

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 5¹

Sporting capital and inequality – does social class make a difference?

Introduction

This Resource Sheet¹ explores how Sporting Capital levels are impacted by social class building on the analysis presented in [Resource Sheet 3](#). It shows how age and social class interact to impact on Sporting Capital levels. Looking in more detail at the building blocks of Sporting Capital it explores how different Sporting Capital domain scores - psychological, social and physical - vary by social class. The analysis then focuses on some of the interesting differences that occur in the individual question scores. The sheet finishes by summarising some of the policy and practice implications of these findings.

What is Sporting Capital?

Sporting Capital is analogous to the theory of Human Capital and may be defined as:

"The stock of physical, social and psychological attributes and competencies that support and motivate an individual to participate in sport and to sustain that participation over time." It is a theory that can help us to better understand and explain

sporting behaviour across individuals, communities and populations. More information about the nature of Sporting Capital and its important characteristics is provided in [Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 1](#).

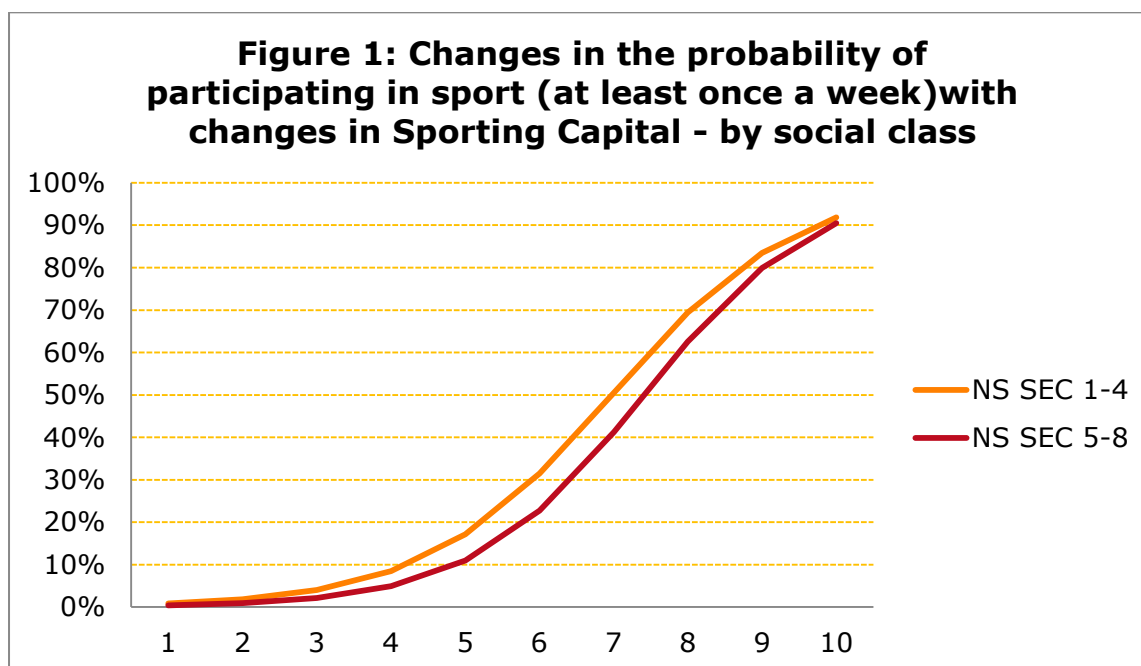
What are the social class differences in levels of Sporting Capital?

Social class is a difficult thing to define. In the Active People Survey it is defined by the NSSEC classifications that are used in the census and which are the general standard accepted in social policy analysis (although interestingly a recent study commissioned by the BBC suggests a different approach to measuring social class that incorporates amongst other things cultural and sporting activities in the definition). Because of sample size limitations the analysis in this sheet differentiates between two broad social class groupings – the 'upper' social class group (which includes a combination of NSSEC 1 to 4) and the 'lower' social class group (which includes a combination of NSSEC 5 to 8). Over many years of measurement sports participation rates have shown significantly higher participation rates for the upper compared to lower social class groups. These inequities persist as shown by recent results

¹ This Resource Sheet was prepared by Nick Rowe with analytical support from Oliver Norden at TNS-BMRB. It was commissioned by StreetGames and published in April 2013.

from the Active People Survey 6 with participation rates for NSSEC 1-2 at 42.7% which is 15.6% higher than those for people in NSSEC 5-8 with a rate of 27.1%.

