

# SCHOOL GAMES

## Approaches to Competition



# RESEARCH OVERVIEW

In 2018 the Youth Sport Trust (YST) commissioned research into the design and delivery of competitive youth sport domestically and globally. The intention was to use the findings to ensure that youth sport in the UK is inclusive, accessible and fun. Competition can be viewed as positive or negative, depending on how the competition is designed and how the young people taking part perceive these experiences.

There is no simple solution to what works best to engage and sustain young people in sport and competition. However, this resource considers alternative ways to deliver competition to engage more young people. It has been developed following a review of secondary evidence, consultations with key stakeholders and a pilot group of School Games Organisers (SGO's), Local Organising Committees (LOC's) and National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGB's) delivering different approaches to competition. This resource aims to support practitioners working with young people.

Through findings from the research and an analysis of why different approaches were implemented, the variations could be identified or grouped into eight different themes. It was evident that crucial to the success of the delivery was that competition facilitators knew why they were delivering the competition e.g. what outcome they were trying to achieve.

As a result, this resource aims to share with you the eight themes and some example approaches that have been used to achieve the different outcomes, with examples from global and domestic practice.



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# PRINCIPLES OF COMPETITION

## Principles of competition

- 1 The young person's motivation, competence and confidence are at the centre of the competition.
- 2 The focus is on the process rather than the outcome (on the learning and values and development of the young person rather than the result).
- 3 Volunteers, leaders and officials are appropriately trained and display behaviours reflective of the nature of the competition.
- 4 The environment is safe and creates opportunities to learn and maximise social development.
- 5 The facility and the environment that is created for the competition reflects the motivations, competence and confidence of the young people and format of the competition.

## Smiles

If all the competition principles are followed, that should result in SMILES.

Use the below as a check list:

**SAFE** participants feel physically and emotionally safe.

**MAXIMUM PARTICIPATION** participants are fully involved all of the time, i.e not hanging around.

**INCLUSIVE** all participants can take part; activities are designed to suit and develop their abilities.

**LEARNING** participants develop personal, social, creative, thinking and/or physical skills.

**ENJOYMENT** activities recognise individuals' personal needs and interests.

**SUCCESS** participants feel they are making progress and getting satisfaction.

**NB.** While there isn't a specific letter for fair play, **SMILES** only happen for all participants if they feel a sense of fairness. Fairness underpins inclusion, enjoyment and success; it isn't just about 'rules'.

## School Games' mission

Keeping competitive sport at the heart of schools and provide more young people with the opportunity to compete and achieve their personal best.

## School Games' vision

By 2020 the School Games will be continuing to make a clear and meaningful difference to the lives of even more children and young people.

# INFLUENCING KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Within school-based competitions, it is our responsibility as teachers, coaches, organisers and parents to ensure the following:

- The environment is enjoyable and motivating,
- The successes are measured by improvements,
- The values are associated with effort and learning, progress is recognised; and
- Any errors are viewed as learning opportunities.

Organisers cannot do this in isolation. Organisers **MUST** influence others so that all key stakeholders understand **WHY** it is important to get competition right and **WHY** any alternative formats have been added.

## Who are the key stakeholders?

- Young People
- Schools (Teachers, Head Teachers, Teaching Assistants)
- Sports Coaches
- Parents/Guardians
- Spectators



## How can we influence the key stakeholders?

- **Educating stakeholders** - Share this online resource with PE subject leaders. Also, ensure the main video 'Why is it important to get competition right?' is shared with Headteachers and to those selecting and bringing the young people to a competition.
- **WHY do you need to make any changes** - In partnership with other key stakeholders, look at your competition offer and see if any competitions need adapting and **WHY**. If alterations need to making, then select appropriate alternative formats linked to the **WHY**.
- **Communicating the WHY and the WHAT** - Ensure communication to all key stakeholders is clear before and during a competition about **WHY** any changes have been made and **WHAT** they are.
- **Young People's feedback** - Ask the young people their thoughts on a competition they have attended with an approach applied and ask them whether it was better with or without this approach.
- **Sharing best practice** - Ensure schools and stakeholders are aware of the young people's feedback, so that this is taken into account for future competition approaches.

