% had some level of anxiety about returning.

11.6% had significant levels of anxiety.

Most likely to have higher levels of anxiety:

- Females.
- People with a disability or LTHC.
- Older participants/members.
- Those who did less or stopped during lockdown.
- Those undecided about returning.

### Anxiety Levels across Participant/Member Respondents were Largely Positive

Respondents were asked to rate their personal levels of anxiety about returning on a scale of 1 (Not At All Anxious) to 5 (Extremely Anxious). 56.1% of respondents reported having some degree of anxiety. 11.6% rated their anxiety as 4 or 5 (significant levels of anxiety), 44.4% had low to moderate levels of anxiety (rating themselves as a 2 or 3) and 43.9% reported that they were not at all anxious.

### Anxiety Ratings of Participant/Member Respondents Based on a Scale of 1 to 5



### Females were More Likely to Feel Some Level of Anxiety than Males

61.3% of females reported some levels of anxiety about returning to their club/group compared to 52% of males. The gender difference was however less pronounced amongst those with more significant levels of anxiety with 12.9% of females and 10.6% of males rating themselves as 4 or 5. It is also noted that there was a variance of 9.3% between males (48%) and females (38.7%) who rated themselves as not at all anxious.

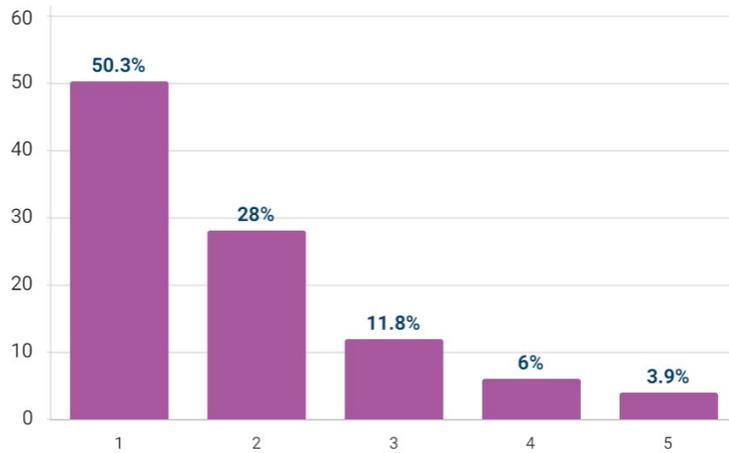
### People Living with a Disability or LTHC were Almost Twice as Likely to Feel Very or Extremely Anxious About Returning

19.7% of people with a disability or LTHC rated their anxiety as 4 or 5 compared to 10% of people without a disability or LTHC. 11.5% of people with a disability or LTHC rated their anxiety 4 and 8.2% rated their anxiety a 5, compared to 6.6% and 3.4% of people without a disability or LTHC. 32% of respondents with a disability or LTHC reported that they were not at all anxious about their return compared to 46.3% of respondents without.

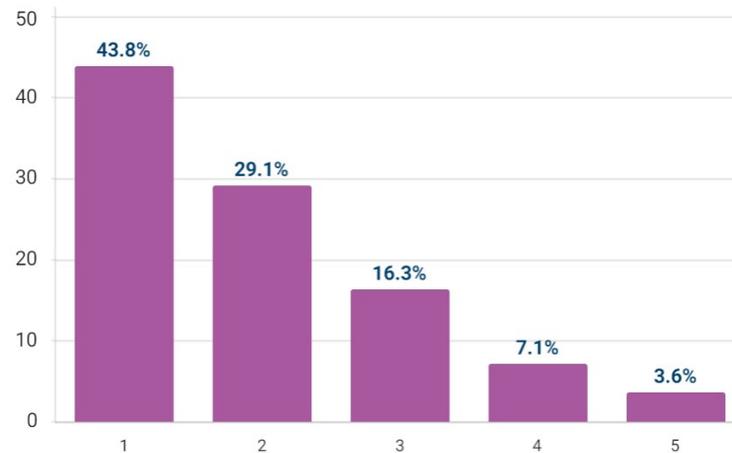
## Anxiety About Returning Increased Notably with Age

Those aged 65+ were more likely to exhibit higher levels of anxiety, with 17.8% rating their anxiety at 4 or 5 on the scale, compared to those aged 35-64 (10.7%) and those aged under 35 (9.9%). 30.5% of people aged 65+ reported that they were not at all anxious about returning compared to 43.8% of those aged 35-64 and 50.3% of those aged under 35. Overall, over two thirds (69.5%) of participants/members aged 65+ reported some level of anxiety about returning, compared to 56.1% of those aged 35-64 and 49.7% of those aged under 35.

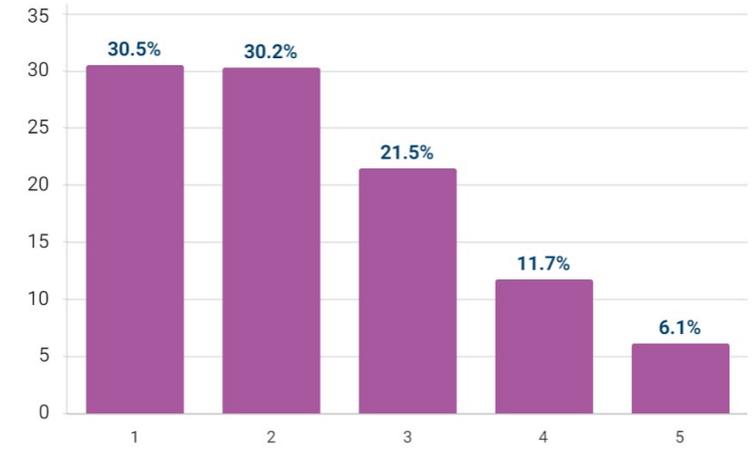
Anxiety Levels of Participants/Members Under 35 (%)



Anxiety Levels of Participants/Members Aged 35-64 (%)



Anxiety Levels of Participants/Members Aged 65+ (%)



(1 = Not At All Anxious, 3 = Moderately Anxious and 5 = Extremely Anxious)

## Ethnicity did not Appear to Impact on Anxiety

There were no notable differences between different ethnic groups and levels of anxiety. 44.1% of participants/members from a White British or White Other ethnic group reported to be not at all anxious compared to 42.7% of those from a BAME group. Similarly, 57.3% of participants/members from BAME groups reported some level of anxiety about returning compared to 55.9% of those from a White British or White Other ethnicity.

## Frequency or Duration of a Respondent's Participation did not Appear to Impact Anxiety

There were only small differences between frequency and duration of participation and the anxiety levels reported. Those that had been participating for 2-3 years were marginally less likely to be 'Not At All Anxious'; and those that had been participating for 10+ years were marginally more likely to be 'Extremely Anxious'.

### People who Remained Active over Lockdown had Lower Anxiety Levels

Those that did more or the same amount of their main sport/activity over lockdown were less likely to rate themselves at 4 or 5 on the scale (4.3% of those doing more; 3.1% of those doing the same) compared to those that had been doing less (7.7%) and those that stopped (18%). Those who did more or the same were at least 10% more likely not to be at all anxious than those who did less or stopped. This may be related to activity type, as some sports/activities could continue safely during lockdown whilst many others ceased. This may also account for greater anxiety amongst those who stopped, as some activities have higher inherent risk factors.

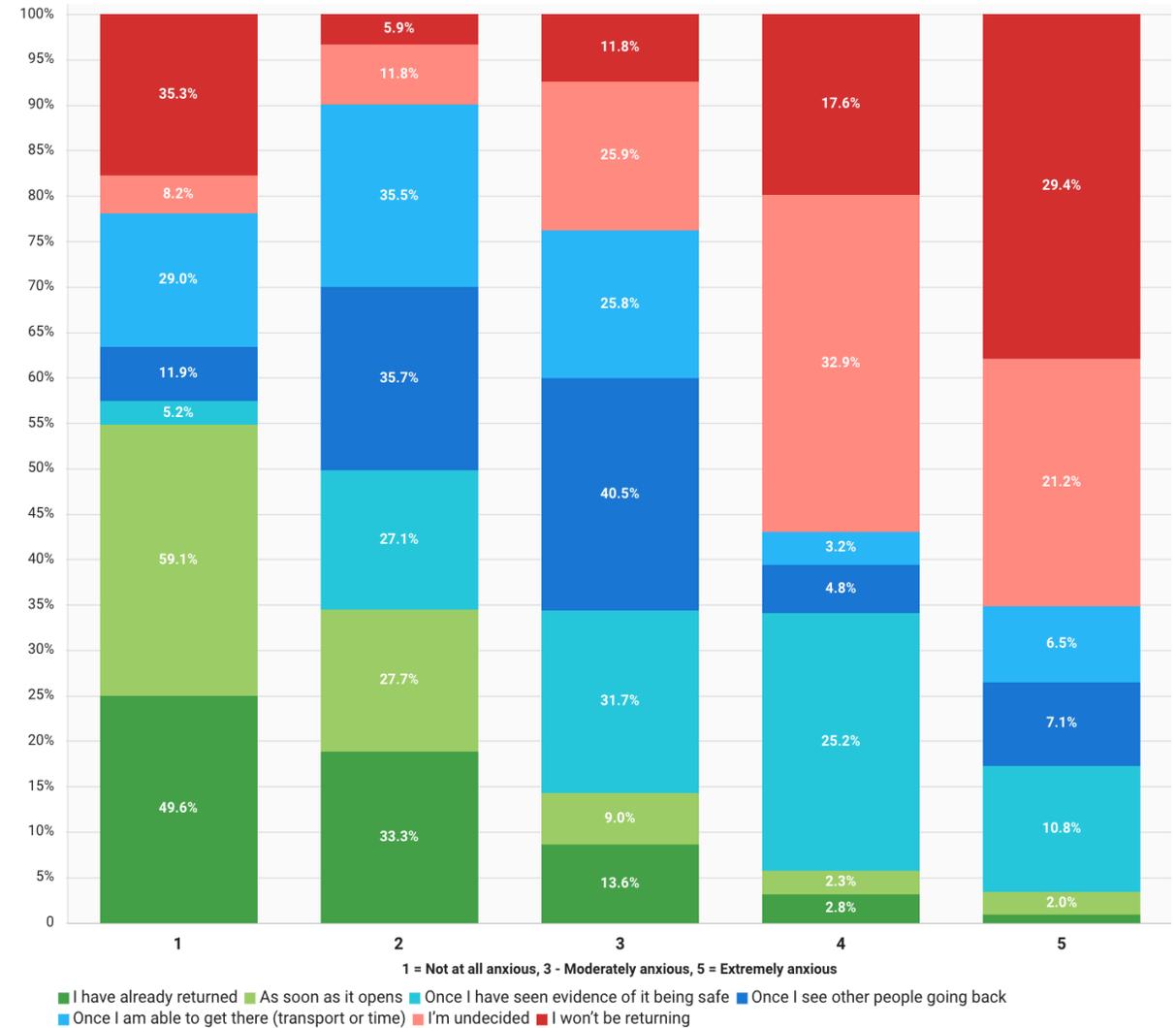
### Those that had Returned or Planned to Return As Soon As Possible were the Least Anxious

Those that had already returned (49.6%) or planned to return as soon as possible (59.1%) were most likely to report being not at all anxious. This group was also considerably less likely to be very or extremely anxious than all other groups. 'Undecided' respondents were more likely to be very or extremely anxious (54.1%) compared to those that had already returned or intend on returning.

### Respondents from Individual Indoor Sports/Activities Showed Higher Anxiety Levels

Participants/members from Individual Indoor Sports/Activities were more likely to have higher levels of anxiety about returning (13.1%) in comparison to sports/activities from other categories. However, participants/members from this category were also most likely to be 'Not At All Anxious' about returning to their club/group (45.5%). This suggests a notable difference in the anxiety levels of participants/members from the Individual Indoor Category. This could be a result of the wide variety of sports included within this category and the differing demographic profiles of their participant/membership base.

Anxiety Levels by Speed of Return



## Respondents from Cricket were the Least Anxious about Returning

Across the 13 sports with the most responses, Running/Athletics/Jogging (32.1%) and Outdoor Bowls (24.6%) clubs/groups had the lowest proportion of participants/members reporting that they were 'Not At All Anxious' about returning. Respondents from Cricket (53.9%) and Rugby Union (50.7%) had the highest percentages of people who stated that they were not at all anxious about returning. Given the small amount of people who answered very or extremely anxious across each sport, it was not possible to draw robust conclusions on specific sports.

## Summary

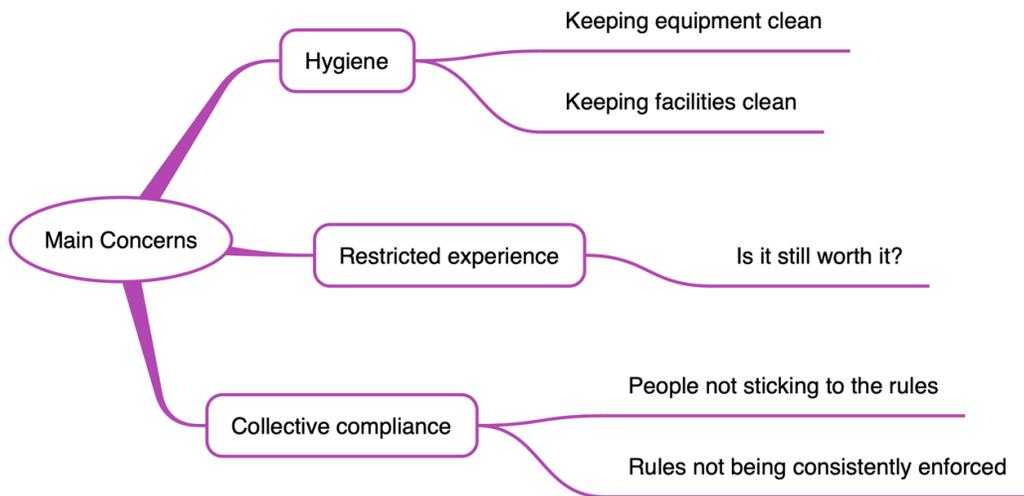
The majority of participants/members reported some level of anxiety about returning to a club/group environment. Increased levels of anxiety were however more apparent in those who are often under represented in sport/activity including; women, people with a disability or LTHCs and older participants/members. To reduce the levels of anxiety experienced by participants/members as they return, it would be beneficial for clubs/groups to take time to understand any anxieties and the specific needs of participants/members so that measures can be implemented to help alleviate these. As participants/members behaviour may be continually affected by further restrictions and individual situations, clubs/groups should consider the ongoing monitoring of anxiety levels. Changes to levels of anxiety can then be captured any additional reassurances or processed to continually support their return can be implemented.



## 4.4 Participants'/Members' Main Concerns

In answering the open text questions about challenges and concerns and the support needed to help participants/members return, there were three recurring themes. These are set out in the diagram below. Whilst these were key concerns for participants/members, these will not necessarily translate into direct barriers for returning.

### Key Findings



### Hygiene and Cleanliness was Very Important to Participants/Members

Hygiene, and specifically the cleanliness of equipment and facilities, was a major concern for participants/members and was mentioned regularly by all demographic groups of those who have not yet returned to club/group activity. However, this was not a significant concern for those who had already returned, which suggests that effective communications and demonstration of cleaning process and protocols can provide reassurance that it is safe to return to a club/group environment.

- *“Clean changing areas, hand sanitizer available, more fitness related skills and group drill activities so distancing can be maintained.”*
- *“Making sure everyone obeys the rules of cleanliness and that equipment is cleaned as required.”*
- *“Safe training practices, smaller group sizes, cleaning things before use.”*
- *“Extremely comprehensive cleaning routines/procedures.”*
- *“Bringing in extra cleaning measures.”*

### Participants/Members were Worried about Others Sticking to the Rules

Concerns that other participants/members wouldn't abide by the same rules, was also a key concern. This concern was not just club/group specific, as it reflects a broader concern in the media about some people feeling they are 'not at risk' or not willing to comply. The reality is that social distancing guidelines only work when everyone sticks to them. However, when social distancing doesn't appear to be enforced by a club/group, it erodes trust amongst participants/members concerned about the risks.

- *“Social distancing [is] almost non-existent now we are back.”*
- *“Other people understanding socially distancing where need be”.*

## The Negative Impact of Restrictions on the Usual Club/Group Experience

Nearly all participants/members accepted that restrictions are inevitable and must be put in place for their own safety. However, there were some concerns that in the process of making the club/group environment safe, it will lose its appeal. These concerns related both to the sports/activities themselves, and to the wider social aspects and use of facilities. For some sports/activities in the Team Indoor Sports/Activities and Outdoor Pitch/Court Sport/Activities categories, physical contact was seen as a key element of the participant/members experience but also a key challenge to address.

- *“Netball is a close contact sport so know we will not return in full capacity for a long time - working out what we can do within guidelines can be hard.”*
- *“We have started socially distanced training which is not the same at all as full training and matches. We still really miss this part.”*
- *“I am concerned that close contact training and grappling will be forbidden, due to social distancing. I find this ridiculous and am unhappy to be restricted in this way. People who want to train closely, spar, and grapple should be allowed to do so if they wish”.*

The lack of physical contact was much less of a concern for Individual Outdoor Sports/Activities including Athletics, Golf and Equestrian where participants/members thought that their sport/activity (though not necessarily being in the clubhouse socialising) could largely continue as normal.

