

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 8¹

Sporting Capital amongst the young – a focus on 16 to 25 year olds

Introduction

This Resource Sheet¹ explores Sporting Capital levels amongst those aged 16 to 25 years – a key market for Government, Sport England and StreetGames. It focuses in particular on how Sporting Capital and related aspects vary between young people in different social class groups. 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**.

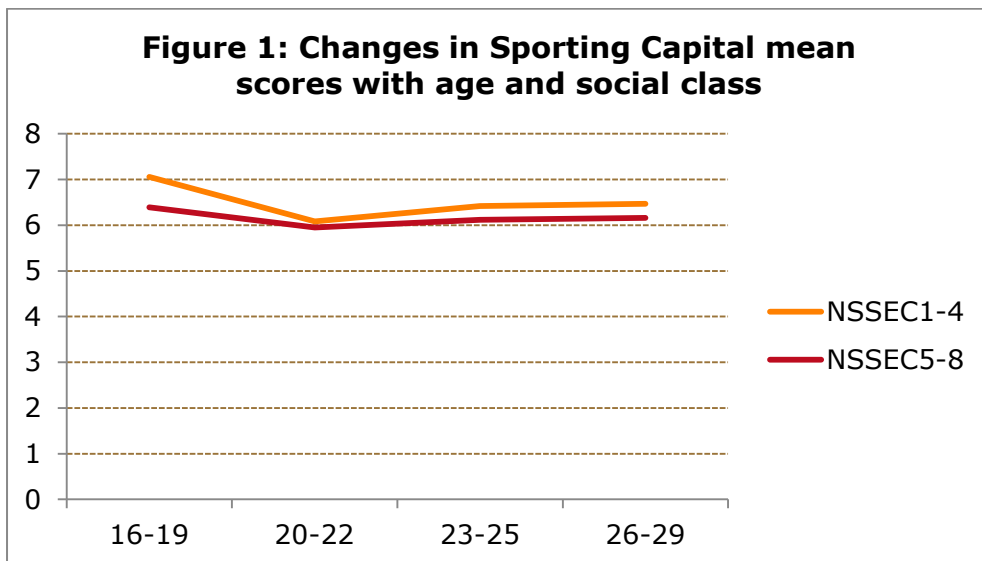
What are the levels of Sporting Capital amongst young people and how does it vary by social class?

Figure 2 in **Resource Sheet 3** shows how mean levels of Sporting Capital change with age and noted that there is little change in the levels between the ages of 16 and 44 years (ranging from 6 to 6.3). Given the known decline in participation rates in sport over the same ages it suggests that while the locked in potential to participate – i.e. the stock of Sporting Capital – is maintained until the mid 40's the external barriers and constraints that make participation more difficult increase.

Figure 1 below focuses on 16 to 29 year olds to show 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. However, by the age of 22 years Sporting Capital levels converge as the upper social class group levels decline to meet that of the lower group. The analysis in

