



# Tackling inactivity in colleges

June 2021

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
Tackling inactivity in colleges (TIC)	3
Engaged Student Profile	4
<b>More students more active and more positive about physical activity</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Engaging inactive and less active students</b>	<b>5</b>
Barriers, motivations and relationships	6
Student voice and ownership	6
Overcoming barriers to participation	7
Female students	7
Students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds / ESOL learners	9
Disabled students	10
Students from low socioeconomic groups (LSEG)	11
Technology playing a role	12
Other ways that projects have offered the right activities to engage less active students	12
<b>Offering positive experiences, contributing to college outcomes</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Coronavirus innovation and learning</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Enhancing mental wellbeing</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Sustained impact</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>25</b>

# Introduction

## Tackling inactivity in colleges (TIC)

The Tackling Inactivity in Colleges (TIC) programme aimed to reduce the number of students in Further Education (FE) who are inactive by improving inactive students' attitudes towards physical activity.

TIC investment is helping to change FE students' attitudes by offering opportunities which focus on socialising, fun or de-stressing rather than ability, winning or competition.

Throughout the four-year programme Sport England has provided £9.5 million to 49 colleges. Between them the 49 funded projects aimed to engage 45,340 inactive students over the four years of the programme<sup>1</sup>. So far, data up to early April 2021 shows a total of 37,788 inactive students have been engaged in the programme and completed the baseline survey. This represents 83% of the target. Until the coronavirus pandemic, colleges had met and exceeded their annual targets.

The projects were designed to contribute to four of the five Government Outcomes set out in Sport England's 2016–2021 strategy 'Towards an Active Nation': physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, and social and community development. The link between sport and physical activity and college outcomes is also important.

Previous TIC reports have described the impact of this programme around changing attitudes to physical activity and the resulting positive impact on behaviour. These positive impacts have continued throughout Year three and Year four of the programme, despite the disruption caused by coronavirus. During Year three and Year four of delivery the focus for colleges was on getting students active rather than completing data collection for the evaluation. Undoubtedly, the disruption caused by Coronavirus and a change to remote learning would have impacted on colleges' ability to communicate with students and collect data.

The report presents the quantitative data collected from participating students, data from line managers of those who were running the projects in colleges, and feedback from projects. The quantitative data is collected at two time points from each student: when they first engage with the TIC programme (baseline) and then again approximately three months later (follow-up). We explore the impact the projects are having.

The discussion areas covered in this report include:

- More students more active and more positive about physical activity
- Coronavirus innovation and learning
- Enhancing mental wellbeing
- Sustaining impact

<sup>1</sup> At the end of investment, the total number of colleges involved in the programme had reduced to 45. This was due to some colleges merging and others not having the capacity to support the programme.





## Engaged Student Profile

At the time of this report, good progress has been made over the four years. There have been over 60,323 students engaged in the TIC programme. Of these, nearly four out of five (79%) were inactive (completing either no or 1 day a week of 30 minutes of physical activity). TIC projects are successfully identifying and engaging their inactive students. Colleges have also successfully engaged other groups that traditionally are less likely to be physical active:

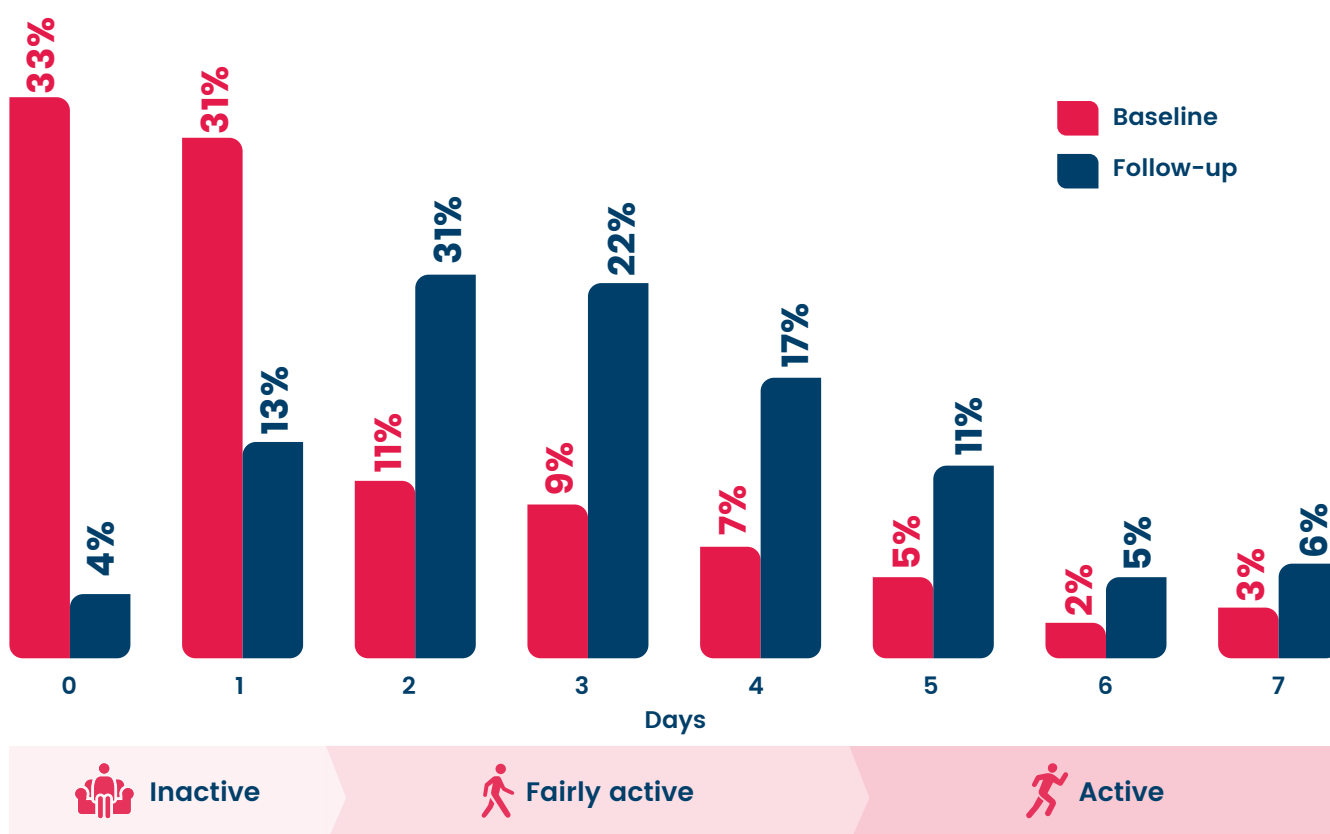
- 52% of engaged students identified as female (compared with 47% who identified as male)
- Three out of ten engaged students came from culturally diverse communities (29%)
- Half of the engaged students (49%) came from the 30% most deprived areas in England.
- One in five engaged students, for whom we have the data, identified as having a disability or long-term health condition.