Access to facilities concerned participants/members in some sports. For some sports/activities, such as Swimming and Athletics, that require dedicated facilities, re-opening was being impacted by external factors including budget constraints and wider council priorities. In the case of Swimming in particular, there are limited alternatives to using a pool, leading to some difficult work arounds.

- *“Our local pool has not reopened and says it can't. Our coach is not allowed to coach anywhere else so we can't train while some other clubs do have pools and are starting training. We are currently travelling 40 miles each way 3 times a week for me to train on my own in an open water venue but it is not sustainable and not the same. I am worried what will happen if our pool does not reopen.”*

*“We have started socially distanced training which is not the same at all as full training and matches. We still really miss this part”*

*“I am concerned that close contact training and grappling will be forbidden, due to social distancing.”*

## Summary

The predominant concern amongst participants/members related to safety. For those who had not yet returned this related to hygiene, specifically the cleanliness of equipment and facilities. Increased cleaning protocols should be visible and communicated to help alleviate this. It is recommended that clubs/groups don't rely on participants/members to notice that the facilities being used are cleaner than normal but that they show them how processes and activities have changed and the difference it's making. Cleaning processes are often hidden out of sight, but at the moment people need to see them for reassurance.

With regards to safely returning to a club/group environment, participants/members also raised a concern that others won't follow the rules or new practices that have been implemented to help ensure the safety of all participants/members and volunteers. Where new rules have been implemented, it will be important for clubs/groups to effectively communicate and enforce these.

The other major concern was about the core experience of the sport/activity and hence the club/group environment. While some members were delighted to be back and felt able to continue with their sport/activity with little change, others were disappointed and concerned about the experience. The longer respondents are not able to do what they love most, the higher the risk that they will drop out. For clubs/groups this means not assuming that everyone who has returned will stay. They must keep listening and finding safe ways to deliver on the aspects of the sport/activities, and/or the club/group environment, that members/participants signed up for. This could mean finding new ways to host mini-competitions or finding ways to increase physical contact as the guidelines continue evolve.



## 4.5 Likelihood of Return Amongst Participants/Members

### Key Findings

6.7% were undecided about whether they will return to their club/group.

13.8% were waiting to see evidence of it being safe or others returning.

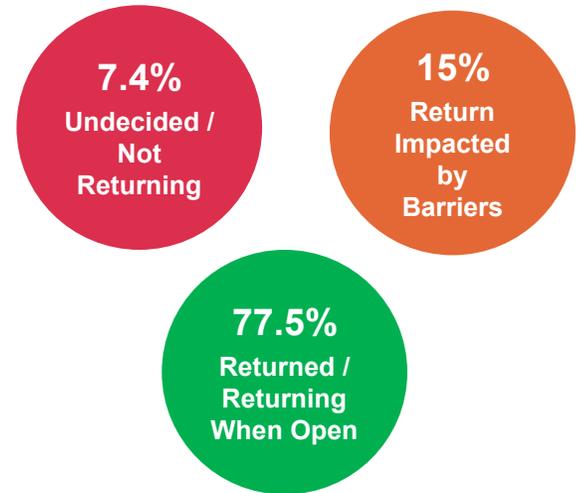
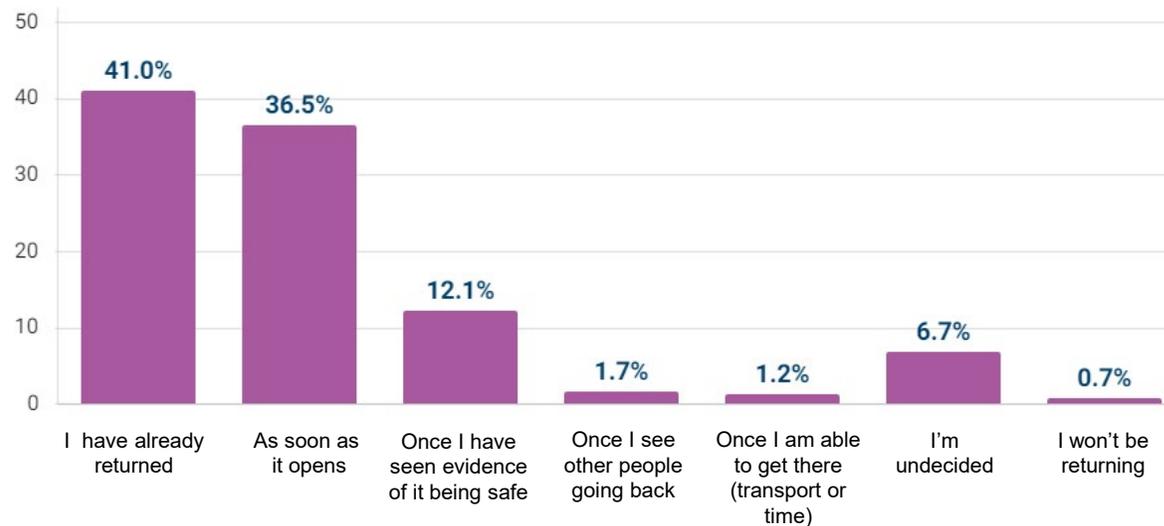
77.5% had or will return as soon as their club/group reopens.

### 2 in 5 Participants/Members had Already Returned to Their Club/Group

At the time of completing the survey (July – August 2020), 41% of respondents indicated that they had returned and 36.5% said they would return as soon as their club/group could open.

However, 6.7% of respondents noted that they were 'undecided' about their return but only 0.7% (n=17) stated they would not be going back. Considering the characteristics and trends present in people who were 'undecided' about returning may help to identify actions for clubs/groups to reduce the risk of this group becoming non-returners. This section explores the mindsets and characteristics of those who were more and less likely to return.

### Participant/Member Respondents' Speed of Return (%)



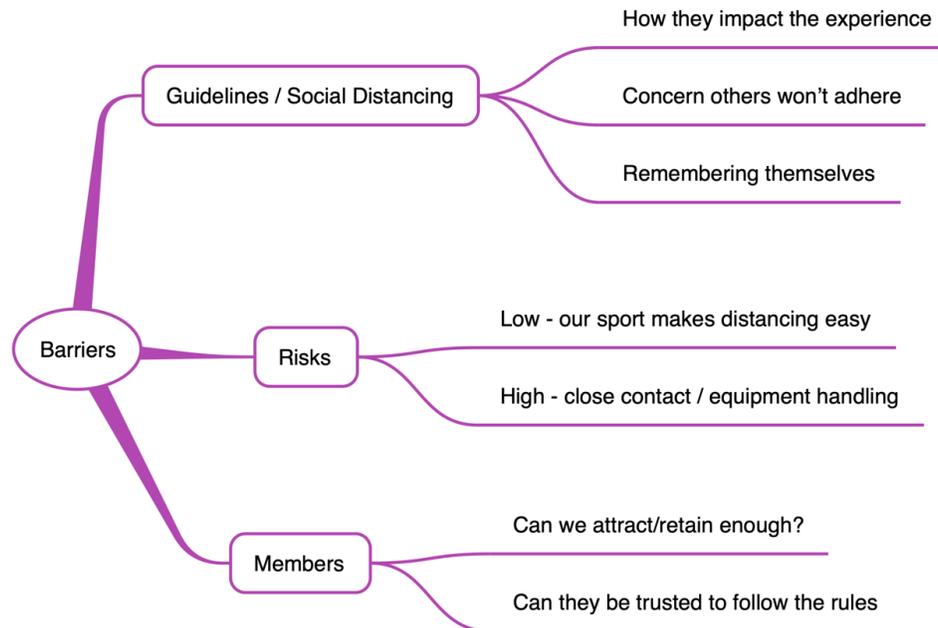
### 15% of Participants/Members Expected Their Return to be Impacted by Certain Barriers

15% of respondents were intending to return but were waiting for evidential requirements to be met or the removal of physical barriers (time and transport). 12.1% stated they needed to see evidence of it being safe first; 1.7% stated they would wait until others had returned and 1.2% expected to wait until logistical barriers (transport or time) had lessened.

## 4.6 Barriers to Returning

All respondents were asked an open text question about any concerns or challenges that may impact on their return to sport/activity at their club/group. The three recurring themes regarding barriers for participants/members were identified and summarised in the diagram. These reinforce the themes presented on how participants/members were feeling about returning.

### Key Findings



### The Impact of Compliance Regarding Social Distancing

Looking at the overall responses, the single topic mentioned most often as a concern or challenge was social distancing. Within this, the biggest concern was compliance with the rules. While some respondents were concerned about remembering the rules for themselves, many more suggested they didn't trust other members to stick to them.

- *"Some people may not take social distancing seriously".*

Others were more concerned about how the new guidelines would impact their experience when training and participating. While they understood the importance of the guidelines, they were concerned that the modifications could ruin the experience for them. The rules were described as:

- *"Complicated."*
- *"Restrictive."*
- *"Detrimental to the game."*

Part of what attracts some participants/members to clubs/groups is the contact-elements of a sport/activity, this left some frustrated. For others, it's the club/group environment rather than just taking part in the sport that they enjoy.

- *"We're not allowed to play games as we can't stick to the Covid-19 guidelines."*
- *"On-going Covid-19 restrictions that have to be put in place for protection that really limit the enjoyment of being at the club."*

Social distancing was the top concern for nearly every type of respondent, except those who were undecided about returning. These respondents mentioned Covid-19 (Coronavirus) most often.

## The Risks Associated with Covid-19

When looking at the risks associated with Covid-19, the specific sport/activity that respondents took part in seemed to make a difference to perception. Participants/Members from sports like Running, Equestrian and Golf felt that the risks were low because it was easy to stay apart. However, some participants/members in team and contact sports had different view.

- *“Golf is very safe sport and unlikely Covid-19 will affect us due to ease of social distancing.”*
- *“We want to return to playing but 5-a-side is a contact sport that involves all players in close proximity, using the same equipment (1 football), it is high intensity so lots of sweat, shouting is part of the game, all of which means that 5-a- side is a high risk pastime.”*

The risks of Covid-19 were rarely mentioned by participants/members who rated their anxiety levels as low (1 or 2 out of 5) or had already returned to their club/group. However, for those rating their anxiety as high (4 or 5) and those who were undecided or not returning to their club/group, the risk associated to Covid-19 was regularly mentioned. These respondents were also far more likely to specifically mention vaccines and the specific risk of infection.

Frequency and longevity of participation, age and gender did not significantly change the proportion of people mentioning the risks associated to Covid-19 as a barrier to returning.

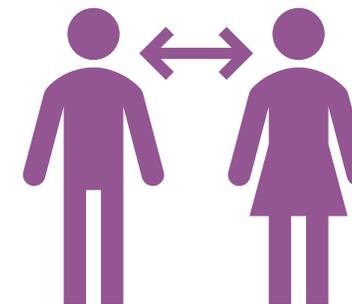
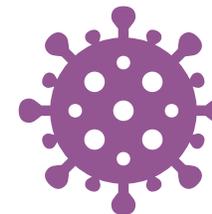
## Concerns about Other Participants/Members

When considering other members/participants at their club/group, respondents had two distinct perspectives. Some were worried about whether enough participants/members would return and the financial impact on the club/group from the lost revenues, whilst others cited the competitive impact from not being able to field strong teams.

- *“How can we recruit when we don’t know about fixtures and competitions?”*

Respondents were also worried about how returning participants/members would behave with one respondent referring to the *“cavalier attitude”* that fellow participants/members had towards the virus. Concerns about how other participants/members will respond was a more common topic for those who attended their club/group more frequently (2 or more days per week) compared to those who took part less than once a week.

Similarly, respondents who had been with their club/group for more than 5 years were much more likely to mention other participants/members as a risk, compared to those who had been with the club/group less than 2 years. Respondents with high levels of anxiety, and those who were still undecided about returning, were less likely to mention other participants/members as their concerns, they focused more specifically on the risk associated to the virus.

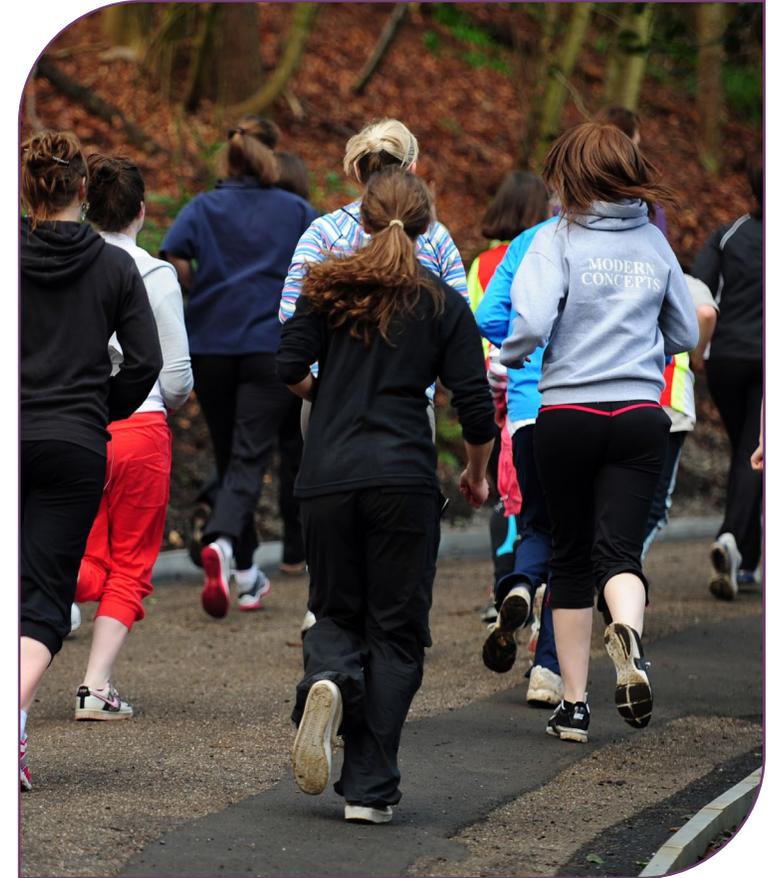


## Summary

The concerns and challenges resulting in the biggest barriers to participants/members return, related to social distancing guidelines, perceptions of risk associated to Covid-19 and the expected (rather than actual) behaviour of other participants/members. By and large, these themes didn't change based on demographic factors. Some of these issues were not specific to the club/group or even to sport/activity in general. The underlying challenge appears to be that there isn't one standard, easy way to communicate guidelines for returning to sport/activity. Other industries like retail, have conditioned people (including club/group participants/members) that similar rules apply everywhere they go (queuing outside, wearing a mask, floor stickers to help people stay 2m apart etc). This helps people accept the new normal but this consistency is lacking in sport/activity given the unique nature of different sports/activities.

Sports clubs/groups are having to adopt and communicate a much wider range of guidelines and this is leading to subjective interpretation. Without a common view of the 'right thing to do', participants/members perceive that *"other people"* don't appear to be taking things seriously. For example, one commented: *"None of the clubs I paddle with are taking the right guidelines in a common-sense manner"*.

The perception that other people won't follow the rules was not a club/group specific issue. However, it is something that clubs/groups will need to proactively address. This includes having a clear and consistent policy for how non-compliance will be dealt with. This is important for reassuring participants/members, as well as minimising risk.



## 4.7 Characteristics of Returned Participants/Members

Survey respondents that reported they had already returned to their club/group are defined as returned participants/members. Respondents who stated that they that they would return to their club/group as soon as it reopened, once they had seen evidence of it being safe, once they had seen others go back or once they were able to get there (time / transport) have been classed as participants/members that intend to return.

### Key Findings

77.5% indicated they had already returned or would return as soon as their club/group reopened.

More likely to have already returned:

- People aged 65+.
- Males.
- People without a disability or LTHC.
- Those who have participated for 10+ years.
- Those who are less anxious.

#### 41% of Participants/Members had Already Returned

41% of participant/member respondents had already returned to activity at their club/group at the point at which they answered the survey (July – August 2020). A further 36.5% stated that they would return to their club/group as soon as it reopens.

#### Evidence of Activities Being Safe is Important in Encouraging Participants/Members to Return

Evidential requirements will play a key role in encouraging participants/members to return; 12.1% of respondents were waiting to see evidence of activities being safe and 1.7% were waiting until they see others returning. 1.2% were wanting to return once they are able to get there or have more time.

#### Males were More Likely to Returned than Females

45.3% of males had already returned to their club/group compared to 35.6% of females. However, a higher proportion of females (38.3%) indicated that they would return to their club/group as soon as it reopens compared to males (34.9%). Evidential factors were slightly more likely to be a requirement for females before they return (15.5%) than males (12.6%)

#### Participants/Members with a Disability or a LTHC were Less Likely to have Already Returned

Respondents who states that they had a disability or LTHC (32.2%) were less likely to have already returned to activity at their club/group compared to those who did not have a disability or LTHC (42.9%). This may partially be explained by the fact that a number of LTHCs were included in the Government lists that classified people as at higher risk from Covid-19. A key factor in encouraging their return will be seeing evidence that it's safe with 16.1% stating this was an important consideration.