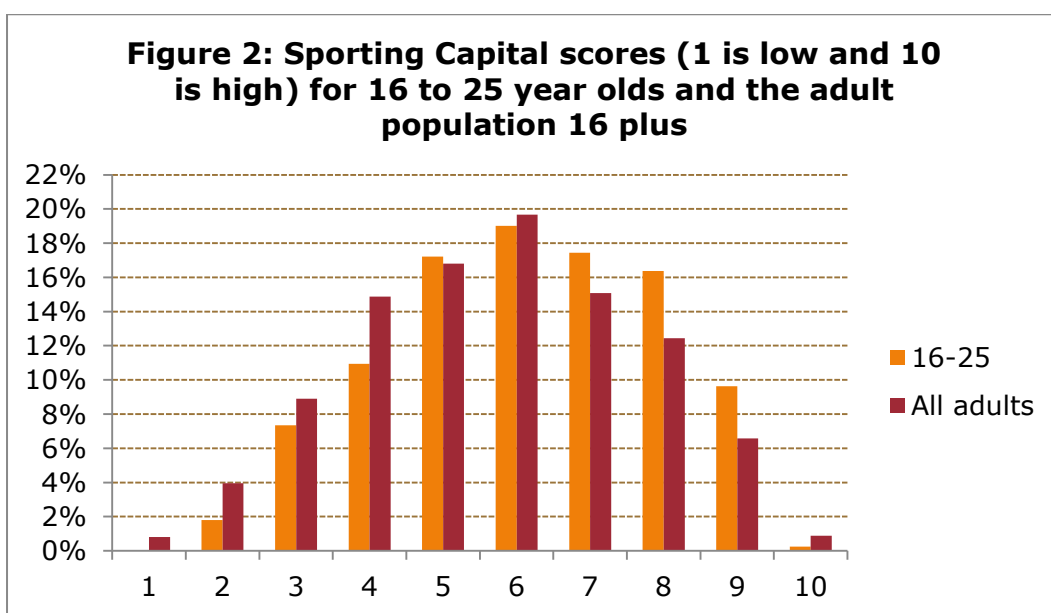
¹ This Resource Sheet was prepared by Nick Rowe with analytical support from Oliver Norden at TNS-BMRB. It was commissioned by StreetGames and published in April 2013.

Resource Sheet 5 shows that in later life those in the upper social class group maintain levels of Sporting Capital at higher levels than their lower social class counterparts.



Resource Sheet 5 also goes on to examine how the building blocks (domains and question items) of Sporting Capital vary in their relative strengths and weaknesses between those in different social class groups. It showed how 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.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of Sporting Capital index scores for 16 to 25 year olds and compares this with the distribution across the adult population. The scores are skewed towards the upper end of the distribution – and more so for young people than for the adult population as a whole.²



² The figures for young people at the extreme ends of the distribution (scores of 1 and 10) should be treated with caution due to the small sample sizes.

Figure 3 below focuses on 16 to 19 year olds to show Sporting Capital index and domain scores vary by social class amongst this age group. It shows a significant difference in the mean Sporting Capital Index score with those in the upper social class group having a mean score that is 0.7 above that of their peers in the lower social class group. This higher score for Sporting Capital is reflected across all of the domains – with the biggest differences found in the psychological and social domains.