Figure 1 shows how the probability of participating in sport changes with increases in Sporting Capital for 'upper' and 'lower' social class groups. It demonstrates that for any given level of Sporting Capital the probability of participating in sport is higher for the upper social class group than it is for the lower social class group. This suggests that the external barriers facing those from a lower social class background are greater and more difficult to overcome than those faced by their higher social class counterparts (see Resource Sheet 9).



Measuring inequities in participation between social class groups tell us about the outcome – but does little to help us better understand the causes. An examination of variations in the levels of Sporting Capital between different social class groups tells us something more profound about the underlying factors that lead to these inequities and the culture that shapes them. Resource Sheet 2 showed how the mean Sporting Capital Scores are significantly higher for the upper social class group (NSSEC 1-4) (6.0) than for the lower social class group (NSSEC 5-8) (5.3). Figure 2 shows how the Sporting Capital scores change with age for both upper and lower social class groups. The highest Sporting Capital levels are found in 16 to 19 year olds in the upper social class group (NSSEC 1-4) with an average score of over 7. It is interesting to see that by the age of 22 years Sporting Capital levels converge as the upper social class group declines to meet that of the lower group. In later life, however, those in the upper social class group maintain levels of Sporting Capital at higher levels than their lower social class counterparts.

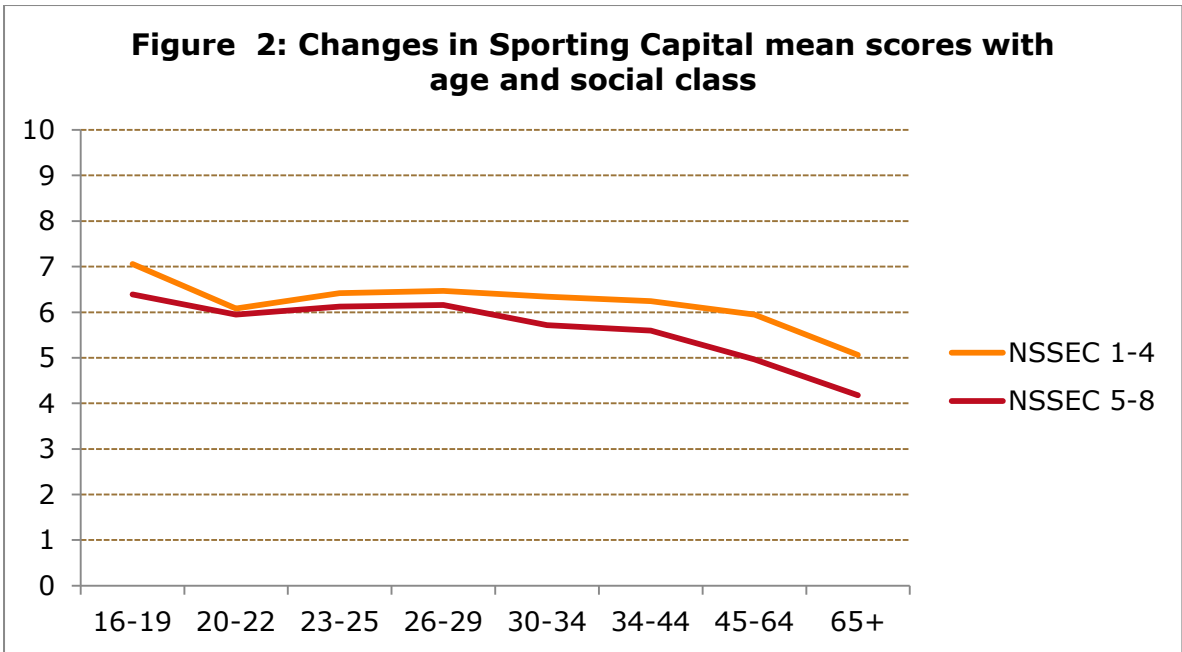
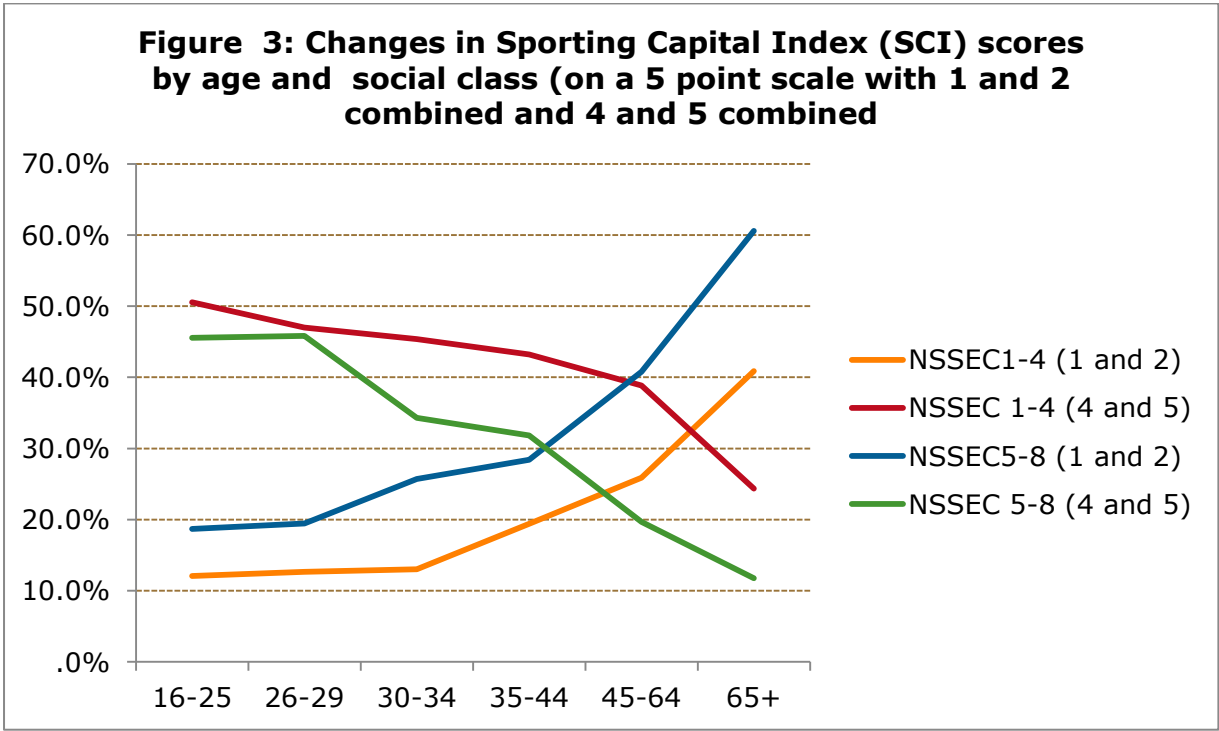