## Those Aged of 65+ were More Likely to have Already Returned

53.7% respondents aged 65+ had already returned to activity at their club/group compared to 40.8% of those aged between 35-64 and 35.7% of those aged under 35. A full breakdown is provided in the table below:

### Age Profiles of Participants/Members by Return Rate %

Age Category	Who Have Returned (%)	Will Return as Soon as Their Club/Group Reopens (%)	Evidential/Physical Barriers (%)	Total Return Rate (%)
Under 35 Years	35.7	49.2	11.3	96.2
35 – 64 Years	40.8	33.6	16.4	90.8
65+ Years	53.7	17.3	19.6	90.6

It is important to understand the characteristics of respondents aged 65+ years, given that those aged 70+ are classified by the Government as being more at risk of the effects of Covid-19 due to their age.

## Those who had Already Returned were More Likely to have been Active in Lockdown

33.5% of respondents who had returned to their club/group were undertaking more or the same amount of activity during lockdown compared to 7.6% of those who had not yet returned. A notable proportion (68.9%) of respondents who had not yet returned to their club/group had not been doing any of their main sport/activity during lockdown. This may have been a result of no/limited access to equipment and/or facilities.

## Those who had Participated in Their Main Sport/Activity for More than 10 Years were More Likely to have Returned

Respondents who had participated in their main sport within a club/group environment for more than 10 years were more likely to have already returned compared to those who had participated for less than 10 years. However, when looking at the overall return rate, respondents who had participated within a club/group environment for between 2+ – 3 years were marginally more likely to return:

### Longevity of Participation and Return Rates %

Longevity of Involvement	Already Returned (%)	As Soon As It Opens (%)	Once They Have Seen Evidence of Being Safe (%)	Once They See Others Going Back (%)	Once They Are Able to Get There (%)	Total Return Rate (%)
10+ Years	45.9	30.5	13.2	1.5	(n<10)	91.8
5+ to 10 Years	41.9	38.4	9.1	2.4	(n<10)	92.8
3+ to 5 Years	39.2	40.9	10.5	(n<10)	(n<10)	93.9
2+ to 3 Years	37.3	40.4	16.2	(n<10)	(n<10)	95.6
1+ to 2 Years	32.3	43.5	14.2	(n<10)	(n<10)	93.5
0 to 1 Year	25.0	47.1	8.8	(n<10)	(n<10)	87.5

Note: where less than 10 respondents gave a specific response, the corresponding box in the table has been greyed out to avoid conclusions being drawn from too small a sample size.

## **61.3% of Participants/Members from BAME Groups Intended to Return to Their Club/Group**

A higher proportion of participants/members from BAME groups (61.3%) said they would return to their club/group as soon as it opened, once evidential requirements had been met or physical barriers had been removed, compared to 51.1% of respondents from White British or White Other groups. It should however be noted that 41.6% of White British or White Other groups had already returned.

## **Participants/Members from Outdoor Sports/Activities were More Likely to have Already Returned**

Respondents who took part in outdoor sports/activities were more likely to have returned to their club/group. Sports/activities within the Outdoor Pitch/Court (61.8%), Water Sports (53.5%) and Individual Outdoor (43.6%) Categories had the highest percentages of returned participants/members. In comparison, 17.3% of respondents from the Individual Indoor Category had already returned. It is noted that leisure centres and pools re-opened approximately 2 weeks before the survey closed.

## **Those that had Already Returned Showed Lower Anxiety Levels**

Respondents that had already returned reported lower levels of anxiety compared to those who had not returned. 82.9% of respondents that had returned and 72.2% of those who intended to return rated their anxiety as 1 or 2 (based on a 5 point scale with 1 being not at all anxious and 5 being extremely anxious). In comparison, 3.5% of those who had already returned rated their anxiety as 4 or 5 compared to 12.1% of those who intended to return.

## **Those that had Returned were More Likely to be Satisfied with Their Club/Group's Communications**

83.5% of those who had already returned rated satisfaction with the communications they received from their club/group throughout lockdown as 4 or 5 (based on a 5-point scale with 1 being not at all satisfied and 5 being extremely satisfied). In comparison, 63.6% of those with an intention to return scored their satisfaction as a 4 or 5.

## **Summary**

Whilst it may be surprising that older participants/members (aged 65+) were more likely to have already returned to their club/group, it is important to consider the correlation of this return rate against the sports/activities that returned earliest from lockdown. A higher proportion of participants/members from younger demographics (under 35 and 35 – 54) intended to return to their club/group following the removal of physical barriers (e.g. closure of their club/group) or once evidential requirements had been met (evidence of it being safe or seeing others return). Across all respondents, 92.5% had or were intending to return to their club/group. While it is not advisable to stop any recruitment/retention efforts, as an immediate priority clubs/groups may want to focus on supporting other core elements of their operations e.g. recruiting or retaining volunteers or ensuring the financial sustainability of their club/group as the vast majority of participants/members are likely to return, albeit there remains a degree of fluidity as to when. There were no significant disparities in the return rates (those who had or intended to return) of respondents across other demographic profiles. It is however important for clubs/groups to consider the needs of those who are classified as vulnerable or at higher risk from contracting Covid-19.

Those that had already returned to their club/group reported lower levels of anxiety compared to those who intended to return. Those who had an intention to return were more than 3 times as likely to rate their anxiety as a 4 or 5 (with 5 being extremely anxious) compared to those who had returned. It was also apparent that a key factor in the speed of return is the ability of clubs/groups to demonstrate that their club/group is a safe environment and show evidence of other people returning.

In order to alleviate these concerns and anxieties clubs/groups can explore and identify how they can evidence, promote and communicate the safety procedures that have been implemented and demonstrate that others have returned to activity.

## 4.8 Characteristics of Participants/Members 'At Risk' of Not Returning

Respondents 'at risk' of not returning to their club/group are defined as those who stated that they were 'undecided' about returning to their club/group when completing the survey. It is important to consider the different characteristics of these respondents to identify any actions that clubs/groups could implement to encourage them back.

### Key Findings

6.7% were undecided about returning putting them at risk of not returning.

At greatest risk of not returning:

- Females
- People with a disability or LTHC.
- People who did less/stopped during lockdown.
- People with higher levels of anxiety.

#### 6.7% were 'Undecided' about Returning

6.7% of participant/member respondents were 'undecided' about returning to activity at their club/group at the time of the survey (July – August 2020).

#### The Vast Majority Reported they Would be Returning to Their Club/Group

A very small minority of participants/members (0.7% n=17) indicated that they would not be returning to their club/group. It is, however, important to note that those who had already decided not to return were less likely to see and complete this survey. No further analysis has been completed for those that stated they would not be returning due to the small sample size.

#### Women were Slightly More Likely to be Undecided About Returning than Men

A slightly higher proportion of females (8.4%) were undecided about returning to their club/group compared to males (5.5%).

#### Participants/Members with a Disability or LTHC were More Likely to be 'At Risk' of Not Returning

A higher proportion of respondents with a disability/LTHC (10.9%) were undecided about returning to their club/group in the future, compared to 5.9% of respondents without a disability/LTHC.

#### Over 40% of Those Undecided About Returning were not Very or Extremely Satisfied with Club/Group's Communications

56.5% of participants/members that were undecided about returning rated satisfaction with their club/group communications as 4 or 5 on the 5-point satisfaction scale (with 1 being 'Not At All Satisfied' and 5 being 'Extremely Satisfied'). 17% (n=29) of undecided returners rated their satisfaction as 1 or 2. In comparison, 10.3% of all respondents rated their satisfaction as 1 or 2, and 71.1% rated it as 4 or 5.

#### Those Over the Age of 35 were More Likely to be Undecided

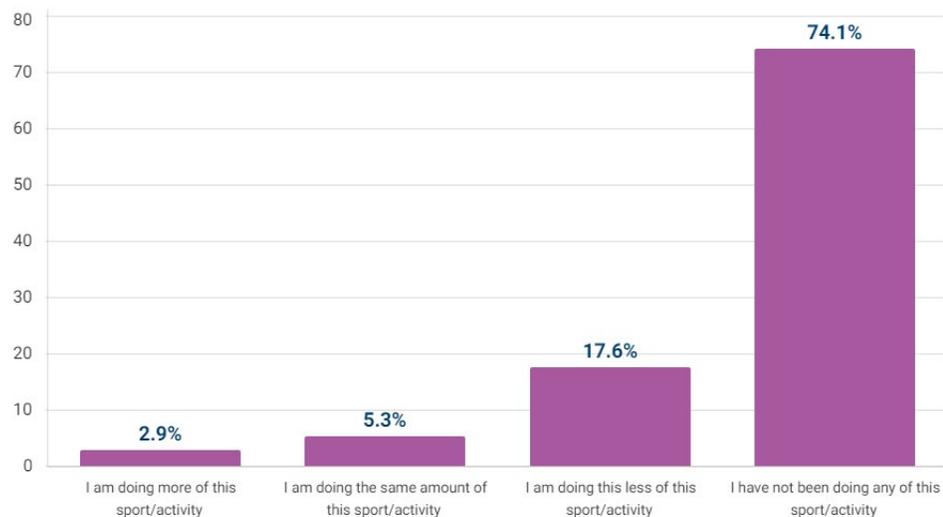
9% of respondents aged 65+ and 8.5% of those aged 35-64 were undecided about returning compared to the average of 6.7% across all age groups. While the sample size was too small to draw conclusions from, 3.2% of respondents under 35 (n=29) were undecided.



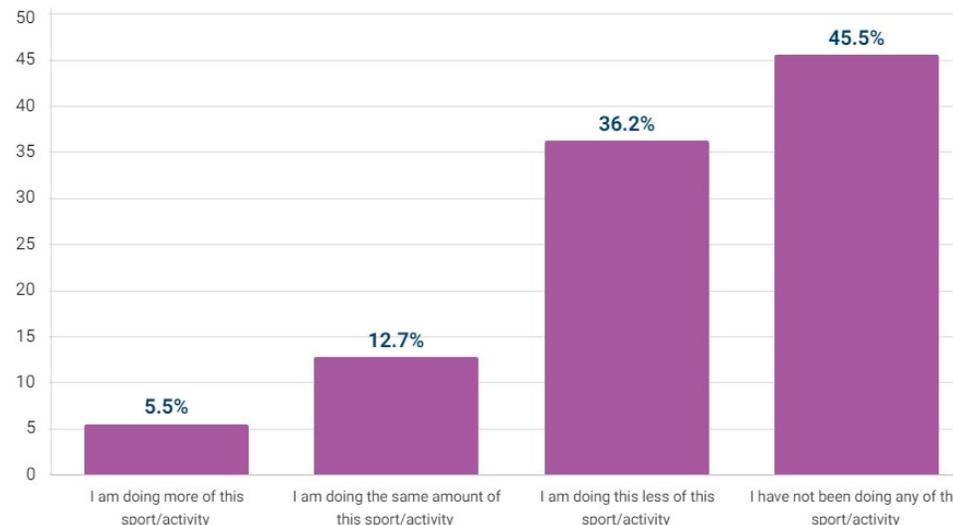
## Those who were Undecided were More Likely to have had Their Participation Habits Disrupted by Lockdown

74.1% of respondents that were undecided about returning did not do any of their main sport/activity during lockdown, compared to 45.5% of overall respondents.

Lockdown Behaviour –  
Respondents 'Undecided' about Returning (%)



Lockdown Behaviour –  
All Respondents (%)



## Covid-19 has Changed the Way Most Undecided Participants/Members Felt About Participating at Their Club/Group

77.1% of respondents that were 'undecided' stated that Covid-19 had changed how they felt about taking part in sport/activity in a club/group environment. In comparison, 42.4% of all respondents and 39.6% of those who had returned / were intending to return reported a change in their feelings due to Covid-19.

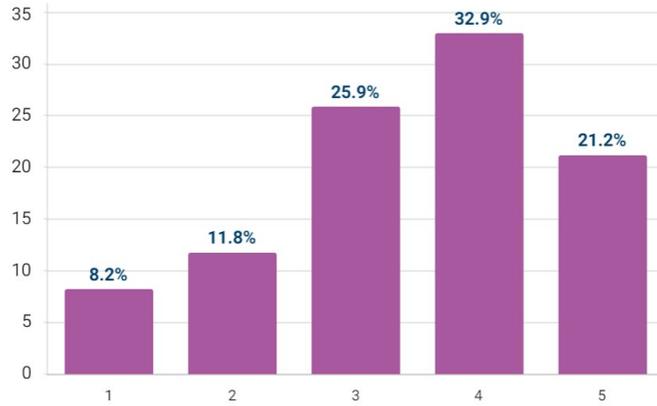
**77.1%**  
of 'Undecided'  
said their  
feelings had  
changed

**42.4%**  
of returned  
participants/  
members said  
their feelings  
had changed

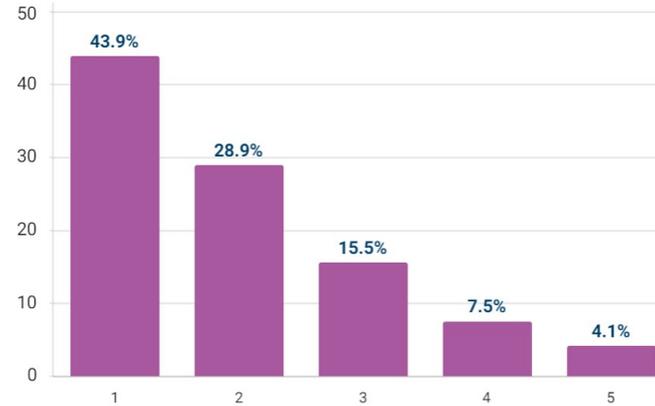
## Undecided Respondents were Likely to Exhibit More Significant Anxiety Levels

More than half of respondents who were undecided about returning (54.1%) rated their anxiety as 4 or 5 on the scale. This is drastically different when compared to; the average for all respondents, and those who had already returned or intended to return in the future.

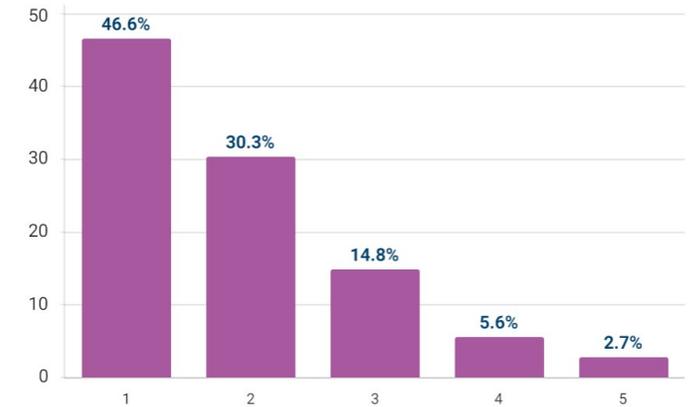
Anxiety About Return - % Respondents 'Undecided' about Returning



Anxiety About Return - % All Respondents



Anxiety About Return - % Respondents Already Returned / Intending to Return



(1 = Not At All Anxious, 3 = Moderately Anxious and 5 = Extremely Anxious)

## Summary

It is important for clubs/group to consider what they can do to encourage those that are undecided to return to activity. As clubs/groups emerge from lockdown and return to sport/activity, there is an opportunity to encourage and support the return of these participants/members.

While there was only a small percentage difference across the age profiles of participants that were undecided, it would be beneficial for clubs/groups to identify the main age categories of their participants/members. If a high proportion are within the 35-64 or 65+ age categories it may be valuable to explore and identify different ways to encourage these individuals to return and remove any barriers/concerns that might have led to them being undecided.

Promoting and communicating safe practices and removing any evidential barriers to return may also help to address the higher proportion of females and participants with disability / LTHC who were undecided. Clubs/groups may also want to consider diversifying their offer to ensure that their participants/members can continue to take part in activity outside of their physical club/group environment (e.g. via a virtual offer) where they may feel safer.

The majority of those who were undecided about returning reported that they either stopped or reduced their participation levels during lockdown. Shifting the evident change in behaviour seen throughout lockdown is likely to present clubs/groups with an important challenge to address. It is recommended that clubs/groups consider if their offer is sufficiently flexible and that pricing is structured correctly in order to determine whether there is a need to adapt any current practices to encourage these participants back.