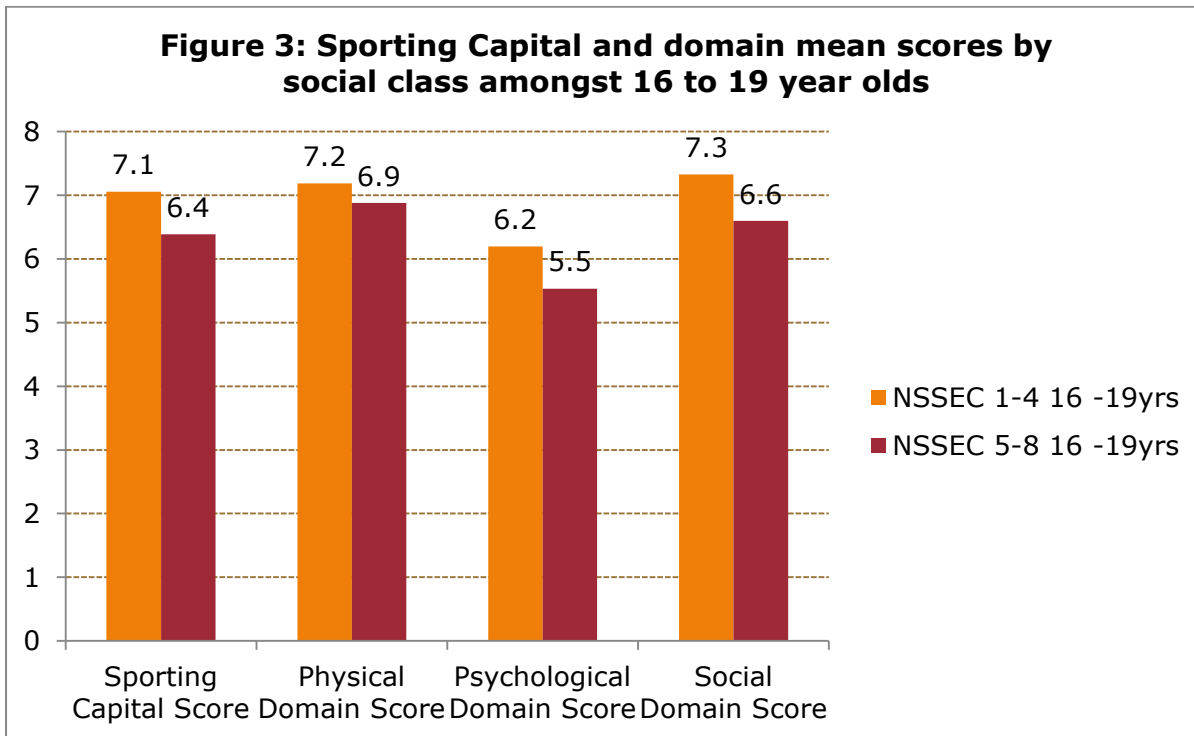
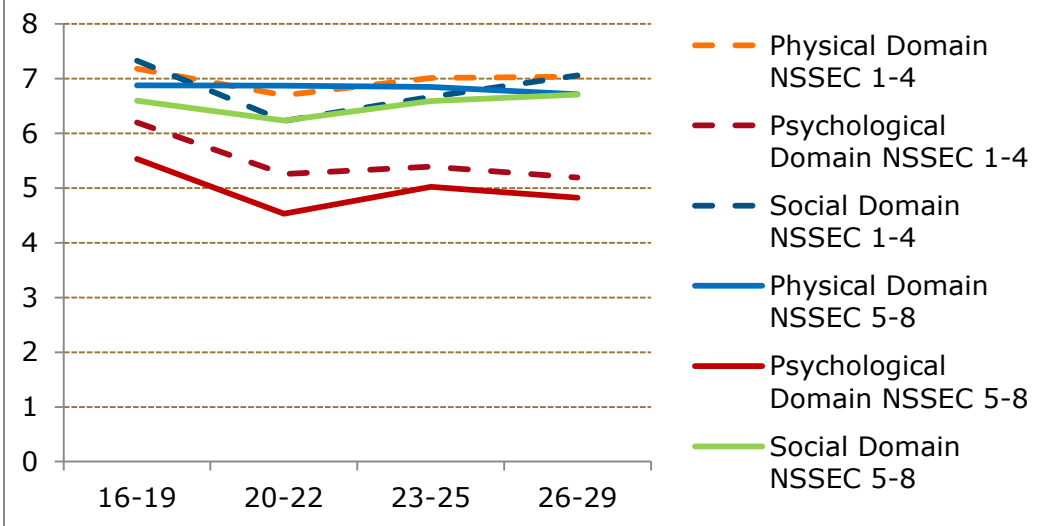


Figure 4 widens the age range to 16 to 29 years to examine how Sporting Capital domain scores vary by social class as young people get older. It shows that the physical domain scores are similar for both social groups over this age range. The social domain is higher for the upper social class group at age 16 to 19 years but then the gap is closed by the age of 20 to 22 years as levels decline. It is interesting to note that social domain scores for both social class groups pick up again between the ages of 22 and 29 years. The most marked difference in profile between the social class groups is found in the psychological domain where those in the upper social class group have scores that track higher for all ages than for their peers in the lower social class group – although for both groups levels decline most rapidly between the ages of 16 and 22 years.