# THEME 1

## Widening the competition environment to develop character and life skills

Young people do not always see or access the wider benefits from taking part in competitive sport. This theme shows that designing a competition around the process rather than focusing on the outcome (single measure of success) can help develop the children and young people's character and life skills. While we know the development of character and life skills can be benefits from taking part in sport, focusing on the design of a competition can make sure these elements are explicitly taught.

### WHY

- It is often a barrier to some young people that the focus of the competition is on one single measure of success e.g, the winning team, the fastest time, the longest throw/jump etc.
- Insight from young people suggest that they value other outcomes rather than just winning such as enjoyment, skill development, being with their friends and improving their health.
- The development of life skills prepares young people for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

### HOW

- By introducing self-refereed games enables young people to develop skills such as conflict resolution, leadership, communication, teamwork and empathy.
- Scores for players displaying great values and fair play are celebrated alongside the results. Ensuring these scores are regarded as highly as the results.
- Players learn life skills whilst playing and by introducing concepts such as self-refereeing and spirit scoring enables the development of life skills to be a intended outcome.

### WHAT

#### Self-refereeing:

- Ultimate is a fast paced, non-contact team sport that is played with a flying disc (frisbee). The sport is refereed by the players themselves, even at World Championship level, according to a code of conduct known as 'the Spirit of the Game'. It places the responsibility of fair play on the players themselves. Players are responsible for resolving conflicts amongst themselves, and if they are unable to agree they resume play in a manner which simulates what would most likely have occurred if there had been no breach.

## Case Studies

Find out what else has been done to implement different approaches for this theme by clicking on these case studies.

Self - Refereeing and Spirit Scoring



### Top tips to designing a competition with this theme.

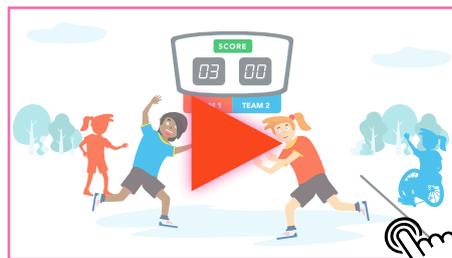
- Playing with smaller teams can make participation more accessible for young people.
- If officials/adults are used to supervise the game, they should give players the freedom to take ownership.
- Simple guidelines to help young people rate their opponents on 'the Spirit of the Game' can help to facilitate this process. Examples of some guidelines can be found here.

### Types of sports this theme suits.

- The self-refereeing approach is ideally suited to sports where a referee is not required for any health and safety reasons.
- The Spirit of the Game approach can be used for all sports.

## Animations

### Widening the competition environment to develop character and life skills.



Developing Character & Life Skills - Spirit Scoring



Developing Literacy - Redefining The League Table

# THEME 2

## Adapting the scoring to develop different sport skills

A school sport competition should be a learning environment for the young people. It is very common that young people attending competitions may still need to develop their skills further. Incorporating skill development within a competition is an excellent way for the young people to learn and help them to understand how the skills link to the game itself. This can support the development of Physical Literacy for all young people and should not be seen as an approach only for younger less able pupils.

### WHY

- Utilising skill development as part of the competition can help support individuals to continually strive to develop and see their own improvement.
- Young people should not feel pressured by the result if the intent of the competition is to develop wider outcomes
- Ensuring that ALL young people feel involved within the competition.

### HOW

- The focus is not just on the score of the game play.
- Young people can be rewarded for skill development in addition to overall score through skill stations.
- All young people contribute to the team's performance through their skill scores.
- Scoring systems can be adjusted to keep motivation and engagement high.

### WHAT

#### Different Scoring Systems:

- Basketball England has trialled the introduction of new regulations, which aim to give young people greater enjoyment from participating in competitions, along with more opportunities to develop their basketball skills.
- They found that teams would often feel demoralised if the scoreboard showed a vast difference in points between the winning and losing teams. For the under 13 regional tournaments, each quarter of the game was treated as a new game, i.e. players played four individual games instead of one. The number of baskets for each quarter was not recorded on the scoreboard (only by the table officials) and at the end of each quarter, the teams were simply awarded three points for winning, two for a draw and one for losing. These points were shared on the scoreboard.