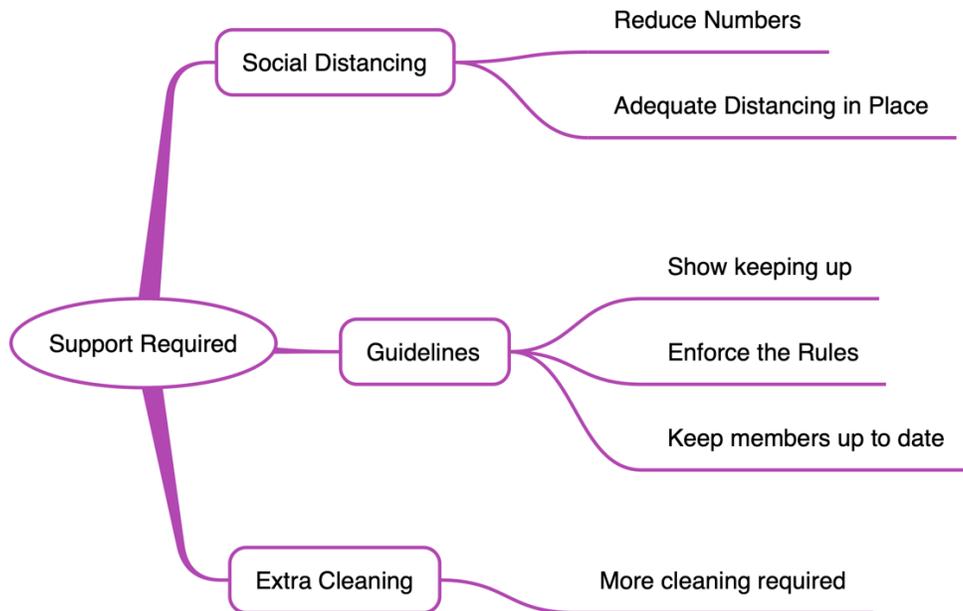
Participants/members who were undecided about returning were more likely to be dissatisfied with their club/group's communication throughout lockdown. It would be valuable for clubs/groups to improve their communications in line with suggestions from respondents as outlined within [4.12](#).



## 4.9 Information, Support/Reassurances to Encourage Participation

All respondents were asked an open text question about what information, help or guidance would support or encourage them to continue participating over the coming weeks and months. The three key themes that emerged are highlighted below.

### Key Findings



### Social Distancing

Given the concerns and barriers identified in previous sections, respondents highlighted requiring support around social distancing. Participants/members wanted to be able to see that things are different and to feel reassured that what's changed will make a difference. Reducing numbers either accessing sessions or accessing facilities (like the clubhouse) came up several times. Some also had more specific suggestions, for putting adequate distancing measures in place.

- *"Use small groups for training to ensure distancing is possible at all times."*
- *"Reduce numbers, [provide] hand sanitiser, enforce social distancing."*
- *"Make better use of the outside space to support social distancing."*
- *"Change the rules to allow playing at a safe distance and ensure no sharing of equipment, other than the football."*

### Cleaning

Hygiene came out as a major concern for respondents, and as a result cleaning was also a common request for further support. Some respondents provided suggestions for how this could be done. It is noted that extra cleaning can be costly for club/groups. Even if they're not paying for the additional cleaning, it costs them volunteer time and may distract time away from other activities. However, some participants/members did note that their clubs/groups were already managing to do a good job.

- *"Work with the facility providers to ensure they adhere to cleaning regimes and offer adequate sanitisation"*
- *"Making sure everyone obeys the rules of cleanliness and that equipment is cleaned as required"*.
- *"They are doing a great job, keeping things clean, and making the best of the restrictions they're in"*.

## Understanding and Enforcing Guidelines

Respondents also wanted more support around Covid-19 guidelines in general. These support requests covered three areas:

### • Keeping Up with the Guidelines

Showing that the club/group is keeping up with guidelines requires a combination of communications and physical changes. The support need was about clarity on the guidelines, as well as how they would be applied. This means confirming to participants/members that both government and NGB guidelines are being followed.

- *“Continue to provide advice and updates.”*
- *“By ensuring social distancing and following Bowls England guidance.”*
- *“Keeping us all up to date with current guidance and club complying with this.”*

### • Enforcing the Rules

Enforcing the rules was important to many participants/members, both to keep everyone safe and to ensure that everyone takes the rules seriously.

- *“Be clear on social distancing rules and be consistent.”*
- *“Ensure distancing and adherence to the rules in place at any time with sanctions for those who do not comply. Some people seem to think the rules do not apply to them.”*

### • Keeping Participants/Members Up to Date

Building on the need for good communications, respondents asked for additional support through keeping participants/members up to date with the latest changes and requirements. Regular communications, highlighting what the club/group is doing and how any guidelines have changed can have multiple benefits. Not only will it ensure that people feel informed, it will also provide reassurance that the guidelines are worthwhile and that the club/group is taking them seriously (which includes enforcement). These positive communications need to run across different channels, both digital and physical.

- *“I would be encouraged if there was more communication/updates even just on social media. I would like there to be signs up to remind me what I should be doing (as I am nervous about forgetting). I would just like clear communication of the plan, so that I know what to expect and also what's expected of me.”*
- *“Provide very clear and direct updates and instructions. No 'leave it to your common-sense' type instructions please!”*

This is not to say that all clubs/groups need to improve all aspects of their communications. In fact some respondents praised their club/group for what they had done so far.

- *“None (support needs) currently, they are doing a lot to keep on top of the changing restrictions and keeping us updated”.*

*“Keeping us all up to date with current guidance and club complying with this.”*

*“None (support needs) currently, they are doing a lot to keep on top of the changing restrictions and keeping us updated”.*

## Summary

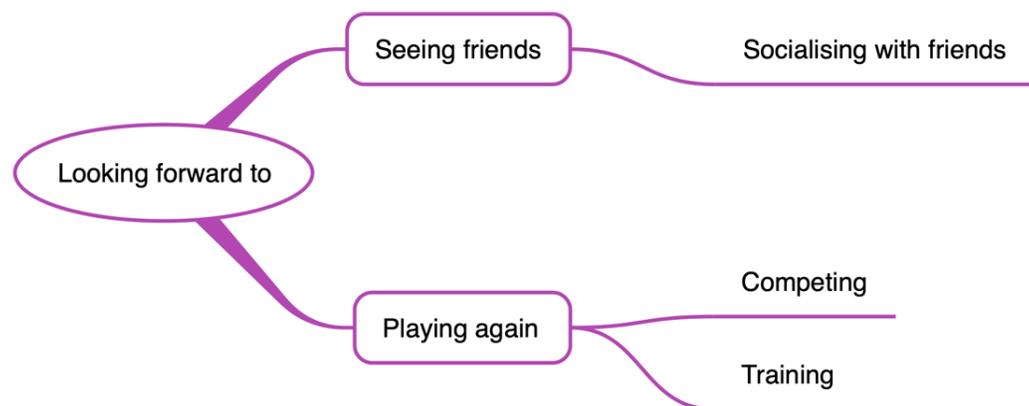
Respondents focused on asking for support/reassurances about keeping safe within the physical club/group environment with social distancing and hygiene being key elements of this. Participants/members wanted to see and be reassured that their clubs/groups were taking the NGB and social distancing guidelines seriously, both in terms of the rules they put in place and how they choose to enforce them. It is recommended that clubs/groups proactively reflect this in any communications they share.



## 4.10 What Participants/Members were Most Looking Forward To

All respondents were asked an open text question about what they were most looking forward to when their club/group reopened. The two key themes that emerged are highlighted below.

### Key Findings



Two key themes emerged from the responses received; seeing friends again and being able to participate in their main sport/activity again. These priorities reflected more broadly what respondents said they loved most about their sport. These themes were consistent across the different demographics and respondent types. Seeing friends and other members was the most popular response across all respondents.

### Seeing Friends and Other Members Again

The social aspect of sport/activity is a strong part of why many people choose to participate in the club/group environment. The competitive nature of club/group sport, means that these friendships are not just restricted to the members own club/group.

- *“Actually meeting up with friends (not on a screen)”.*
- *“Socialising with friends again.”*
- *“Meeting up with our club members and old friends from other clubs.”*
- *“Seeing friends, competing, learning new skills, being active.”*

Respondents also talked about having shared passions and were looking forward to doing what they love with people they like.

- *“Forgetting everything and just doing what I love with my friends.”*
- *“Playing the sport, seeing my friends, laughing.”*
- *“The feel-good factor of playing sport and meeting friends.”*

*“Meeting up with our club members and old friends from other clubs.”*

## Participating in their Main Sport/Activity

Exercising at home has become a viable alternative for a proportion of the wider population who are just seeking to keep fit. However, for club/group participants/members, their passion is often playing sport and they've missed both the competition and the training. For many, they can't wait to get back to the thrill of competition, whether within the club/group or against other clubs/groups. This came through strongest with the 65+ age group, and sports like Golf and Bowls where the focus is on playing matches. For some sports, such as Running, Triathlon and Martial Arts, participation is geared around training and preparing for a few specific competitions which came out in the commentary.

- *“Getting back on court and competitions.”*
- *“Meeting up with teammates and playing competitive cricket.”*
- *“Preparing for races next year.”*

For some sports/activities, respondents were keen to start improving their training and skills again. In fact, amongst those keen to return as soon as clubs/groups reopened, getting back to training was mentioned more than seeing friends again.

- *“Partner [based] training which cannot be replaced by weights and individual exercise.”*
- *“Being pushed to improve – [as] my running has plateaued in lockdown.”*
- *“Workout and improve my skills and also to spend time with my teammates.”*

## What People were Looking Forward to Mirrored What They Loved about their Sport/Activity

What respondents were looking forward to when their club/group reopens mirrored the responses received regarding what they loved about taking part in their main sport/activity. This shows the importance of the club/group environment to their overall sporting experience. This contrasts with the fitness industry, where physical gyms are coming under increasing pressure from digital streaming platforms. Looking at what participants/members loved most about their sport, they talked about friends and the challenge. The challenge that appeals to participants/members takes many forms. It can come through competing against themselves or others, developing skills or even the activity environment.

- *“Playing for my friends and teammates.”*
- *“[My club/group] gave me the chance to play again and join a whole new group who have become good friends”*
- *“Challenge of improving a skill.”*
- *“Being outside, the challenge of water.”*

## Summary

What participants/members loved about club/group sport and activities, and what they were most looking forward to were the social aspects and the challenge of training and competition. This may seem obvious to those involved with clubs/groups, but it shouldn't be taken for granted. Where clubs/groups are finding themselves struggling to get some participants/members to return, they should look to ensure their messaging doesn't just focus on the new safety protocols but also focusses on reminding people what they used to enjoy about their sport/activity and their club/group. After many months away, members may have temporarily lost the 'buzz', and got distracted by other activities. It may not mean they have less time for club/group sport/activities, but rather they need to be reminded of why they used to make time for it again.

## 4.11 Satisfaction with Club/Group Communications

### Key Findings

The majority were satisfied with the comms from their club/group during lockdown.

10.3% were dissatisfied.

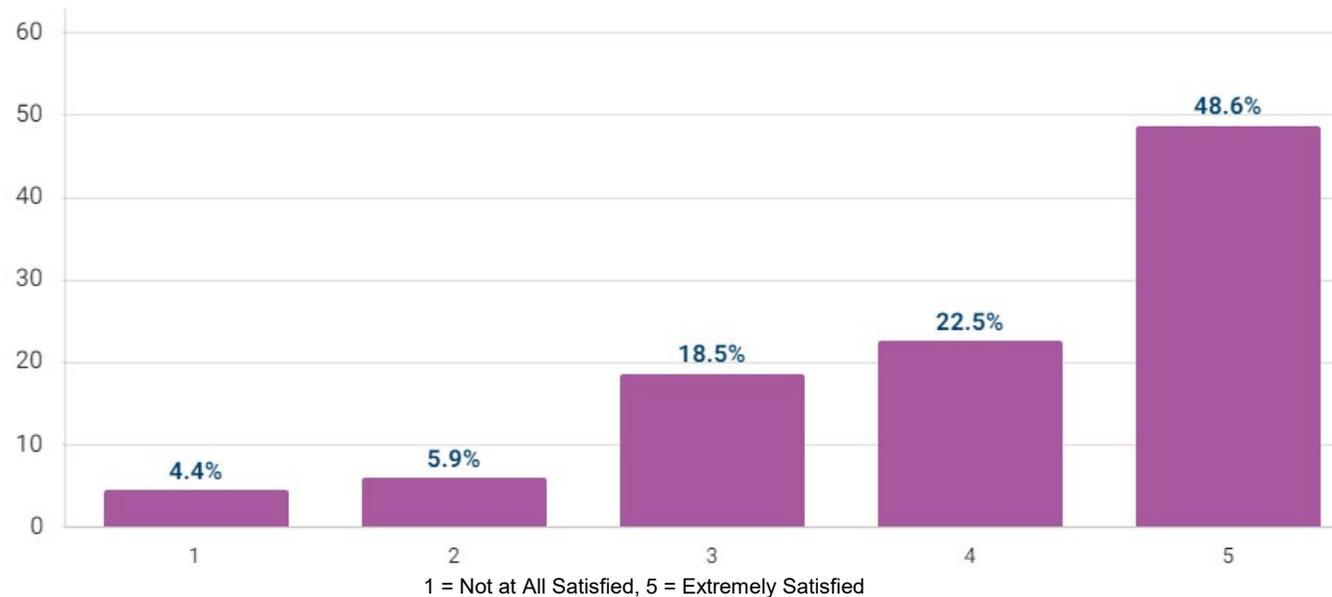
Communication remains vital to club/group success, even after reopening, to:

- Encourage people back.
- Keep people up to date with changes/measures in place.
- Manage anxiety levels.
- Keep people connected.

### 1 in 10 Participants/Members were Dissatisfied with Their Club/Group's Communications

10.3% of respondents rated their satisfaction with the communications they received from their club/group as 1 or 2 on a 5 point scale where 1 was 'Not At All Satisfied' and 5 was 'Extremely Satisfied'. However, the majority of respondents were satisfied with how their club/group communicated with them during lockdown. Nearly half of all respondents (48.6%) rated themselves as being 'Extremely Satisfied'.

### Satisfaction Ratings with Communications – All Respondents (%)



### Females were Slightly Less Likely to be Satisfied

Females were marginally less satisfied with communications from their clubs/groups than males. 11.5% of females ranked their satisfaction rating 1 or 2 out of 5 (with 1 being 'not at all satisfied' and 5 being 'extremely satisfied'), compared to 9.6% of males.

### Participants/Members from BAME Groups were Less Likely to be Very/Extremely Satisfied

52% of respondents from BAME groups rated their satisfaction with their club's/group's communication throughout lockdown as 4 or 5 compared to 72% of participants/members from White British or White Other ethnic group.

### Satisfaction Levels Increased with Age

In general, satisfaction levels increased with age. 66.5% of those aged under 35 rated their satisfaction as 4 or 5 compared to 70.6% of 35-64 year olds and 83.4% of those aged 65+.

### Respondents with a Disability or LTHC were Less Satisfied

Lower satisfaction levels were more prevalent among those with a disability or LTHC than those without. 12.3% of people with a disability or LTHC gave a satisfaction rating of 1 or 2 compared to 10.1% of people without a disability or LTHC.

### Participants/Members that had Already Returned had Higher Satisfaction Levels

Those who had returned to sport/activity reported the highest levels of satisfaction with communications from their clubs/groups. It is interesting to note that those who were undecided about returning or who had decided not to return both still positively rated communications, although not to the same extent.

### Different Categories had Slightly Different Satisfaction Levels

The category with the highest levels of satisfaction with communications (scoring 4 and 5) was Outdoor Pitch/Court (77.7%). The category with the lowest percentage of participants/members that scored their satisfaction as 4 or 5 was Individual Indoor (53.7%). The results may in part be explained by those activities that had either returned to play or were close to returning, being rated more favourably by respondents because they had more good news to share.

Satisfaction with Communications by Category

Category of Sport/Activity	Rating and % of Respondents 1 = Not at All Satisfied, 5 = Extremely Satisfied				
	1	2	3	4	5
Individual Indoor Sports/Activities	7.6	9.5	29.2	20.5	33.2
Individual Outdoor Sports/Activities	3.1	5.3	15.3	21.2	55.1
Martial Arts, Combat and Target Sports	(n<10)	(n<10)	19.4	20.9	53.0
Outdoor Pitch/Court Sports/Activities	3.3	4.0	15.0	24.5	53.2
Team Indoor Sports/Activities	(n<10)	(n<10)	21.4	25.4	44.4
Water Sports	(n<10)	6.6	14.2	30.1	45.1

Note: where less than 10 respondents gave a specific response, the corresponding box in the table has been greyed out to avoid conclusions being drawn from too small a sample size.

### Club/Group Involvement had no Obvious Link to Satisfaction with Comms

Neither frequency (how often someone participated each week) nor longevity (number of years) of participation before lockdown were factors that significantly impacted on satisfaction with club/group communications.