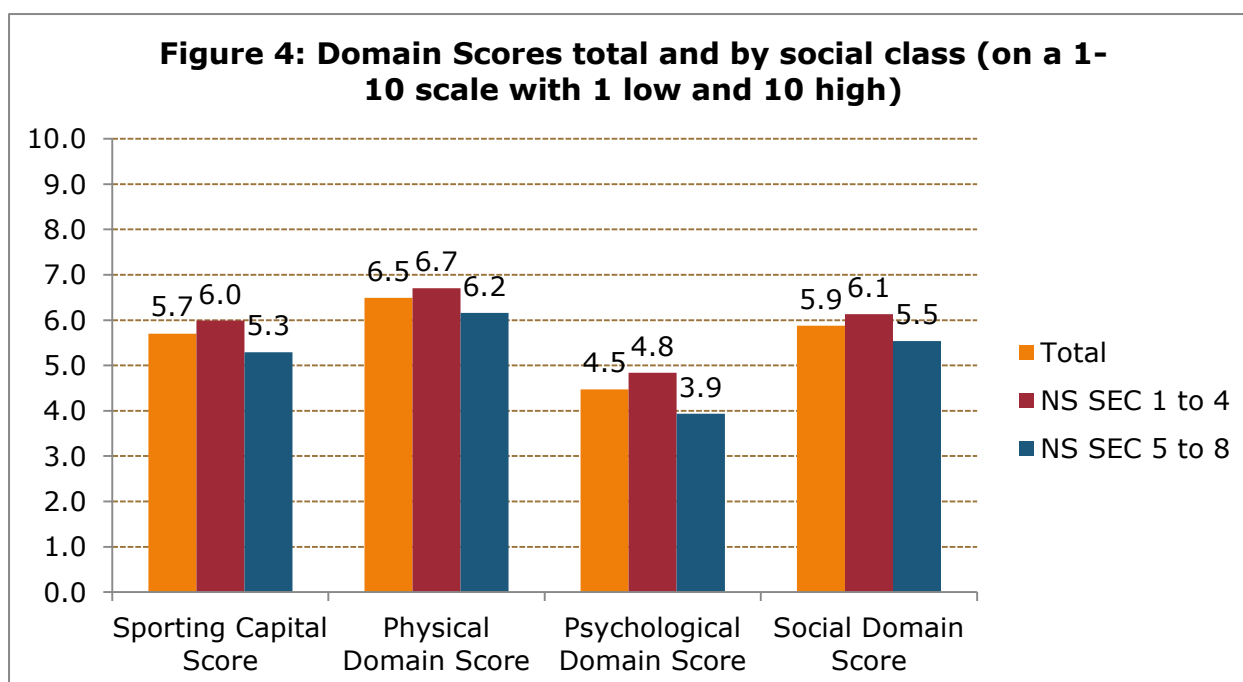
Figure 3 provides a more in-depth analysis of how age interacts with social class to impact on levels of Sporting Capital. The Sporting Capital scores have been shown using the 5 point scale with 1 and 2 combined showing those with low levels of Sporting Capital and 4 and 5 combined those with high levels. The results show that the proportions in the highest Sporting Capital group (scores of 4 and 5 combined) are greater for those in the upper social class groups at all ages although the differences increase with age (see red and green lines). Up to the age of 45 years the decline in Sporting Capital for those in the upper social class groups is a gradual one (see the red line). This is in marked contrast to those in the lowest social class groups where Sporting Capital levels of those categorised as 4 and 5 drop rapidly after the age of 29 years (see green line).