## WHAT

- Basketball England reduced the team sizes to ten instead of the traditional twelve players. This ensured all players would have more game time. The organisers stated that for the first two quarters of any game, every player on the team should spend some time on court. They also introduced a scoring system for a skills-based challenge that involved all players and took place between the warm up and the start of the game. Players had to undertake skills-based tasks, including dribbling, passing and shooting, against the clock. Each player scored points for the quality of the execution (e.g. closest to the target) and the time taken for the team to complete the tasks. The team that were the most successful in the skills challenge were crowned 'Skills Challenge Champions' and received a prize.

## Case Studies

Find out what else has been done to implement different approaches for this theme by clicking on these case studies.

Skills Stations



Different Scoring System



### Top tips to designing a competition with this theme.

- Any regulation or rule changes need to be clearly communicated to all stakeholders in advance (e.g. players, coaches and spectators); being clear on the reasons for the changes and the potential benefits is key to ensuring individuals are supportive of the changes.
- Introducing simple regulation or rule changes that do not require any additional resources (e.g. space, time or expertise) will be easier to implement.

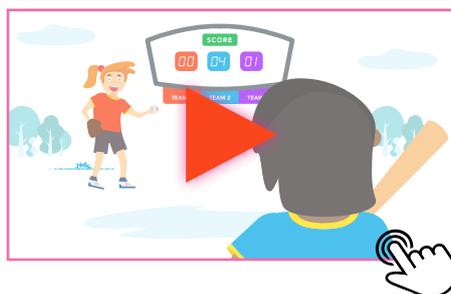
### Types of sports this theme suits.

These approaches are ideally suited to team sports.



## Animations

### Adapting the scoring to develop different sport skills



Adapting The Scoring To Develop Skills - Skills Stations



Developing Sport Skills - Adapting Scoring

## THEME 3

### Adding fun elements to engage new audiences

Young people have different motivations to taking part in sport. Enjoyment is the biggest driver for activity (Active Lives Children and Young People Survey, Sport England, 2019). The key to this theme is not to use the new approach all of the time as it may lose its impact as young people become familiar of it and no longer view it as fun.

#### WHY

- Competitions often lose the element of fun for some young people because the focus is on a single measure of success.
- Understanding what young people see as fun will help to engage new audiences.