## Summary

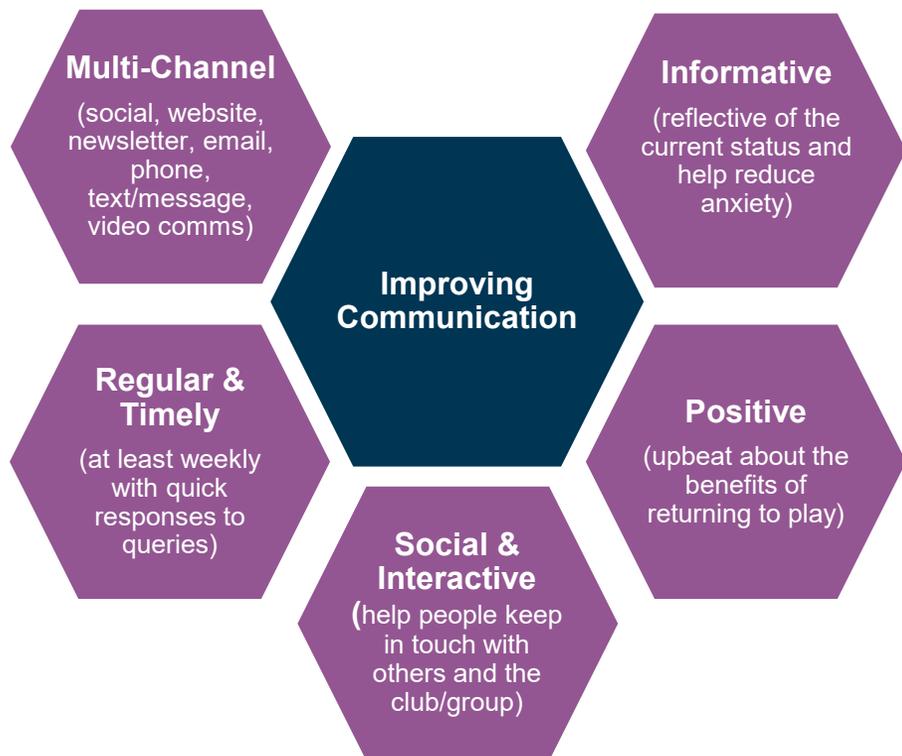
The results showed that clubs/groups had been largely successful in communicating with their participants/members during lockdown. High levels of satisfaction were achieved across a broad range of demographic groups and respondent types with those who had already returned recording highest levels of satisfaction. Key to this seems to have been the deployment of a wide range of communications methods – from use of public facing open platforms to more individualised approaches that include telephone contact and text messages.

Choosing a mixture of methods has enabled clubs/groups to tailor their communications to meet their participants/members needs, with a range of information provided from simple factual information to social activity that contributes to the health and welling of their club/ group participants/members. It is clear that some groups feel less satisfied with communications, these include younger people, females, people with a disability or LTHC and those who are undecided about returning. It is therefore recommended that clubs/groups do not lose sight of communicating with these groups to help ensure their return, retention and satisfaction with comms.



## 4.12 Improving Communications

### Key Findings



Respondents were asked to comment on the one thing that their club/group could do to improve how they communicate with them. A range of observations were made, not only the communication channels and their relative successes, but also on the content and tone of the communications.

### A Number of Potential Communications Methods were Identified by Respondents

The findings illustrate that clubs/groups can use a number of techniques to keep in touch with their participants/members. These include:

- Use of the club's main social media channels including frequent website and Facebook posts.
- Newsletters, emails, text and WhatsApp messages direct to participants/members.
- Video communications with specific groups of people, with use of Zoom for chats and webinars.

Commentary from respondents indicated that regardless of the approaches used, there has been frequent engagement to not only update participants/members on returning to sport/activity but more generally to encourage connections between them which included an important social dimension of making sure people are staying well and connected.

### Communications Should Fulfil Some Key Functions

Most notably communications have needed to strike a balance between:

- Addressing participants/members fears about Covid-19 which ranged from its impact on their personal health and wellbeing to the club's/group's survival and concerns around return to play.
- Being upbeat about the return to play, with 'Joy' being a frequently referenced emotion.
- Acknowledging the club/group's role as being one of building and maintaining trust amongst its participants/members.

## Key Learnings

Key themes and learnings identified from the analysis include:

- **Use a Range of Techniques and Platforms**

Not everyone has access to social media so a range of communication techniques do need to continue to be deployed. Individuals also have their own preferences on how they like to receive information so it cannot be assumed that all their members subscribe to any one method of communication.

- **Frequent Contact is Key**

Clubs/groups should consider the logistics and practicalities of providing regular updates. At least weekly communication is expected and desired by most.

- **Keep Communications Up-to-Date**

The focus of communications and updates needs to keep pace with the status of the sport's/activity's return to play and so will change over time. As return play gets closer, allaying participant/member fears is key, providing reassurance that the club/group can be trusted to have made the playing environment Covid-19 secure and as safe as possible. In doing this, it is important to stress the pleasure of returning to sport/activity to continue to help motivate return/retention.

- **Communication Should be Interactive and Support Socialising Where Possible**

Communication is much more than about relaying information. There is a strong social element to it too. There is also an expectation that more vulnerable members will need individual and personalised contact and that the club/group will undertake this role.

*“Need to communicate more regularly and in different ways to suit a broader range of participants”*

*“Introduce a buddy system for those members who do not use social media”*

*“More direct personal communication”*

*“They could have been more proactive at sharing information on the impact of Covid-19 on the club and how we are looking to mitigate the challenges it presents”*

## Summary

The results show club/groups have been largely successful in communicating with their participants/members during lockdown. Digital solutions were by far the most common form of approach, suggesting clubs/group have successfully embraced the digital age for the benefit of their participants/members. As seen in section 4.11, high levels of satisfaction were reached across a broad range of demographic groups and participant types, with those who had already returned to play recording the highest levels of satisfaction. From the analysis, it can be concluded that respondents expect their communications to be:

- **Timely**, with quick responses to queries and questions.
- **Informative**, to address uncertainty and confusion about what is happening and relay any future plans. This includes translating sport specific and wider partner guidance to their specific club/group setting.
- **Multi-channel**, using a wide range of distribution channels – from the use of public-facing open platforms to more individualised approaches that include telephone contact and text messages.
- **Interactive**, with opportunities for engagement with other club/group members. Communication is seen to be much more than simply relaying information. Social activity that contributes to the health and wellbeing of their club and group members is also expected.

To ensure clubs/groups can meet expectations, training and development is key. This ranges from how content is generated, preferred channels and how to use them, to being clear on what sports clubs/groups need to do to comply with data protection law and GDPR requirements. Covid-19 required swift action so it remains vital that internal policies and procedures are in place, understood and tested so increased communication can continue to be actioned without concern to the management, retention and protection of their members', volunteers' and employees' personal data.



## 4.13 Views and Behaviours of Participants/Members Under 16 Years Old

### Key Findings

92.9% did less or stopped during lockdown.

91.1% had or will return to their club/group as soon as it opens.

28.6% said Covid-19 had changed how they feel about taking part at their club/group.

Under 16's were more likely to consider themselves 'not at all anxious' (51.4%) compared to all respondents.

While the majority of responses to the survey were received from people aged 16+, 12.9% of responses were received from/on behalf of people under the age of 16. This section spotlights the headline findings from this age group.

### Demographic Breakdown of Under-16 Respondents

Within this age group:

- 55.1% of respondents were male and 44% were female.
- 92.9% were 'White British or White Other' and 6.1% were from BAME groups.
- Respondents were most likely to have participated for 2-3 days per week before lockdown (47.7%). 28% took part once a week and 22.2% took part 4+ days a week.
- 53.9% had been a member/participant for 3 years or more.

### Most Under-16s did Less or Stopped their Main Sport/Activity during Lockdown

43.4% reported doing less and 49.5% stopped. This is slightly higher than the percentages of all respondents, which saw 36.2% doing less and 45.5% stopping their sport/activity.

### Most Respondents Aged Under 16 Did Not Report a Change in Feelings Towards Participation Due to Covid-19

More than two-thirds reported that their feelings towards participating in a club/group setting had not been changed by the Covid-19 pandemic. 71.4% confirmed that how they felt had not been impacted; 28.6% reported that Covid-19 had changed how they feel, this is significantly lower than the percentage of all respondents (42.4%).

### Under-16s were Most Likely to be 'Not At All Anxious' about Returning

51.4% rated their anxiety as 1 on the scale. This is a higher proportion than all age respondents, as shown below. Under-16s were also less likely to show significant levels of anxiety, with 7.7% (n=25) rating themselves at 4 or 5 compared to 11.6% of all respondents.

### Percentage of Respondents by Anxiety Rating – All Respondents and Under 16s (%)

	1 (Not at All Anxious) (%)	2 (%)	3 (Moderately Anxious) (%)	4 (%)	5 (Extremely Anxious) (%)
% of All respondents	43.9	28.9	15.5	7.5	4.1
% of Under-16s	51.4	30.8	10.2	5.2	2.5

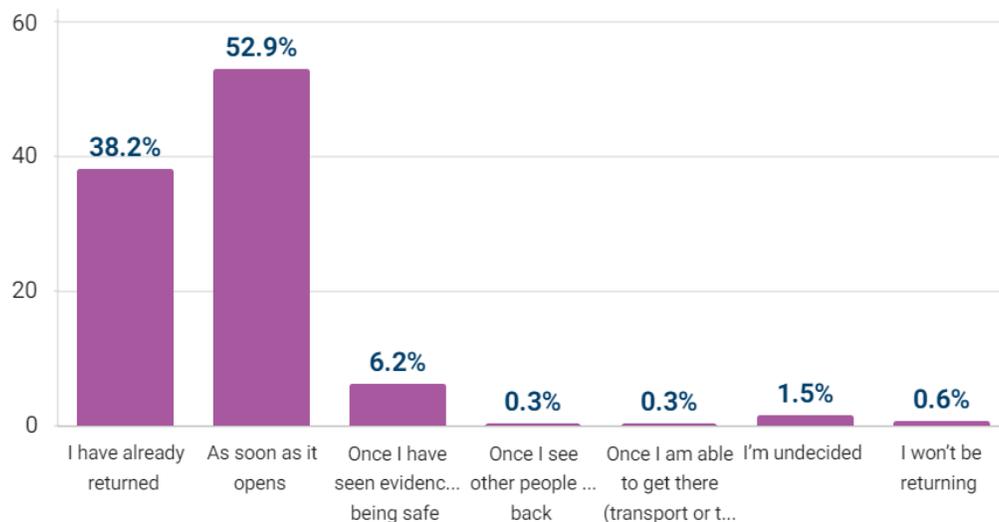
## The Majority of Under-16s were Satisfied with their Club's/Group's Comms over Lockdown

46.2% rated themselves 'Extremely Satisfied' (5 on the scale); 12.7% rated themselves dissatisfied (1 or 2 on the scale). However, Under-16s were marginally less satisfied than all respondents (48.6% of which were 'Extremely Satisfied' and 10.3% were dissatisfied).

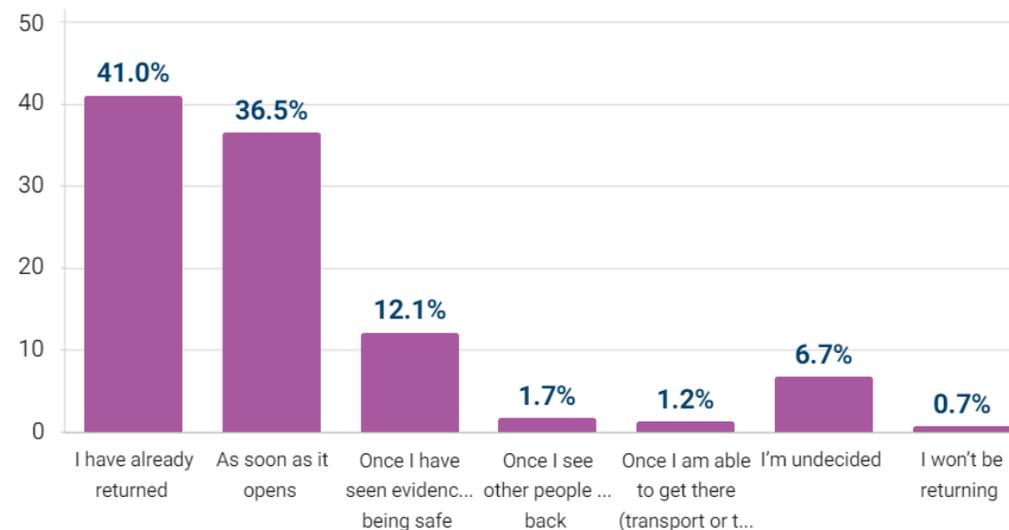
## Under-16s Are More Likely to Return As Soon As Their Club/Group Opens

Compared to the national dataset, those under the age of 16 were marginally less likely to have returned to their club/group at the time of the survey. However, they were more likely to say that they will return as soon as their club/group opens. As shown below, although a marginally smaller proportion of Under-16s have returned (38.2% compared to 41% all respondents), more than half planned to do so as soon as their club/group reopened (52.9% compared to 36.5% of all respondents).

Speed of Return – % of Under 16s



Speed of Return – % All Respondents



## Summary

The opinions, feelings and intentions of Under-16s in relation to returning to their club/group were somewhat different to those of all respondents. Under-16s appeared to show less anxiety about their return, were less likely to report that their feelings have been changed by the Covid-19 pandemic and were more likely to be intending to return as soon as their club/group reopened. In terms of specific recommendations, Under-16s may be one of the groups that are easier to encourage to return. As such, this may be a good time for clubs/groups to recruit new, younger participants/members if appropriate, to support their growth/re-growth after this challenging period. However, it is also recommended that clubs/groups take action where necessary to ensure that Under-16s appreciate and understand the importance of the Covid-19 risk reduction measures they have implemented, to ensure their safety and that of others and give further reassurance to parents/carers.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

Sports clubs/groups continue to play a vital role in the delivery of grassroots sport in local communities and their value must not be overlooked. They provide opportunities for people to socialise, learn new skills, take part and possibly even compete in their preferred sports/activities. Clubs/groups can, and do, play a pivotal role in meeting the needs of the local communities they serve. In times of crisis they have been seen to pull on their team spirit and dig deep to support not just their own participants/members and volunteers but people and groups in their local areas. Thriving clubs/groups serve the needs of a diverse membership/participant base. In turn these participants/members help foster a sense of community and contribute towards their club/group's financial sustainability.

This report helps to illustrate the extent of the disruption that clubs/groups and their participants/members have experienced throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Most clubs/groups have faced long periods of closure and, in an ever-changing landscape, for some the future remains uncertain. The findings of this report give hope that clubs/groups are likely to see the vast majority of their participants/members return but makes clear the need to continue to work pro-actively to encourage and retain existing participants/members. Understanding and responding to their needs, anxieties, concerns and preferences is of paramount importance, as is ensuring appropriate and regular forms of communication. Living with the presence of Covid-19 comes with the potential for national and local lockdowns and changing national restrictions which impact not only clubs/groups but the facilities they hire and the activities they can do safely. Restrictions are likely to remain for many more months to come. As a result, the findings within this report will continue to provide an important reference point for Governing Bodies, wider partners supporting clubs/groups and clubs/groups themselves as local sports delivery continues to adapt.

It is evident across the survey that respondents' desire to return to their club/group environment is being driven by emotions and attitudes as much as it is by demographics. It's important that clubs/groups, Governing Bodies and wider partners don't homogenise attitudes by age group or other characteristics. The Covid-19 pandemic is impacting different people in different ways. Two individual participants/members who previously engaged with a club/group in similar ways may now have very different views about the safety and appeal of their club/group environment.



## 5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to be a starting point. They reflect tangible actions that can be taken to address some of the recurring themes highlighted within this research. Some Governing Bodies, wider partners and clubs/groups may already be implementing some, if not all, of these processes and priorities. Whilst the recommendations outlined within this report should be reviewed and actioned in the short term to support the return of participants/members, they should not be considered as standalone, one-off recommendations. During the last few months, clubs/groups and wider partners have learned lessons that should also be applied to 'business as usual'. For example, lockdown highlighted the importance of good communications for keeping participants/members engaged when they're not able to regularly attend their club/group. As clubs/groups, their participants/members and volunteers continue to live with Covid-19 in the longer term these recommendations should be continually reviewed, addressed and adapted to better support club/group participants/members.

**Understanding and addressing the needs and concerns of BAME groups to provide inclusive participation opportunities.**

As highlighted in this report, responses to this survey from BAME groups were extremely low. In striving to tackle under-representation and provide opportunities for all, it is important for clubs/groups to not only offer inclusive opportunities but work proactively to ensure the needs and concerns of BAME groups are fully understood and addressed. It is recommended that further research is undertaken by clubs/groups, Governing Bodies and relevant wider sector partners on how Covid-19 has and is likely to continue to impact on BAME groups.

**Maintaining virtual activities to support the ongoing engagement of participants/members and reduce the risk of participant/member dropout.**

Some respondents complimented their clubs/groups on how well they kept them engaged during lockdown. They shared a wide range of examples that came from clubs/groups being willing to re-imagine and broaden the scope of their offer. Online challenges, quizzes and virtual social events complemented the information distributed to help people feel like they were still part of a shared community.

Continuing these digital engagement activities, even if the club/group has returned, will be important in the months ahead. Restricted group numbers, the need to self-isolate, fear of Covid-19, concerns about social distancing and national and local lockdowns can all drive reduced attendance numbers, even amongst those who have already 'returned'. Nearly half of respondents stopped their main sport/activity during lockdown, and further bouts of isolation and inactivity could lead them to dropping out. Similarly, those unable to train as frequently or those who don't have a specific competition to aim for may start to question why they are still training at all.