Survey completion rates were lower for Year three and Year four (due to colleges focusing more on delivery rather than data collection). However, 41% of students engaged in the programme completed both the baseline and follow-up surveys compared with 48% in Years one and two. Colleges had previously had most success with completing surveys face to face in groups, rather than sending by email. The data used in the rest of the report is based on the students' matched data (N=24,976) from across all four years of the programme. Where analysis has been completed for a specific sub-sample this is stated on the graph. This allows accurate monitoring of changes in behaviour and attitude.

# More students more active and more positive about physical activity

The TIC programme has increased students' activity levels and, importantly, fostered positive feelings about sport and physical activity.

Engaging inactive and less active students



Student survey data shows that 3 months after engaging in the TIC programme students had increased the amount of physical activity that they did each week.

Inactivity levels reduced by 47% while those classified as fairly active and active increased by 35% and 12% respectively.

## Barriers, motivations and relationships

Many young people have had negative experiences of sport and physical activity at school. Project leads taking time to build relationships with both students and tutors has paved the way for successful engagement. Working with tutors has enabled projects to target groups of students they know to be less active who are enrolled on particular courses. Linking physical activity to course work or areas of study means students can see how taking part will help them achieve their academic and career goals.

The Oaklands College project lead commented on the value of building relationships: *“Staff around the college know me and what I do, they are keen to invite me into their personal development review sessions, which is a good way to meet students and start building relationships with them, making them feel comfortable taking part in the fun activities that I have on offer.”*

TIC projects have specifically designed some activities in response to lower rates of activity among females, disabled students and students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

## Student voice and ownership

Listening and empowering students has been key to ensuring that activities address the different barriers and motivations for avoiding or becoming active. Projects have learned that:

- Surveys and polls via social media provide useful information but an individual approach – talking – connects with uninterested students in a way that surveys don't
- Students are more likely to engage if they are involved in choosing and planning activities, for example by having an initial discussion or workshop, debating the benefits, then inviting, listening and responding to ongoing feedback with adjustments once delivery is underway
- Ownership is enhanced and engagement improves when students also have leadership roles: student ambassadors or activators for target audiences, and peer group activity leaders.
- The Halesowen College project described how they identified a role model/leader within the inactive group who was open to physical activity, quickly trained them to be the direct link from the project lead to the group of students: “Having a student leading the sessions ensured that the session was more about a group of friends participating in something together rather than participating in physical activity. An example of this was our e-gaming club where we offered them a table tennis table so they could play together when they weren't e-gaming. This was a great way to introduce physical activity into the group, but also meet the students' needs.”

## Overcoming barriers to participation

Using the insight they gained, the TIC projects found a variety of ways to help students overcome common barriers to being active and tap into motivations.

The Tyne Coast College project found their offer was more successful when underpinned by sound knowledge of behaviour change towards healthier lifestyles. Linking to national campaigns can help to motivate students.

Simple marketing, emphasising the social aspects, having fun and destressing, and with imagery reflecting the student population works best.

Leadership style has been important, as explained by the Sir Francis Xavier Sixth Form College project: *“less authoritarian/coach-like, presenting as an equal, finding common ground, building better relationships and deeper understanding.”*

Reframing, widening the scope of physical activity and introducing novel activities that students have not experienced before avoids preconceptions and means students start from the same point. This has appealed to a range of previously disinterested students, as have a number of the features described below specifically with less active audiences.

## Female students

We know that female students are more likely to have low levels of physical activity than their male counterparts. Our research shows that many girls and young women are put off taking part in physical activity due to a fear of judgement – this might be about the way they look when they exercise, that they're not good enough to join in or they should be spending more time on their studies or other priorities. Projects have responded to previous poor experiences and fear of judgement with:

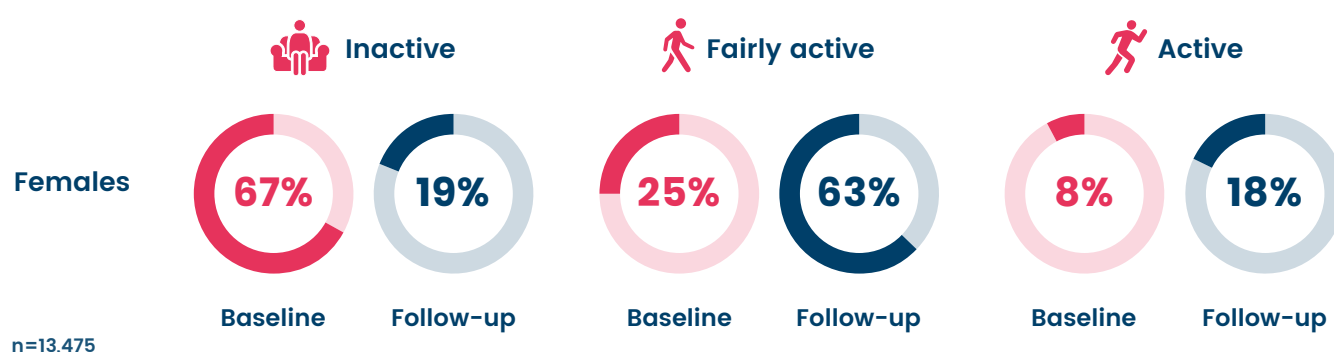
- New activities that are different to the usual offer or those offered at school
- Female only sessions, some with an exit route to mixed activities
- Emphasis on fun rather than competition (attractive to many groups)
- Reaching out to groups rather than individuals as female students are more likely to enjoy attending with friends, a more social dynamic, shared experience, opportunity to chat
- Locating activities in spaces that are not overlooked, or sessions under UV light (glow sports)
- Bespoke wellness gym without mirrors or unachievable images
- Online activities responding to coronavirus also removed the fear of judgement
- Female and not typically 'sporty' coaches who the students can relate to, especially if they can explain the journey from inactive to active from personal experience
- Uplifting music, reducing anxiety