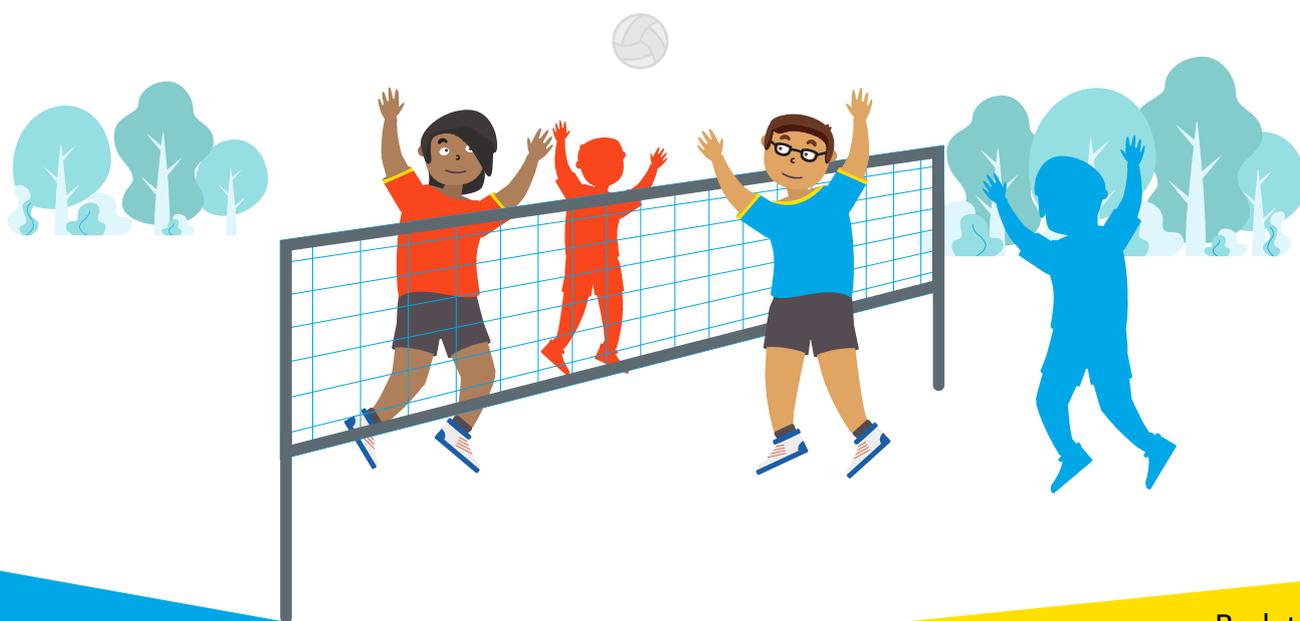
#### HOW

- Changing the original format by adding in elements that will engage the young people e.g. including music to re-energise participants.

#### WHAT

##### Power Plays to Music:

- The Premier League offers Power Play tournaments. At random periods during a football match music will play. Within this time period any goals scored count as double. The idea is to offer an alternative format that enhances players enjoyment of the game. The music may act as a distraction and it requires an extra skill level to be able to continue to concentrate and communicate with team mates.



## Case Studies

Find out what else has been done to implement different approaches for this theme by clicking on these case studies.

Power Plays to Music



### Top tips to designing a competition with this theme.

- Ask the young people what they would like to add in to increase enjoyment to increase enjoyment
- Fun variations should only be used occasionally otherwise they will become the norm and lose the fun element.

### Types of sports this theme suits.

These approaches can be applied to all sports.

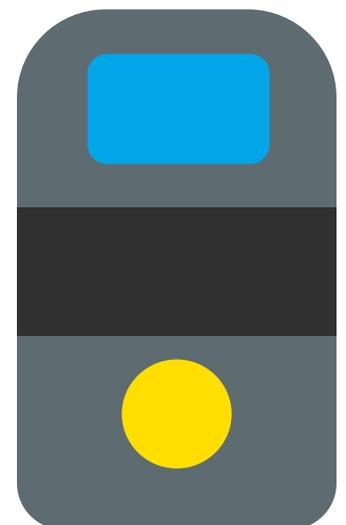
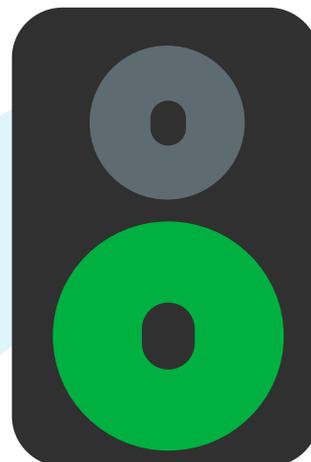
## Animations

### Adding fun elements to engage new audiences



Increasing Motivation - Music

Power Plays



# THEME 4

## Widening the competition environment to improve health

Supporting the development of a young person's health is crucial to many individuals working in youth sport. If a single measure of success acts as a demotivator – utilising different approaches and celebrating success that is relative to the individual can help motivate and improve health.

### WHY

- Focusing on different outcomes rather than just the result can help motivate young people.
- Competitions can have various ways to measure success, not just the winning.
- Participants are motivated to take part in sport for health reasons.
- Certain young people who are inactive may need to focus more on the health outcomes of sport and the competition could target this group.

### HOW

- The focus is on a health outcome instead, or in addition to, the outcome of the sports competition e.g. rewarding effort as well as the overall outcome.

### WHAT

#### Heart Rate Monitors:

- During 2017 a high school in Iowa, United States, trialled using heart rate monitors for students in PE lessons. The aim was to motivate those students who were not engaged with PE. The heart rate monitors generated individual reports that showed how long students had spent in their heart rate goal zone. They also enabled teachers to set goals for classes and individuals based on need.
- Teachers involved in the trial found that students' motivation increased and gave more students the opportunity to engage in understanding their body and the impact of exercise.

## Case Studies

Find out what else has been done to implement different approaches for this theme by clicking on these case studies.

Heart Rate Monitors



Man vs Fat



### Top tips to designing a competition with this theme.

- Ensure that all participants are aware of the alternative approach to scoring and are comfortable with the outcomes being celebrated e.g. weight loss may not be appropriate for young people in a school environment, but number of minutes being active in a week might.
- Consider affordable and meaningful ways to work with specific cohorts.
- Using heart rate monitors ensures the students can be rewarded for reaching their heart rate goal zone. If schools do not have enough heart rate monitors for every student, they could target certain students or share the activity across a number of weeks.