The first step to minimising the risk of drop out over the coming months is to have a plan for how participants/members can best be kept engaged when not physically within the club/group environment. Club Matters already has a range of case studies which give examples of how clubs/groups have turned to virtual activities to keep in touch with their participants/members and will continue to build on these over the coming months. A new guide on 'Re-Imagining Your Offer' will also be developed to further support this recommendation.

Put plans in place to drive effective ongoing communications across a range of different channels that aid re-engagement, retention and reduce anxiety.

On-going communications are vital to continued engagement and are crucial to helping people feel informed, reassured and safe. The survey findings showed that not all clubs/groups or sports are providing the communications that participants/members need and that, even where communication has been good, there is a need for clubs/groups, NGBs and wider partners to continually refine their approach and maintain regularity.

**Information People Need.** When reviewing communications it is recommended that clubs/groups consider the three distinct types of information that respondents said they needed, including:

- Facts – people wanted to feel informed and up to date about when clubs/groups and facilities are re-opening, how redesigned sessions or processes will work and the implications for their sport/activity.
- Reassurance (safety) – people wanted to understand how their clubs/groups are keeping them safe, what new processes are in place and how they are helping to reduce risks of infection.
- Reassurance (compliance) – people also wanted to see/hear how rules are being enforced, and that there are implications for non-compliance. Their assumption and concern is that others won't follow the rules.

**Format and Timings of Communications.** Most clubs/groups are already using social media channels, however not all participants/members regularly use the same channels. It is important for clubs/groups not to assume that just because somebody follows a page, that they've seen and understood the messaging/communications on it. It is recommended that key messages are repeated consistently and across multiple channels. The survey findings demonstrated that participants/members want to be engaged with in a timely manner and using the channels they already use themselves – in some cases this is social media, in others it's telephone, text and messaging services like WhatsApp. Considering the timing and format of club/group communications is a vital component of developing a Communications Plan. Club Matters is committed to developing further advice and guidance on the different techniques clubs/groups can use to communicate with their participants/members.

**Catering for the Needs of Different Groups.** Reluctance to return was higher amongst some demographic groups, such as females, those with a disability or LTHC and those aged 35-54 years. This doesn't mean that communications or delivery needs to be specific to these demographic groups. Instead, it means that it is advisable that clubs/groups check that these groups aren't feeling excluded by what's currently being done.

**Remind People What They Love About their Sport/Activity and Club/Group.** The survey findings indicated that people were most looking forward to coming back to their club/group to socialise with friends/other members, and train, take part and even compete in the sport/activity they love. Maintaining a focus on this as well as helping to allay people's concerns is an important balance to maintain.

**Training and Development.** To ensure clubs/groups can meet expectations, some training and development may be required, this could range from how content is generated, preferred channels and how to use them to being clear on what sports clubs/groups need to do to comply with data protection law and GDPR requirements. Covid-19 required swift action so it remains vital that internal policies and procedures are in place, understood and tested so increased communication can continue to be actioned without concern to the management, retention and protection of personal data.

**Ask participants/members for help to boost volunteer numbers.**

The 'Club Matters, Return to Sport and Activity Survey Findings, Volunteers Report' identifies that there could be a disparity between the proportion of participants/members and volunteers that return. The risk of relatively fewer volunteers returning, combined with the increased Covid-19 related workload is a major threat. Trying to implement these recommendations could, at face value, add to the workload and exacerbate the problem. It is recommended that clubs/groups look at how they engage more participants/members to help with communications and other aspects of their club/group. Helping could be as simple as; a participant/member running a WhatsApp group to confirm weekly attendance, so the coach/leader can instead focus on sharing updates on how well the club/group are managing safety measures to control the health risks, or asking people to write posts/testimonials to be shared with others on their return to sport/activity experience.

**Be clear about the rules and determine whether some groups would benefit from a re-induction.**

Participants/members were concerned about understanding the rules and making sure they, and others, stick to them. Being clear about the rules, the extra routines that are in place to support social distancing and additional hygiene factors and showcasing these could help to drive down anxiety levels and concerns. It is recommended that clubs/groups adapt their existing rules/policies to enable them to take action against those that don't adhere to the new practices and processes introduced to keep people safe.

It is also recommended that clubs/groups consider offering a re-induction to participants/members to help alleviate their concerns and encourage the consistent application of social distancing and other sport specific guidance. Seeking new volunteers to support this from within the membership/participant base would also help to reduce any additional burden this may place on volunteers.

**Developing ways to monitor the anxiety levels of participants/members on an ongoing basis.**

11.6% of participants/members rated their anxiety levels as significant, and even though some have returned to their clubs/groups their anxiety remains. In part, this is driven by their perceptions that others aren't taking the risks as seriously as they are, however, there is also a desire to avoid risk. To reduce the likelihood of drop out, it is recommended that clubs/groups consider ways to monitor how their people are feeling – both those who are returning and those who are unable or unwilling to participate right now. This could be done informally, through coaches/session leaders having specific conversations with their groups and sharing what they hear with the committee, or it could be done through a regular short survey. For example, it could ask participants/members to rate their current levels of anxiety (using the 5-point scale from the survey) and then ask an open question about what's working for them or what they would like to see improved. This would give clubs/groups a solid and reliable way of understanding how their own people are feeling.

**APPENDIX 1**  
**SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES BY QUESTION**  
**(PARTICIPANTS/MEMBERS)**



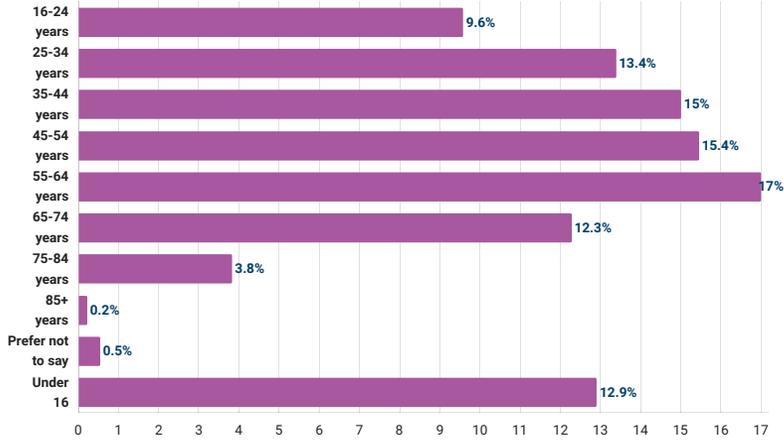
# Participants/Members Survey Responses

Total Survey Responses

2.521k

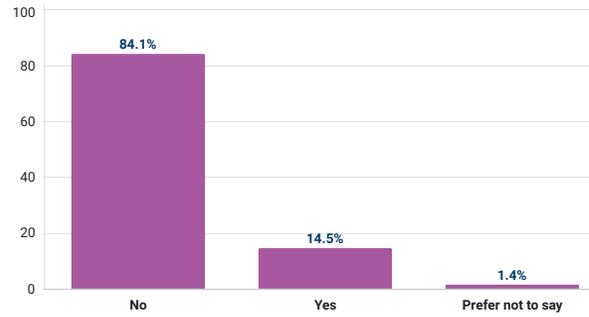
Please tell us which age category you are in:

Age Distribution of Respondents (% of responses)



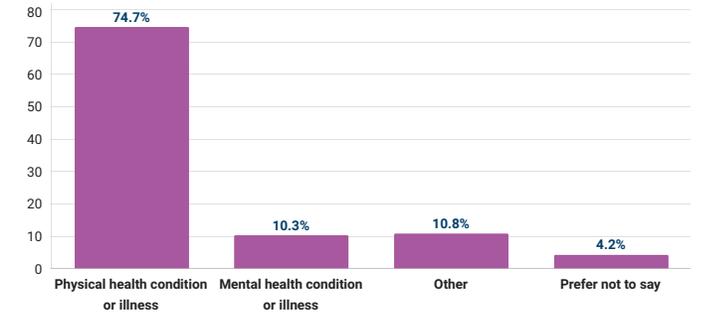
Do you have a disability or long-term health condition?

Disability or long-term health condition (%)

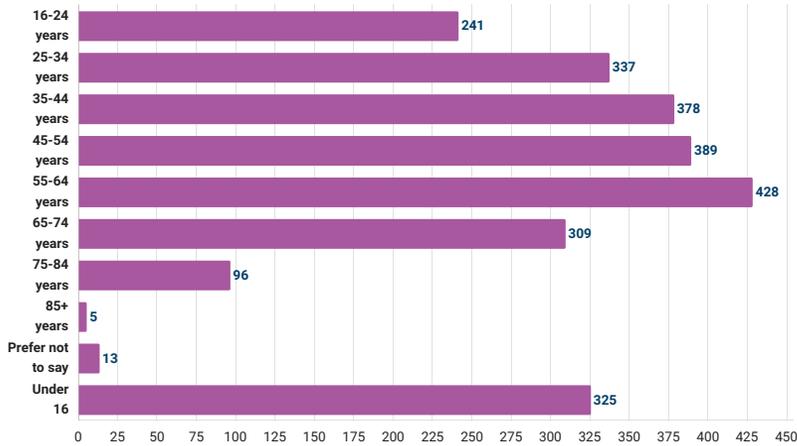


Please tell us if your condition or illness affects you in any of the following ways?

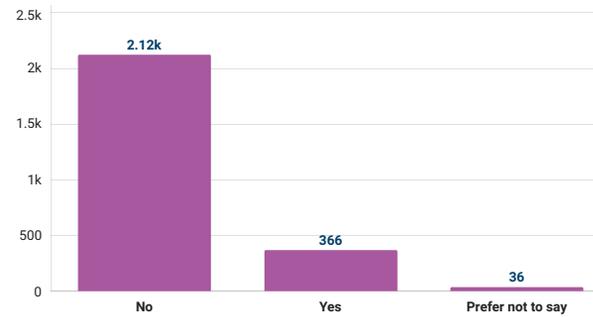
Disability or long-term health condition - Detail (%)



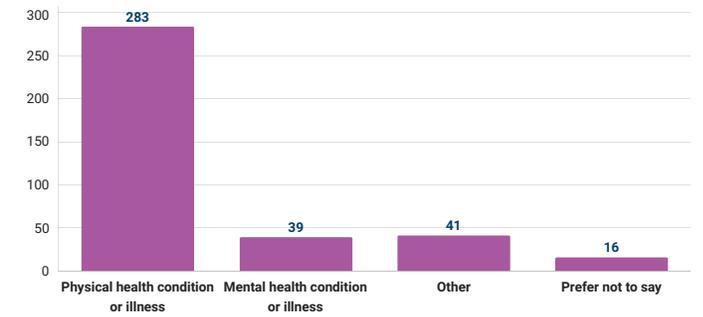
Age Distribution of Respondents (# of responses)



Disability or long-term health condition (#)



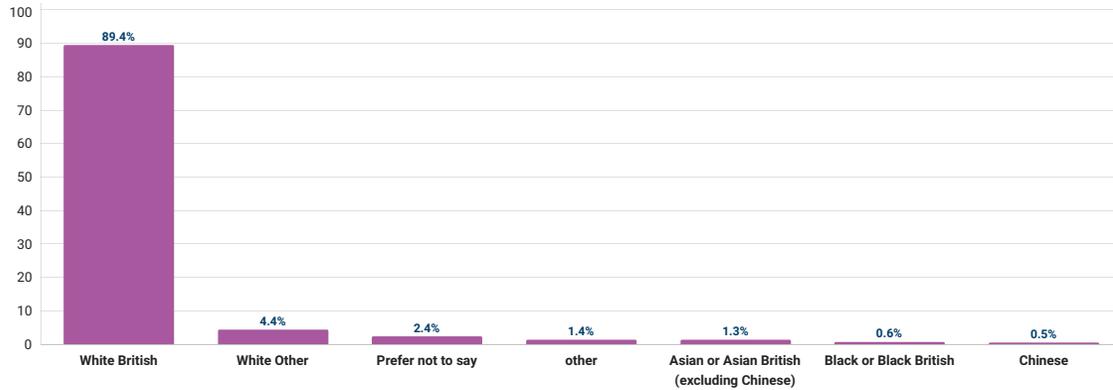
Disability or long-term health condition - Detail (#)



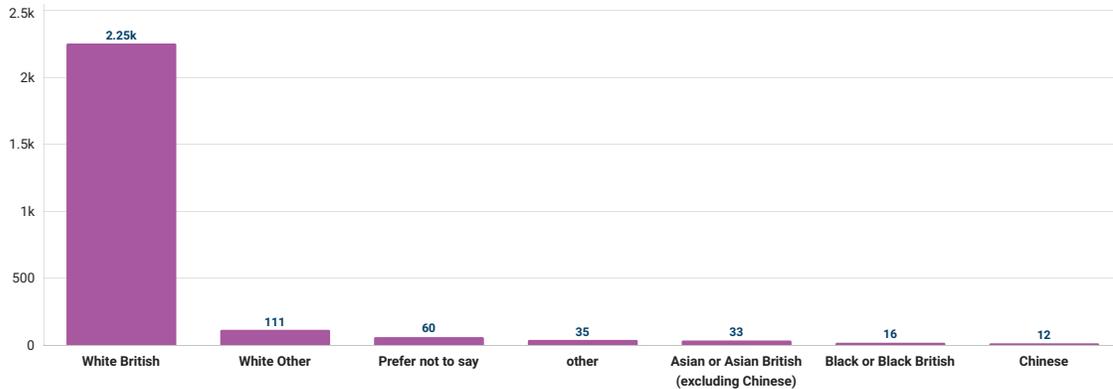
## Participants/Members Survey Responses

Which of the following best reflects your ethnic group or background:

### Ethnicity (% of responses)

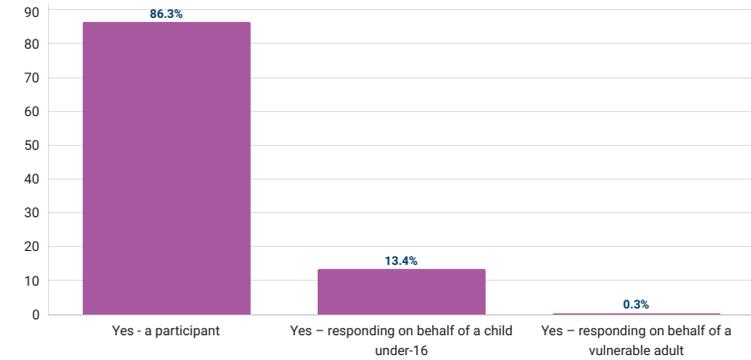


### Ethnicity (# of responses)

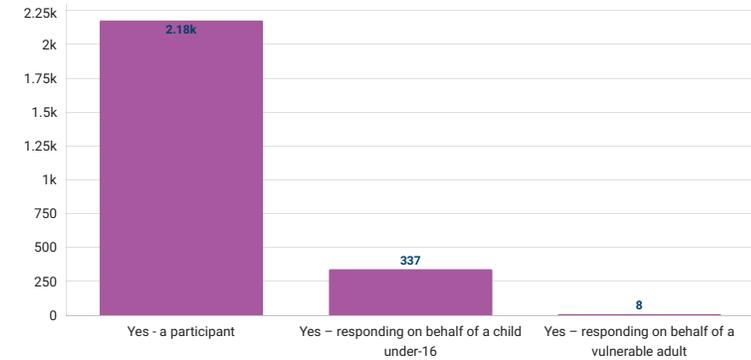


Before the Covid-19 pandemic, were you involved in taking part in a sport or physical activity as part of a formal or informal club or group?