Hereford Sixth Form College was among the projects that offered glow sports (under UV light) and discover their particular appeal to female students: *“The simple principle where they can’t be seen and therefore “judged” seemed to have a profound effect upon the amount of students getting involved and the extent that they got involved.”* In addition: *“sometimes removing the traditional parameters of an activity helped to open the door to them. For example, often we just set up some equipment, identified what they could use, turned the lights off and popped some music on. Many of the students would start creating their own mini games and scoring systems without our input. It was amazing to see how creative they could be and how much fun they were having, which in many cases certainly wouldn’t have been case in daylight.”*

The success of a new netball academy at one college reinforces the importance of understanding the audience and avoiding a blanket approach. Sometimes female students have not been active because a traditional activity that they enjoyed at school has been unavailable.

The impact of these initiatives is shown in the student survey data. At baseline two-thirds of female students (67%) were inactive (doing at least 30 minutes of physical activity on no days or 1 day a week), a quarter (25%) were fairly active and just 8% were active. By the follow-up survey inactivity had decreased to 19%, and those classified as fairly active or active had increased to 63% and 18% respectively.





## Students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds / ESOL learners

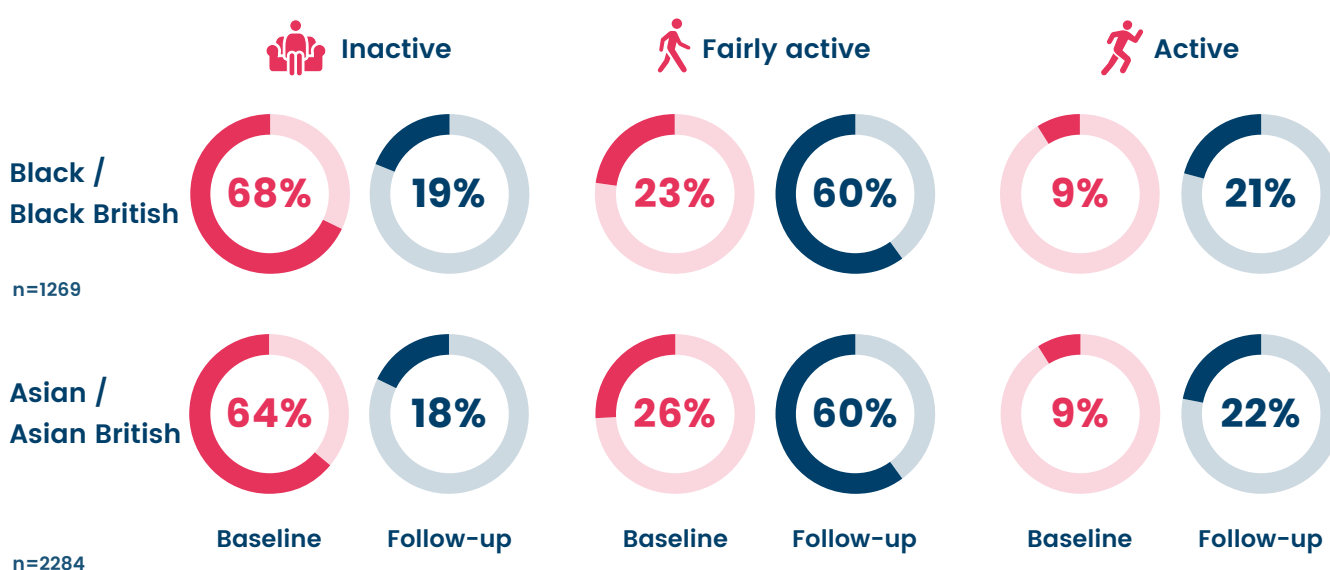
It is important to recognise that this is not a single homogeneous group, and has a diverse range of experiences, barriers and motivations, however there are typically lower rates of activity among students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and students on English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) courses. The TIC projects have successfully engaged students from these backgrounds with:

- Activities that are not available to them outside college due to cost and/or language barriers
- A range of activities timed flexibly so they can fit around commitments outside college such as Friday prayers
- Flexibility during Ramadan: evening sessions when students have been able to eat and it is cooler and, but accepting attendance will be lower
- Female only sessions that overcome some cultural barriers
- Opportunities to 'Just Play' sports such as football, cricket, table tennis
- Offering students on ESOL courses (English as a Second or Other Language):

- a safe environment to develop their English skills and confidence
- familiar activities such as volleyball and handball
- dance/physical activity from different countries
- encouragement to keep diaries of likes and dislikes and develop their spoken and written English skills while learning the rules of games, communicating, and scoring

At Suffolk New College self-defence classes were popular and helped to break down language barriers faced by some groups. Students were then more receptive to activities like dodgeball and basketball. The sessions were linked to learning outcomes such as education on knife crime, county lines and bullying.

