

Review of reporting frequency for the Active Lives Adult Survey

November 2021

Background

High quality data, insight and learning that's used to drive action is one of the catalysts for change identified in our new strategy, [Uniting the Movement](#). The aim of the catalyst is to create a shared understanding of the opportunities and challenges we face in getting the nation moving.

To deliver on the ambitions of Uniting the Movement we all need access to a wider range of high-quality data and we need the capacity, skills and confidence to apply it in the form of insight and learning.

The Active Lives Surveys are (and will continue to be) foundational to our data, insight and learning work. However, as we begin to implement Uniting the Movement, there are aspects of the surveys we want to review and improve.

We currently report Active Lives Adult Survey results twice a year (mid-May to mid-May data in October, and mid-November to mid-November data in April) and Active Lives Child and Young People survey results once a year in December. Each release requires two to three months of dedicated focus from a significant team within our Insight directorate which limits their capacity to undertake other work.

The proposal

We'd like to hear the views of users of Active Lives Adult Survey statistics about a proposal to move from reporting Adult Survey results twice a year to once a year.

Why change?

By reducing the frequency of reporting Adult Survey results, we believe a better balance can be achieved. Less time spent on descriptive reporting of results and more time spent on deeper and wider analysis and interpretation that has a focus on future action against strategic priorities.

We'd like to work with stakeholders to establish the exact programme, but examples of sort of work we might undertake with the additional capacity, include:

- **The production of major new reports aligned to our strategic priorities and challenges:**
Last year, our research and analysis team played a key role in the production of the [Sport for All?](#) report, focusing on inequalities in engagement in sport and physical activity by race and ethnicity. Limited capacity has meant it has not been possible to do more of these wider, more strategic reviews.
- **New/updated market segmentation:**
Sport England has previously overseen major [market segmentation](#) projects (combining its participation data with other population and consumer data). Whilst now significantly out of date, this information has been valuable to, and well used by, a range of key partner organisations.
- **Fuller analysis of all the data captured by the Active Lives Adult Survey:**
This could include more detailed analysis of volunteering, club membership and settings data.
- **Forecasting of future trends/levels of engagement:**
More sophisticated models could be developed that will enable us to better anticipate trends and issues that might require a policy response in the future.
- **Improved and/or more timely local intelligence:**
Small area estimates.
- **Better support delivery against the big issues and catalysts:**
A key part of this will be more sophisticated analysis of the drivers of geographic and demographic inequalities in engagement.
- **More real-time data:**
During the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic we've run a [Covid-19 pandemic tracker](#). The responsiveness and flexibility of this data collection has been extremely valuable (alongside the more comprehensive, ongoing picture provided by Active Lives). This is something we'd like to develop and expand in the future.

We recognise that some users of Active Lives statistics may feel a 12-month gap between Adult Survey results is too long. We feel this can be justified because prior to the pandemic, we did not observe dramatic changes in national, regional or Active Partnership level Adult Survey results over a six-month period.

We expect this will once again be the case when we emerge from the current situation. We believe the other work that would be possible (see above) would be of greater value to stakeholders.

During initial, informal discussions about the proposal with key stakeholders, two related ideas have also been raised:

- **Reviewing the reference period covered by Active Lives Adult Survey reporting**

Active Lives Adult Survey results currently cover the reference periods mid-November to mid-November and mid-May to mid-May each year. Understanding when in the business planning cycle (e.g. when undertaking strategic reviews, business and budgetary planning) stakeholders have access to the latest Active Lives results is important. Within the consultation we've also included questions on which Active Lives stakeholders would like to retain.

Stakeholders have also suggested that we consider changing the reference period future results cover to either the calendar year (1 January – 31 December) or the financial year (1 April – 31 March). We recognise why this change has been suggested, but it does present significant challenges to the ongoing management of survey fieldwork and also disruption to the comparison of future survey results (based on a different reference period to previous results).

We'll explore in more detail the practical implications of making such a change but do not feel it's the right thing to do at the current time.

- **Reducing the time gap between the release of survey results and the reference period to which they relate**

We currently report Active Lives Adult Survey results twice a year in October (mid-May to mid-May data) and in April (mid-November to mid-November data) and Active Lives Children and Young People Survey results once a year in December. Stakeholders have asked if the time gap between the end of the data collection period and publication of results could be reduced.

We're committed to publishing Active Lives Survey results as quickly as possible. However, the complexity of the survey design (combining online and paper questionnaires) and the scope of each release (measures of physical activity, sports participation, volunteering, attitudes and outcomes across a wide range of demographic characteristics and geographical areas) is considerable. We also undertake a rigorous assurance process to ensure accuracy so users can have confidence in the statistics we publish.

We'll continue to look for efficiencies in the process of producing and assuring Active Lives statistics but do not feel it would be right to make any changes that could compromise the quality of the statistics published.

How to respond

This consultation opens on 15 November and will run for 10 weeks closing on 28 January. To respond please complete the [online form](#). If you're unable to complete the online survey, please send your responses to the questions below to activelives@sportengland.org.

Questions

When completing the online questionnaire, users of Active Lives Adult Survey statistics will be asked to give their views on the following:

Accountability and rate of change

1. What is an appropriate frequency of reporting Active Lives Adult Survey results to ensure the accountability of Sport England and other key stakeholders across the community sport sector?
2. What is the best frequency of reporting Active Lives Adult Survey results to inform the policy, investment and operational decisions you need to make?

Benefits and opportunities

3. How well does Sport England's current analysis support the policy, investment and operational decisions you need to make?
4. If there were more capacity to undertake strategic and future focused analysis, what would you like it to focus on?

Risks and timing

5. If the frequency of Adult Survey reporting was reduced to annual, when do you think this change should be introduced?
6. If the frequency of Adult Survey reporting was reduced to annual, which reporting period would you prefer to retain and why?

Final questions

7. On balance, do you think the frequency of reporting Active Lives Adult Survey should be changed from twice a year to once a year to create capacity for more strategic, future focused analysis?
8. Do you have any other comments on the Active Lives Surveys and/or Sport England's research and analysis priorities?

After the consultation

This consultation will close on 28 January. We'll then review all of the consultation responses and use these to inform our final recommendations on the future frequency of reporting. These recommendations will be presented to our Executive Team and discussed with policy and statistics leads within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. We'll publish a response to the consultation, and our plans for the next steps, in March.

Adult Survey results are currently released twice a year (in April and October) and Child Survey results are released once a year (in December). If the consultation indicates the change should be made, the earliest implementation would be to not publish Adult Survey release for the period covering mid-May 2021 to mid-May 2022 (scheduled for October 2022). However, changes to reporting frequency will only be made when we're confident the coronavirus situation is sufficiently stable.

Getting in touch

If you have any queries or comments about the consultation process, please contact Andrew Spiers (Strategic lead – research and analysis) via email at andrew.spiers@sportengland.org.

Confidentiality and data protection

As someone who's interested in our statistics, we welcome your views. To promote greater transparency, all responses to the consultation will be published. We plan to summarise and share responses in ways that retain the anonymity of respondents. However, in the event that we may want to attribute some comments to the person providing them, we'll first ask their permission to do so and only do so where permission is given.