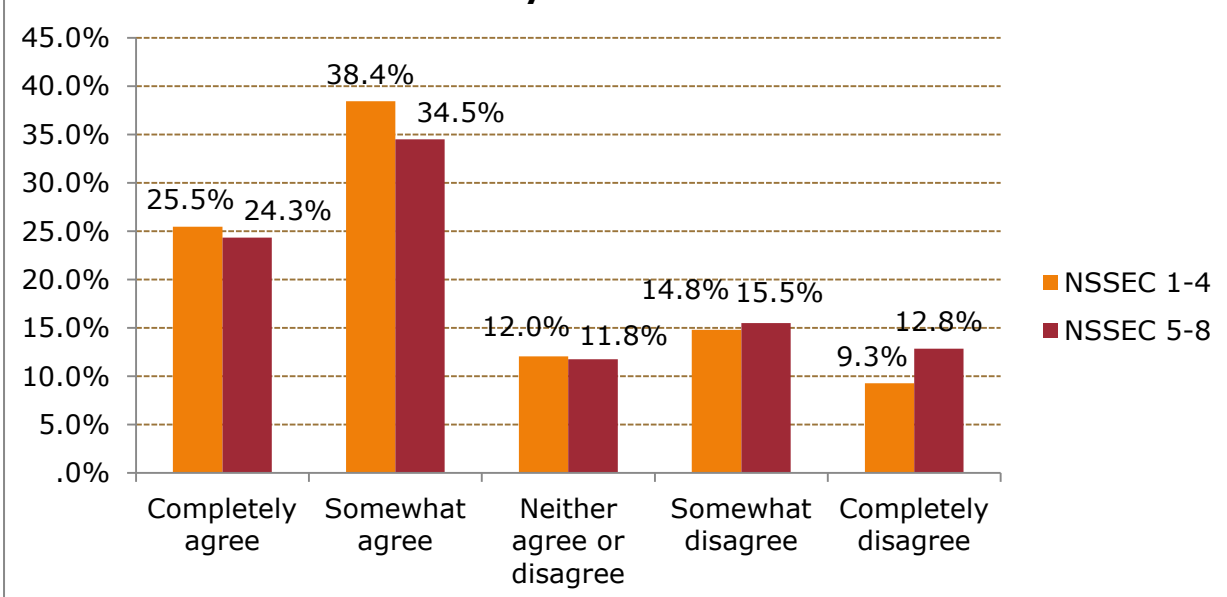
Figure 4: Sporting Capital domain scores by age (16 to 29 years) and social class



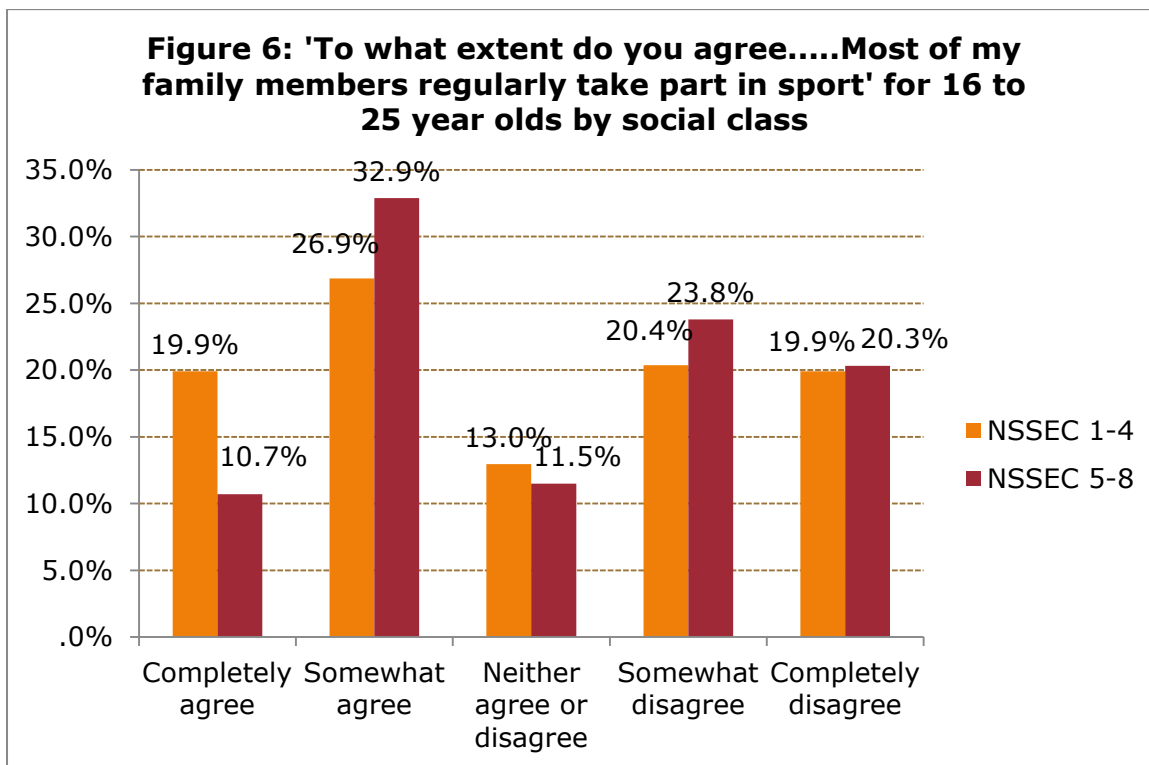
How do measures in the social domain vary for young people from different social class backgrounds?