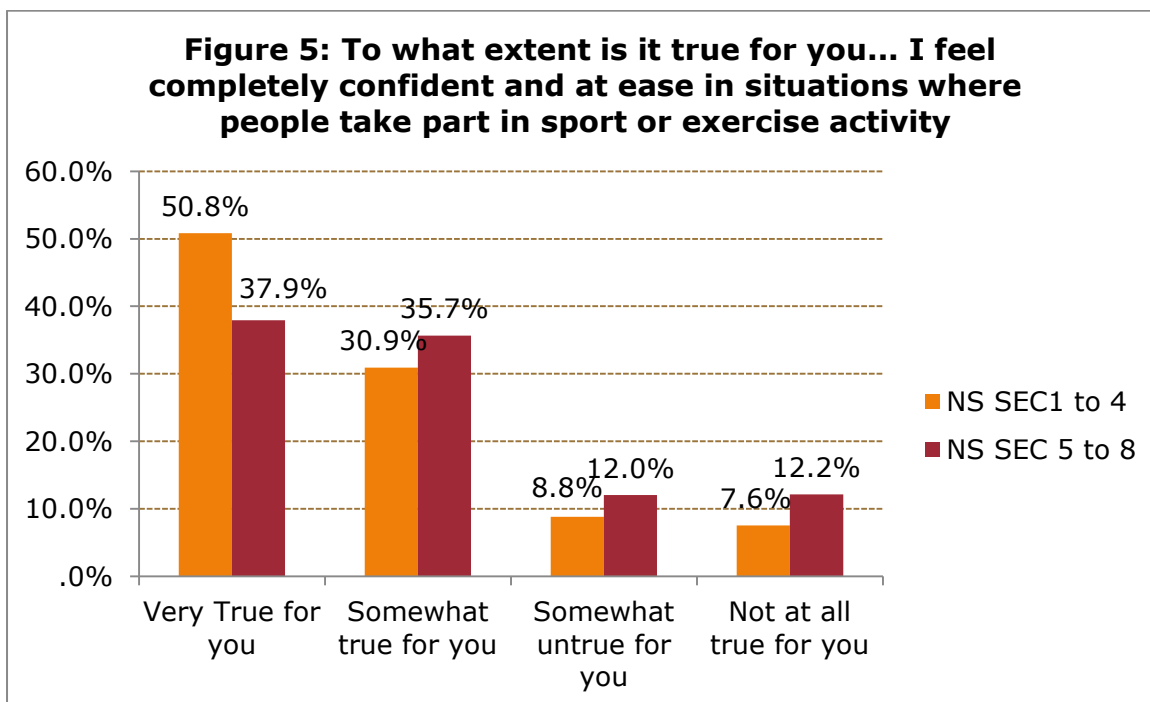
Do the 'building blocks' of Sporting Capital differ between those in different social classes?

Sporting Capital is made up of three domains – the psychological, social and physical. In turn these domains are measured by a series of questions that provide 'markers' that are relevant to each domain. For example in the psychological domain these measures address questions related to self efficacy in sporting situations, self confidence and identity. In the physical domain the questions seek to establish markers of peoples sporting ability relative to others of the same age and gender in a range of sport related skills and their overall physical health status. In the social domain there are questions related to social connectedness in sport ranging from how sporty other family members are to the sportiness of friendship networks and work colleagues ([see Resource Sheet 1](#)).