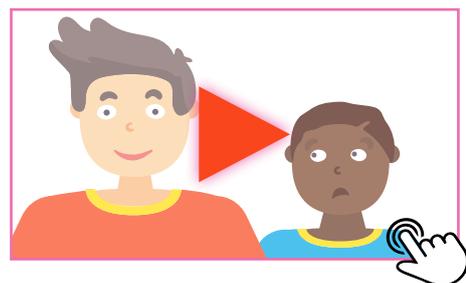
### Types of sports this theme suits.

These approaches best suit any individual activities that can then in turn be added together for team scores.



## Animations

### Widening the competition environment to improve health



Improving Health & Increasing Motivation - Rewarding Effort

# THEME 5

## Adapting the format to increase motivation

Young people are motivated to take part in sport and competition for a variety of different reasons. Understanding your young people's motivations is the key to this theme. Designing competitions to increase a young person's motivations is a great way to ensure they continue to participate in the future.

Planning a competition calendar that offers a wide variety of competitions that will cater for all young people's motivations will ensure that more young people will enjoy taking part in the competitions.

It is also key that schools understand the aims of each competition and what type of young people it is designed for, so that they can select the appropriate children and young people for each event.

### WHY

- Increase the young people's enjoyment of the game. Young people often lose motivation within a game if the score is one sided (both sides lose motivation).
- Increase the young people's decision making within a game.
- Providing young people with more playing time.
- Planning for the emotional, physical and psychological development of each young person attending.

### HOW

- Adopt a different approach to the competition by changing the scoring system; reducing the amount of running; changing rules; mixing ability levels etc.
- Adopt a rule that reduces the amount of time a child is 'sitting out' e.g. 50% playing time.
- Include Point Power Plays to keep young people motivated.
- Include Player Power Plays where teams can bring on additional players if they are losing by a large margin.

### WHAT

#### Walking basketball:

- Walking basketball is a walking paced version of the original basketball game, suitable for all ages and abilities. It was developed in the UK but has received global interest over recent years. An evaluation conducted by the University of Hertfordshire of walking basketball in Melbourne found participants were positive about the game, felt it was a good opportunity to have fun, socialise, improve health outcomes and provide mental stimulation.

## Case Studies

Find out what else has been done to implement different approaches for this theme by clicking on these case studies.

50% Rule

Walking versions

Point Power Plays

Player Power Plays

### Top tips to designing a competition with this theme.

- Ensure you put the emotional, physical and psychological development of each young person at the centre of planning your competition format.
- Ensure all stakeholders understand the rules.

### Types of sports this theme suits.

These approaches can be applied to all sports.



## Animations

### Adapting the format to increase motivation



Increasing Motivation -  
The 50% Rule



Supporting Individual  
Development - Point Power Plays



Increasing Motivation &  
Developing Individuals - Player  
Power Plays

# THEME 6

## Considering age or maturity levels to support fair competition and foster social connections

Young people grow and mature at different rates, which has shown to impact on their performance in sport. Sport is typically played in chronological age groups but current research would suggest until the age of nine or ten, a child's month of birth can have an impact on selection within sport (relative age effect).

Biological maturation is known to be a predictor of a young person's fitness and performance; young people who are advanced in maturation are likely to be identified as those with talent. However, young people who mature earlier are likely to play to their strengths (i.e. size, strength and power), meaning that they are less likely to develop their tactical and technical skills. Late maturers are often overlooked as being too small and therefore not provided with opportunities.

### WHY

- Ensure all young people regardless of current performance are able to maximise learning and enjoyment.
- Ensure late maturers are not overlooked and are provided the opportunity to develop and compete.
- Ensure early maturers are challenged and avoid over training/competing.

### HOW

- Up to the ages of nine or ten, teams are selected with young people born in each quarter of the school year to avoid September - December bias.
- For secondary aged young people, the approach known as bio-banding is adopted where children are grouped by their biological age as opposed to their chronological age.

