

80 per cent of population not hitting participation target

New research published today by Sport England has revealed that only 21 per cent of adults in England are hitting recommended targets for participation in sport and active recreation – taking part in moderate intensity, three times a week.

The Active People study shows that 50 per cent of adults are not taking part in sport at all, and a further 28 per cent have only built a moderate amount of active recreation and sport into their lives.

The research team questioned 363,000 people over 16 years-old, with at least 1,000 respondents from each of the 354 English local authorities – in the largest study of its kind in Europe at a cost of £5.5m.

The figures, which do not include general physical activity undertaken, such as cycling or walking to work, paint an overview of sports participation right down to local authority level, with some clear areas for development identified.

Sport England chair Derek Mapp admitted he was "disappointed" that 50 per cent of people are not taking any part in sport, adding: "We aim to get two million more people doing sport by 2012. It's a huge challenge and we're ready for it."

Only 8 per cent of people with a disability are regular participants, although perceived racial inequalities may not be as dramatic as expected – participation among black and other ethnic minority groups is at 17.5 per cent, against 21.2 per cent in white adults.

While the relationship between areas of social and economic deprivation and lower participation is demonstrated, with there being a high degree of correlation between the two, Mihir Warty, director of policy at Sport England said there were exceptions: "We can now drill down into the regions and to a local level. Local needs drive success."

He added that the data would show where local authorities might be underperforming or overperforming, and that these "beacon examples" could be used to demonstrate methods of tackling participation despite deprivation.

The research has been welcomed by national governing bodies who will be able to use the information to target their regional development plans and identify areas for growth across the country.

Peter King, chief executive of British Cycling, told Leisure Opportunities: "This is a huge opportunity to investigate and develop and expand participation. We now have 10 regions in place and are taking a regional approach, so the detail provided by this research is welcome." |

The most popular activities are recreational walking (8.1m participants); swimming (5.6m); attending a gym (4.3m); recreational cycling (3.2m) and football (2.9m); although surprisingly, other sports such as cricket, rugby union and netball are further down the list

Some of the lowest participation rates in the country are found in the Thames Gateway – the boroughs of Newham, Greenwich and Waltham Forest – reinforcing the need for the London Olympics to leave a lasting participation legacy in the region.

Source: Sports Management (www.sportsmanagement.co.uk) – 08/12/06