It would be expected that the building blocks (domains and question items) of Sporting Capital would vary in their relative strengths and weaknesses between those in different social class groups. Figure 4 shows that those in the higher social class group score more highly in all three domains than those in the lower group but the gap is biggest in the psychological domain where the scores are relatively low for both groups (interestingly this is a similar pattern to that found when looking at gender differences – see [Resource Sheet 4](#)). This is important as it is the psychological domain that has the highest weighting and hence the largest relative impact on the overall Sporting Capital scores. It is worth, therefore, exploring some of the psychological scores in more depth.

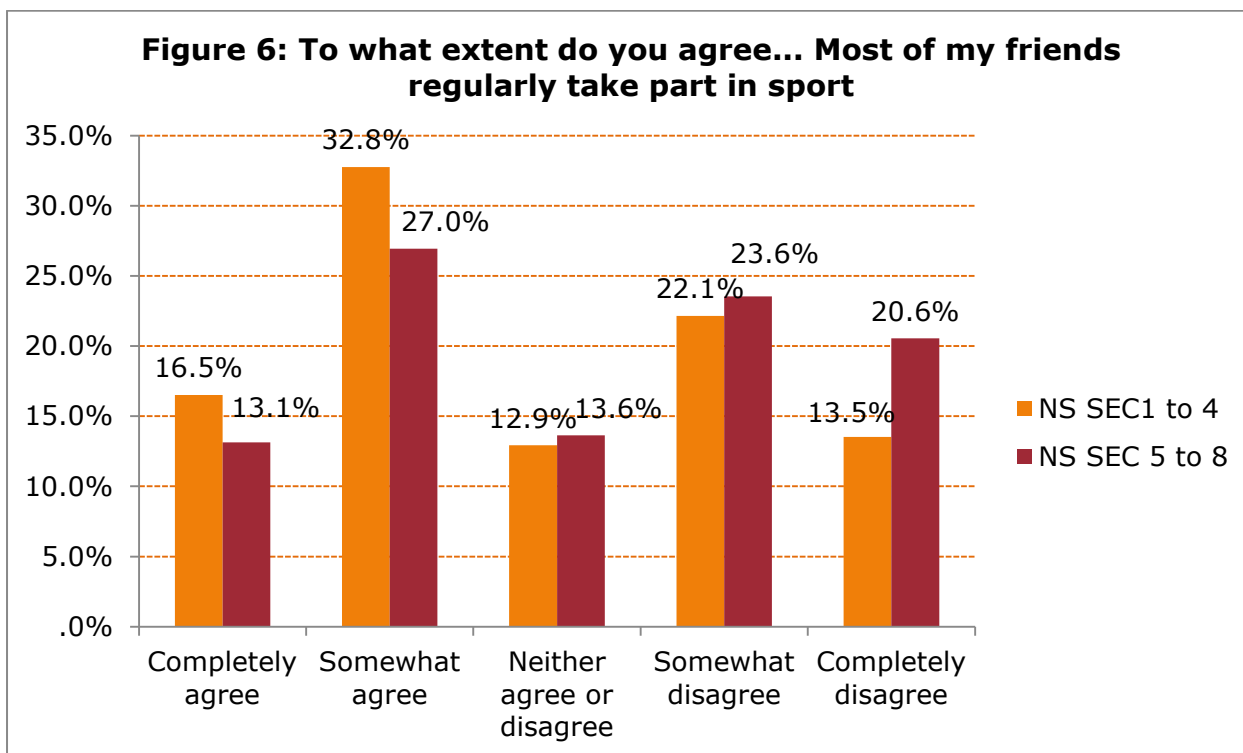


An interesting measure in the Social domain concerns how confident and at ease a person feels they are in situations where people take part in sport or exercise activity. This relates more broadly to how inviting or intimidating people are likely to see sports environments such as gyms, sports centres and swimming pools. Figure 5 shows that a persons' social class does impact on these feelings. Just over 50% of those in the upper social class group expressed a very positive view compared with 38% of those in the lowest social class group.