Approximately, two thirds of students who identified as Black / Black British (68%) and Asian / Asian British (64%) were inactive at the start of the programme. By follow-up one in five Black / Black British (19%) and Asian / Asian British (18%) students were inactive.

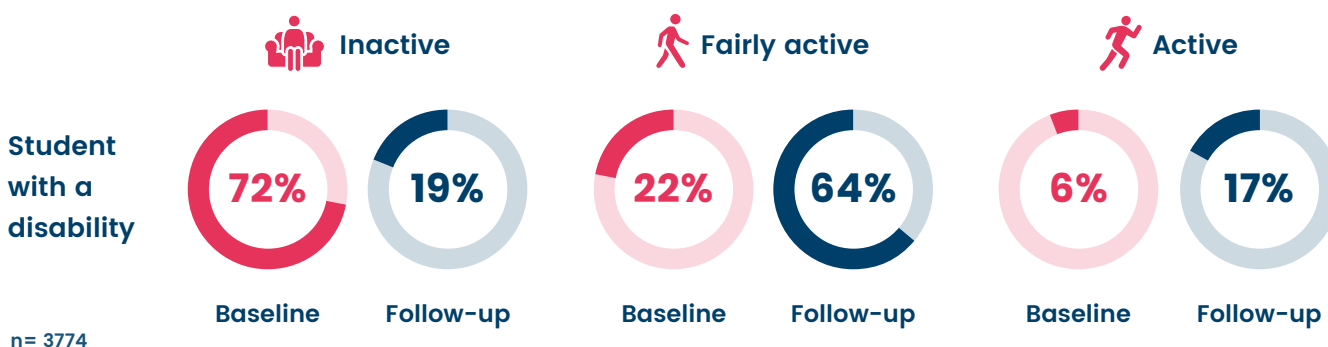


## Disabled students

Seven out of ten (72%) disabled students were inactive at the start of the programme, and this decreased to two out of ten students (19%) after engagement with the programme for 3 months.

Projects have tailored their programmes to successfully engage disabled students in sport and physical activity with:

- Sessions timed to suit strict food timetables
- Inclusive equipment
- Inclusive activities such as boccia, kin-ball and rounders
- Avoiding students having to meet the cost of more expensive provision
- Opportunities to access a closed gym session
- Students setting and recording targets
- Competitive opportunities and team elements, engendering pride and confidence



“ Competition and team elements have made them (the disabled students playing football and boccia) feel they play an important part and belong to a student group that represents their peers and the college, giving them confidence to attend clubs outside of college.”

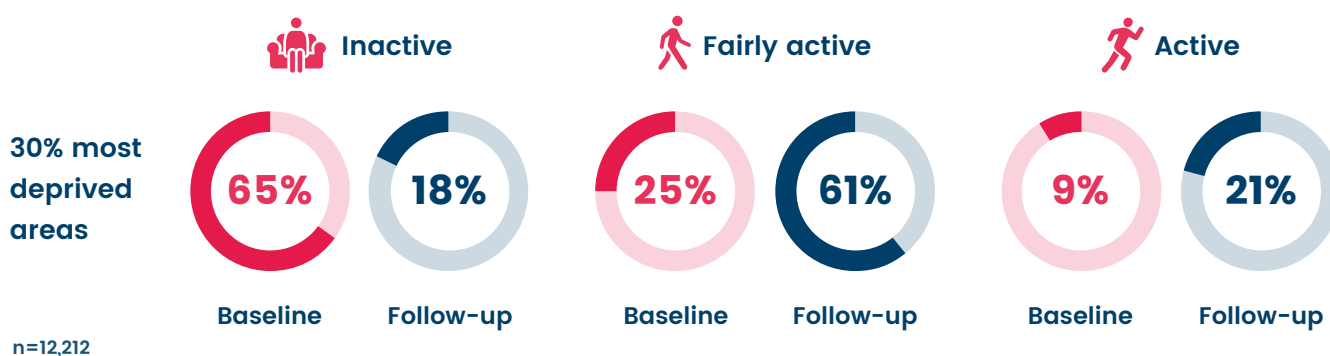
East Durham College.

## Students from low socioeconomic groups (LSEG)

TIC projects have increased activity among students from low socioeconomic groups (LSEG) by aiming to address some common barriers in the following ways:

- Free or subsidised gym access and activities
- Providing free or subsidised access to necessary equipment
- Not requiring specific clothing to take part
- Providing snacks at after school sessions, fixtures and trips off-site so that students relying on free school meals have the energy to be active
- Encouraging retention with the reward of new experiences to look forward to, such as paddle boarding

Student survey data shows that two-thirds (65%) of students from the 30% most deprived areas in England were inactive before starting engagement in the projects. However, this had reduced to less than one in five (18%) after 3 months of TIC programme engagement.





In addition to enhancing their physical wellbeing, students taking part have met different people and travelled beyond their area, opportunities that many don't normally have outside college.

The Hereford Sixth Form College project found that boxing sessions were successful with students from LSEG: *"Short pad-based sessions released lots of frustration and stress they were experiencing, and tutors often reported much better behaviour in their lessons post-activity."* The project also educated the students on physical activity and signposted to opportunities to be active outside college.

## Technology playing a role

Technology has been used to good effect to engage less active students, with projects reporting success with common apps such as Strava and Teams as well as more novel ways to take part. Remote engagement is covered in more detail when we discuss innovation in response to the coronavirus pandemic, however technology has also helped to engage students in face to face sessions.



Students have felt special getting the chance to use technology never used before: *"Blazepods are reaction buttons that are linked to an app with hundreds of possibilities to keep things fresh and interesting. Setting the pods up for them to run and slap to turn them off in a mildly competitive environment has gone down a storm. With endless possibilities to kick, punch and slap it keeps large groups entertained, they don't even realise they are doing exercise. We can then begin to incorporate more complex movements or work them into sporting environments with the focus on the reaction of the light rather than the sport. This removes the focus upon what they are actually doing and becomes a distraction technique."* – Hereford Sixth Form College

## Other ways that projects have offered the right activities to engage less active students

At Oaklands College the project used information from referrals, for example offering students struggling to make friends small group sessions with others in a similar situation, bringing health and social benefits. Skill-based competitions such as pool, table tennis and bocchia, that are more about teamwork and communication, advertised as 'for all', attracting students at Wiltshire College who don't feel they are physically fit enough for sports sessions.

