

Background Quality Report

Active Lives Adults Survey

Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.

Active Lives was developed in response to the new Government strategy – ‘Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation’; and Sport England’s former strategy – ‘Towards an Active Nation’. We have designed Active Lives to give us and anyone working in this field detailed and reliable insight into the physical activity habits of the nation. The Active Lives Survey findings will also provide key insights towards Sport England’s new strategy published in 2021 (Uniting the Movement).

Active Lives consists of two similar, yet distinct, research projects: the Active Lives Adult Survey and the Active Lives Children and Young People Survey. This Background Quality Report focuses on the Active Lives Adult Survey. Both surveys are administered by IPSOS.

The adult survey provides data for those aged 16 plus across England, about the sport and physical activities adults undertake and their attitudes to physical activity. Please note that during November 15–16 and November 16–17, there were also 14- and 15-year-olds included in the Adults dataset. This was before Sport England’s remit widened to include 5- to 14-year-olds (and the Children and Young People Survey was developed as a separate entity).

Each year, there are approximately 180,000 adults surveyed, with a minimum target sample size of 500 for each English local authority, and additional boosting in some local areas. The large sample size provides reliable and robust data for all questions, enabling subgroup analysis by demographics and by geographic area.

The Active Lives Adult Survey collects data for key metrics including:

- Participation in sports and physical activity (done in the last 12 months, or 2+ times in the last 28 days)
- Sports spectating (watching live sport events and other cultural activities done in the last 12 months)
- Club membership for sports and physical activity
- Settings (where individuals have taken part in sports and physical activity)



- Volunteering (taking part in any sports and physical activity volunteering in the last 12 months, excluding solely raising funds)
- Outcome and wellbeing measures (including life satisfaction, happiness, anxiety, resilience, and loneliness (from November 18-19 onwards), etc.)

The Active Lives Adults survey achieves a high degree of relevance, providing the largest and most detailed physical activity survey for England, and covering whether the CMO's guidelines for physical activity are being met, including the muscle strength guideline measured from Nov 19-20 onwards.

Accuracy

Accuracy is the proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.

The Active Lives Adults survey also achieves a high degree of accuracy. The data from both the Adults and Children and Young Peoples Active Lives surveys provides official statistics, complying with the Official Statistics Code of Practice. Both Active Lives surveys are administered and managed by leading market research company IPSOS. The Active Lives Adults survey has previously been published twice per year – in April (which covered the full year November–November period) and in October (which covered the mid-year May–May period). Following an external consultation (per official statistics protocols) in early 2022 results are now only being published annually each April. More information about publications can be accessed via this link: <https://www.sportengland.org/research/active-lives-survey/>

The Active Lives Adults survey involves detailed quality assurance processes, and thorough checking is carried out at all stages of the project. Any questions considered for the survey are subject to cognitive testing prior to being added, to ensure the question is interpreted correctly and not misleading or overly taxing for respondents. The questionnaire is also checked by multiple people and across multiple devices. Throughout the fieldwork, a data cleaning protocol has been agreed between IPSOS and Sport England. Further information about the protocol, alongside derived variable checks, can be found in the survey's full technical report, published on our website. The University of Edinburgh have previously carried out checking and quality assurance, at the analysis and published file stages, for the November 17-18 to the November 19-20 releases. For the May 20-21 release onwards, the University of Southampton are helping to carry out the quality assurance checks on our analysis and published tables.

Sport England's checking processes include various stages. When the dataset arrives from IPSOS, there is time set aside for quality assurance. We make sure all variables and survey responses are contained as expected, checking both the online and postal completions are included, and that the file size and structure are similar to previous years. The Month / Quarter variables are checked to ensure an even



distribution of survey responses across the year, and the Region / Indices of Multiple Deprivation / Local Authority variables are checked to ensure a representative spread of survey responses across England. All variables are reviewed, to make sure they are named and labelled correctly, and missing values are correctly set where appropriate (e.g., age 75+ set to missing for the NS-SEC variables). It is also checked that there aren't too many missing values at questions where there should be data. All headline measures are compared to previous years, and composite / derived variables are checked against the 'building block' variables to ensure data accuracy. Where activity disciplines are grouped, we make sure that all sub-disciplines are correctly feeding into the activity (e.g., Open Water Swimming is checked to be included in the overall Swimming category for example). Any questions which are asked for online group 1 only for example (e.g., club membership) are also checked to ensure only this relevant group has been included, and new variables in particular are checked.

IPSOS provide the weighting plan files, using the latest ONS statistics, to ensure results are nationally representative and therefore as accurate as possible for the population of England. The weighted and unweighted demographic profiles are reviewed by Sport England, and compared to previous years and national population statistics to ensure the profile is as expected. The range for weights is reviewed to ensure that any single responses aren't give too much emphasis within the final weighted data. More detail about the weighting procedures can be found within the survey's full technical report on our website.

Sport England and the University of Southampton have worked together to fully check the analysis and published tables for the Nov 20-21 release. A quality assurance checklist is adhered to. Weighted and unweighted bases and counts, rates, shares, confidence intervals, standard errors, population estimates, and significance tests are checked to be correct against the raw SPSS data outputs and significance test calculations. We make sure any population estimates calculated are using the most up-to-date population figures available. Published tables are checked to ensure all numbers are shown to 1 decimal place, time periods are shown separately, column headings are correct and showing respondent numbers, etc. We also add any new local authorities where appropriate.