### WHAT

#### Bio Banding:

- Young people grow and mature at different rates, which has been shown to impact on their performance in sport. Biological maturation is known to be a predictor of player fitness and performance; young people who are advanced in maturation are likely to be more successful players. However, young people who mature earlier are likely to play to their strengths (i.e. size, strength and power), and means that they are less likely to develop their tactical and technical skills.

## WHAT

- The Premier League developed a football tournament that grouped players for competition by their maturation, rather than age; a process known as bio-banding. Young people aged 11-14 years old and between 85-90% of predicted adult stature participated in the tournament (based on measures of height and weight).

## Case Studies

Find out what else has been done to implement different approaches for this theme by clicking on these case studies.

Average Team Age



Bio Banding



### Top tips to designing a competition with this theme.

- Additional judgements may be required to assess whether young people are technically or physiologically ready to 'play up' a level.
- The research shows that players appreciated the value of the bio-banding tournaments, but also enjoyed competing in their respective chronological groups, so a mix of these two approaches would be beneficial for young people's development.
- It is important that the adults have the right knowledge and skills to be able to undertake the bio-banding analysis and to communicate the approach to others (including the young people).
- It may take time for students to engage in the process, so start with the students that are interested in engaging first and then gradually seek to engage others.
- It does not necessarily have to be a full bio-banding process; a simple assessment of the students based on height can also be effective.
- This approach should not be used all of the time.

### Types of sports this theme suits.

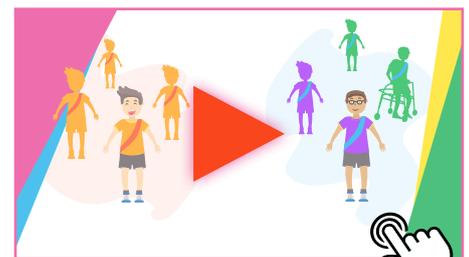
These approaches can be applied to all sports.

## Animations

### Considering age or maturity levels to support fair competition and foster social connections



Bio Banding



Considering Age & Maturity Levels - Average Team Age

# THEME 7

## Using technology to develop physical skills

The digital age is upon us, and many young people are engaged by technology and it is part of their everyday life. This theme is based around embracing the technology that young people use to engage them in competitive sport.

### WHY

- Embracing the digital world.
- Reduce travel time and cost.
- Compete with a wider population.
- No face to face competition for those not motivated by this element of competition.

### HOW

- Competing through online videos and uploading results or videos.
- Virtual competitions.
- Learning by doing and adding inspiration through the joy of accomplishment.

### WHAT

#### Parkour Jam:

- Parkour Jam is an online platform that creates a community of participants. Individuals register on the site and then upload videos capturing their parkour/free running activities. Competitions are judged by the site users themselves and whilst opportunities to win prizes are included, the main focus of the video competitions is self-development and the opportunity to share knowledge and experience, rather than strictly competing. The competitions are separated into three categories: beginners, intermediates and advanced.

## Case Studies

Find out what else has been done to implement different approaches for this theme by clicking on these case studies.

Parkour Jam and TOPYA



### Top tips to designing a competition with this theme.

- Ensure all rules are outlined clearly with videos to show examples rather than the usual demonstration.
- Clearly explain how the competition will be judged.
- Ensure the online platform is accessible and it is easy to upload videos/results into the competition.

### Types of sports this theme suits.

These approaches can be applied to sports such as gymnastics and free running when sports are judged on set criteria or skill-based activities.



TOPYA Content Link



# THEME 8

## Adapting the competition environment to support individual development in sport

Sport can have a positive impact on developing young people as individuals. Whether a competition is for teams or individuals, there is still the opportunity to focus on individual development. This theme highlights the process of learning and values development of the young person rather than the result of the competition.

### WHY

- To give young people a feeling of personal achievement.
- Value individuals performance.
- Aimed at young people who are motivated by individual achievements.
- Focus on individual's performances rather than solely on the outcome of a game.

### HOW

- Develop a system to achieve and improve on an individual's score or time - Personal Best.
- Allowing individual's to set their own goals. (e.g. improving times, reaching milestone numbers of runs, or running the whole distance).
- Incorporate match analysis principles into a game e.g. a shooter in netball being awarded a percentage for successful shots in comparison to those they have taken.