Offering students keen to enhance their CVs the opportunity to gain sport-related qualifications, while at the same time supporting other students to be active.

Many students are motivated to fundraise for charity and view that as the main point of challenges and events such as Race for Life.

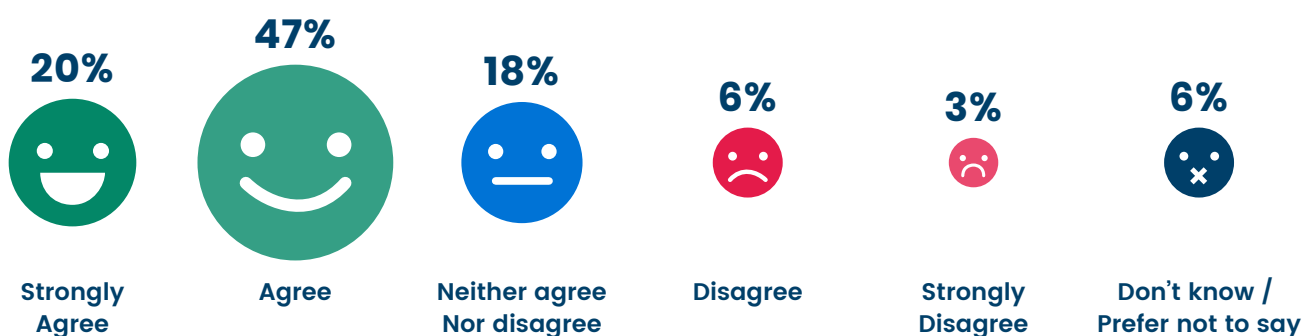


## Offering positive experiences, contributing to college outcomes

Students' reluctance to take part in physical activity often stems from negative experiences at school. The TIC projects have provided students with experiences they have enjoyed, developing their confidence to take part and encouraging many to attend college more regularly.

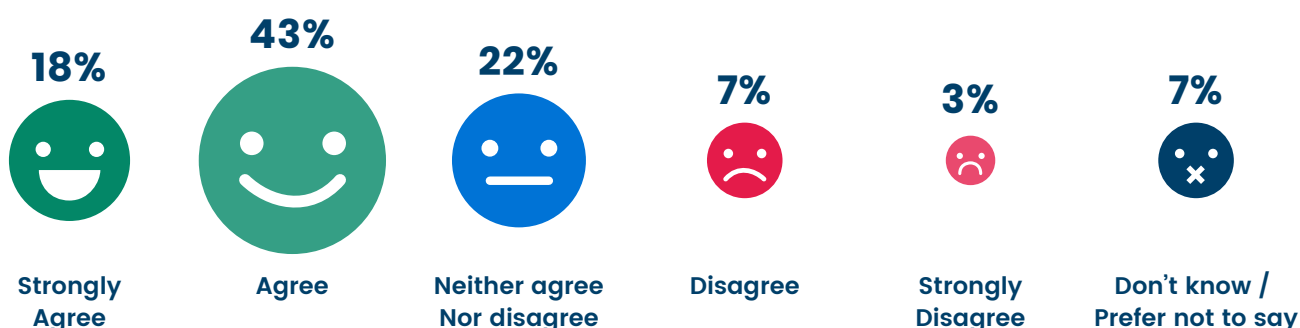


### I have enjoyed taking part in sport & exercise more since being at college



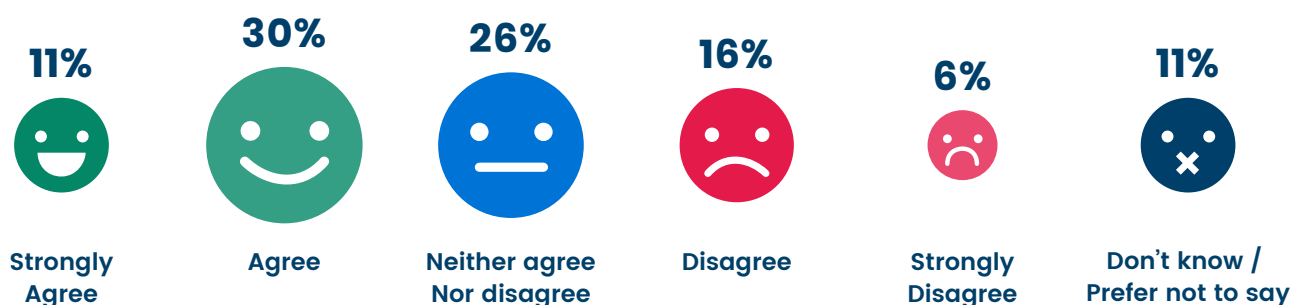
At the follow-up point, two-thirds (67%) of students agreed that they enjoyed taking part in sport and physical activity more since being at college.

### Since being at college I have felt more confident taking part in sport and exercising



Three out of five students (61%) reported feeling more confident in taking part in sport and physical activity since being at college.

## Being involved in sport & exercise at my college has meant I attend college more than I otherwise would



Being involved in sport and exercise at college meant that two out of five students (42%) reported that they attend more frequently than they otherwise would have done.