### Responding on behalf of (% of responses)



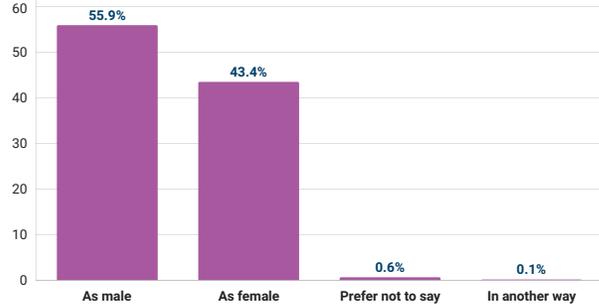
### Responding on behalf of (# of responses)



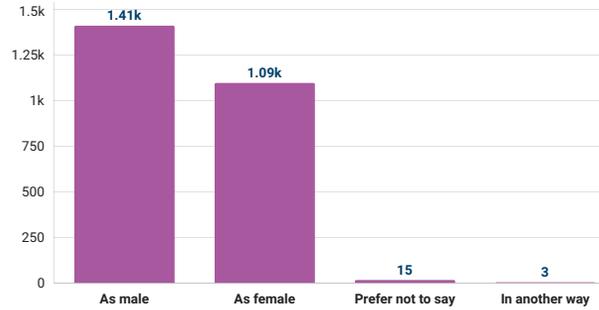
# Participants/Members Survey Responses

In relation to your gender, please tell us how you identify:

### Gender (% of responses)

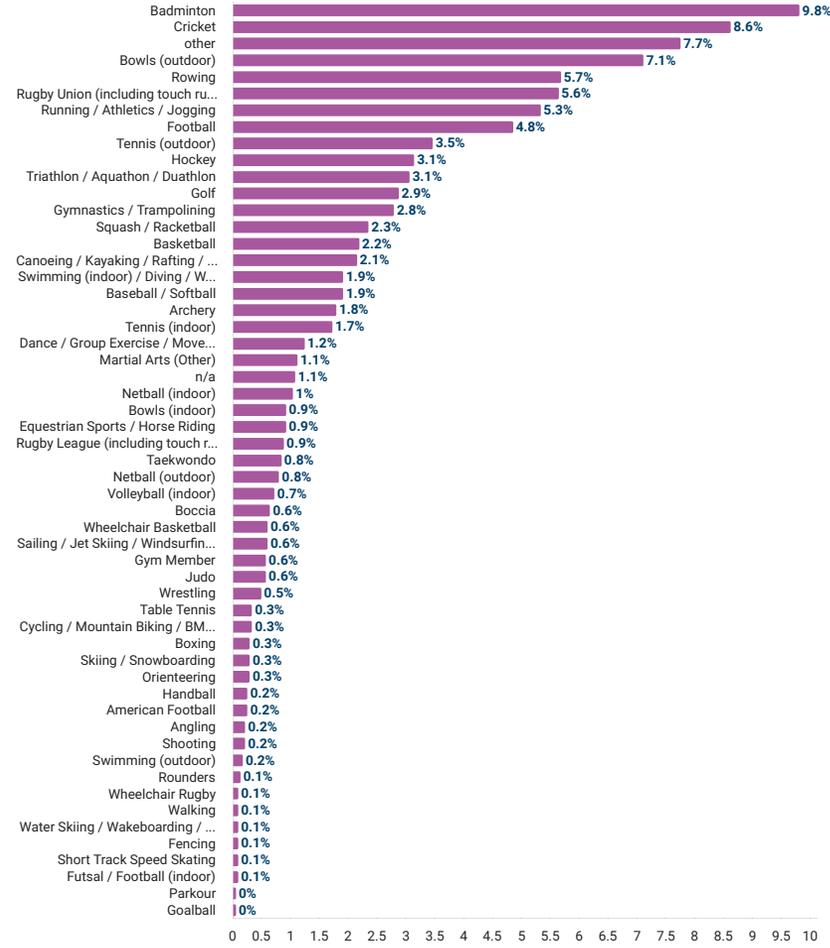


### Gender (# of responses)

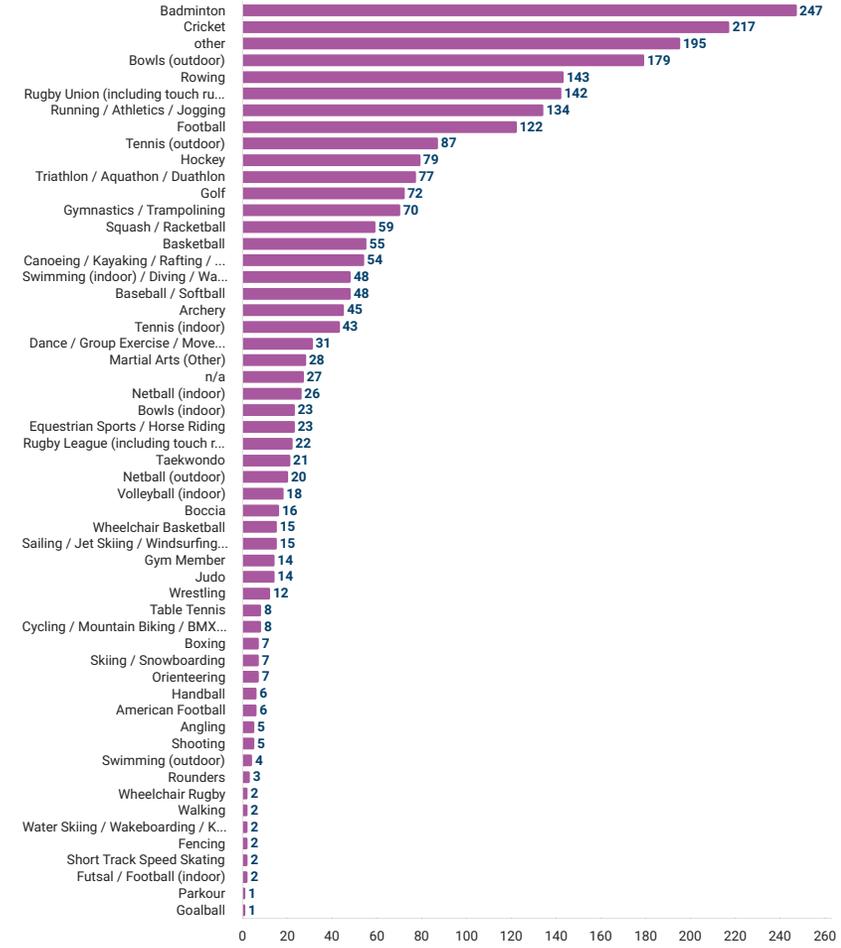


Which sport or physical activity are you most involved with at your club/group?

### Main Sport (% of responses)



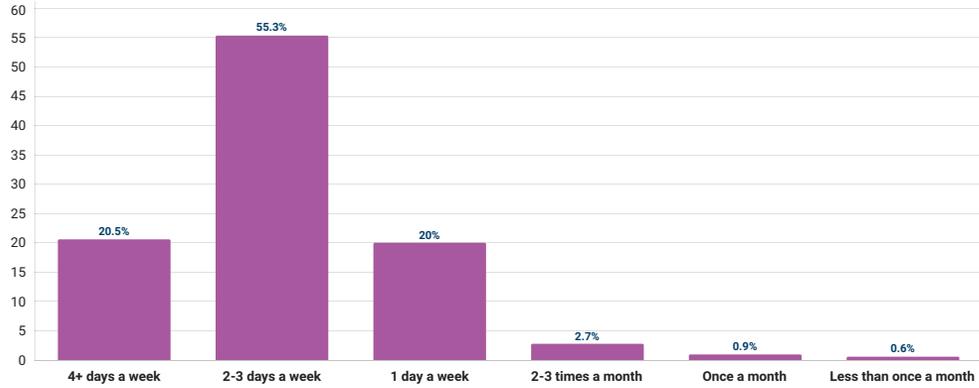
### Main Sport (# of responses)



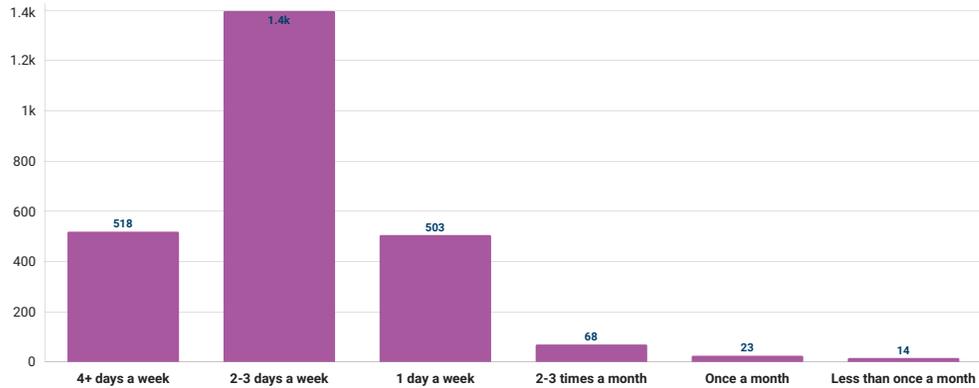
## Participants/Members Survey Responses

On average, how often did you participate with your club/group (before the Covid-19 pandemic)?

### Frequency of Participation (% of responses)

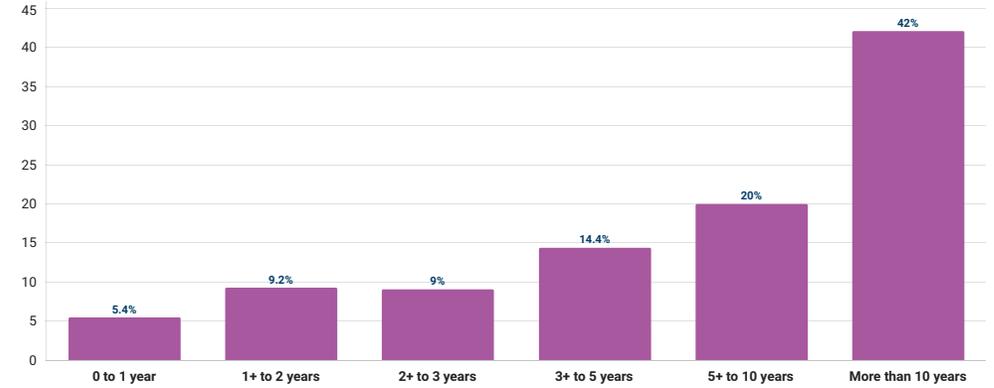


### Frequency of Participation (# of responses)

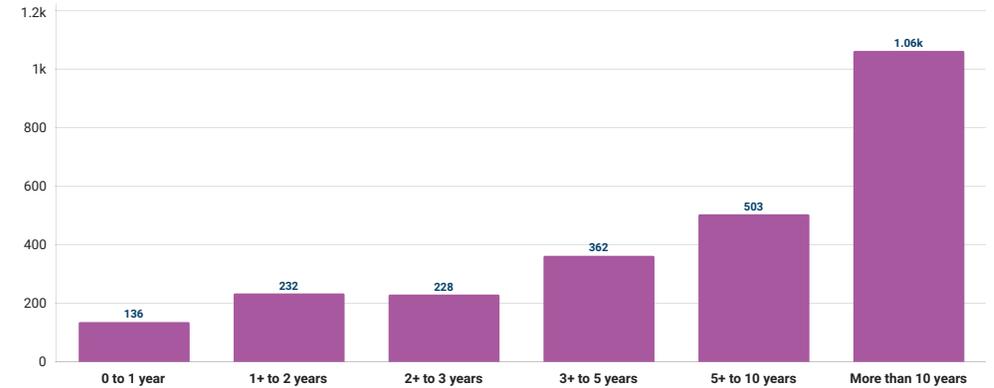


How long have you been participating in your main sport in a club or group environment?

### Duration of Involvement (% of responses)



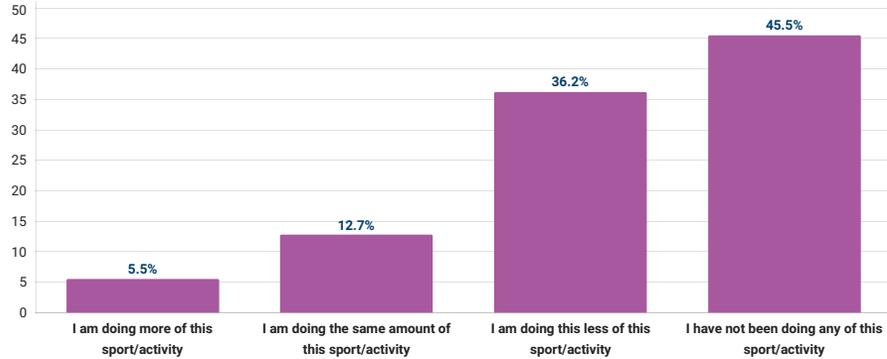
### Duration of Involvement (# of responses)



## Participants/Members Survey Responses

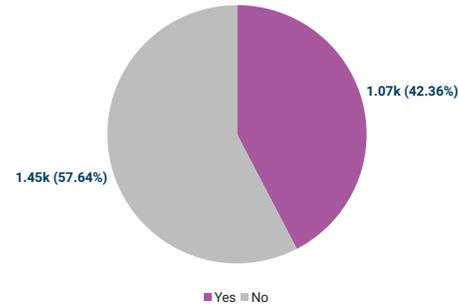
How has the Covid-19 pandemic changed your recent participation in this sport/activity?

Impact of lockdown on participation behaviour (% of responses)



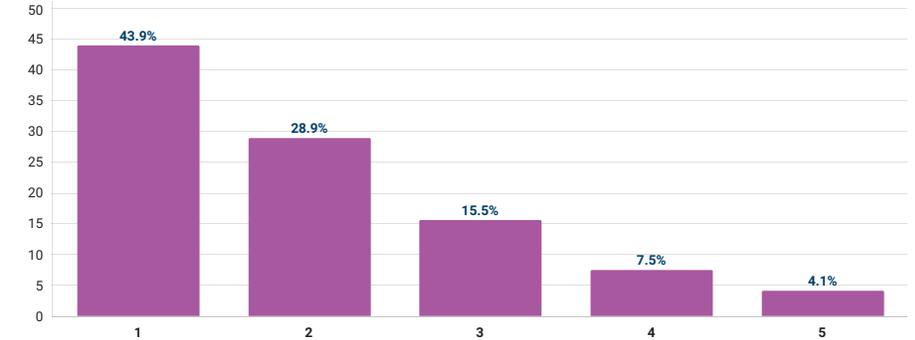
Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed how you feel, about taking part in your sport/activity in a club or group environment?

Have feelings changed (Y/N)



On a scale of 1-5, how anxious do/did you feel about returning to your club or group?

Anxiety about Returning [1=Not at All, 5=Extremely] (% of Responses)



Impact of lockdown on participation behaviour (# of responses)



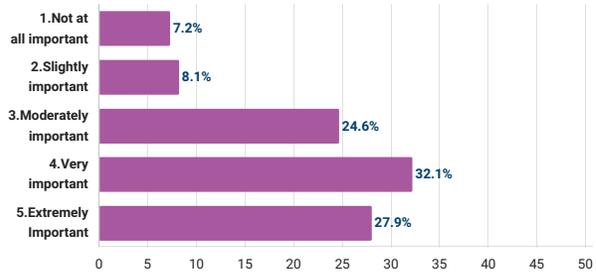
Anxiety about Returning [1=Not at All, 5=Extremely] (# of Responses)



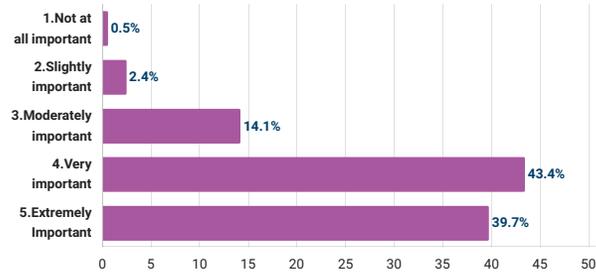
# Participants/Members Survey Responses

How important are each of the following to your club/group experience:

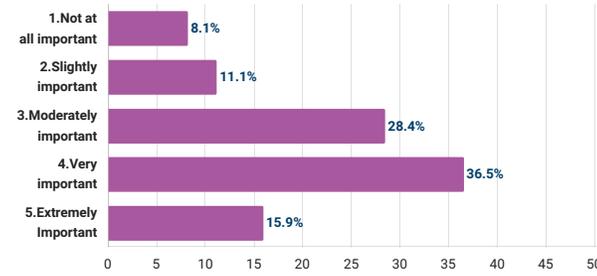
### Importance of Competition (%)



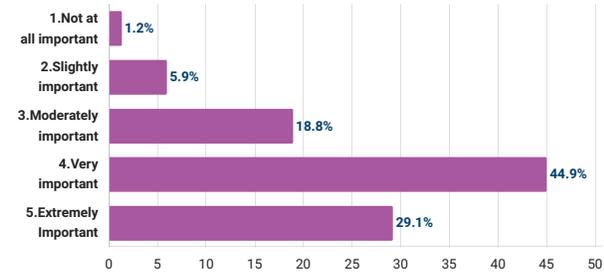
### Importance of Improving Skills/Fitness (%)



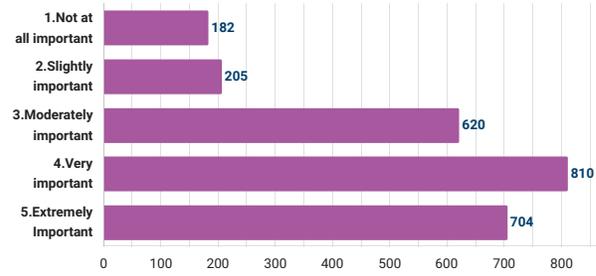
### Importance of Informal Play (%)



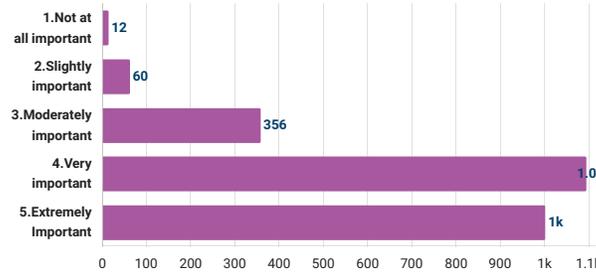
### Importance of Socialising (%)



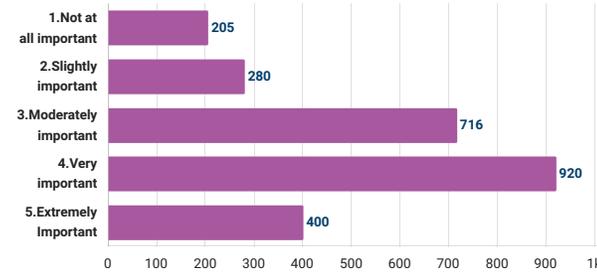
### Importance of Competition (#)