A high degree of accuracy is also achieved through the large response numbers each year. All sample for the survey is selected at random using the Postcode Address File (PAF). This enables selection of a good spread of addresses across local authorities, and only up to two adults per household can complete. The survey uses a push-to-web methodology, so respondents without the internet can also complete via post. Through achieving c.180,000 completes, this enables collection of more accurate mean values (with larger sample sizes the identification of any outliers is easier, and their effect diminished). Larger sample sizes also result in smaller margins of error, as it is more likely the sample achieved will be representative of the population at large.

Additional quality assurance processes include checking postal responses which are scanned and coded into the final data. The postal data are subject to errors introduced by respondents, as well as

errors resulting from scanning or keying errors. Many errors are fixed through standard edit rules. Any missing data is checked and populated if the information has been provided elsewhere. A full record of any forced / manual data edits is kept – these are done to improve the quality of the data and make it easier to analyse. In addition to this, the online survey prevents the entry of answers which are unfeasible or illogical based on earlier answers, as checks and edits are found within the questionnaire. Break-off rates for the online survey are monitored by question and by device.

A coding scheme has also been created which is used for back-coding of activities – any which cannot be done automatically using this coding scheme are checked manually. At the end of the process, all ‘other’ answers are assigned a code which indicate which type of activity it is, which can then be used in the derivation of the participation and composite variables. Detailed checks are also carried out on data for questions such as intensity – if the majority of answers indicate a light intensity (e.g., for a sport such as darts), then that intensity is ‘assumed’ for the sport. This also helps to reduce respondent burden, reducing the numbers of questions required. Data is also checked for duplicate completes, as some respondents may submit multiple entries without realising or to try and claim multiple incentives.

Reliability

Reliability is the closeness of early estimates to subsequent estimated values.

Through the use of a continuous tracking survey, dating back to November 2015, the Active Lives Adults survey displays a high degree of reliability. Repeated measures for key metrics have been taken over time using independent samples, measuring and assessing change, at regular twice-yearly intervals. Whilst results show some fluctuation over time, as expected with participation rates moving upwards or downwards, the Active Lives Adults survey has displayed a large degree of consistency for its results (major shifts or unexplainable results have not been found).

The Active Lives Adults survey also uses detailed statistical tests. With every publication, confidence intervals are included for any percentage rates shown. Within the technical report, survey design effects and effective sample sizes are published. In addition to this, other statistics such as shares, standard errors, weighted and unweighted bases and counts are analysed. When reviewing change over time, statistical significance tests are used, and only significant differences are reported.

Timeliness and Punctuality

Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.

The time between the reference period e.g., November 20 to November 21, to publication e.g., on 28th April 2022, provides time for quality assurance processes, back coding, data preparation, data analysis and production of the final report (ahead of publication). Active Lives release dates are outlined in the DCMS Official Statistics Release Calendar. Active Lives releases have always been delivered punctually, meeting the agreed dates outlined in the DCMS Calendar.

Accessibility and Clarity

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.

The Active Lives Adults survey data is made accessible to users. The Sport England website contains detail about the scope and background, data collection methodology, survey development and sampling, survey measurements, supporting information for adults completing the survey and data and reporting archive. With each release, documents published on the Sport England website include the full written report, published tables and technical note. The full report has been accessibility checked and confirmed as WCAG 2.1 compliant

The published tables are made as easy to navigate as possible for users, with an index page taking users to relevant tabs and grouped columns to review relevant survey time points. The total number of respondents unweighted is shown for each breakdown variable, and rates, confidence intervals and population estimates are included. Significant changes compared to the baseline year (November 15–16) and compared to 12 months ago are also highlighted. In addition to this, the technical note contains further supporting information about survey design, weighting, confidence intervals, significance testing, population estimates and definitions from the report.

The Active Lives survey provides open data, and datasets are shared with anyone who requests a copy for analysis and signs the user agreement. When datasets are shared, supporting documents are provided including the Active Lives user guide and data code book. These documents are also uploaded to UK Data Archive, alongside the full Active Lives technical report, where users can download



the files themselves if they have created an account. Data can also be easily accessed through the Active Lives Online Tool, available at the following link: <https://activelives.sportengland.org/>.

Comparability and Coherence

Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain. Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar.

As the Active Lives Adults survey has been running since November 2015–2016, we have now produced eleven publications up to November 2020–21. This means that change over time between the result publications can be assessed, and therefore within our analysis we have created time series charts enabling the tracking of trends and significant changes. Change over time since the November 2015–2016 period can be assessed. Results so far have proven to be highly comparable, with no unexplainable shifts in the findings. In addition to the Active Lives survey, Sport England also holds similar data for 10 years prior to the Active Lives inception from the Active People Survey, and whilst there are differences in mode and definitions, this provides further reassurance that the trends we are seeing are reliable and comparable.

Results are compared to the NHS Health Survey for England, which monitors trends in the nation's health and care. It provides information for adults aged 16 and over (which is consistent with Active Lives). The Health Survey for England also provides comparable statistics around the %s of adults who are active or inactive based on their minutes of moderate or vigorous activity each week (albeit from a slightly broader range of activities such as gardening and activity for work which fall outside of Sport England's remit), as well as fruit and vegetable consumption and BMI. The activity measure is very similar to Active Lives, which also classifies those doing less than 30 minutes of moderate equivalent activity per week as inactive. The Health Survey for England has also previously provided a measure for Muscle Strength, very similar to the Active Lives new measure (using the same question wording), however, differences in the results previously can be explained by the fact that Active Lives includes walking as a muscle strengthening activity, but the Health Survey for England does not, which results in differences in the findings between the two surveys.