A flexible relaxed approach to activity design has enabled projects to meet students' needs and provide positive experiences. A 5-a-side football session turned into 'keepy-uppy' competitions which the students found more enjoyable at Kingston College. The Calderdale College project used different equipment for example different sized or shaped balls for a particular activity and changed the distances of things to promote success for the individual or to challenge them further. The Grantham College project offered this advice: *"Your first approach may not always work but don't lose heart, be prepared to be flexible with your approach and understand that what may work for one group, or one individual, will not work for another."*

As Newham Sixth Form College project observed, coaches need to be "passionate about engagement rather than winning". The Kingston College project highlighted the importance of clear rules and expectations for staff, students and external coaches so that students feel comfortable in sessions and understand what is expected, creating a safe space where everyone feels welcomed. "Examples would be no swearing at each other, no making fun of people who found the activity difficult, pairing up with anyone attending alone, everybody welcome, take it in turns if equipment not available etc. We found this to be highly successful in creating a fun environment, as staff were able to prevent any negative behaviour from students as well as keeping sessions fair, which definitely improved cohesion amongst everyone, with a community feel to sessions." Involving students in setting ground rules helps to build trusting relationships.

The Oaklands College project lead found that continuity in relationships was very important in retaining less active students. Having the same faces for delivery, can develop trust, help students feel comfortable and build confidence so that activity habits can change little by little without the students even realising, at first.

Some of the other ways in which the TIC programme has helped students to enjoy being active:

- Emphasis on fun and destressing
- Relaxed atmosphere, incorporating social breaks, allowing students to join in or sit out when they want to
- Friendly but optional competition, the focus not always on winning
- Playing students' choice of music helps students make the session their own, rotation ensures no one feels overlooked
- Freedom to just play with friends or to take up a coaching offer to develop skills
- Building confidence with smaller groups and shorter (30 minute) sessions, which feel like less of a commitment, then slowly building intensity/duration
- Making students feel listened to by increasing the range of fun and engaging options through links with local providers
- Offering novel activities that students haven't done before can 'level the playing field' as all can learn together and avoids negative associations from previous experiences

Projects explained that new activities that students haven't tried before give everyone the chance to learn skills together without feeling as though they are the least able. It also means that most do not have any negative associations with the activity so reinforces the positive environment.

The Calderdale College project recommended: *"Be understanding, approachable and show empathy, particularly with students taking part in their first ever activity, praise, and support everyone to give them confidence and encourage to try new things but only when they feel comfortable with what they are doing. I think variety is the spice of life, the more opportunities, the more chance you have of finding something that the individual likes or can do successfully."*

The project also "hid" the active element in some sessions, for example a scavenger hunt got students moving as part of a teambuilding exercise but wasn't thought of as 'sport'.



# Coronavirus innovation and learning

**The coronavirus pandemic restrictions that began in March 2020 brought national and local shutdowns of educational venues for the majority of students, and periods when attendance and activities were limited to minimise the risk of virus transmission between students.**

As projects were unable to operate as they had done in previous years, with in-person delivery impossible or greatly restricted, they moved to remote engagement and found new ways to keep students active during the challenging year, which affected the final two academic years of the programme.

TIC projects rapidly developed their online communications with students and programme delivery typically moved to platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom. In many cases the overall success of these new engagement methods has meant colleges intend to continue with a combination of online and in person delivery when all restrictions have been lifted.

Students have been engaged online with combinations of:

- pre-recorded and live sessions, including home workouts, yoga, self-defence,
- setting challenges and goals
- quizzes and surveys
- social media and tracking apps such as Strava
- health and mental wellbeing tips
- prizes and incentives.

The RNN group project extended its reach using Google classroom to communicate with staff and students on a more regular basis. They post 2-3 times a day (during term time), engaging students with workouts, health tips and their most controversial and engaging post: *"Song of the Day, where we pick an up-beat song and encourage learners to get up and get moving for the duration of the song. We also get students to suggest songs and workouts and take part in surveys and challenges."*



In many instances online delivery has been found to improve take up among less active young people, playing an important role particularly for students with additional needs and disabilities. Projects explained:

- Less willing inactive students who would otherwise opt out have joined in with classmates
- Being able to take part at home with the camera off has removed the fear of being seen for many self-conscious and nervous students
- Live sessions have helped students structure their days and provided a break from assignments
- Having video resources is particularly helpful for students with special needs: they often find it difficult to cope with change but sessions can go ahead at the scheduled times even when a live coach is unavailable
- Sessions on demand have enabled students to take part in activities they are interested in, combatting the restrictions and push back from students who have been unable to engage at set times
- 20 minute sessions are less intimidating and students can try out and mix and match different activities
- Offering sessions on demand together with the chance to chat and socialise before activity starts has helped build self-esteem and confidence.



The Suffolk New College project commented: *“Anxiety and confidence has taken a big hit since last March. Willingness to be active in front of others has seen a dip. Students feel more comfortable taking part in sessions and going out and enjoying being active even if it’s by joining remote challenges on their own to start with, such as distance goals, or just watching a session back and enjoying what they feel confident trying.”*

The Suffolk New College project reported: *“Feedback from staff and parents has been incredibly positive and we have seen a real impact on disabled students’ behaviour, concentration and memory skills. Moving sessions online since November kept a routine in their learning.”* The students were kept engaged with memory games, themed weeks and playlists for sessions, together with home-based challenges involving coordination and party and fairground games. When in-person delivery was permitted, with restrictions, team building and life skills games maintained continuity. Students also enjoyed tailored activities such as parachute sessions, themed charity events and curriculum appropriate sessions teaching them how to eat healthily, be active and have fun in the process. Students were excited to take part remotely and with anticipation and opportunities for face-to-face sessions. Hybrid sessions are planned at Oaklands College, with some students in a room with the coach and others logging in from home or elsewhere on campus. The project explained:

*“It gives students in special needs groups more flexibility to join if the sessions are scheduled on a day they are not due in college. Something like yoga can really support their physical development and physiotherapy exercises. It also means with the current restrictions on groups mixing we can open the sessions up to multiple*

*groups on campus with the coach in with one group and other groups projecting it onto their whiteboard. The coach has the flexibility to be live in the room with different groups on different weeks, so they all get some face-to-face time.”* The RNN group project engaged disabled students through its partnership with the charity Sense, which provides weekly Sense Active virtual sessions that they send on to tutors. Activities have included drumming, dance and boxercise.