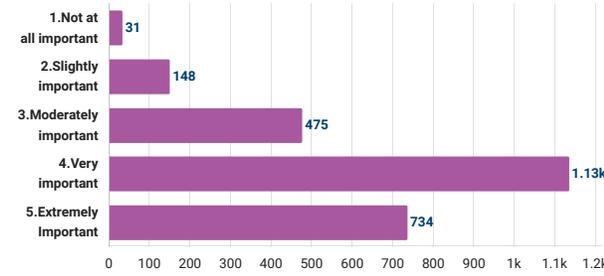
### Importance of Improving Skills/Fitness (#)



### Importance of Informal Play (#)



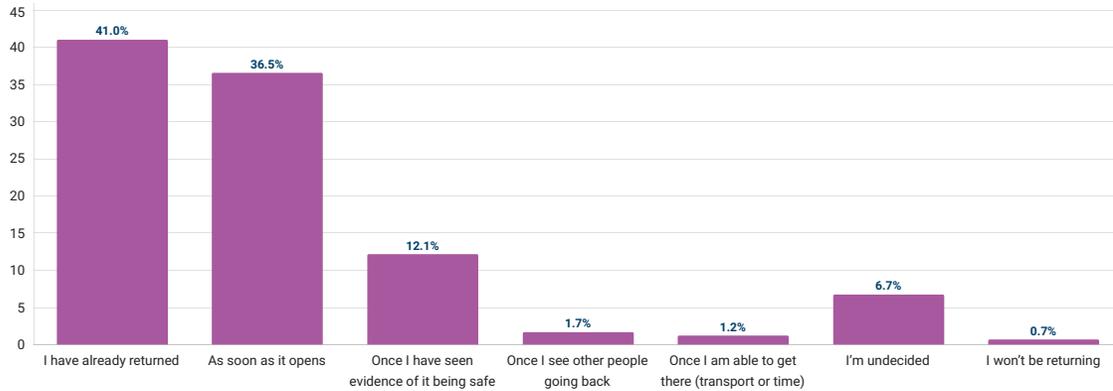
### Importance of Socialising (#)



## Participants/Members Survey Responses

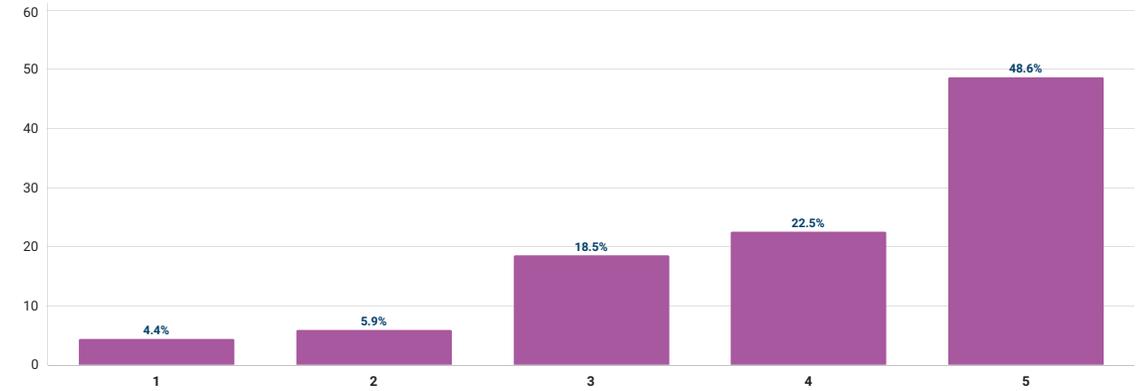
When do you think you will return to your club or group once Covid-19 restrictions are eased?

Speed of Return (% of responses)

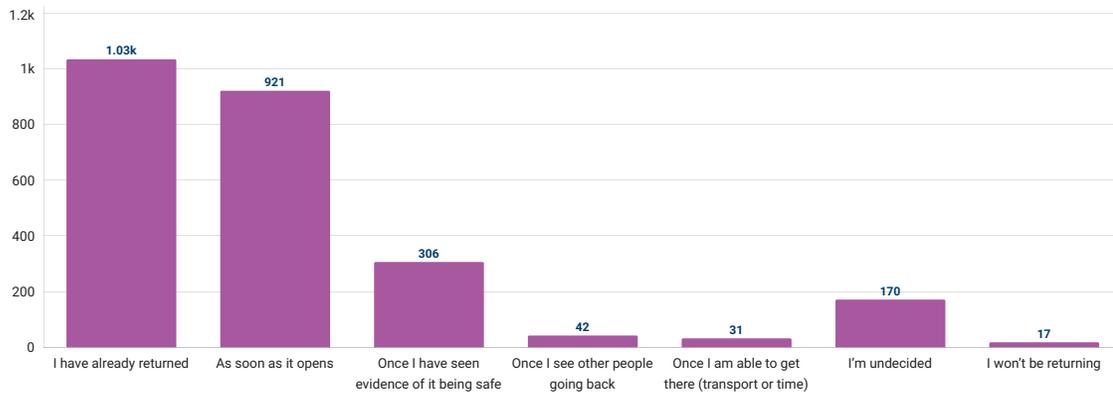


On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with how your club or group kept you engaged during lockdown?

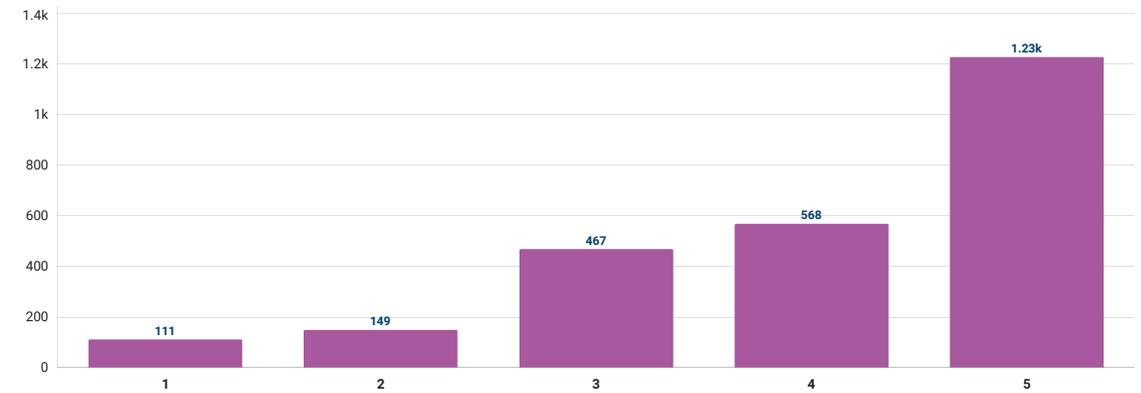
Satisfaction with club/group comms [1=Not at All, 5=Extremely] (% of responses)



Speed of Return (# of responses)



Satisfaction with club/group comms [1=Not at All, 5=Extremely] (# of responses)



**APPENDIX 2**  
**COPY OF SURVEY QUESTIONS ASKED**  
**(PARTICIPANTS/MEMBERS)**



Q #	Question – Participants/Members	Answer Format/Options
1.	Before the Covid-19 pandemic, were you involved in taking part in a sport or physical activity as part of a formal or informal club or group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes - a participant.</li> <li>• Yes – responding on behalf of my child under the age of 16.</li> <li>• Yes – responding on behalf of a vulnerable adult.</li> <li>• No.</li> </ul>
2.	Which sport or physical activity are you most involved with at your club/group?	Dropdown list of Sport England funded sports + gym membership – respondents choose one or answer 'Other' (please specify).
3.	Tell us what you love most about taking part in this sport/activity.	Text Response.
4.	How important are each of the following to your club/group experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socialising.</li> <li>• Informal play.</li> <li>• Improving your skills / fitness.</li> <li>• Competing.</li> </ul>	Respondents choose from a 5-pt scale for each aspect: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not at all important.</li> <li>2. Slightly Important.</li> <li>3. Moderately Important.</li> <li>4. Very Important.</li> <li>5. Extremely Important.</li> </ol>
5.	On average how often did you participate with your club/group (before the Covid-19 crisis)?	Respondents tick one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4+days a week.</li> <li>• 2-3 days a week.</li> <li>• 1 day a week.</li> <li>• 2-3 times a month.</li> <li>• Once a month.</li> <li>• Less than once a month.</li> </ul>
6.	How long have you been participating in your main sport in a club or group environment?	Respondents tick one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 0 -1 year.</li> <li>• 1+ – 2 years.</li> <li>• 2+ - 3 years.</li> <li>• 3+ – 5 years.</li> <li>• 5+ – 10 years.</li> <li>• More than 10 years.</li> </ul>

Q #	Question – Participants/Members	Answer Format/Options
7.	How has the Covid-19 pandemic changed your participation habits in sport/activity?	Respondents tick one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am doing more of this sport/activity.</li> <li>• I am doing the same amount of the sport/activity.</li> <li>• I am doing less of this sport/activity.</li> <li>• I have not been doing any of the sport/activity.</li> </ul>
8.	Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed how you fell, either positively or negatively, about taking part in your sport/activity in a club or group environment?	Yes/No.
9.	Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed how you fell, either positively or negatively, about taking part in your sport/activity in a club or group environment?	Text Response.
10.	On a scale of 1 – 5, how anxious do/did you feel about returning to your club or group?	5pt sliding scale; 1 = Not At All Anxious - 5 = Extremely Anxious.
11.	When do you think you will return to your club or group once Covid-19 restrictions are eased?	Respondents tick one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have already returned.</li> <li>• As soon as it opens.</li> <li>• Once I have seen evidence of it being safe.</li> <li>• Once I see other people going back.</li> <li>• Once I am able to get there.</li> <li>• I'm undecided.</li> <li>• I won't be returning.</li> </ul>
12.	What were/are you most looking forward to when your club or group restarts or reopens?	Text Response.
13.	Tell us about any concerns or challenges that have/might affect your return to sport/activity at your club or group?	Text Response.
14.	As Covid-19 pandemic restrictions evolve over the next few weeks and months, what changes could your club/group make to encourage you to continue participating?	Text Response.
15.	On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with how your club or group kept you engaged during lockdown?	5-pt sliding scale; 1 = very dissatisfied – 5 = very satisfied.

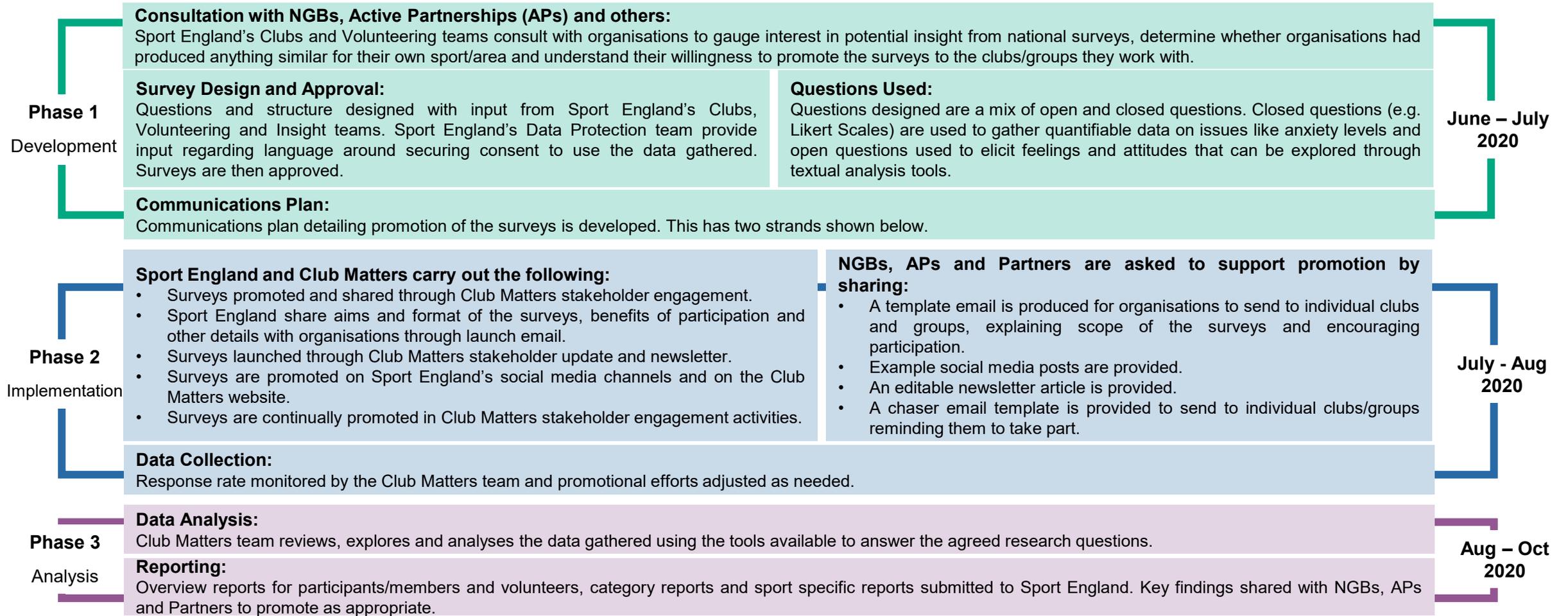
Q #	Question – Participants/Members	Answer Format/Options
16.	What's one thing your club or group could do to improve how they communicate with you?	Text Response.
17.	Please tell us which age category you are in:	Respondents tick one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under 16.</li> <li>• 16-24 years.</li> <li>• 25-34 years.</li> <li>• 35-44 years.</li> <li>• 45-54 years.</li> <li>• 55-64 years.</li> <li>• 65-74 years.</li> <li>• 75-84 years.</li> <li>• 85+ years.</li> <li>• Prefer not to say.</li> </ul>
18.	In relation to your gender, please tell us how you identify:	Respondents tick one of the following: As female / As male / In another way / Prefer not to say.
19.	Do you have a disability or long-term health condition?	Yes / No / Prefer Not To Say.
19a.	Please tell us what type of disability or condition you have?	Respondents tick all that apply: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical health condition or illness.</li> <li>• Mental health condition or illness.</li> <li>• Other.</li> <li>• Prefer not to say.</li> </ul>
20.	Which of these best reflects your ethnic group or background?	Respondents tick one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asian or Asian British (excluding Chinese).</li> <li>• Black or Black British.</li> <li>• Chinese.</li> <li>• White British.</li> <li>• White Other.</li> <li>• Other Ethnic Group.</li> <li>• Prefer not to say.</li> </ul>

Q #	Question – Participants/Members	Answer Format/Options
21.	What is your home postcode?	Text Response.
22.	What is the name of your club or group?	Text Response.

## APPENDIX 3 OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY & TIMELINE



# Club Matters Return to Sport/Activity Surveys – Methodology and Timeline



## APPENDIX 4

### BREAKDOWN OF SPORTS/ACTIVITIES BY CATEGORY



# Breakdown of Sports/Activities by Category

## Individual Indoor Sports/Activities

- Badminton.
- Boccia.
- Bowls (indoor).
- Gymnastics / Trampoline.
- Short Track Speed Skating.
- Squash / Racketball.
- Swimming (indoor) / Diving / Water Polo / Synchronised Swimming.
- Table Tennis.
- Tennis (indoor).
- Weightlifting / Powerlifting.

## Team Indoor Sports/Activities

- Basketball.
- Futsal / Football (indoor).
- Goalball.
- Handball.
- Netball (indoor).
- Volleyball (indoor).
- Wheelchair Basketball.
- Wheelchair Rugby.

## Martial Arts, Combat and Target Sports/Activities

- Archery.
- Boxing.
- Fencing.
- Judo.
- Shooting.
- Taekwondo.
- Wrestling.
- Karate and Martial Arts (other)

## Water Sports

- Angling.
- Canoeing / Kayaking / Rafting / Stand Up Paddle Boarding.
- Rowing.
- Sailing / Jet Skiing / Windsurfing / Yachting / Motor Cruising / Powerboating.
- Swimming (outdoors).
- Water Skiing / Wakeboarding / Kneeboarding.

## Individual Outdoor Sports/Activities

- Cycling / Mountain Biking / BMX / Cyclo-cross / Bicycle Polo.
- Equestrian Sports / Horse Riding.
- Golf.
- Modern Pentathlon.
- Running / Athletics / Jogging and Triathlon / Aquathon / Duathlon.

## Outdoor Pitch/Court Sports/Activities

- American Football.
- Baseball / Softball.
- Bowls (outdoor).
- Cricket.
- Football.
- Hockey.
- Lacrosse.
- Netball (outdoors).
- Rounders.
- Rugby League (including touch rugby).
- Rugby Union (including touch rugby).
- Tennis (outdoor).
- Volleyball (beach).

## Adventure Sports/Activities

- Parkour.
- Skateboarding.
- Skiing/Snowboarding.
- Mountaineering/Climbing.
- Orienteering.

## Other

- Exercise/Movement/Dance.
- Walking.