### WHAT

#### Parkrun:

- Parkrun offers free, weekly, timed 5km runs in public spaces that are open to individuals of all running abilities (including those that choose to walk the 5km). The initiative has an online results system that provides a weekly update of individuals' achievements.
- Parkrun enables individuals to compare their time with those of the same sex and age. It generates an age grading, which takes an individual's time and uses the world record time, along with their sex and age to produce a score (a percentage). This allows runners to compare their personal performance against other people's performances even though they may be of a different age and sex to one another.
- Parkrun also records and celebrates the number of runs that individuals have completed, celebrating and rewarding them when they complete 10 (for under 17's only), 50, 100, 250 and 500 runs.

#### Multi Skills Festivals:

- Multi skills festivals provide opportunities for young people to develop fundamental movement skills.
- A rotation of multi skill activities such as jumping, throwing, catching, skipping, lunging etc challenge young people to achieve their personal best.

## Case Studies

Find out what else has been done to implement different approaches for this theme by clicking on these case studies.

Parkrun



Multi Skills Festivals



### Top tips to designing a competition with this theme.

- Ensure the young people can set their own clear individual goals to help sustain their engagement.
- If the theme is being applied to a team sport, then make sure individuals can set goals within the team.
- Not every competitor will want their results or performance announced or highlighted. Ensure the goals are kept individual and comparisons are not made between individuals, unless they are motivated by this addition.

### Types of sports this theme suits.

These approaches are ideally suited to individual sports, but in turn can be utilised within a team sport environment too.

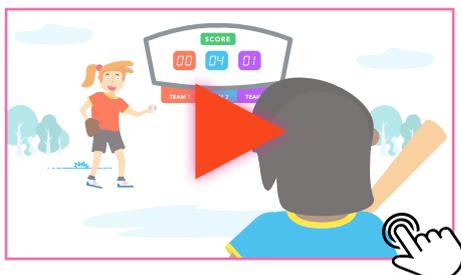


## Animations

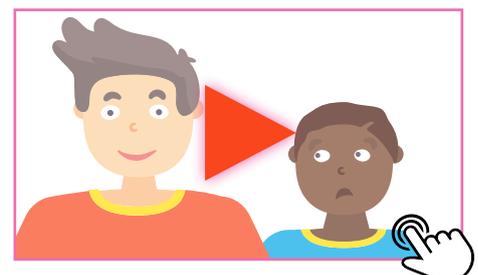
### Adapting the competition environment to support individual development in sport



Developing Character & Life Skills - Spirit Scoring

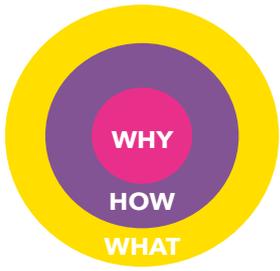


Adapting The Scoring To Develop Skills - Skills Stations



Improving Health & Increasing Motivation - Rewarding Effort

# TOP TIPS TO IMPLEMENTING VARIATIONS



Use the Golden Circle principles and always start with the WHY?

Young people are different, so understanding their motivations, competence and confidence levels can help to shape competition formats.

More variation in the types of sports and alternative approaches to competition has shown to be a positive factor for engaging young people and increases the probability of participating later in adulthood.

Simple changes that do not require any additional resources or expertise can make alternative approaches to competition easier to implement.

Any changes need to be clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

Introducing different approaches alongside more traditional competition opportunities is well received.

Different approaches to competitions that reward personal development can complement whole school priorities.

Placing the same kudos on broader achievements as the traditional competition "winner" is important to make changes successful.

Introducing adaptations to the formats of sports can help to engage a broader range of participants.

The variations should not be used all of the time because otherwise they become the norm.

The recommendations can be separated into general and specific. General recommendations are applicable across alternative approaches and specific recommendations refer to specific alternative approaches.

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus on one or two alternative variations for initial events.
- Ensure that young leaders have an adequate understanding of the alternative approach and feel confident to lead the activity.
- Consider how best to support the change in mindset.
- Communicate clearly with all participants.

## SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Adapted scoring** is a simple adaptation found to be effective at engaging and motivating participants.
- **Music** worked to engage young people and create a fun atmosphere.
- Support staff and young people to identify those for **awards** to ensure consistency and to support decision making.
- For **walking variations**, consider the environment and audience involved with the pilot.

# SCHOOL GAMES