Disabled students in the high-risk category have taken part in sessions adapted to a walk and talk, with litter picking, fulfilling part of their course at Halesowen College.

Apps such as Strava have been popular and expected to continue to be used as a communication tool to stimulate activity, motivating students with a variety of challenges and goals, and a way to track progress and achievements. Other examples of social media use included Instagram, a WhatsApp beginners running group and challenges on TikTok.

The Hereford Sixth Form College project posted home workouts, nutrition advice, mental health support and competitions on an Instagram page. They learned that, although all students are on the app and it’s a great way to reach them, “there is a cost-reward matrix in play” as they will follow/unfollow, and it is hard work keeping content appealing. They used the Association of Colleges Sport’s Mental Health & This Girl Can ambassadors to direct and create content that students are interested in.



Not all students targeted by the TIC projects have been reached with online delivery. In some cases students found it too easy to avoid sessions, while for others their home circumstances prevented them from taking part in activities due to lack of space indoors, sharing bedrooms, no suitable outside space, lack of equipment and the needs of other family members.

There has also been greater anxiety around coronavirus in black and minority ethnic communities together with higher levels of poor mental wellbeing and other stresses (such as finances). Sir Francis Xavier College introduced a weekly Active Lives Active Minds Newsletter, as a high proportion of students at the college are from low socioeconomic groups. The newsletter contains wellbeing information, challenges and advice around maintaining good mental and physical health. It is due to continue next year as a Sport and Wellbeing Monthly newsletter for all students and staff.

Sports packs developed at Oaklands College have proved a versatile engagement tool: *“The sports packs included cross curriculum resources linked to sport, such as maths (utilising game scores and rules), literacy (matching key terms to their definitions and wordsearches) and art/design (kit/facility design or colouring in). By building a picture around the sport it helped the students to understand the aim and rules whilst also being supported by tutors with the cross curricular work. The packs also had 3 x sports activities at the end for the students to challenge themselves to score the best they could – the aim is to revisit these sports and see if they can beat their previous score.”* The main benefit of the pack was versatility as they could be used in college or at home. The college continues to engage students who are having to self-isolate by linking their weekly delivery to the sports packs so students can be involved irrespective of location.

At Tameside College the move to online delivery led to greater efficiency with the introduction of QR codes for forms, induction videos, and instructions for use on gym equipment, leaving staff more time to plan and produce programmes to engage inactive students further. An online system to provide students and staff with plans based on their ability is being explored. The PT distinction and PT Hub (personal training apps) are being tested for potential use with pre and postnatal students, inactive students and those struggling to lose weight as they can provide steps towards becoming more active before mainstream college provision.



# Enhancing mental wellbeing

**Throughout the 4-year TIC programme projects have developed both proactive and reactive ways to enhance students' mental wellbeing through engagement in sport and physical activity, also benefitting a number of college staff.**

The arrival of the coronavirus pandemic increased the pressures experienced by students and led to greater numbers of mental health referrals from student safeguarding and counselling services and awareness of the heightened anxiety across the student population. Projects adapted their response making use of online platforms and social media as well as the face-to-face contact when that has been possible. Data from the student surveys shows an increase in student wellbeing scores after engaging in the programme for 12 weeks. This indicates the positive impact on mental wellbeing of being active and the support colleges put in place during the pandemic.

At Lancaster and Morecambe College the TIC project has aimed to proactively reduce the number of students coming forward each year with concerns over their mental wellbeing by strategically offering sport and physical activity sessions to course groups that have historically had higher than average numbers needing help. Reactively, they have offered carefully planned one-to-one or small group sessions for students who have mental health problems or choose to self-refer. The sessions have proved extremely popular, reducing levels of anxiety and self-consciousness whilst exercising. Pastoral Progress Mentors can also refer any student they feel would benefit from a short burst of physical activity, such as boxing, described as having “life changing results”... *“We believe it has been so successful because students can feel their emotions spiralling, and after a short burst of exercise (typically boxing) they instantly feel much more in control. It gives them first-hand experience of how powerful physical activity can be.”*







Adding physical activity to the range of Wellbeing Services offered to students at Hereford Sixth Form College helped to ease demand on counselling support. Most of the one-to-one referrals have chosen gym-based sessions in the college's Physical Wellbeing sanctuary. Students have a choice of male and female coaches with different approaches. The sessions start in an isolated setting, with good social interaction between coach and student, and progress gradually, increasing intensity each week. They build confidence, improve wellbeing with the post-exercise feel-good factor and help students to "leave their worries at the door".

The project learned that text reminders a few hours before sessions work well to increase attendance, and when the student is not in the right frame of mind to attend the session it can be rescheduled and progress is maintained.

One project (at Grantham College) highlighted the importance of ensuring student buy-in and understanding of the benefits of activities. For example with a physical introduction, as sometimes a referred student may initially agree to the physical activity offer but then not follow through.

At some colleges external partnerships have played a part in increasing students' awareness of the mental wellbeing benefits of physical activity. For example a joint campaign with Lancashire Mind at Lancaster and Morecambe College. The year-long campaign featured student-led fundraising events involving hundreds of students and raised awareness of the TIC project. Other projects linked with external partners to offer workshops, talks and resources.

Online sessions, resources and challenges have been tailored to support students' mental health, for example including mental health and wellbeing tips, as mentioned in the previous section, discussions and opportunities to ask questions, and walk and talk sessions.