Another measure in the social domain looks at how 'sporty' a person's friendship networks are by asking 'to what extent do you agree... Most of my friends regularly take part in sport'. Figure 6 shows that the answer to this question is also socially skewed with those in the upper social class group much more likely to express a positive view than those in the lowest social class group. In fact over one in five of those in NSSEC 5-8 completely disagreed with this statement compared with less than one in seven of those in NSSEC 1-4. This measure raises particular concerns as it points towards the reinforcing nature of Sporting Capital – both in a positive and negative sense. Someone who mixes with people who are sporty will, all other things being equal, be more likely to take part in sport themselves both because on a practical level they will have greater possibilities of finding someone to play with but also more subtly they will be influenced by the positive value systems that their friends demonstrate in relation to sport participation. Additionally people with higher levels of Sporting Capital (and higher scores on the social domain that contributes towards overall Sporting Capital levels) will by participating be likely to meet more people who play sport and as a consequence extend their friendship networks amongst sport participants. By definition this further builds their levels of Sporting Capital. Of course the opposite will also occur – with

fewer 'sporty friends' reinforcing values that are non sporty and in turn increasing the probability of inactivity and further diminishing levels of Sporting Capital.



What are the public policy and practice implications of social class differences in Sporting Capital?

Participation rates in sport are socially skewed towards the upper social class groups and have been for as long as measures of sports participation have been in place. However, the way social class interacts with sport to shape and influence the experience, perceptions, attitudes, values and ultimately participation behaviours of individuals is complex and as a consequence will not respond to simplistic public policy 'solutions'. The default assumption is that people in the lower social class groups participate less because they face more challenging external factors including lack of access, cost, transport difficulties, longer and more unsociable work hours, and particular demands of childcare. The results of this analysis would support this contention – but also demonstrate that this is far from the full picture. This sheet shows that there are more fundamental processes at work that lead not only to inequities in participation but also to inequities in levels of Sporting Capital. The results would suggest that barrier reduction alone will not overcome social class differences in participation in sport and that to be successful sports development policy and practice needs to address the more fundamental antecedents of low participation rates stemming from inequities in the levels of Sporting Capital across different social class groups. To do this will require better targeting of interventions and a more sophisticated approach to sports development and outreach that combines barrier reduction with Sporting Capital enhancement tailored to the

particular needs of the individual. The implications for programme and project design are discussed more fully in **Resource Sheet 9**.

ⁱ This Sheet is the fifth in a series of eleven 'Sporting Capital Resource Sheets'. The Resource Sheets are organised in way that move from the general to the more detailed and specific. The common thread is the theoretical concept of Sporting Capital and its application to public policy and practice.

Each individual Sheet has been designed to be freestanding and to make sense in its own right – the series of Sheets has been designed to provide a logical progression that builds knowledge and understanding about Sporting Capital, its characteristics, the relationship it has to participation in sport, its distribution in the population, its variation across different social groups and its potential to influence and shape future sports policy and practice.

The Sheets have been purposefully designed to be succinct and selective rather than long and comprehensive. Each should leave the reader with an interest to think further about Sporting Capital as an idea and what it may mean for their work in sports development whether at the higher strategic levels of policy making or delivering localised programmes on the ground.

All the analysis in the Sheets draws from empirical data collected by Sport England's Active People Survey (6). The analysis in these Resource Sheets is carried out on the household survey sample collected in APS6 (October 2011 to October 2012) of the APS6 survey period. The sample size used in this analysis was 4,527 cases. For more information about the methodology see the full Technical report available from StreetGames.

These Sheets build on earlier thinking and analysis in work carried out for StreetGames and available in the following publications:

Sporting Capital – a new theory of sport participation determinants and its application to 'Doorstep Sport' Nick Rowe, Sport Research Consultant, September 2012, A report commissioned by StreetGames

Part 1. What is Sporting Capital and how can its principles be applied to create a new generation of sustained sports participants?

Part 2. The Sporting Capital Index – exploring the levels of Sporting Capital in the English population and its variation across different social groups.

The following Sheets are available in this series:

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 1: Sporting Capital – what is it and why is it important to sports policy and practice?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 2: What is the relationship between Sporting Capital and participation in sport and why does it matter?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 3: Are we a sporting nation – what are the levels of Sporting Capital in England?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 4: Sporting capital and gender – mind the gap

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 5: Sporting capital and inequality – does social class make a difference?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 6: To what extent do levels of Sporting Capital impact on the frequency of participation and vary by the type of sport people play?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 7: Sporting Capital and ethnicity

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 8: Sporting Capital amongst the young – a focus on 16 to 25 year olds

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 9: Sporting Capital - why it is important to public policy – a strategic perspective

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 10: Doorstep Sport - building Sporting Capital to increase participation in sport – applying the theory to practice