It is interesting to explore how some of the measures in the social domain vary for young people from different social class groups. Figure 5 shows the extent to which young people aged 16 to 25 years agreed that 'most of my friends regularly take part in sport'. It shows a slightly more positive profile for young people in the upper social class group with 63.9% completely or somewhat agreeing compared with 58.8% of those in the lower social class group.

Figure 5: 'To what extent do you agree ...Most of my friends regularly take part in sport' for 16 to 25 year olds by social class

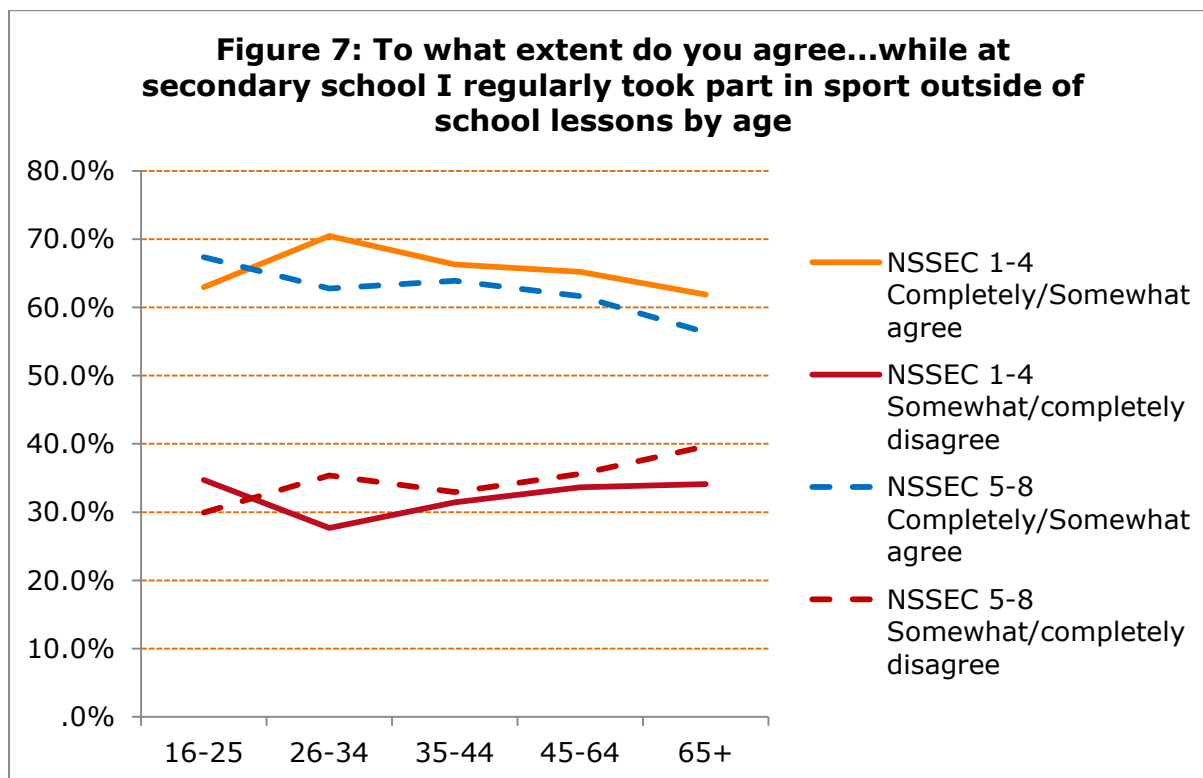


The social domain includes a similar question that focuses on 'sporting relationships' within the family. Figure 6 shows a different pattern to that found for the relationship with 'sporting friends' with almost twice as many young people in the upper social class groups than in the lower class groups completely agreeing that they have family members who regularly take part in sport (19.9% and 10.7% respectively).



This research on Sporting Capital has been restricted to those aged 16 years and over due to data limitations from the Active People Survey. That is not to say that the earlier years – pre 16 – are not important in influencing and shaping Sporting Capital. In fact the theory would suggest that the formative years – from as early as aged 3 to 5 years - may be the most important in creating the right conditions that shape the positive attitudes and values associated with high levels of Sporting Capital in adult life. The closest we can get in the Active People Survey to understanding some of these earlier years is to ask people to recall their experiences whilst at school. Such recall has to be treated with caution – but the results shown in Figure 7 are interesting. They show how people of different ages and from different social class groups responded to the question regarding their participation in sport outside of school lessons while at secondary school. From the ages of 26 to 34 years upwards the results are as we might expect with those from the higher social class groups responding more positively than their lower social class counterparts. However the picture amongst those aged 16 to 25 years is a different and more surprising one with those in the lower social class groups being more positive. Perhaps of more general concern, however, is the recent dip in those who 'completely or somewhat agree' amongst the younger (16 to 25 years) generation