### One student explained:

**"I feel like I have all my stresses and anxieties that build up like water behind a dam. After I exercise it feels like I have opened a tap to release most of the water pressure, and I feel much better".**

Hereford Sixth Form College Student

The value of SMART targets and having someone who listens and cares was highlighted by the Wiltshire College project's experience with one student. The target is reviewed weekly with a short catch-up. *"With negotiation he agreed to try and go for a walk after college. Once he did this we met again, and he had enjoyed his walk. We talked about places of interest in his area and what he could look out for along the way. We met regularly so he could tell me what he had seen. He now goes for 4/5 walks a week and is continuing to enjoy this."*

Strava running, walking and cycling clubs encouraged students to leave their homes and move at their own pace and time. At Trafford College the project set up a month-long walking and photo challenge, with incentives for the most steps and best photos. Students spoke of how the walks cleared their heads, and gave them a goal and focus. The East Durham College observed that there was most interaction with the challenges under the unique circumstances of the first lockdown, described as "a perfect storm". Weekly TikTok challenges helped to keep up students' morale at Bridgewater and Taunton College.

Weekly 60 second activity challenges for special needs students, from the Complete PE online resource, helped students experiencing loneliness to feel part of the Oaklands College community, and to build safe connections online. The project said: *"For the students working remotely this really helped them feel valued members of their tutor groups and encouraged lots of teamwork. Often groups logged onto Teams sessions so they could see each other taking part, count for each other and cheer each other on to get the most points for the table that week! The feeling of belonging and community was a real support to all that took part in the challenges and there was a sense of pride to represent their groups, lifting morale for the week."*

Some groups experienced technological barriers to live online engagement. The Oaklands College project addressed this by sending out videos to follow for activities such as boxing. This meant students could broadly keep to their normal timetable, seeing the activity deliverer on the usual days, but perhaps in the evening when the Wi-Fi was under less strain. It supported daily patterns and encouraged students to sleep at night and get up and study by day.



The value of yoga for mental wellbeing has been widely reported, and TIC projects have described its impact over the years. Oaklands College tutors fed back that students were much better focused and ready to learn after a live online session; also “It gave the students structure to their day and some time out from the stresses of daily life in lockdown to concentrate on themselves.” Similarly, another project (at Wigan and Leigh College) reported that after physical activity sessions students have been calmer in the classroom environment, which helps with concentration and processing information.

The Cardinal Newman College project reported that engaging in activities in a different environment has helped some students to build connections with others they might not have spoken to in class. The impact, with students “coming out of their shell”, has been noticeable in the classroom.

Activities away from the East Durham College site, that are free and different, have helped students classed as NEET (not in education employment or training) or vulnerable more of an opportunity to switch off from the stresses of studies and homelife.

Staff have also been helped to unwind, as part of a ‘healthy college’ approach, for example with weekly yoga sessions at Lancaster and Morecambe College. Apart from yoga, Bridgewater & Taunton commented that “sometimes online challenges had more take up from staff than students, but that’s ok because if staff have improved mental health this helps students too.” Online fitness sessions, with a 30-minute stretch and relax activity at the end, proved popular with staff and students at City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College. These continued post lockdown with an instructor delivering virtually on a big screen.





# Sustained Impact

## **Some of the projects identified specific activities that will continue at their colleges in their reports.**

The line managers of TIC project leads were asked to complete a short survey. Three out of four (73%) responded.

All but one of the 33 line managers who responded to the survey said their college would continue to provide a physical activity offer for inactive students/staff. Four out of five said that the project lead would remain or was likely to remain in post.

When asked about the types of activity to be offered after the TIC funding has ended, seven out of ten (23) respondents said their college would continue to offer students physical activities specifically to enhance their physical and mental wellbeing and to provide social benefits alongside delivery of traditional team sports. At one college, where the project lead was unlikely to remain in post, the respondent indicated no physical activity offer for inactive students/staff was expected, for financial reasons. The remainder expected their colleges to offer between one and three categories of activity, with one referring to online developments as a fourth strand.

Continuous evaluation of the physical activity offer, to ensure that activities remain relevant, was mentioned by the project at Bury College.

Staff buy-in at Stoke-on-Trent College has led them to take over ownership of successful online fitness classes. This will ensure they can continue and free up the TIC project lead to develop other new sessions.

The current offer at Halesowen College is focused on rebuilding confidence post-coronavirus, with a greater emphasis on communication rather than activity during sessions such as walks and talks, gym talks or sport specific sessions for example weightlifting. These activities are due to continue beyond the TIC funding period. They have allowed participants to talk openly and feel supported by those around them, leading to positive changes in their lives.

The TIC programme has also helped students to develop longer-term habits, for example by building up their confidence to take part in sport and physical activity outside college. The Oaklands College project explained how having external coaches deliver sessions allows relationships to be formed so that the students have the confidence and opportunity to continue with the sports in the wider community. *“A familiar face in a familiar environment often removes some of the worries of joining an external group.”*



# Conclusion

**Over the four years of Sport England funding the TIC programme has successfully increased activity levels among students at further education and sixth form colleges. They have worked hard to change inactive and less active students' attitude to sport and physical activity by offering positive enjoyable experiences.**

Engaging in TIC activities has improved students' physical and mental wellbeing, and enhanced their individual and social development. In doing so the projects have also contributed to college outcomes, encouraging more regular attendance and supporting educational attainment and retention.

Projects have developed their understanding and shared their learning from their experience of reaching out to students who would otherwise do little or no activity and have previously felt that sport and physical activity was not for them. Over the past year they have quickly adapted and found innovative ways to reach out to students during the coronavirus pandemic, playing an important role helping students to manage their mental health during the biggest crisis in a generation, and in turn continuing to support their studies.

The learning from TIC and the evidence of the impact on students will be used within colleges and locally to make the case for similar approaches to engaging more students in sport and physical activity. The Active Lives survey results are a cause for concern and show the importance of a continued focus on the 16–24 years age group. Sport England's new 10-year strategy, *Uniting the Movement*, presents an opportunity to stop and reflect, and consider how we can best support these young people to have maximum impact.





Sport England  
1st Floor  
21 Bloomsbury Street  
London WC1B 3HF

**[sportengland.org](https://sportengland.org)**

June 2021