in the upper social class groups which suggests a decline in participation in organised sport outside of school lessons compared with those in the same social class group who are now aged 26 to 34 years.



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

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'.

Resource Sheet 5 talked about the 'default assumption' in public policy 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. However, the evidence suggests 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.

This Resource Sheet builds on that earlier analysis to explore how social class differences amongst the young impact on levels of Sporting Capital and in particular how the social domain underpinning Sporting Capital varies between these groups. The results add further

weight to the argument that there are fundamental social processes at work that impact on the levels of Sporting Capital achieved by young people from different social backgrounds and disadvantage (from a sporting perspective at least) those from lower social class families. The family link is an interesting one. Although the evidence suggests that young people from lower social class background have as many 'sporting friends' as those from the upper social class groups they appear to have a weaker sporting influence within the family network. More generally young people from upper social class groups have a stronger profile in the psychological domain than their lower class peers and this more positive profile extends and is maintained into the middle and older age groups.

These results show that by the age of 16 to 19 years the socio-cultural, economic and environmental processes that shape and influence an individual's fundamental relationship to sport have already taken effect. As in most things prevention is better than seeking a 'cure' – and ideally this early stratification of the 'sporting capital have's' and 'sporting capital have not's' would be addressed in the formative early years experiences of primary and secondary school children. To this extent the recent Government investment in primary school sport is to be welcomed.

There remains, however, an important role for community sport development in seeking to build Sporting Capital amongst those who have had a 'slow start' to get them on a positive upward cycle that leads to sustained sport participation throughout the life course. **Resource Sheet 5** suggests 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 10**.

ⁱ This Sheet is the eighth 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